PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2001–02

COMPRISING PERIOD
20 May 2002—13 June 2002

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20 May 2002

THE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES VOLUME 386

SEVENTEENTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2001–2002

House of Commons

Monday 20 May 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

WORK AND PENSIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Minimum Income Guarantee

1. **Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk): If he will make a statement on the take-up rate of the minimum income guarantee. [55487]

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): More than 2 million pensioners benefit from the minimum income guarantee. Those pensioners are on average £20 a week better off. Some 3,400 pensioners in the North Norfolk constituency are claiming MIG.

We have introduced several measures to make it easier for pensioners to understand and claim their entitlement, including a new 10-page claim form and a dedicated MIG claim line, and claims for MIG are now invited when pensioners apply for their retirement pension.

Norman Lamb: May I draw the Minister's attention to research carried out by a university of East Anglia student, Victoria O'Brien, which I will send to him? It sets out the extent and impact of the lack of take-up of the minimum income guarantee in North Norfolk and nationally. In particular, I draw his attention to the estimate that in North Norfolk alone the poorest pensioners are failing to receive between £2.5 million and £4.5 million. The impact on them, and on their access to food, heating and so on, is obviously considerable. What further steps is the Minister taking, beyond the big initiative back in 2000, to ensure that the poorest pensioners get what money is due to them?

Mr. McCartney: I would welcome a copy of the review of MIG by the hon. Gentleman's constituent. Local authorities also conduct reviews. In the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell), my Department, the local authority and community groups have collectively made a great effort extensively to increase the number of those who can benefit from MIG. We will do anything that we can to achieve that in North Norfolk and more widely between now and the introduction of the pension credit, which will be a further major boost by the Government to older people's income.

In my first answer, I told the hon. Gentleman about some of the measures that we have taken, but since September last year we have also been making more information available. We have been looking at older people's life cycle events and linking those to our attempts to involve them in claims. We have introduced a dedicated Pension Service, the role of which is to act as a first-hand evidence system and an advocate on behalf of older people. Between now and the introduction of the pension credit, the Government are taking a whole range of measures, including advertising and making direct contact with older people and with organisations that represent them. We want to ensure that we build on the success of benefiting 2 million people.

Let me put the matter into context: when we came into power, more than 2 million pensioners were not getting the benefit of MIG, which we introduced from a standing start. Those pensioners were in poverty, forgotten about and voiceless, but under this Government they are out of poverty and have a very strong voice.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the pilot programme to which he referred has increased the take-up of MIG from 76 per cent. to 81 per cent. in less than 18 months? Will he consider encouraging all local authorities to set targets to raise the take-up of MIG in that way, specifically using the unique system developed in Tameside whereby pensioners can claim online? Just by putting in their national insurance number and their council tax benefit number, they can automatically find out whether or not they are entitled to MIG.

Mr. McCartney: I honestly did not know that my hon. Friend was behind me when I mentioned him; I thought that I would give him a plug for his excellent work anyway. I hope to visit his borough in the next few months. It has an exemplary record in introducing systems of working directly in the community. Those include making household visits to everyone over 60, introducing new technology, setting up local advice centres in conjunction with our departmental officers and working with community groups. As a consequence, there has been a huge increase in the take-up of MIG there. Indeed, more than £800,000 of additional income has been claimed through MIG simply as a result of the campaign.

I shall study that best practice in the hope that we can introduce it as part of the local work by the Pension Service. We need to look at the best of what local authorities do and at the best of what we do, put the two together and ensure that every pensioner who is entitled to income from the Government gets it.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): With up to a quarter of those eligible for MIG not taking it up and with the take-up of housing benefit and council tax benefit falling, is it not now clear that the Government's mania for means-testing, which leads to low take-up, is betraying the very vulnerable people whom they were elected to represent?

Mr. McCartney: One of the main reasons why the take-up of housing benefit has fallen is not a lack of take-up by older people but the fact that the Government have got more than 1 million people back into work. They are getting a fair wage, so they do not have to claim housing benefit, unlike the position that they were left in by the previous Government. As well as MIG, we are introducing the pension credit, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will support that measure in the Lobby on Thursday. The pension credit means not only that 5.1 million pensioners will get additional income, but that, for the first time, many pensioners will get access to both housing benefit and council tax benefit because of our changes to the rules on capital. That would never have been done under the Conservatives.

Mr. Frank Roy (Motherwell and Wishaw): The Minister will agree that take-up of any benefit is important, but it is especially vital for our poorer pensioners. Will he assure me that pensioners will be able to visit the new Pension Service agency centres throughout the country and speak to staff face to face to ensure that they receive the benefit to which they are entitled?

Mr. McCartney: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. One of the new pension centres is situated in his constituency. It will be welcomed by pensioners in Scotland and will provide new jobs in the area. The role of the Pension Service is to create pension centres that will deal with up to 80 per cent. of the total case load. The other 20 per cent. includes household visits, take-up and special needs campaigns and issues associated with people with special needs such as language and disability. We will focus the local service to deal with that work on a local basis. Older people will have the choice of doing their business through pension centres such as the one at Motherwell or receiving home visits and participating in other local activities. By providing that choice, we will make improvements for the older pensioners who need to access such services from time to time.

Pensions

2. **Angela Watkinson** (Upminster): When the ratios of pensioners' income being derived from funded pensions from the state will be reversed. [55488]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): In 1998, we set out our long-term objective of ensuring that funded pension provision is substantially increased. That remains our position.

Angela Watkinson: I see three obstacles to achieving the Government's target of 40 per cent. of pensions deriving from state funding: first, the increasing number of pensioners on means-tested benefits; secondly, the poor performance of many private pension plans, which are giving pensioners a much poorer income than they ever anticipated; and thirdly, the very poor performance of mortgage endowments, which means that many pensioners will not clear their mortgage debts and will still be making mortgage payments in their retirement years.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Lady makes three points. In relation to endowment products, she raises a matter of concern, especially for people who were possibly not given the right advice some years ago. Of course, the regulatory framework has been greatly strengthened since that time, but she is right to express concern about people in that position. She also referred to private pension funds. As we discussed in the previous Question Time and on other occasions, increased longevity and the fall in the stock market have caused a number of companies to rethink their position. Interestingly, in the now corrected Office for National Statistics data, of which the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) made so much, we find not only that there was no £100 billion fall in pension assets, as he claimed, but that contributions rose by £27 billion, which is encouraging.

In making her first point, the hon. Lady complained about the pension credit, which will benefit more than half of pensioner households by an average of £400 a year. If the Conservatives are against that, we look forward to hearing more from them. About 2 million people are benefiting from the minimum income guarantee, which will be £100 next year. The state second pension sees

18 million people gain, and some of them are getting more than double what they would have received under the former state earnings-related pension scheme.

The hon. Lady was right to raise her point about endowment mortgages. On her other two concerns, the Government will make proposals on private pensions, and we are absolutely right to make state provision available, especially for those on low incomes, and to ensure that saving pays—something that never used to be the case.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): Does the Secretary of State accept that the great driving force affecting funded provision is the new accountancy rules, which will make it more difficult for the Government to achieve objectives that the whole House supports? Is there not a case for suggesting that the Government should request the accountancy body to withdraw the rules to allow further consideration? Some accountancy rules are necessary in deciding what liabilities appear on what balance sheets, but the current rules are harmful to long-term funded pension provision.

Mr. Darling: My right hon. Friend refers to the accounting rule commonly known as FRS17. It is not FRS17 or any other accounting rule that is closing down pensions: companies are choosing to close down those pensions, but they should take a long-term view on their pensions just as they do on other matters. They would not make a major investment decision on one set of accounts, and they should not make a long-term decision on pension funds purely in relation to what is shown in respect of one accounting requirement. I have told the Accounting Standards Board that I think that FRS17 is exacerbating an already difficult situation. I find it difficult to understand why we have an accounting standard that is not shared by other countries—the standard used in the United States, for example, is different—and I have suggested to the board that it might be better for everyone concerned if we had a standard that allowed companies to look at their pension funds over a period of years, rather than taking a snapshot decision that could be grossly misleading.

I must make the point that companies considering their pension funds should themselves take a long-term view, and that simply getting rid of, or rewriting, FRS17 would not solve the problem that some occupational funds face. I certainly would not argue in favour of the Government taking over accounting standards, because I believe that there is some merit in those matters being independently scrutinised. I happen to think that the Accounting Standards Board has got it wrong on this occasion, and that it should accept that.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that the lesson of history is that one group that, on average, does badly out of privately funded pensions is women? Women past and present tend to have fewer and lower occupational pensions, and lower private pensions. Is it not also the case that only one in three of the Government's new shiny stakeholder pensions have gone to a woman? Will the Secretary of State tell us what projections his Department has produced of the future entitlements of today's working women to funded pensions? If no such projections have been produced, will he commission a study of women's pension entitlements, to ensure that history does not repeat itself and that women do not remain the poor relation in private pension provision?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman omitted—by accident, I am sure—to mention that most of the gainers under the pension credit will be women. He is right to say that women have not done so well out of funded pensions—partly because of low pay, and partly because, historically, there were fewer women in the labour market—and that the beneficiaries have predominantly been men. The pension credit, however, will predominantly benefit women. The state second pension—which I think that the hon. Gentleman opposed, although I might be wrong about that—will also benefit women, particularly those on low wages. Indeed, some 18 million people on low wages, and others, will gain from the state second pension, and women who take career breaks to look after children or other people will also now get a pension, whereas in the past they got none. So, in relation to both the pension credit and the state second pension, women have gained as a result of the changes that the Government have made.

Child Support Agency

3. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): What measures are taken against self-employed absent parents who accumulate excessive arrears to the Child Support Agency. [55489]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): Assessing liability will be simpler under the new scheme, so a higher proportion of the agency's time will be spent on enforcement. Changes to legislation since January 2001 have enhanced the CSA's powers to recover sums due. For example, non-resident parents now face a penalty of up to £1,000 for refusing to co-operate.

Mr. Edwards: I thank my right hon. Friend and congratulate the Government on certain changes that are being made. Does he agree, however, that it is disgraceful that certain self-employed fathers can escape their responsibilities to the Child Support Agency and to their children? I draw to his attention the case of Mr. Julian Barnes, who has made not one child maintenance payment to his former partner, Elaine Lanchbury, in seven years, and to that of Mr. Alan Shinton, who was recently assessed and ordered to pay the CSA £19,295.19. Does my right hon. Friend agree that people who are responsible for bringing children into this world must be responsible for their upbringing? Will every effort be made to make these parents maintain their responsibilities?

Mr. Darling: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. Responsibility for maintaining children rests with the parents of those children. When we talk about the Child Support Agency, we should never forget that we are talking about making sure that money goes to support children. That is sometimes overlooked by some of the parties involved.

In relation to the self-employed, my hon. Friend is right to say that, in the past, too many such individuals have managed to escape an award being made and enforced, simply by refusing to hand over information. As a result *of powers that we took in the child support legislation* passed two years ago, it is now possible for the CSA to get information from the Inland Revenue so that individuals cannot play one part of the state off against another.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing both those cases to the attention of my noble Friend, Baroness Hollis—*[Interruption.]* Getting up at 5 am is starting to play tricks on me.

Under the new system, which I want to introduce as quickly as possible, the agency will be able to put the calculation of maintenance in place more quickly, and to get payments made without the delay that is unfortunately characteristic of the present system. The situation will improve and, once the new system is in place, it should do so quite dramatically.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I echo the words of the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards), but will the Secretary of State's new assessment regulations cover the unacceptable situation, which I suspect all hon. Members have in their case files, of a self-employed man who deserts his wife or partner, leaving the children, and then claims that his income is a quarter of the actual amount? Although I agree that it is difficult for the CSA to find out the exact position, should not there be some system under which the burden of proof falls on the deserting father, rather than his wife having to prove that he is earning much more than he claims?

Mr. Darling: One reason why we took additional powers was to enable the CSA to access the records lodged with the Inland Revenue. It was very difficult to do so in the past. I am sorry that some Conservative Members opposed that measure when it went through the Commons. It is right that we should be able to access information held by the Inland Revenue. Very often, we found that people would not tell the CSA about their income, but that the Inland Revenue knew of it. We are keeping all those matters under review. The key must be to ensure that the money due to the child of that self-employed person—it is not for the benefit of the former spouse or partner—is paid, and as quickly as possible.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I fully support my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards), but may I draw to the Secretary of State's attention a case that has led to arrears for one of my constituents of £30,000? A woman with three children has not received a penny from her ex-partner. She has been to an appeals tribunal twice and won twice. Her ex-partner has been found guilty of diverting his income, yet nothing has happened. Such situations are atrocious, and even something as simple as removing an individual's driving licence would clearly help. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we should put more pressure on some of these absent parents?

Mr. Darling: The common theme of all three questions is that the agency should spend more time on enforcement. I wholeheartedly agree. The problem under the present system is that too much time goes into calculating what is due. The key is to make the calculation quickly and then to spend more time on enforcement. My hon. Friend will know that we took powers two years ago to ask courts to remove driving licences when people would not comply. Interestingly, when courts have been invited to do so, all bar one of those affected paid the money that was due. That shows that there is some value in ensuring that people's responsibilities are brought home to them.

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): Can the Secretary of State give any comfort to the many mothers who are owed excessive amounts by announcing a time scale for change in the current system? In my constituency, one parent is owed in excess of £15,000 by a husband who is apparently living the high life.

Mr. Darling: As the agency improves its performance in calculation and compliance, more effort is going into recovering sums due. As I told the House in March, until I am satisfied that the new computer network that is necessary to operate the new system of child support is operating effectively and acceptably, I am not prepared to authorise my officials to commission it. I hope to be able to tell the House something in the not too distant future. I am pleased to say that testing has continued and that good progress is being made. As soon as I am satisfied that the system will operate in the way intended, I will let the House know and, as I undertook to hon. Members, I will give sufficient notice in advance of its introduction so that all concerned can prepare for it.

Stakeholder Pensions

4. **Ms Bridget Prentice** (Lewisham, East): What assessment he has made of the contribution of stakeholder pensions to saving for retirement. [55490]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): Stakeholder pensions have made an encouraging start, and figures from the Association of British Insurers show that about 815,000 had been bought up to the end of March 2002. They have also had a wider beneficial effect on pension provision, helping to drive down other personal pension charges and stimulating the provision of personal pensions. Everyone now has access to a good-value pension arrangement. That is all good news for consumers.

Ms Prentice: While I appreciate my hon. Friend's reply, two things concern me. The first is the suggestion from the Financial Services Authority that there should be compulsion on private pensions and the second is the report published today that says that a number of private pension companies are apparently unaware that we are all living longer thanks to wonderful advances in medical science and our health service. Does she have any comment on compulsion in pensions and what has she to say to encourage people to take up stakeholder pensions, given their success so far?

Maria Eagle: My hon. Friend is right that there has been discussion around and about in the pensions industry on whether there should be compulsion. Opposition Members have raised the issue in debates, as have my hon. Friends occasionally. The Government have no plans to make it compulsory for employers to contribute to their work force's stakeholder pensions. In respect of living longer, I agree with my hon. Friend that it is entirely a good thing. Perhaps we should make that clear. *[Interruption.]* I am not going to claim that the Government are making people live longer. It is a Monday afternoon; I am not going to make claims like that.

The fact that we now have a low-cost simple vehicle that people can save into helps to ensure that they can make proper provision for their old age. People now live longer in retirement, so it becomes all the more important that they make proper provision during their working lives to enable them to enjoy their retirement with an adequate pension. In that respect, the stakeholder pension is important. The value of new regular pension premiums rose by 52 per cent. in 2001. That is due in part to stakeholder pensions—I am not going to say that it is all due to them—and it shows that when people are provided with simple low-cost vehicles that they can save into for their retirement, they start to do so. Members on both sides of the House should welcome and encourage that, and I hope they all do.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): I am in favour of increased life expectancy, having reached an age when mortality becomes all the more apparent. My hon. Friend will have seen the weekend reports that private pensions are not worth while for those on average or lower incomes. She will also be aware, as we all are, of the deterioration in employee occupational pensions. Is it not time for the Government seriously to consider a substantial increase in the basic state pension, funded by compulsory savings from employees and compulsory larger contributions from employers?

Maria Eagle: First and foremost, my hon. Friend is looking particularly well this afternoon, even if he is feeling mortality closing in on him. On his points about the basic state pension, Government policy in respect of the balance between state pensions and private provision is clear and he will have heard it discussed during debates on the State Pension Credit Bill. We believe that the balance is about right. We all recognise the fact that the key to ensuring that people have enough money to lead a pleasant and well-provided old age is a mix between private and public pensions. We must encourage people to save, where they are able to do so, into a good private pension, and that is what we intend to do.

Labour Market

5. **Mr. Bill Rammell** (Harlow): If he will make a statement on trends in the labour market since 11 September. [55491]

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): There are problems in the world economy, but the UK is withstanding them better than other major countries. Compared with last September, there are more than 70,000 more people in employment and unemployment is broadly unchanged. Our labour market is in a strong position: the number of people in employment is at a record level—up by more than 1.5 million since 1997. The number of job vacancies is high—more than 10,000 are being notified to jobcentres every working day; and recent unemployment levels are the lowest since 1975.

Mr. Rammell: I welcome that response, which clearly indicates that, contrary to some predictions, we have not gone into an employment downturn since 11 September. Indeed, in my Harlow constituency, the claimant count this month shows that unemployment figures continue to fall. However, does my right hon. Friend agree that certain sectors of the economy, especially telecommunications, face continuing problems because of the worldwide situation? Does he agree that where redundancies occur, it is the responsibility of both national and local government to work with employers and trade unions to help people to retrain and up-skill to take advantage of the job opportunities that are available?

Mr. Brown: Yes, I agree with my hon. Friend. On job losses in the telecommunications industry, specifically in his constituency, I can confirm that Harlow jobcentre is in touch with local employers and that we shall do whatever we can to stand the corner of his constituents. Nevertheless, as he says, it is a fact that unemployment has fallen—it has halved in Harlow's travel-to-work area since 1997.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): The Minister said that notwithstanding problems in the world economy, the United Kingdom's employment trends are better than those in many other countries. Is it not interesting that since 11 September last year—and, indeed, for some months before that—those trends have been particularly favourable compared with those in the eurozone? Will the Minister do the sensible and honourable thing on behalf of the hard-working British public in recommending to the Treasury, both to the First Lord and to the Chancellor, that we keep the pound?

Mr. Brown: I always try to do the sensible thing on behalf of the hard-working British public. I think that our colleagues in the European Union have much to learn from the way in which we manage the labour market.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): My right hon. Friend will recognise that in constituencies such as mine, it is high-paid and high-skill jobs in the aerospace industry that have been lost or put at risk the most by what happened on 11 September. Will he reiterate that the Government remain committed, for the benefit of constituencies such as Burnley and, indeed, of the whole country's economy, to maintaining high-skill jobs at the sharp end and to doing everything possible for investment to secure those jobs in the future?

Mr. Brown: I understand what my hon. Friend says. It is true that in constituencies such as Burnley the labour market is undergoing a period of adjustment. To address some of those local issues, we have introduced a number of special programmes designed to bear down on unemployment, especially long-term unemployment. My hon. Friend is right that there has been movement in the labour market away from employment in manufacturing towards employment in the service sector, but it would not be true to say that there are not secure, well-paid careers in the service sector—there are.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Does the Minister agree that in this longest, deepest recession, which has been compounded by 11 September, two sectors—the airline industry and farming—have been particularly badly hit? Will he give some assurance to constituents of mine who came to see me having, in the case of the husband, just been made redundant from farming? Will people get a fairer hearing and more assistance from the jobcentre and Employment Service staff than was the case in that instance?

Mr. Brown: I do not agree with the hon. Lady that we are in a long and deep recession. Indeed, there have never been so many people in employment. However, I am happy to consider cases of individual constituents who, according to the hon. Lady, have been displaced from employment in agriculture. It is fair to point out that agriculture employs fewer than 1 per cent. of the total work force, but if the hon. Lady has a constituent who is looking for work and needs help, and she writes to me about the case, I shall see what I can do.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): The electronics sector has also suffered since 11 September. After many years of decline, unemployment in my constituency has risen sharply since 11 September. A characteristic of the sector is the number of people employed on short-term and casual contracts. Too often, Government employment initiatives are not sufficiently flexible to deal with people who experience periods of unemployment. Will my right hon. Friend consider the operation of Jobcentre Plus and the new deal to ascertain whether people on short-term contracts can be caught more quickly and helped back into work so that they can benefit from the booming economy elsewhere?

Mr. Brown: Employment on short-term contracts is relatively low nationally, but if it is a peculiar feature of the labour market in my hon. Friend's constituency, I shall, of course, consider the problems that he mentioned. However, I must emphasise that the trend that he cites goes against the national trend. Perhaps he wishes to draw some local circumstance to my attention. I assure him that the staff who work for Jobcentre Plus—as it will become—are there to help his constituents. If he wants to draw a specific problem to my attention, I shall examine it.

Child Support Agency

6. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): How many staff vacancies there are in the Child Support Agency. [55492]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): When expressed as the equivalent number of full-time posts, the latest available estimate for staff vacancies in the Child Support Agency is 798. At the end of March, the agency had just over 12,000 staff. That gives a vacancy rate of 6 per cent. We are taking several steps to fill those vacancies.

Mr. Turner: If there are so many vacancies, why does the Child Support Agency, like many other Government agencies, refuse to consider people over 65 who apply for jobs with them? Instead of waiting for Europe to direct the Government to do what is clearly right, why do not Ministers end Government age discrimination?

Malcolm Wicks: Many companies and public services have vacancies, not least because unemployment has declined—by 48 per cent. in the hon. Gentleman's constituency. We are taking several steps, which include recruiting and promoting opportunities for evening work and family friendly employment. I acknowledge that there is a debate about ageism and appropriate retirement rates. That will continue in future, because as hon. Members have pointed out earlier, we are all getting older.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): There will be a greater demand for staff at the Child Support Agency, and vacancies will increase when the reforms are introduced later this year. The reforms introduce two standards on maintenance payments. One is the new rate of 15 per cent. and the other is the old rate of 30 per cent. That will create a greater anomaly and more staff will have to be recruited to deal with it. Will my hon. Friend address that?

Malcolm Wicks: I do not recognise that the reforms will lead to more staff. We are simplifying the formula for child support and placing greater emphasis on enforcement. It was pointed out earlier that hon. Members of all parties are worried about absent parents who do not understand their obligations. We are therefore emphasising enforcement.

I pay tribute to the staff of the CSA who, in the past five years, have seen maintenance increase from £400 million to £800 million. That is a credit to them.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): As the Minister said, the new formula will increase the efficiency of the staff of the CSA but will it better take account of cases in which the care of children is genuinely shared 50:50 between the parents, especially as 100 per cent. of child benefit has to go to one parent?

Malcolm Wicks: Yes is the short answer. Some children are brought up by both parents and we want to encourage that. The formula therefore takes account of it.

Pensions

7. **Mr. Hugo Swire** (East Devon): If he will make a statement of the number of final salary schemes that have closed since 1998. [55493]

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling): Since 1998, about 4 per cent. of known defined benefit schemes have notified the pension schemes registry of their closure.The overriding issue is how much is being saved towards a pension. The fact is that most people are not saving enough towards their retirement. Therefore, building on the reforms we have already made, we shall be making further proposals to help individuals and companies to make provisions for retirement. As I said at the previous Work and Pensions Question Time, I expect to publish our proposals this autumn.

Mr. Swire: We are now witnessing the demise of the final salary pension scheme with the day-to-day closure of more and more of those schemes. Do the Secretary of State and his Government accept that the increasing burdens they have placed on such schemes since 1997 include the disastrous abolition of advance corporation tax relief, which is responsible for the precarious situation in which many of today's and tomorrow's pensioners find themselves?

Mr. Darling: No. Interestingly, the chairman of the National Association of Pension Funds said in his recent address to the association's annual conference, at which I spoke, that he and his association were not calling for a return to the old ACT system. When we made the changes four or five years ago, we also cut corporation tax. It is now at 30 per cent., something that the party of which the hon. Gentleman is a member never managed to achieve in its 18 years in power. That has helped investors, including pension funds.

The real reason why companies are facing difficulties with their final salary schemes is, first, because of increased longevity, which means that costs are rising; and secondly, because the stock market has fallen quite dramatically, for reasons of which we are all aware. That is putting pressure on them. Their contribution holidays have ended and so on. The annuity rules have nothing to do with the final salary schemes. I can understand why the hon. Gentleman personally may want to see some changes: people in the top 5 per cent. of the income bracket may gain from them. However, the majority would not.

As I have said, we want to build on the reforms that we have already made. We intend to bring forward proposals this autumn, which will build on the recommendations from the Sandler and Pickering reviews. They will help companies and individuals to make better provision for their retirement.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Does the Secretary of State agree that the flight from final salary schemes is down not to FRS17 or the Government's inaction but to the almost £30 billion fall in equities in the market, as indicated by Boots, which moved from equities to bonds? Recognising that there is a £27 billion shortfall in savings, will he take the opportunity to ensure that companies that are not performing as they should by their employees close the savings gap? Otherwise, in future, many pensioners will be in penury.

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is right that there is a savings gap. Whether it is £27 billion or something near it, no one can be sure, but what is beyond doubt, as I said earlier, is that most people are not saving enough for their retirement. One of the measures that will help will be to strip away some of the unnecessary regulation in the pensions industry.

We have reached the stage where the buying of pensions has become so complex that even when people want to get a pension and are seriously thinking about making provision for themselves, they are sometimes faced with a five or six-hour selling process. That is why about 10 days ago I advocated setting out perhaps a small range of stakeholder-type products suitable for pension savings. They would be simple, regulated products but the selling of them would not be so bound up in red tape, as it is at present. All these measures are being considered by the Sandler and Pickering reviews. We will publish them in the summer and publish proposals in the autumn.

We are looking at other matters. There are measures that we can take to help individuals and companies to increase the amount of saving. I cite one example, in relation not to pensions but to ISAs. We were criticised heavily by the Conservative party when we replaced PEPs and TESSAs with ISAs. It is a fact that 12 million people, about one in four working adults, have saved £78 billion since ISAs were introduced. That shows what can be done with a simple, easy to understand product that removes some of the mystique and complexity that currently surrounds the selling of pensions.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Does the Secretary of State agree that the problem is not just that final salary schemes are closing, but that conditions for existing pensioners are often changed retrospectively by employers, and that trustees are proving ineffectual or insufficiently independent? Does he also agree that the arrangements need to be looked at afresh, to breed some confidence in this rather battered sector?

Mr. Darling: There has been criticism of some pension trustees. My hon. Friend the Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) asked about FRS17. In many cases, transparency in companies' affairs might have revealed serious problems with pension funds, particularly smaller funds, which tend not to be examined as efficiently as those of bigger companies. That is an example of how greater transparency and openness would help pensioners.

The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) will doubtless be aware that, as part of our general review of pensions, Brian Davis—former chief executive of Nationwide building society—is examining the operation and powers of the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority. When he makes his recommendations later in the year, I hope to build on them, and on the general recommendations put before the House to improve pension provision in this country.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does my right hon. Friend understand how deeply disappointing it is for long-serving employees to discover that, as a result of changes in their company's pension scheme, they will receive a significantly reduced occupational pension? That is totally unacceptable. What would happen if Members of Parliament and Officers of the House discovered late in the day that their anticipated pension was to be substantially reduced? This issue constitutes a clear injustice in the labour market, and I hope that my right hon. Friend will pursue the matter.

Mr. Darling: A company scheme involves a contractual agreement between the company concerned and its employees—it is not something that the Government underwrite or stand behind. Of course, the Government do pay money into contracted-out pension schemes and take certain steps through national insurance contributions and tax relief.

On the general proposition, as I have told the House on several occasions, we are considering a range of measures that will help individuals as well as companies. As I said, it is not the accounting standard that is causing the difficulties with certain pension schemes. Not all companies that are deciding to close their pension schemes have to do so; in some circumstances, they could continue with them. Long and hard thought should be given to their obligations to their employees—both current and retired.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): May I invite the Secretary of State to agree with the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner)—sadly, he is not in his place—the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle) and the many other of his colleagues who have signed early-day motion 1180, which expresses concern at the impact of advance corporation tax on the former registered dockworkers pension scheme? That early-day motion also notes that their dividend income has been reduced by 33 per cent., and that that income could have been reinvested, or provided higher benefits. Instead of the complacency that the Secretary of State has shown this afternoon, why does he not listen to his colleagues? They understand the damage that the tax increase is doing to people's pensions, and everything that their early-day motion says about the dockworkers pension scheme applies to every other pension fund in the country.

Mr. Darling: My right hon. Friend the Minister for Pensions has just reminded me that, under several of the privatisations that took place when the hon. Gentleman was a Minister and his party were in office, pension schemes were sometimes the biggest casualties. I had no idea that the hon. Gentleman has joined the campaign group to which he refers, and I am sure that they will welcome him as a new recruit.

On the hon. Gentleman's central point, I do not accept the underlying proposition that he attributes to the early-day motion—I have not seen it—tabled by my hon. Friends. The changes that we made to the corporation tax regime four years' ago were entirely right. If the hon. Gentleman was right to argue that they were the cause of current problems, one would have expected them to have occurred four years' ago, but they did not. The problems have been provoked by two factors: companies are belatedly waking up to the fact that beneficiaries are living longer; and, for reasons that we all understand, the stock exchange has fallen dramatically. That has concentrated minds in an unprecedented way. Those are the underlying reasons for the current difficulties, and it is the Government's job to ensure that we introduce proposals that can help individuals and companies. That is precisely what we will do later this year.

8. **Mr. Mark Hoban** (Fareham): If he will make a statement on the availability of occupational pension schemes for future pensioners. [55494]

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): It is estimated that occupational pension schemes are available to 16.4 million employees, or 66 per cent. of the total number of employees in Great Britain. Many of those employees who do not have access to an occupational scheme will have access to either a stakeholder scheme or the second state pension.

Mr. Hoban: I thank the Minister for his response. Will he ensure that one of the outcomes of the numerous reviews that the Secretary of State outlined in his earlier answers will be a legal and regulatory framework that will ensure that the decline in occupational pension schemes is reversed, so that more occupational pension schemes will be available to future pensioners?

Mr. McCartney: The whole purpose of the reviews is to ensure that we encourage people to save in a way that they have not previously, and that schemes do not suffer overbearing regulation or disproportionate costs. The difficulties of management of such schemes make it less likely that they will continue or even be set up in the first place. I would welcome the hon. Gentleman's views on the proposals when they are published. It is also important that we review proactively the role of the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority. It will be the first time that it has been reviewed since its establishment. The purpose of the review is to ensure that the body is recognised as one that represents the interests of pensioners when it considers the general problems of schemes or particular problems connected with the management of schemes.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Will the Minister of State take any notice of the chairman of the National Association of Pension Funds at its annual conference less than a fortnight ago when he said:

> "The Government is pursuing policies which have actually undermined company pensions."?

Does not the Minister of State feel some regret now that the Budget last month made no reference to pensions or savings? In order to save the time of the House, I shall not invite him to read out the long list of companies that have changed their pension arrangements from defined benefit to defined contribution schemes. Instead, I invite him to name one company that has moved in the opposite direction in the past 12 months.

Mr. McCartney: I would prefer to have a proper debate instead of juvenile ping-pong over the issue. So far this Question Time, we have had an adult debate about the issues. The hon. Gentleman asked for a list, so I shall give him one. The companies in question include BAE Systems, BP, British American Tobacco, Diageo, Corus, the John Lewis Partnership and Tesco, among others. However, I do not rest my case on that list. This is the first Government in a long time to set up several reviews in partnership with industry, the outcome of which will be to strip out regulations and burdens on schemes—both continuing and those being set up. This is the first Government to introduce stakeholder arrangements and pension forecasting. All that is being done in partnership with industry and, with all due respect to the hon. Gentleman, it is a hell of a different picture now compared with when he left office a few years ago.

Benefit Fraud

9. **Mike Gapes** (Ilford, South): If he will make a statement on new measures he plans to combat benefit fraud. [55495]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): In April, we introduced a range of measures using powers taken in the Fraud Act 2001 which will help us to tackle the fraudster. Investigators can now request information from banks and utilities to find evidence of fraud. They also have stronger powers to tackle employers who collude with their staff to defraud the benefit system. We now also have the power to remove benefits from those people who persistently abuse the system. That shows the Government's determination to crack down on the fraudster.

Mike Gapes: I welcome that reply, and those measures are long overdue. Previous Governments allowed far too much fraud by employers and unscrupulous people and it is good that this Government will put that right. Can the Minister give us some indication of the effectiveness of the measures that have been taken so far? Will he give consideration to further measures in the future, including perhaps biometric cards or other technological means to ensure the effectiveness of identity checks?

Malcolm Wicks: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the possibility of identity fraud. We have systems and technologies enabling us to identify it wherever possible, and we are beginning to win the war against the social-security fraudster. Between 1999 and March 2001 we reduced the amount of fraud and error in income support and jobseeker's allowance by 18 per cent., nearly double our first milestone of 10 per cent. Moreover, that was achieved a year ahead of schedule.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I acknowledge that much has been done, which is right and proper, but will the Minister turn his attention to housing benefit fraud and to the verification framework in particular? According to recent written answers and departmental research, central Government expenditure on the framework has amounted to nearly £1 billion, for a net win of £100 million annually. Bearing that in mind, along with some of the administrative delays caused by the framework, will the Minister ask his officials to conduct a cost-benefit analysis?

Am I not right in thinking that last April, more than a year ago, the Department decided to undertake a housing benefit review? I do not think we have heard any more about that to date.

Malcolm Wicks: We are conducting a research exercise to produce an up-to-date figure for the amount of housing benefit fraud. We are not complacent, but we feel that the money we are spending will prove cost-effective. More and more local authorities are safeguarding the system by adopting the verification framework. They can now adopt chunks at a time, by means of a modular approach.

As with fraud related to income support and jobseeker's allowance, we are confident that we are beginning to win the war—but yes, much more needs to be done.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): Does my hon. Friend agree that employers frequently know that their employees are cheating the system? Subject to evidence, should such employers not be prosecuted for aiding and abetting?

Malcolm Wicks: Yes. There is capacity in the system for employers to collude with employees, but we are on to the problem. It should be tackled, and it is being tackled.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): How many national insurance numbers are there in the country? Will the Minister give us the latest figure, and tell us how much greater it is than the entire British population? Will he also tell us what measures he has taken to tackle abuse of national insurance numbers, one of the most rapidly growing forms of benefit fraud?

Malcolm Wicks: We are tackling the abuse of national insurance numbers. We now employ rigorous processes when people apply for them, and a number of people are turned down every week and every month.

I realise that there is some confusion about the total amount of national insurance numbers. We are conducting an analysis in the Department, so that everyone knows what we have already made clear in parliamentary answers—that there is a difference between those of working age with national insurance numbers and those who have retired, but must still have numbers for obvious social-security purposes.

Mr. Willetts: Is the Minister aware that there are more than 80 million national insurance numbers, 20 million more—

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Alistair Darling) *rose—*

Mr. Willetts: It seems that the Secretary of State is going to answer my question. I look forward to hearing his answer.

Is the Minister aware that, according to the most recent parliamentary answer, there are more than 80 million national insurance numbers, over 20 million more than the entire British population? Whatever ingenious explanations the Minister offers, in terms of national insurance numbers for the deceased husbands of widows and suchlike, we still have a problem: far more national insurance numbers are being issued than there are people who legitimately need them.

Malcolm Wicks: Unlike a previous Administration, we are being rigorous about the issuing of national insurance numbers. As I have said, we turn down numerous people every week and every month. We are conducting an exercise so that we can explain fully to the House why the numbers in existence are in existence, but when someone dies, the widow or widower's entitlement is an issue. Common sense suggests that the national insurance number should therefore be retained.

Single Room Rent Restrictions

10. **Mr. Gordon Marsden** (Blackpool, South): What assessment he has made of the impact of single room rent restrictions on the accommodation situation in seaside and coastal towns. [55497]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): We introduced improvements to the single room rent provisions last July. They now strike a more effective balance between ensuring that young people have access to accommodation while making sure that the benefit system does not provide them with better housing than young people who are in work.

We also plan to commission a joint study with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to examine the impact of these changes later this year.

Mr. Marsden: Grateful though I am to my hon. Friend for that reply, does he appreciate that the present restrictions bear down particularly hard on young people in seaside and coastal towns who are looking for work? Streetlife, a charity in my constituency, said that it had about 30 landlords who would take young people presenting as homeless before the rent restriction was introduced. Since its introduction, the number has declined to zero. I ask my hon. Friend, in whom I have great faith, to speed up the review that is taking place over the summer and, notwithstanding that, to put some oomph into his officials, who have been remarkably complacent about the issue in recent years.

Malcolm Wicks: I can assure my hon. Friend that our officials have plenty of oomph—those who work on behalf of the House and the public are very energised people. We have changed the system for single room rent. It used to be limited to the average cost of a non-self-contained room with a shared toilet and kitchen. It now allows someone to have exclusive use of a bedroom, with shared use of a toilet, bathroom, kitchen and living room. I looked up the evidence, and about 71 per cent. of all single adults under 25 without children who live in the privately rented sector have accommodation of that kind. I am confident that we are striking the right balance but, of course, we keep all such matters closely under review.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you had any request from the Ministry of Defence to make a statement on the relief—let us use the polite word—of Brigadier Lane in Afghanistan? Does not the House of Commons deserve to know what the heck is going on in Afghanistan, particularly in the prisoner camps? If what was outlined in "The World Tonight" on Friday and to my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) and me is true, it is almost holocaust-like and the west should be ashamed. If the reports are true, should not the House of Commons be told?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman's first question was whether I had been contacted by any Minister with regard to a statement. The answer is no. It is the responsibility of the Minister concerned to come before the House.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to raise, not for the first time, the inordinate length of ministerial replies to supplementary questions, as the Question Time that has just finished showed. Will you make a study of *Hansard* tomorrow and, if you believe it appropriate, write to Ministers or communicate with them to ask them to make their replies shorter? They really are becoming longer and longer.

Mr. Speaker: I have already made a study, and we reached only Question 10. I agree that ministerial replies to supplementaries are far too long. They should be brief, and so indeed should the supplementary questions. I hope that Ministers take note—we should get further down the Order Paper than Question 10.

BILL PRESENTED

REGULATION OF CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

Mr. Geraint Davies, supported by Ms Debra Shipley, Jane Griffiths, Ms Karen Buck, Mr. Brian H. Donohoe, John Austin, Ms Julia Drown, Mr. Frank Cook, Chris McCafferty, Linda Perham, Ms Oona King and Siobhain McDonagh, presented a Bill to make provision about child care providers: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 21 June, and to be printed [Bill 140].

Orders of the Day

Adoption and Children Bill

[3RD ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended in the Standing Committee, further considered.

Clause 81

RESTRICTION ON BRINGING CHILDREN IN

3.34 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): I beg to move amendment No. 59, in page 44, line 21, after "are" insert "natural".

Mr. Speaker: I remind the House that with this we are discussing Government amendments Nos. 60, 61, 29, 298, 299, 255, 38, 27, 28, 306 and 39.

Jacqui Smith: The amendments are largely linked to the Bill's inter-country provisions, which are an important part of the package of measures that the Government are putting in place to ensure that inter-country adoption takes place only where, as a minimum, the same safeguards as for domestic adoptions have been applied.

Clause 81 re-enacts the restrictions in the current legal framework that make it a criminal offence for British residents to bring a child into the United Kingdom for the purposes of adoption—in other words, intending to adopt them in the UK—unless they comply with prescribed requirements. The Adoption of Children from Overseas Regulations 2001 make it a requirement that prospective adopters apply to a local authority or voluntary adoption agency to be assessed and approved under similar procedures as those followed in domestic adoptions, and to have a certificate of eligibility issued by the Secretary of State.

The clause also extends the restrictions to include British residents bringing a child into the UK whom they have adopted outside the British islands within the past six months and do not intend to adopt in the UK, thereby closing an important loophole. It is our intention that the prescribed requirements and conditions that must be met by people wanting to bring a child into the UK for the purposes of adoption—prospective adopters—should be similar to those made under the current legal framework: that the prospective adopters apply to, and are assessed by, an adoption agency in the UK; that while going through the assessment process the prospective adopters provide as much information as requested by the agency; that the prospective adopters agree to the carrying out of police and medical checks; that the case is referred to an adoption panel; that the home study assessment and such other information as is required by the overseas authority is sent to the central authority—the Department of Health in England and the National Assembly for Wales—so that it can be checked that the proper procedures were followed and all the relevant information collected before a certificate of eligibility is issued on behalf of the Secretary of State and sent to the relevant overseas authority; and that within 14 days of arrival in the UK with a child that they intend to adopt, notice of an intention to adopt is given to the local authority in whose area the prospective adopters reside.

[Jacqui Smith]

The effect of those provisions is that the prospective adopters must first be assessed and approved as suitable to adopt in the UK before adopting overseas. If they do not do that, they are guilty of an offence. We will, of course, consult on draft regulations and guidance that set out the requirements that must be met prior to bringing them into force.

Clause 81 also increases the penalties for those found guilty of breaching the restrictions on bringing, or causing to bring, a child into the country. At present, the maximum penalty on conviction is three months' imprisonment or a fine of £5,000, or both. We have strengthened that so that there is a maximum penalty in a magistrates court of six months' imprisonment and/or a fine of £5,000, and the possibility of an even higher penalty if the magistrates court refers the case to a Crown court, or if the defendant enters a plea of not guilty and elects for a Crown court trial. In such cases, the maximum penalty will be 12 months' imprisonment or an unlimited fine, or both.

Finally, clause 81 allows us to apply with modifications and disapply the provisions in chapter 3 on inter-country adoption cases. It is our intention to modify the provisions to provide that, where the proper procedures have been followed, children brought to the UK for adoption spend at least six months living with their prospective adopters prior to an application being made for an adoption order, and at least 12 months where they have not. We also intend to ensure that children adopted from overseas are able to obtain access to information that the agency holds about them, although the exact nature of such information will vary depending upon the procedures in the child's state of origin. Clause 121 makes similar provision for Scotland to that made by clause 81 in respect of England and Wales.

Clause 84 allows us to put in place arrangements for the recognition in England and Wales of adoption orders made overseas. It permits the Secretary of State to make an order specifying the adoption orders to be included. The clause also allows the Secretary of State to make regulations setting out the criteria that an overseas country's procedures must meet in order for the country to be included in the list of countries whose adoptions are recognised—sometimes known as the designated list.

The current designated list was created in an order made in 1973. It was amended in 1993 to add China, but other than that it has remained unchanged. It has always been our stated intention to review the designated list. However, that is not possible without changes to primary legislation, as the removal of a country from the list would automatically remove recognition of adoptions made before the review, which would undermine the status of children and adults adopted in the past from countries included on the list. Clause 122 makes similar provision for Scotland to that made in clause 84 in respect of England and Wales.

Government amendments Nos. 59 and 60 seek to clarify the definition of the word "parent", as referred to in clause 81, in relation to overseas adoption. The policy intention is for the restrictions provided for by clause 81 not to apply where the adopter or prospective adopter is a natural parent of the child. Those amendments respond to concerns expressed by stakeholders that the term "parent" includes an adoptive parent, and therefore that the provision in clause 81(1)(b), which imposes the restrictions that I explained, is nullified by subsection (2), which provides that those restrictions do not apply to a parent of the child.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I am most grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way so early in her speech. Hon. Members understand the point that she is making, but will she explain why she feels it necessary to use the word "natural", rather than "genetic"? The term "natural parent" suggests that birth parents are the only parents who are natural. Surely adoptive parents would be natural. Why not use a more narrowly defined word, such as "genetic"?

Jacqui Smith: We understand from our discussions on the Bill that there are a lot of sensitivities about the nature of birth parents and their relationship with the child and the nature of adopters. It is generally recognised, however, that the use of the phrase "natural parent" conveys what is necessary. I suspect that we will continue to discuss some of the sensitivities involved in the use of such terms.

In response to those concerns, and following further consideration of the wording of clause 81, we seek to make amendments Nos. 59 and 60 to clarify the meaning of the word "parent".

Amendment No. 61 will provide a power to impose functions on a local authority where notice of intention to adopt has been given to the authority in respect of a child brought into the United Kingdom under clause 81(1)(a). The amendment will ensure that the maximum possible protection is conferred on children brought into the United Kingdom for the purposes of adoption. Where subsection (1)(a) applies, a person who brings a child into the United Kingdom for the purposes of adoption will be required to give a local authority notice of his or her intention to adopt within 14 days of returning to the United Kingdom.

In such a case, the intention is to impose specific functions on local authorities by regulation, following full consultation. The regulations are likely to require a local authority to visit the child, to inspect premises, to require specified information in respect of the child and prospective adopters and to monitor the child. In summary, amendment No. 61 will afford the maximum protection to be conferred on a child brought into the country for the purposes of adoption.

Amendment No. 27 is similar to amendments Nos. 59 and 60. It will ensure that the Scottish restrictions in clause 121—on bringing a child who is not habitually resident in the British isles into the United Kingdom—do not apply to a natural parent or relative.

I shall now deal with the amendments—in particular, amendment No. 29—that we have tabled to the defence provisions. We tabled the amendments to ensure that the clauses comply with the way in which the courts are now interpreting defences in the light of article 6 of the European convention on human rights, which states:

> "Everyone charged with a criminal offence shall be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law."

As several amendments follow the same principle, I am sure that hon. Members are paying close attention.

3.45 pm

The amendments change the legal burden in the defence provisions to an evidential burden to comply with recent court judgments. When a person is charged with an offence in contravention of a clause that provided a defence, he will not have to prove the matter set out in that defence on the balance of probabilities. The change means that if there is sufficient evidence that a defence provision may apply to the case before the court, it will be for the prosecution to prove beyond reasonable doubt that it does not. We consider that to be the appropriate balance in the light of convention case law.

To counterbalance that change in the burden of evidence, the amendments also amend the formulation of "did not know or have reasonable cause to believe" currently in the Bill, to "did not know, and had no reason to suspect", which provides a higher test. Amendment No. 29 applies to the offence of arranging the removal of a child from the United Kingdom for the purpose of adoption, in contravention of clause 83, and I have explained the principles behind that.

Amendments Nos. 298 and 299 substantially amend clause 84. In Committee, I set out our plans to bring into force some of the Bill's provisions before full implementation. As part of the early work, we intend to begin the process of reviewing the designated list, but we want to do so in light of the regulations that will prescribe the requirements. The review will involve bilateral discussions with countries to decide which ones should be included in the list on the basis that their adoptions are likely to meet the requirements set out in regulations. Having completed the review, the Secretary of State may make an order that adoptions made in those countries from the date that the order is made are to be overseas adoptions for the purposes of the 1976 Act and the Bill, which means that they will be recognised in the UK. As it stands, we cannot begin the review against those prescribed requirements before the commencement of the Bill as a whole, and we are keen to get on with it.

I stated in Committee that I would table an amendment on Report to allow us to set in place the new arrangements in 2003, should we be in a position to do so. The revised clause 84 will enable the review to begin in advance of the commencement of the Bill as a whole. However, the review of the designated list is likely to be a time-consuming process and we will not be able to complete it in respect of some countries by the time it comes fully into force. So the amendments to clause 84 also provide the necessary flexibility to continue to recognise adoptions from those countries currently on the designated list that have not yet been reviewed.

Amendment No. 298 largely replaces what is now clause 84. Amended subsection (1) re-defines overseas adoption for the purposes of the Bill and the 1976 Act. Subsection (2) enables the Secretary of State to make regulations prescribing the requirements that should be met by an adoption that is made after the commencement of the regulations for it to be an overseas adoption. Those are likely to be: that the law in the overseas country ensures that the child has been freely given up for adoption and that that has not been induced by payment or compensation of any kind; that the overseas country makes attempts to place the child in a family in their own country; that it confirms that inter-country adoption is in the child's best interests; that the domestic and inter-country adoption arrangements and requirements are the same; and that profit is not made from the process.

Those are the main requirements in the amendments on the inter-country provisions. The key consideration is that the Bill already significantly strengthens and clarifies the position on inter-country adoption. Its additional restrictions and tougher penalties will protect vulnerable children overseas by acting as a deterrent to those who do not want to go through the proper assessment and approval procedures. It should also help us to ensure that a consistent service is provided to those who wish to adopt overseas, and that they are helped to navigate the often complex procedures. The amendments will provide for the Bill to go even further to strengthen the safeguards and procedures for children who are adopted overseas, and I commend them to the House.

Mr. Brazier: I shall focus mostly on Government amendments Nos. 61 and 298, although I want to press the Minister for a moment on the point that I made in an intervention in relation to Government amendments Nos. 59, 60 and 27.

Terminology is of some significance. To many adoptive parents, it seems sad to hear the genetic parents of the children concerned, many of whom have been most unnatural in their treatment of their children, referred to as "natural parents", as if adopting were somehow unnatural. Why cannot the much more usual terminology of "birth parents" be used, or a more technical term such as "genetic parents"? That is not clear to me.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): I have some sympathy with the use of the term "birth parents". Would the hon. Gentleman agree, however, that the term "genetic parents" can cause problems, as genetics do not always bear out—in probably 20 per cent. of cases, I understand—what a child believes to be truly his or her parentage?

Mr. Brazier: The hon. Lady is taking us into a terminological minefield. Perhaps she and I can agree on the most commonly used phrase: "birth parents". We do not want to spend too much time on the terminology, but the fact is that many adoptive parents resent the idea that it should be suggested in law that their relationship with the children concerned—the adoption of whom has often involved them making huge sacrifices—is somehow unnatural.

In relation to Government amendment No. 61, it is worth making a few background points on clause 81. The United Kingdom still has a bolt-on inter-country service, both currently and even after the introduction of this Bill, rather than, as is the case in many other signatories to the convention, a system that is specially designed to deal with overseas adoptions. The amendment takes a small step in the right direction of putting Britain into the mainstream of convention-signing countries that receive children for adoption. Adopters will now have to notify their local authority about their new child's arrival. That should mean that the local authority is then obliged to make welfare visits: alas, these are all too frequently not done because of the pressures on social services staff.

The provision will help a little with the difficulty that adopters have in trying to get recognition of the probity of inter-country adoption within their local authorities, but,

[Mr. Brazier]

sadly, it probably does not go far enough, and certainly not as far as was envisaged by the Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act 1999. There is, indeed, a question. The 1999 Act envisaged that any adoption of a child into the UK should be treated as though it were an agency adoption. That ensures that local authorities oversee the assessment of adopters and review the child's progress once the child comes into the UK, and that the rest of the protective measures apply. Given that this Government amendment is, effectively, less strong than the 1999 provisions, what happens to those provisions? They have not yet been put into operation, so are they simply to disappear?

The Minister referred to the importance of helping overseas adopters, as we do other adopters. They battle with paperwork and practicalities here and in the sending country almost alone. There is no specialist agency of any kind to help them here. When the British adoptive family have returned to the UK with the child, they have hitherto received very little assistance from most local authorities. Sometimes, there has been monitoring of the early days of the adoption, but, mostly, work pressures in local authorities have prevented even that.

It is worth noting that very few overseas adoptions have broken down over the years. The one group that has been thoroughly researched is the 500 or so children who came from Romania in 1991 and 1992. About 20 of those 500 adoptions have broken down—that is only 4 per cent., which is an extraordinarily low figure and much lower than the rate for domestic adoptions. It is particularly remarkable, given the horrendous conditions—we all saw the pictures on television—from which the children came.

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): Can the hon. Gentleman tell the House the average age of the children who came from Romania? Children from the UK who are adopted tend to be older and, therefore, have more problems.

Mr. Brazier: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a direct answer, but I believe that the children from Romania came from across the age spectrum. They were certainly not all babies, which seems to be the point behind his question.

Before I move away from the subject of Romania, it is worth putting on record the anger that many adopters feel about the activities of Baroness Nicholson. She was sent to Romania by the European Parliament to consider the position there, and in her report on adoption in Romania she makes an attack that appears to be corroborated by very little evidence. The suggestion that children were being sold from Romania so frightened the authorities there that overseas adoption from that country to this country has stopped completely, thus denying many children the opportunity of a loving family to adopt them.

The fact that such a high proportion of overseas adoptions succeed is a towering achievement and testimony to the intense commitment of overseas adopters. Surely help should be available to them. It is well known that early intervention with a problem is usually productive and often saves the relationship. The amendment should help a little, because social workers will have a duty to monitor families just as they do with domestic adoptions. I hope that the barrage of quality protects indicators—it seems to get larger every year—will be followed up and delivered despite the extreme overstretch that many local authorities, including mine, have experienced.

Government amendment No. 298 will amend clause 84 and it is clearly designed to deal with cases such as that involving the Kilshaws. As the Minister said, it will close the current loophole that allowed the Kilshaws to get round having a local authority pre-adoption vetting. They used a private home study that went directly to a US-based agency, which then allowed the adoption. A number of such adoptions have taken place each year. I am not attacking the Kilshaws under parliamentary privilege—enough has already been said about that case—but there is a danger that those with genuinely sinister motives, such as paedophiles, might take advantage of the loophole. Therefore, it is right to close it and to bring the rules for UK adoptions from the US into line with those for other countries. However, in the Kilshaw case, it must be pointed out that the American and British laws together finally delivered a satisfactory result.

The Kilshaw case resulted in much animus against American adoption agencies. However, although the state of adoption law in some American states is not very good, it is better in many states than it is in this country. Furthermore, many couples in this country make up for the complete absence of proper independent advice in this country about overseas adoption by approaching an American agency. Very often, American agencies can assist British couples in adopting children from countries outside America and Britain.

Taken as a whole, the amendments make a number of sensible changes to improve the administration of overseas adoption. We are minded to support them, but we still feel that there should be a little more carrot—a little more positive assistance for people who bring children into this country, often from the most appalling conditions, and give them a loving home.

4 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): When the Minister sums up the debate, will she tell us her assessment of the Bill's likely effect on the volume of inter-country adoption? Will there be significantly more of it or significantly less, or will the level remain about the same?

I have no professional interest in adoption, whether overseas or domestic, and I have no personal experience of it. However, I have dealt with the casework of constituents who have attempted overseas adoption, and they have found the procedures in this country amazingly negative and labyrinthine. First, they go to the local council's social services department, where they find that social workers are unremittingly hostile because they seem to feel that there is something not quite correct about adopting children from another culture. They fear, often completely wrongly, that they may be stolen or that there may be profit involved. Cases may go, on appeal, to the Department of Health. I was involved in one such case, and found that there was hostility there too. If the case gets through that hurdle, it has to go through immigration control, where such adoptions are viewed very negatively, as a loophole in immigration regulations.

There is not only anecdotal evidence of that approach; there is evidence of it in the number of such adoptions. We seem to have one of the most restrictive regimes for inter-country adoptions in the western world. I understand that there are about 300 applications a year, fewer than the number of inter-country adoptions in small countries such as Norway and about a tenth of the number in France. There may be technical reasons for that, but in the absence of any evidence to the contrary, I assume that it is the result of our extremely restrictive philosophy.

Most of the Minister's introduction was about strengthening restrictions and tightening controls. She said nothing to imply that there was anything worth while about inter-country adoption. However, in many cases it may be a very desirable activity. There are people who are genuinely humanitarian and who wish to give children a home, and if one of the partners has a link overseas, inter-country adoption may be a perfectly natural thing to do. I would hope that the Minister would be a little more positive about the spirit behind such adoptions.

I sense that my sentiments are echoed by many of the countries with which we deal. For example, India and Colombia, which have developed sophisticated domestic monitoring systems to prevent abuse and profiteering, have found this country absolutely impossible to deal with because our philosophy is so negative. South American countries such as Peru have followed the same route. This country is clearly sending out the message that it does not want inter-country adoption, so it makes it as difficult as possible for parents to pursue that course. I hope that the Minister will make her approach clear.

I listened to some of the debates that took place last week. The philosophy behind much of the Government's thinking, on unmarried couples for example, is that it is better to have an imperfect relationship than to leave a child in an orphanage, and surely that is even more the case here. There are many children in dire circumstances who would benefit from adoption. If the right procedures and proper protections are in place, why cannot overseas adoption be not merely tolerated but actively encouraged?

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): Will the hon. Gentleman please explain to the House what an imperfect relationship is?

Dr. Cable: I do not want to reopen the debate that we had last week. I happily supported the principle of giving unmarried couples the right to adopt. The Government seemed to say—I fully supported them—that it was often better for unmarried couples rather than married couples to adopt because that widened the pool of adoption and brought more people into play. I am simply asking them to follow through the same logic in relation to the very specific problem that we are considering.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I did not intend to speak in the debate on this amendment, but I am stimulated by contributions from the Conservative Front Bench and the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable).

I have grave doubts in principle about overseas adoptions. Last week, I mentioned the circumstances that I witnessed in Romania. I know nothing about Baroness Nicholson's report, which I have not read, but I share her concern about procedures for removing very poor children from Romania. I believe strongly that our contribution in such circumstances should be to try to work with the authorities and the children and their families to ensure that poverty and deprivation are addressed in their own country.

I mentioned my visit 10 years ago to a nursery in Romania containing 100 children below the age of five. I remember the children climbing all over me while I stood. On starting in child care work, I found that when somebody goes into a children's home, children who do not know them climb on to them for love and for the sake of touching somebody. My experience in Romania was the same. The nursery was supposedly an orphanage, but, as I said last week, when I asked the woman in charge how many of the children were without families, she told me that only one out of 100 was an orphan. The rest had families, mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters who loved them dearly, but could not afford to bring them up.

I passionately believe that we need to tread carefully in relation to overseas adoptions. I would welcome an assurance from the Minister that we will consider how this country might assist in protecting youngsters in countries such as Romania who are removed from their families. It can happen for what might seem the very best of reasons. Indeed, I and one or two other members of the Select Committee on Health had contact with a previous scheme in which poor children were removed from this country to the other side of the world for the very best of reasons. When they came back, a number of them asked, "Why did you do it, Britain?"

Would we honestly argue that children in this country who are in poverty and are deprived and living in very difficult circumstances should be sent overseas and adopted there because we cannot look after them and support their families? I do not think so. I hope that we will tread very carefully in dealing with these matters.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Broadly speaking, I fully support the amendments, which are a useful step forward.

Mention has been made of the Kilshaw case. I am not here to use parliamentary privilege in an unfair way either, but I point out that the case highlighted numerous problems that are addressed by the amendments, which are most welcome. Many criticisms are made of social services. It is obvious that they are under a great deal of pressure, but the Flintshire social services moved rapidly indeed in that case and deserve credit for what they did. Equally, the Government have listened to the evidence taken in the Special Standing Committee. The amendments are welcome and the Bill is far better now than a few months ago.

The hon. Members for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) and for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) referred to youngsters in Romania. I visited Belarus not so long ago and saw similar circumstances in which children were seemingly being offered to all and sundry, which is completely unacceptable. The comments made by the hon. Member for Wakefield were absolutely right: we need better liaison between UK authorities and those in other countries.

The memorandum submitted by the Adoption Forum to the Special Standing Committee states, among other things:

> "There is no provision for help or advice beyond the home study. Prospective adopters will still be on their own battling with the bureaucracies of two countries—their own and the country of origin of the child."

Here is the crunch:

> "How are people to find reliable contacts and agencies abroad when there is so little official help on offer?"—[*Official Report, Special Standing Committee*, 21 November 2001; c. 171.]

[Mr. Elfyn Llwyd]

I fully support the contention of the hon. Member for Wakefield that we need to make it possible for these countries to address their problems rather than offer their children for adoption. Will the Minister consider this point, however, in the cases where adoption is a viable alternative—perhaps the viable alternative? This argument was put to various bodies during the evidence taking, and, as far as I can see from the Bill, we have not progressed much further since then. I am not levelling criticism unfairly or casually; many of the amendments have plugged the gap that existed, and they are welcome. I would, however, like the Minister to address the small point that I have just raised. Apart from that, I am very pleased to support the amendments.

Jacqui Smith: We have had a short but useful debate, in which different views have been expressed on whether the Government should further restrict inter-country adoption or take an even more positive approach to it. This partly represents the sensitivity and the concerns of people engaged in such adoption; it also reflects a failure to understand some of the progress that is being made in the Bill.

To return to the point pressed by the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) about the use of the word "natural", I am not sure that I am going to be able to satisfy him today, so to speak. The Government considered other terms, but they were all seen to have problems attached to their use, some of which have been mentioned today. Perhaps I could write to him about why "natural" is the most appropriate term.

Several hon. Members have understandably mentioned the Kilshaw case in relation to safeguards. I note the presence in the Chamber of my hon. Friend the Member for Delyn (Mr. Hanson); he was, of course, the Kilshaws' constituency MP. I understand that he supports the views of the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) about the important contribution made by Flintshire social services, and about the importance of ensuring—as we are doing in the Bill—that significant changes are made to protect children from the kind of events that we saw in the Kilshaw case. This will be assisted by the Government's decision to restrict the bringing into the country of children adopted in other countries within the last six months. As I suggested in my introduction, that is quite an important loophole that the Bill will enable us to close.

Several hon. Members have mentioned the need for more support for those engaged in inter-country adoption. The hon. Member for Canterbury talked about the need for inter-country adoption agencies. I believe that some agencies already concentrate on inter-country work, and it is also possible for inter-country adoption agencies to be set up under the Bill. I would say to the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) that it is not the intention of the Bill either artificially to increase or artificially to hold back the number of inter-country adoptions. It is not clear whether the number will increase, although it has risen steadily over the last couple of years. The Bill will, however, improve the quality of procedures for those wanting to adopt from overseas. I do not agree with the hon. Member for Twickenham that there is hostility in the system to inter-country adoption. I shall outline some of the action already taken by the Government.

We have introduced the provisions in the Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act 1999 that place a clear duty on local authorities to establish an inter-country adoption service. Those adopting from abroad are already eligible under provisions relating to adoption support, which we have debated at some length. However, procedures are necessarily tight in order to protect and safeguard children. Given the concerns that hon. Members have expressed and what we know about some cases, it is important that those safeguards are in place.

4.15 pm

We have fewer inter-country adoptions than some other countries, but we have 10 times the number of domestic adoptions than in Norway, for example. There is an important cultural issue to be considered. In many countries, there is nothing like the emphasis—if any emphasis at all—on the adoption of children out of care that there is in this country. Hon. Members will recognise that it is a very important priority for the Government not only to maintain but to increase the ability to adopt out of care. That is quite often the reason for discrepancies in adoption figures among countries. In addition, The Hague convention, against which I have not heard any hon. Member argue, requires that we tighten controls in order to proceed with our ratification.

Prospective adopters have the support both of their agencies and of the Department of Health's adoption unit in finding out the information that they need to help them adopt children from overseas. I do not quite understand the accusation made by the hon. Member for Twickenham that, somehow, Government officials are attempting to make life more difficult for those who want to adopt from overseas. I have evidence of people thanking officials in my Department for the assistance that they have been given on inter-country adoption.

The hon. Member for Canterbury suggested that the provisions in the Bill were weaker than the 1999 measures. In fact, clauses 81 and 84 are tighter in the sense that the Secretary of State will have to prescribe the requirements that ought to be met by local authorities in discharging their responsibilities to those adopting from overseas. Without that provision, the Secretary of State would not have any criteria to work to and would therefore be more likely to be challenged.

We recognise that a balance needs to be struck between enabling parents who have a genuine wish to adopt and a contribution to make in adopting a child from overseas, and the very important need to ensure that our legislation protects children not only in this country but overseas. As we have made clear throughout proceedings on this Bill, whether we are considering domestic or inter-country adoption, we must ensure that the needs of the children are at the centre of policies. I commend the Government's amendments to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

It being forty-five minutes after the commencement of proceedings on consideration of the Bill, MR. SPEAKER, *pursuant to Order [16 May], put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of business to be concluded at that hour.*

Amendments made: No. 60, in page 44, line 22, at beginning insert "natural".

No. 61, in page 44, line 42, at end insert—

'(b) if notice of intention to adopt has been given, impose functions in respect of the child on the local authority to which the notice was given'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 83

RESTRICTION ON TAKING CHILDREN OUT

Amendment made: No. 29, in page 46, line 21, leave out subsection (5) and insert—

'( ) A person is not guilty of an offence under subsection (4) of causing a person to take any step mentioned in paragraph (a) or (b) of subsection (3) unless it is proved that he knew or had reason to suspect that the step taken would contravene subsection (1).

But this subsection only applies if sufficient evidence is adduced to raise an issue as to whether the person had the knowledge or reason mentioned'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 84

OVERSEAS ADOPTIONS

Amendments made: No. 298, in page 46, line 40, leave out from "adoption"" to end of line 10 on page 47 and insert "—

(a) means an adoption of a description specified in an order made by the Secretary of State, being a description of adoptions effected under the law of any country or territory outside the British Islands, but

(b) does not include a Convention adoption.

(2) Regulations may prescribe the requirements that ought to be met by an adoption of any description effected after the commencement of the regulations for it to be an overseas adoption for the purposes of this Act.

(3) At any time when such regulations have effect, the Secretary of State must exercise his powers under this section so as to secure that subsequently effected adoptions of any description are not overseas adoptions for the purposes of this Act if he considers that they are not likely within a reasonable time to meet the prescribed requirements.

(3A) In this section references to this Act include the Adoption Act 1976.'.

No. 299, in page 47, line 12, at end insert—

'( ) In this section—

"adoption" means an adoption of a child or of a person who was a child at the time the adoption was applied for,

"regulations" means regulations made by the Secretary of State after consultation with the Assembly.'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 87

SECTION 86: SUPPLEMENTARY

Amendment made: No. 255, in page 48, line 14, at end insert—

' "Prescribed" means prescribed by rules.'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 88

OVERSEAS DETERMINATIONS AND ORDERS

Amendment made: No. 38, in page 48, line 28, leave out "colony" and insert "British overseas territory".—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 121

SCOTTISH RESTRICTION ON BRINGING CHILDREN INTO UNITED KINGDOM

Amendments made: No. 27, in page 69, line 6, leave out "parents," and insert—

'natural parents (whether or not they have parental responsibilities or parental rights in relation to the child), natural'.

No. 28, in page 69, line 24, at end insert—

'( ) In relation to a child brought into the United Kingdom for adoption in circumstances where this section applies, regulations may provide for any provision of Part II of this Act to apply with modifications or not to apply.'—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 122

AMENDMENT OF ADOPTION (SCOTLAND) ACT 1978: OVERSEAS ADOPTIONS

Amendments made: No. 305, in page 70, line 1, leave out from first "adoption" " to end of line 11 and insert "—

(a) means an adoption of a description specified in an order made by the Scottish Ministers, being a description of adoptions effected under the law of any country or territory outside the British Islands, but

(b) does not include a Convention adoption.

(2A) The Scottish Ministers may by regulations prescribe the requirements that ought to be met by an adoption of any description effected after the commencement of the regulations for it to be an overseas adoption for the purposes of this Act.

(2B) At any time when such regulations have effect, the Scottish Ministers must exercise their power under subsection (2) so as to secure that subsequently effected adoptions of any description are not overseas adoptions for the purposes of this Act if they consider that such adoptions are not likely within a reasonable time to meet the prescribed requirements.'.

No. 306, in page 70,, leave out lines 14 to 19 and insert—

'(2D) In subsections (2) to (2C), "adoption" means the adoption of a child or of a person who was a child at the time the adoption was applied for.'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 125

EXTENSION OF THE CONVENTION TO BRITISH OVERSEAS TERRITORIES

Amendment made: No. 39, in page 71, line 6, leave out subsection (3) and insert—

'( ) The British Nationality Act 1981 is amended as follows.

( ) In section 1 (acquisition of British citizenship by birth or adoption)—

(a) in subsection (5), at the end of paragraph (b) there is inserted "effected under the law of a country or territory outside the United Kingdom",

(b) at the end of subsection (5A)(b) there is inserted "or in a designated territory",

(c) in subsection (8), the words following "section 50" are omitted.

( ) In section 15 (acquisition of British overseas territories citizenship)—

(a) after subsection (5) there is inserted—

"(5A) Where—

(a) a minor who is not a British overseas territories citizen is adopted under a Convention adoption,

(b) on the date on which the adoption is effected—

(i) the adopter or, in the case of a joint adoption, one of the adopters is a British overseas territories citizen, and

(ii) the adopter or, in the case of a joint adoption, both of the adopters are habitually resident in a designated territory, and

(c) the Convention adoption is effected under the law of a country or territory outside the designated territory,

the minor shall be a British overseas territories citizen as from that date.",

(b) in subsection (6), after "order" there is inserted "or a Convention adoption".

( ) In section 50 (interpretation), in subsection (1)—

(a) after the definition of "company" there is inserted—

""Convention adoption"" means an adoption effected under the law of a country or territory in which the Convention is in force, and certified in pursuance of Article 23(1) of the Convention",

(b) after the definition of ""Crown service under the government of the United Kingdom"" there is inserted—

"designated territory" means a qualifying territory, or the Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia, which is designated by Her Majesty by Order in Council under subsection (14)".

( ) After subsection (13) of that section there is inserted—

"(14) For the purposes of the definition of "designated territory" in subsection (1), an Order in Council may—

(a) designate any qualifying territory, or the Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia, if the Convention is in force there, and

(b) make different designations for the purposes of section 1 and section 15;

and, for the purposes of this subsection and the definition of "Convention adoption" in subsection (1), "the Convention" means the Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in respect of Intercountry Adoption, concluded at the Hague on 29th May 1993.

An Order in Council under this subsection shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament".'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

New Clause 14

PROCEEDINGS IN GREAT BRITAIN

'Proceedings for an offence by virtue of section 9, 57, 90, 91, 92 or 119—

(a) may not be brought more than six years after the commission of the offence but, subject to that,

(b) may be brought within a period of six months from the date on which evidence sufficient in the opinion of the prosecutor to warrant the proceedings came to his knowledge.

In relation to Scotland, "the prosecutor" is to be read as "the procurator fiscal".'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Jacqui Smith: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government amendments Nos. 30, 31, 233, 62, 63, 32, 144 and 145.

Amendment No. 130, in clause 128, page 72, line 13, leave out from "that" to end of line 14 and insert—

'the person may attend and be heard.'.

Government amendment No. 226.

Amendment No. 131, in page 72, line 32, leave out from "and" to "at" in line 33 and insert—

'who has not given notice under subsection (4) of that section.'.

Government amendments Nos. 235 to 237.

Jacqui Smith: The amendments deal with offences and proceedings relating to adoption, and new clause 14 has its roots in the scrutiny by the Special Standing Committee. Clause 95(2)(a) sets a three-year time limit for bringing proceedings for all offences under the Bill. The net effect of that is to extend the time limit for summary only offences from the standard six months to three years, and to place a three-year time limit on the either-way offences, which are not normally time limited.

Members of the Special Standing Committee will recall that concerns were expressed about the three-year time limit. Offenders could escape prosecution, it was suggested, if the offence came to the attention of the authorities more than three years after it was committed. Under the operation of the current three-year inspection cycle, inspectors could discover too late that an offence had been committed immediately after their last inspection. Members of the Committee also suggested that unlawful activities might not come to light until several years after the offences were committed.

As we undertook to do, we have examined those concerns and we agree that issues need to be addressed by amendment. We considered when each offence would be likely to come to the attention of the authorities. In that context, we concluded that the Bill deals with three groups of offences, each of which we intend to provide for differently.

The first group comprises offences under clauses 81 and 83, relating to issues involving inter-country adoption, which we have just discussed. Each contains an either-way offence triable before a magistrates court or a Crown court, which provides for a higher penalty than the Bill's summary only offences. As there would have to be exceptional reasons for placing a time limit on an either-way offence, we shall remove the current time limit on the two either-way offences.

In the second group, all the other offences are summary only and may be tried only in a magistrates court. We are removing the time limit from most of those—in a moment I shall explain which summary offences will be treated differently—as we would expect the adoption agency or prosecuting authority to receive information or notice soon after the offence was committed.

Such offences are linked to activities in which the agency is involved, and it should soon learn of an offence or expect to be informed by others involved—for example, where the court orders the prospective adopters to return the child to the agency or the birth parents remove the child from the prospective adopters without the leave of the court. Therefore, we shall remove the three-year time limit, allowing the standard six-month time limit for most summary only offences to apply automatically.

To reiterate, those are offences that we would expect to be discovered within that six-month time limit. However, as members of the Committee pointed out, some may go unnoticed by the adoption agency or other authorities where an agency is not involved in making arrangements for an adoption. In the bipartisan spirit in which we are considering the legislation, although that will not happen often, I have to say that it was the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) who raised the issue in Committee. Moreover, the agency may itself commit an offence soon after an inspection visit, and that may not be discovered until three years later when the next visit takes place.

We considered extending the time limit to four years to provide for the three-year inspection cycle, but we were concerned that cases in which, for example, arrangements are made for the private adoption of a baby or an infant, or even of an unborn child, might be missed. The offence could be concealed, perhaps until the child needed to enter primary school. The new clause therefore sets a new time limit of six years for bringing proceedings for offences under clauses 9, 57, 90, 91, 92, and 119.

We think that that will provide sufficient scope to bring prosecutions against those who arrange private adoptions. The prosecuting authorities will be able to decide that if no harm has come to the child, it is not in the public interest to prosecute the parents. However, the longer time limit provides sufficient scope for the authorities to bring prosecutions against those who arranged or facilitated that private adoption. That is why we decided to set a time of six years.

The new clause extends to Scotland as well as to England and Wales, as it imposes a time limit in respect of clause 119 that extends to Scotland.

Government amendments Nos. 30, 31 and 32 relate to my earlier arguments about the series of amendments that change the legal burden in the defence provisions to an evidential burden to comply with recent court judgments on that point. I know that hon. Members were listening carefully when I outlined the reasons for that. To counterbalance the change in the burden of evidence, the amendments also amend the formulation used in the clause—that someone

"neither knew nor had reasonable cause to believe"—

to the question of whether they

"knew or had reason to suspect",

which provides a higher test.

Government amendments Nos. 144 and 145 will ensure that only an evidential burden is placed on the defendant, and that clause 115(3) is compatible with article 6 of the European convention on human rights. They also align the clauses with the defences for electronic distribution of advertisements in the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill.

I now turn to Government amendments Nos. 62 and 63. When clause 97, which was then clause 96, was considered in Committee on 4 December, we—I am using the royal we, because I was not present on that day—agreed to consider the drafting of the clause. The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton), set out the following areas for examination: first, whether there should be an automatic bar on the identification of children in the county court and the High Court to match that already in place in the magistrates court; secondly, whether county courts should have the ability to revert to open court in individual cases; and thirdly, whether to tighten the wording of the clause to ensure the anonymity of those involved in adoption proceedings.

Amendment No. 62 deals with the second of those points. The Government have considered whether county courts should have the ability to sit in open court in individual cases, and we believe that it is important that the family courts have sufficient flexibility to carry out their duties without unnecessary bureaucracy and without causing unnecessary delay. It would be undesirable for a case that is being dealt with at an otherwise suitable court centre to be transferred to the High Court solely to allow judgment that does not even identify the child concerned to be given in public. Amendment No. 62 gives county court judges the discretion to hear adoption proceedings in public when they consider it appropriate to do so—for example, where it is in the child's best interests or in the public interest.

Through amendment No. 62 we are modernising and clarifying the language used in the Bill by substituting for the phrases "in chambers" and "in camera" the phrase "in private". That clarifies the policy intention by ensuring that only those concerned with the case are present and that the public are not admitted. Recent case law has again stressed that "in chambers" is not the same as "in private", so non-parties could seek to enter a hearing in chambers. The amendment updates the clause with the more modern terminology of

"heard and determined in private",

which provides consistency with the language used in the rest of the statute book.

On the first point raised in Committee, the Government have considered the issue of the identification of children involved in adoption proceedings, and we believe that there should be an automatic bar on the identification of children in the county court and the High Court to match that already in place in the magistrates court. Amendment No. 63 therefore inserts in the Children Act 1989 a reference to the Bill, to align the protection of children under that Act and the Bill.

That will ensure that children are protected at all levels of courts by making it an offence to publish any material that is intended to identify, or likely to identify, first, any child as being involved in any proceedings before the courts in which any power under the Bill may be exercised by the court with respect to that or to any other child or, secondly, an address or school as being that of a child involved in any such proceedings.

I believe that the amendments have fulfilled the commitment that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department made in Committee to consider the points that arose, and I hope that in the light of that explanation, hon. Members will support the new clause.

4.30 pm

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I acknowledge the Minister's characteristic graciousness in alluding to the useful debate in Committee. Practical and useful points were made there, and in the interests of bipartisanship, I must acknowledge that the Government have generally taken them on board. However, I fear that that will make for a boring debate this afternoon, as is witnessed by the lack of hon. Members in the Chamber.

I broadly welcome the amendments. I am especially pleased about new clause 14 and the consequential amendments that change the basis of the six-month and three-year restrictions that currently apply. We had a good

[Tim Loughton]

debate in Committee about offences that are often undetected for a long time and hidden by those who are clever at getting around the law. There are shortcomings in part of the inspection system, but the work of the National Care Standards Commission will improve matters in future. Some agencies are inspected on a three-year cycle and the prosecution period is limited to three years, whereas it may take a long time after inspections for some matters to come out of the woodwork. The measure is therefore wholly sensible, and we welcome it.

We welcome the application of the new clause to the more serious case of private adoptions. Like private fostering, those are an unknown quantity. We know that some cases have sprung from lack of proper checks, which is understandable because the private adoptions and fostering have not been officially recognised.

Government amendments Nos. 30, 31 and 32 deal with the change to the evidential basis for the burden of proof, which echoes recent arguments in Committee on the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill. The Minister has not had the pleasure of being party to those debates, but I have, as I try to juggle those responsibilities with my others in connection with this Bill.

The amendments are consistent with those that we considered to the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill. However, it always pains me when I read phrases such as:

> "only applies if sufficient evidence is adduced to raise an issue as to whether the person had the knowledge or reason mentioned".

I fear that plain English has not prevailed.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): I did not say that.

Tim Loughton: The Minister says that she did not say that, but that is the wording of her amendment. I fully realise that it is legalistic jargon, but such terrible English pains me, and it seems to be used all the time nowadays.

Amendments Nos. 62 and 63 refer to the change to proceedings in court. Amendment No. 63 refers to the Administration of Justice Act 1960. The Minister responded positively to sensible points that were made in Committee to ensure the anonymity of vulnerable children in sensitive circumstances. I shall not shed tears for the dismissal of the terms "in camera" and "in chambers". It may sadden lawyers, but it is good news for laymen and supporters of plain English.

The Minister might have said more about amendments Nos. 235 to 237, which single out the treatment of corporate bodies and partnerships. I may have missed her comments but I do not think that she referred to those amendments. The hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) may want to speak about his amendments, with which we have some sympathy.

We believe that the Minister listened to the discussions in Committee, and the amendments are broadly sensible, so we welcome them.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Two of the amendments in this group—Nos. 130 and 131—are in my name. I will not press amendment No. 131, which has been largely accepted by the Government: Government amendment No. 226 is very similar to it, so I will not waste anyone's time quibbling. That amendment relates to amendment No. 111, which we discussed on Thursday. It was the shining example among my 30-plus amendments: the Government accepted it completely. With that little triumph achieved, we will quickly pass on and feel that we are working on the same lines.

I hope that we can also be on the same lines over amendment No. 130 which is similarly about the participation of parents and of anyone who has an involvement in these issues; perhaps it is particularly about the participation of parents, though. The Bill basically says that someone who has given consent for a placement or for adoption need not be required to attend court unless the court insists on it. The amendment says that the person, whether at placement order stage, at the stage of variation of such an order, or at adoption order stage, has a right to attend and be heard.

This is a matter of fundamental human rights. It is about the proper participation of parents in perhaps the most fundamental decisions that any parent can make about the future of their child, and perhaps the most fundamental decisions that any court can make about the future of children. It is not an amendment tabled by some idiosyncratic Labour Back Bencher. It is supported by a vast range of children's organisations. I think that almost every children's organisation that has been involved in making representations on the Bill supports it.

The amendment relates to the concerns that many of us have—unfortunately, we did not have time to air those concerns on Thursday; I hope that we will get the chance later today to refer to them—about the nature of consent under the Bill. The Children Act 1989 is to be changed fundamentally. Parental responsibility could be transferred to other authorities—to the local authority, to the agency, to the adoptive parent—without going through court. Fundamental decisions could be taken at the consent stage, without taking every case to court for a placement order. Huge decisions about children's lives could be taken under the scrutiny of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service—we will return to that point later—without involving the courts. In fact, without returning to court, decisions could be taken that militate against previous court decisions concerning Children Act section 8 orders, residence, or contact.

In essence, the amendment would enable parents to "attend and be heard" at crucial court proceedings at the stage of placement, of possible revocation of placement, and certainly of adoption hearings. The argument might be advanced that, if accepted, the amendment would introduce another stage, through which those who have perhaps not attended to their children's best interests could disrupt, delay and prevaricate over the best efforts of all concerned to meet the interests of vulnerable children. However, I have greater faith than that in the court process and in those who work with children.

I hope that it will be accepted that parents have a right to attend and be heard at these crucial stages, and to participate not just in discussions about whether adoption will proceed, but about crucial issues such as contact with extended family and siblings. It is a matter of human rights and—most importantly—of the best interests of children, so I hope that the amendment will be supported.

Sandra Gidley: I, too, welcome Government new clause 14, and echo the frustration expressed about our proceedings in Committee. Certain hon. Members were delighted when any of their amendments were accepted, and felt that the Government were ignoring them. I am pleased to say that that is no longer the case, as most of our concerns have been addressed through this group of amendments, which will probably improve the process.

I greatly sympathise with amendment No. 130, which was tabled by the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson). A change in emphasis whereby parents would have the right to be present at a hearing is a sound one. Although we can find our way around the system with ease because we do so every day, not everybody feels that way. We tend to forget how difficult it is for others to realise that they have to do certain things at a certain time—such as applying to be present at a hearing—particularly if they are going through a traumatic and stressful time. Anything that would help such people to be part of the process is very welcome.

Through our constituency surgery cases, we have all discovered how easy it is to be wise after the event and establish what should have been done. However, if parents can be involved at every stage, such situations might decrease. In certain cases, social services could decide that the parents are not doing a very good job and put the child up for adoption themselves. In such cases in particular—I am thinking of one fairly close to home—parents often feel victimised by the system and by social services, and excluded from the whole process.

4.45 pm

I do not want to go into the rights or wrongs of individual cases, but I contend that it is fairer to encourage the parents to be there. It is also fairer for social services departments if the parents are involved. The parents may not like what happens, but they will be able to witness the process and, probably, take part in it in some way.

Many of the adoption agencies have raised concerns about the human rights aspects. I hope that the Minister will explain how the Bill fits in with the human rights legislation, especially relating to the rights to a fair trial and to a family life.

Jacqui Smith: My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) is right to say that we are in accord on amendments Nos. 226 and 111—the latter was debated last week—and on his amendment No. 131. He should not be so modest about the impact that he has had on the course of the legislation.

The Government acknowledge the importance of ensuring that the views of parties to proceedings are appropriately put before the court. The way in which views of the parties—for example, the birth parents of the child—are put before the court will vary in different circumstances and in different types of proceedings. The requirements in the Bill to notify parents and guardians of adoption hearings represent minimum requirements to be set out in court rules. We have already said in Committee that the full detail on representation and party status in proceedings will be set out in secondary legislation such as court rules. We can do that by virtue of the wide rule-making power contained in clause 128(1). We have of course listened closely to Members on both sides of the Special Standing Committee on this issue and we will consider the points made by them when we come to consult on detailed proposals.

Amendment No. 130 clarifies that a parent or guardian can attend a hearing for a placement order, for a variation or revocation of such [illegible] order, or for an adoption order, and may be heard [illegible] to their view regarding the proceedings. That is not necessary, because it is legally implicit in the current drafting that notice is given to a person for the same purpose that he is entitled to receive it—that is, to give or withhold consent, apply for leave or whatever. The amendment would not add anything of substance to what is implicit in the Bill.

The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) invited me to comment on amendments Nos. 235, 236 and 237. As he suggested, clause 130 makes provision in relation to offences by bodies corporate and unincorporated bodies. If an offence under the Bill is proved to have been committed with the consent or connivance of, or owing to the neglect of, an officer of a body corporate or an unincorporated body, that officer himself, as well as the body, is guilty of the offence. In cases in which the affairs of a body corporate are managed by its members rather than by officers, the provisions of the clause apply equally to members as to officers.

Amendment No. 235 inserts three new subsections into clause 130. It clarifies the position on taking proceedings against unincorporated bodies under the Bill. The amendment provides for the procedural provisions that already apply to the prosecution of corporate bodies to apply to the prosecution of unincorporated bodies. The second new subsection provides for any fine imposed on an unincorporated body on its conviction for an offence under the Bill to be paid from the funds of the body, rather than from the funds of its individual members.

Amendment No. 237 inserts another new subsection into clause 130. It makes specific provision in respect of partnerships, which are a type of unincorporated body. The amendment provides that if an offence is committed by a partnership and it can be proved that it has been committed with the consent or connivance of a particular partner, or that it is attributable to the neglect of a particular partner, that partner as well as the partnership is guilty of an offence. That aligns the provisions on partnerships with the provisions already included in the clause on bodies corporate and unincorporated bodies more generally, and makes the potential criminal liability of a partner clear.

Tim Loughton: I thank the Minister for her clear explanation of the three Government amendments.

I said earlier that we were potentially sympathetic to amendment No. 130. I feel even more sympathetic to it after hearing it explained by the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson). We discussed the issue in Committee, in the context of another part of the Bill. It was generally felt then that information should be made readily available at various stages of the adoption process through various court procedures. Given the emotional state in which people may be when giving up children for adoption, it is even more incumbent on the

[Tim Loughton]

system to give them every opportunity to participate, to know what they are entitled to, and to be satisfied that the procedures are taking place in accordance with the law and in a fair and balanced way.

I have no doubt that, as the Minister said, what is already in the Bill makes that legally implicit, as she put it, because notice is given. The Minister also said that the Bill set out minimum requirements for court rules, rather than a requirement for the full explanation that would eventually be on offer. I do not disagree, but, as I have said, we are talking about people who are fairly vulnerable emotionally. If I were involved in an adoption process and received notification from the court that unless I wished or was required to attend I need not do so, I would take that almost as an invitation not to turn up. It would, I think, be more positive and more sensitive to put this more clearly and fairly, and say that a person is entitled to turn up and entitled to speak if he or she sees fit. That, I believe, is the intention of the amendment.

The hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre pitched it fairly high, saying that this was a fundamental human right. It is certainly a fundamental human right for people to be fully involved in the process, but I think it only fair and sensible—in order to achieve an equitable result that everyone will accept long after the matter has passed through all the necessary court stages—to make clear to people exactly what they can do, and are entitled to do. That is all that the amendment proposes.

I doubt whether the hon. Gentleman wants to press the amendment to a vote, but I wanted to reinforce its aims in the hope that the Minister would beef up the directions given to courts when their rules were being established, rather than treating the requirement as a minimum requirement and letting it slip through as such. I think there is a world of difference between being negative and being positive—encouraging people and telling them their rights.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I remind Members that we are not in Committee. I was perhaps rather generous in allowing the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) to speak again.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 13

SUITABILITY OF ADOPTERS

'(1) Regulations under section 9 may make provision as to the matters to be taken into account by an adoption agency in determining, or making any report in respect of, the suitability of any persons to adopt a child.

(2) In particular, the regulations may make provision for the purpose of securing that, in determining the suitability of a couple to adopt a child, proper regard is had to the need for stability and permanence in their relationship'.—*[Mr. Hinchliffe.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Clause 90

OFFENCE OF BREACHING RESTRICTIONS UNDER SECTION 89

Amendment made: No. 30, in page 50, line 5, leave out subsections (2) and (3) and insert—

'(2) A person is not guilty of an offence under subsection (1) of taking the step mentioned in paragraph (f) of section 89(2) unless it is proved that he knew or had reason to suspect that the child was handed over to him in contravention of paragraph (e) of that subsection.

(3) A person is not guilty of an offence under subsection (1) of causing a person to take any of the steps mentioned in paragraphs (a) to (h) of section 89(2) unless it is proved that he knew or had reason to suspect that the step taken would contravene the paragraph in question.

( ) But subsections (2) and (3) only apply if sufficient evidence is adduced to raise an issue as to whether the person had the knowledge or reason mentioned'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 91

RESTRICTION ON REPORTS

Amendment made: No. 31, in page 50, line 33, leave out subsection (4) and insert—

'( ) A person is not guilty of an offence under subsection (2)(b) unless it is proved that he knew or had reason to suspect that the report would be, or had been, prepared in contravention of subsection (1).

But this subsection only applies if sufficient evidence is adduced to raise an issue as to whether the person had the knowledge or reason mentioned'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 95

PROCEEDINGS FOR OFFENCES

Amendment made: No. 233, in page 52, line 6, leave out subsection (2).—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 97

PROCEEDINGS TO BE IN PRIVATE

Amendments made: No. 62, in page 52,, leave out lines 17 and 18 and insert—

'in the High Court or a County Court may be heard and determined in private'.

No. 63, in line 18, at end insert—

'( ) In section 12 of the Administration of Justice Act 1960 (publication of information relating to proceedings in private), in subsection (1)(a)(ii), after "1989" there is inserted "or the Adoption and Children Act 2002".

( ) In section 97 of the 1989 Act (privacy for children involved in certain proceedings), after "this Act" in subsections (1) and (2) there is inserted "or the Adoption and Children Act 2002"'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Mr. Dawson: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am obviously completely unclear about what happens on Report, but what happens about amendment No. 130? Will it be taken later?

Madam Deputy Speaker: The amendments are taken in the order in which they relate to the Bill.

Clause 98

OFFICERS OF THE SERVICE

Ms Rosie Winterton: I beg to move amendment No. 135, in page 52, line 21, leave out from "of" to "rules" and insert—

> '(a) any relevant application,
>
> (b) the signification by any person of any consent to placement or adoption'.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 136 to 140, 256, 142 and 143.

Ms Winterton: We now come to a series of amendments to clause 98. Right hon. and hon. Members may recall that I said in Committee that the Government would consider the issue of avoiding conflicts of interest when appointing CAFCASS officers to act in adoption and placement proceedings. I also undertook to review the clause more generally.

I am very pleased to move these amendments, which will not only address the conflict of interest issue but improve the protection for parents. They allow CAFCASS officers to witness consents to placement and adoption and improve the range of information that can be put before the court regarding the welfare of the child. The amendments will also allow officers to be appointed in applications for contact with a child who has been placed for adoption, and in other circumstances in the future, should we decide that they could assist children and families in other ways.

Clause 98 currently provides that rules must provide for a CAFCASS officer to report to the court or act "on behalf of" a child in placement and adoption proceedings, including the making, varying and revoking of placement orders, applications for making adoption orders and applications for the transfer of parental responsibility prior to an adoption abroad. In addition, the CAFCASS officer will witness birth parents' consents in those cases where the birth parents wish to consent. There is power for additional duties to be imposed on CAFCASS officers by secondary legislation. Clause 98 builds on existing provisions in the Adoption Act 1976, as supplemented by secondary legislation.

CAFCASS officers play an essential role in recommending to the court what is in the best interests of the child, advising on the implications of giving consent in consent cases and being an independent witness of that parent's consent. Amendment No. 135 will enable CAFCASS officers to witness consent before the commencement of court proceedings. We envisage that officers will be provided in prescribed cases to advise birth parents on the implications of giving their consent and to witness their consent where it is given.

Amendment No. 136 allows the Lord Chancellor to provide in rules for CAFCASS officers to carry out additional duties in prescribed cases if some were identified in future, such as in relation to post-adoption support or advice.

Amendment No. 137 is a consequential amendment to align the language of "any relevant application" with the reference made in amendment No. 135.

5 pm

The Government recognise the importance of ensuring that all relevant matters on the child's welfare are brought to the court's attention. Amendment No. 138 adds to the functions of CAFCASS the requirement that it report to the court, on the court's request, on matters relating to the welfare of the child. That is similar to provision under section 7 of the Children Act 1989. However, it improves the current position in respect of the work that CAFCASS officers can undertake in adoption, as it ensures that the child's welfare is the paramount consideration of the court, in line with clause 1.

Amendment No. 139 aligns provision in the Bill with that under section 7(2) and (3) of the Children Act, whereby the issues to be covered in a report on the child's welfare must include any matter prescribed by rules, unless the court orders otherwise. Reports may be made orally or in writing as the court requires. We will consult key stakeholders on the rules, following the passage of the Bill.

The Government acknowledge the importance of ensuring that the views of parties to proceedings are appropriately put before the court. The way in which the views of the parties—for example, the birth parents or the child—are put before the court will vary in different circumstances and in different types of proceeding. We have already said that the full detail on representation and party status in proceedings will be set out in secondary legislation, such as court rules. We have listened closely to Members' points in the Standing Committee and in today's debate and will consider them when we hold consultations on the detailed proposals.

We must not pre-empt the consultative process, but it is anticipated that the welfare report will include the views of birth parents. Currently, their views are reflected only in the schedule 2 report or in the reports of the children's guardian or the reporting officer. Amendments Nos. 138 and 139 will, therefore, reflect the current law by ensuring that the representation of the views of birth parents is included in the process of making, varying or revoking placement or contact orders, and in the making of an adoption order. I hope that reassures my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson).

The clause, as currently drafted, also provides for the preclusion of certain persons from being appointed to safeguard the child's interests: in the case of placement proceedings, a person employed by the local authority that made the application, and, in the case of adoption proceedings, a person employed by the adoption agency that placed the child would be precluded from being appointed to safeguard the child's interests.

In Committee, the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) tabled an amendment that would have extended the category of people who may not be appointed. We felt that the provision went too far, but I informed the Committee that I would give the matter further consideration. Having looked more closely at the provisions of clause 98, I think that the specifications for those who could act in the matter could be extended. Amendments Nos. 140 and 256 will fulfil that requirement. I hope that gives the hon. Gentleman some reassurance.

[Ms Winterton]

Amendment No. 142 removes the provision that allows a CAFCASS officer to act on behalf of the child and to witness consents. That provision is no longer necessary as the functions of reporting officer and guardian have been combined.

The amendments address a number of the points made in Committee; they much improve clause 98 and I hope that the provisions—especially those in respect of the role of CAFCASS officers—will give my hon. Friends some reassurance about—

It being one and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings on consideration of the Bill, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to Order [16 May], put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Amendment agreed to.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded to put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Amendments made: No. 136, in page 52, line 23, at end insert—

'(1A) The rules may provide for the appointment of such an officer in other circumstances in which it appears to the Lord Chancellor to be necessary or expedient to do so.

(1B) The rules may provide for the officer—'

No. 137, in page 52, line 24, leave out third "the" and insert "any relevant".

No. 138, in page 52, line 26, at end insert—

'(aa) where the court so requests, to prepare a report on matters relating to the welfare of the child in question'.

No. 139, in page 52, line 28, leave out "other prescribed duties" and insert "prescribed functions.

(1C) A report prepared in pursuance of the rules on matters relating to the welfare of a child must—

(a) deal with prescribed matters (unless the court orders otherwise), and

(b) be made in the manner required by the court'.

No. 140, in page 52, line 32, leave out "or".

No. 256, in page 52, line 35, at end insert—

'or

(c) is within a prescribed description'.

No. 142, in page 52, line 36, leave out from "(1)" to end of line 38 and insert "or (1A)".

No. 143, in page 52, line 40, at end insert—

'( ) the making of an order under section 25, or the varying or revocation of such an order'.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

Clause 115

OFFICE OF BREACHING RESTRICTION UNDER SECTION 114

Amendments made: No. 32, in page 65, line 41, leave out subsection (2) and insert—

'( ) A person is not guilty of an offence under this section (other than one of distributing an advertisement or information, or causing it to be distributed, by electronic means) unless it is proved that he knew or had reason to suspect that section 114 applied to the advertisement or information.

But this subsection only applies if sufficient evidence is adduced to raise an issue as to whether the person had the knowledge or reason mentioned'.

No. 144, in page 66, line 1, at beginning insert—

'Subsections (3A) and (3B) apply'.

No. 145, in page 66, line 2, leave out from "means" to end of line 7 and insert—

'(3A) A person is not guilty of the offence unless it is proved that he knew that what was distributed was an advertisement or information to which this section applies; but this subsection only applies if sufficient evidence is adduced to raise an issue as to whether the person had the knowledge mentioned.

(3B) A person is not guilty of the offence unless it is proved that it was reasonably practicable for him to prevent the distribution; but this subsection only applies if sufficient evidence is adduced to raise an issue as to whether it was reasonably practicable for the person to do so'.—*[Ms Rosie Winterton.]*

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. We have just had a very short debate on the last group of amendments, on which I had some important points to make. It is most unfair that we have timetabling motions on such non-controversial Bills, and we are getting very frustrated. Is there any way to extend some of these debates?

Madam Deputy Speaker: I must inform the hon. Gentleman that I have no power whatever to override the programme motion to which the House has agreed.

New Clause 7

ACCOMMODATION OF CHILDREN IN NEED ETC.

'(1) In section 17 of the 1989 Act (provision of services for children in need, their families and others), in subsection (6) (services that may be provided in exercise of the functions under that section) after "include" there is inserted "providing accommodation and ".

(2) In section 22 of that Act (general duty of local authority in relation to children looked after by them), in subsection (1) (looked after children include those provided with accommodation, with exceptions) before "23B" there is inserted "17".

(3) In section 24A of that Act (advice and assistance for certain children and young persons aged 16 or over), in subsection (5), for "or, in exceptional circumstances, cash" there is substituted "and, in exceptional circumstances, assistance may be given—

(a) by providing accommodation, if in the circumstances assistance may not be given in respect of the accommodation under section 24B, or

(b) in cash.".'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Jacqui Smith: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government new clause 15—*Review of cases of looked after children.*

New clause 12—*Advice and assistance for certain children in need—*

'In section 24(2) of the 1989 Act, there is inserted—

"(f) provided with accommodation under section 17 in circumstances where he was unaccompanied by an adult.".'.

Amendment No. 132, in clause 112, page 63, line 5, at end insert—

'(1B) Regulations may be made by the Secretary of State requiring the local authority to arrange for the appointment of an independent advocate on receiving representations under subsection (1).'.

Amendment No. 133, in page 63, line 27, at end insert—

'(3C) Regulations may be made by the Secretary of State requiring the local authority to provide independent advocacy to looked after children who make a complaint under the Children Act 1989.'.

Jacqui Smith: We welcome the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) to our proceedings this afternoon—at last.

The new clauses and amendments apply to powers under the Children Act 1989. In particular, they deal with the provision of accommodation, putting care plans on a statutory basis and ensuring their review. During the Special Standing Committee, concerns were raised about a problem that had arisen as a result of a recent judgment of the Court of Appeal—A *v.* London borough of Lambeth. The judgment meant that local authorities no longer had the power to provide accommodation to children in need and their families under section 17 of the Act, when accommodation was not available from any other source.

I said that I would review the situation and table a suitable amendment to deal with the problem, with the ultimate aim of safeguarding vulnerable children and their families without placing unacceptable burdens on the system. Since then, there has been a further Court of Appeal judgment in the case of W *v.* London borough of Lambeth, which appears to overturn the earlier judgment. The original case may still go to the other place, and their Lordships might uphold the original judgment. In the light of the continuing litigation and continuing uncertainty, Government new clauses 7 and 15 seem all the more important to provide clarity and certainty about the state of the law on such issues.

Historically, section 17 of the Children Act has been considered by the Government and local authorities to empower councils with social services responsibilities to assist children in need and their families by providing them with accommodation or, more often, help with the costs of accommodation, such as payment of a rent deposit or the first month's rent, where help was not available from other sources. That was considered to be an important safety net support mechanism for particularly vulnerable groups, including those families considered to be intentionally homeless, those needing emergency accommodation or older children who, while needing accommodation, do not need the more intensive support provided by foster care or institutions.

Under the new clause, we therefore aim to clarify the position and to confirm that local authorities have the power, which was thought to exist before the Lambeth judgment, to provide accommodation under section 17 of the 1989 Act. The new clause will do so by amending section 17(6) to make it clear that local authorities can provide assistance in kind, accommodation or, in exceptional circumstances, cash. As a consequence of amending section 17, section 22 of the 1989 Act, which deals with the general duties of local authorities to look after children, also requires amendment.

Subsection (1)(b) of section 22 defines a looked-after child as one who is provided with accommodation by a local authority. Should the new clause be accepted, section 17 will contain a power specifically for the provision of accommodation. It will be used to provide accommodation for children with their families who, while needing accommodation, do not need to be taken into care. It will also be used to provide accommodation for older children when their needs assessment has shown that they need accommodation, but not to be taken into care. The new clause ensures that section 22 does not apply to children accommodated under section 17, either with their families or alone, and they will therefore not become looked-after children.

Section 24 of the 1989 Act, which addresses the after care of former looked-after children, is also amended because it mirrors the wording of section 17. The new clause makes specific reference to the provision of accommodation for that group and serves to make the local authority's powers entirely clear. The local authority will have the power to provide accommodation, although not necessarily a duty to do so. That power provides a safety net for all care leavers who have been looked after at the age of 16 or 17—both those who qualify for the support introduced by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 and those who do not. Amendment No. 238, which will be debated shortly, will enable the new clause to come into force as soon as the Bill receives Royal Assent. So new clause 7 enables us to remove the uncertainty caused by recent court cases and to ensure that local authorities are clear that they have the ability to provide accommodation in the cases that I have outlined.

New clause 15 makes provision in respect of care plans and the review of cases of looked-after children. Care plans are written evidence that the local authority has considered what must be done to ensure that a child's period in care properly addresses the needs of that child. After the assessment, care plans are put together and agreed with a range of agencies and services—most often education and health services—setting out how the needs of the child should be met.

Clause 113 sets out the requirement that a court may not make a care order until a care plan has been prepared by the local authority and considered by the court. We have developed that in the new clause and the amendments on care plans, which are contained in the next group of amendments, to establish a robust system that includes the process for reviewing care plans and how recourse to court may be sought if the care plan is not properly implemented. The provisions apply both to children who are subject to care orders and to those who are accommodated by the local authority. In both cases, the care plan has to be written and reviewed at appropriate intervals, and modified where necessary. We need to be sure that, once prepared, care plans are implemented so that they are worth the paper they are printed on. The mechanisms to review the care plan therefore need to be suitably robust.

Subsection (1) of new clause 15 amends section 26 of the 1989 Act. It enables the Secretary of State to make regulations requiring local authorities to keep care plans for all children under review, whether they be section 31A care plans required in court proceedings, or care plans agreed in the case of children voluntarily looked after under section 20 of the 1989 Act. In addition, the regulations will require the appointment of a person to be a reviewing officer. Subsection (2) of new clause 15 enables regulations to be made setting out who should be appointed and the way in which the person will carry out their role. We have in mind a person who has the seniority required to have sufficient status to ensure that they can

[Jacqui Smith]

effect the implementation of the care plan in the interests of the child. In our view, that person needs to have professional expertise in children's services, and to be independent of the case and its management.

Reviewing officers will be required to chair the review meetings and assure themselves of the implementation of the care plan by speaking to the child before the review takes place. The intention is to ensure that quality control is built into the system. Through their activity, reviewing officers will monitor the performance of the authority in each case. However, despite the best efforts and influencing skills of the reviewing officer, the local authority might fail to carry out key parts of the care plan in some cases. The amendment is being introduced because of concern that sometimes care plans are not implemented. We therefore need to ensure that there is a remedy when there is still a failure. Subsection (2)(c) of new clause 15 will enable the reviewing officer to refer a case to CAFCASS when the situation demands it. It allows the Lord Chancellor to make regulations to extend the functions of CAFCASS officers in respect of family proceedings.

5.15 pm

When a child has no family or carer to act on their behalf, or is unable to challenge the local authority's handling of the care plan, CAFCASS will be able to take proceedings on behalf of the child. CAFCASS will be able to use existing remedies under the Children Act—for example, it can apply for the discharge of the care order or for contact between the child and another person. Under the Human Rights Act 1998, it can seek to injunct the local authority from taking a particular step—for example, removing the child from an established placement. It can also seek a declaration that the local authority's plans are contrary to the child's human rights, which would require those plans to be rethought.

The amendments respond effectively to the issues raised in the case known as Re S & Re W, on which judgment was recently given in the House of Lords. The judgment identified that, currently, a young child in respect of whom a care plan has been made, but with no parent or guardian to act for them, has no effective means of bringing before the court any breach of their convention rights as a result of a local authority's inaction in implementing the care plan. By putting care plans on a statutory footing, establishing a review process that allows for that to happen and providing for the reviewing officer to refer cases to CAFCASS, we are ensuring that this gap in the law is properly filled and that children's needs will be met as effectively as possible through the systems provided under the Children Act.

Sandra Gidley: First, I welcome the increased protection for 16 and 17-year-olds. Frequently, there is a gap in provision when someone hits that age, and it is unclear where that provision will come from. I welcome the extension to other areas. I have a small number of questions, however, about the group of amendments in relation to care plans.

I welcome the Minister's statement. She said that the Government needed to be sure that the care plans were worth the paper on which they were printed. She will recall that, on the first day on Report, we examined the issue of whether the funding would be available. I am still slightly concerned about whether a lack of funding would be accepted as a good enough reason for not fulfilling the care plan. Will the Minister confirm whether any provision in the Bill would, in effect, prevent a local authority or an education authority from cutting a care plan according to the cloth? Will that role be fulfilled by CAFCASS? Does it have the powers to say, "This must be done. Therefore, it must be funded"? How will that work out in practice?

Mr. Dawson: We have been agreeing like billy-oh already this afternoon, so let us try to make further progress with regard to new clause 12 and amendments Nos. 132 and 133.

I tabled new clause 12 a while ago in response to huge concerns expressed to the all-party group on children and young people in care about possible loopholes in the Children Act 1989 and the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. A great deal of concern has been expressed about young people who in other circumstances might be accommodated or looked after by local authorities. Instead of being taken into the care system, with all the implications that that has for the services provided under the 2000 Act, children of up to 21 or even 24 are denied that opportunity. Only their most basic needs for accommodation and food are met under section 17 of the 1989 Act, but they are not looked after by the local authority. They are encouraged to go into bed-and-breakfast accommodation rather than into foster or residential care. Essentially, they are offered a low-quality, low-cost half solution to their tremendous needs. Concern has been expressed that the Government's good intentions for young people in care or leaving care, as expressed in the 2000 Act, which amends the fundamentally important 1989 Act, could be thwarted by the action of adults using—and, frankly, abusing—section 17 for people for whom it should not be used. That would deny such people their rights.

Much concern has been expressed about people in that position, but particular reference has been made to unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people being placed in such circumstances.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): I think I heard the hon. Gentleman say that keeping a child in care was a low-cost scenario.

Mr. Dawson *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Djanogly: That might not be the case, but I am sure the hon. Gentleman will agree that compared with the alternatives such as adoption, which has an immediate cost, the long-term costs of keeping a child in care are dramatically higher.

Mr. Dawson: I may not have expressed myself very well, but the hon. Gentleman has entirely missed my point. I was talking not about adoption but about the needs of teenagers. For example, because of circumstances such as family breakdown, one could argue that some 15 and 16-year-olds should be looked after by the care system. Instead, they run the risk of being fobbed off with a low-cost, poor-quality alternative. I was not talking about adoption for those young people.

As I said, reference has been made, in particular, to the young people who come to these shores as unaccompanied asylum seekers. The children who arrive in this country without adult support and in distressing circumstances often do not have the basic requisites of life. A few months ago, I met a couple of young people who arrived in this country without shoes; such young people require the most thorough assessment of their needs so that their best interests can be promoted.

Children are children are children wherever they come from. It is highly inappropriate that section 17 should be used to place young people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation or poor-quality accommodation without their receiving the thorough assessment and support that they need in circumstances that many adults—let alone young people—would find difficult to face. I support the Government's proposal significantly to strengthen section 17, and I hope that we can move on and ensure that young people on their own who are offered accommodation under that section can have access to the excellent support that the Government introduced in the Children (Leaving Care) Act.

Similarly, I support the Government's proposal to place care plans on a statutory footing and the measures concerning the intervention of an independent person in the review process. That is the most important juncture at which one can intervene in the care system to affect the lives of children and young people, all of whom are entitled to a statutory review of their circumstances on at least a six-monthly basis.

Tremendous work has been done by advocacy organisations such as Voice for the Child in Care and the National Youth Advocacy Service, and by children's rights officers and their association. They have been able to deal with the circumstances of many children and young people in care. Organisations such as National Voice and the Care Leavers Association have been able to respond to children and young people who contact them, but if there can be statutory intervention with an independent element when care plans are being made or reviewed, which is a crucial point in the process, that will be of fundamental importance.

Amendments Nos. 132 and 133 refer to the need to provide independent advocacy to support children in making representations and complaints, which is another important juncture at which young people should be supported by independent organisations. The 1989 Act contains a provision for independent visitors. That is another example of how excellent intentions have not, with one or two exceptions, been fulfilled. It is tremendously important that young people in care have access to independent support.

Mr. Brazier: The hon. Gentleman is making an extremely important point. Will he clarify whether he is suggesting that independent visitors could provide the independent advocacy proposed in the new clause? Many Conservative Members would welcome that.

Mr. Dawson: Yes, indeed. We need to build on the Children Act to ensure that children have more access to independent visitors. It is not enough to say that we will try to ensure such access. Independent visitors often need the backing of advocacy organisations, good examples of which I have mentioned, and we need to strengthen the access of children and young people in care to independent advocacy, particularly when complaints and representations are made. I do not want to digress too much, but I point out that the Select Committee on Home Affairs is currently investigating the alleged mistreatment of people who have worked in the residential care system in years past and been subject to allegations. One of the main concerns relates to adults who make complaints many years on about their treatment in care.

If we are to ensure that young people's complaints and concerns about their treatment in care are represented properly and in a timely fashion, we should ensure that they have good access to independent advocacy and support in making representations and complaints.

5.30 pm

Mr. Bellingham: The hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) made a thoughtful and constructive contribution. I agree with the Minister that the Government should take note of the so-called Lambeth judgment. The need for clarity and certainty was obvious.

I seek further clarification on one or two issues. The Minister spoke about the provision that would be made in relation to section 17 of the Children Act 1989, which deals with accommodation. Presumably, such provision would not relate to local authority homes, but would deal with help for children in private accommodation, whether in bed-and-breakfast establishments, with foster parents or elsewhere.

I take on board the Minister's point about assistance in kind or cash. In what circumstances would that additional assistance be made available? I would have thought it was important for direct help to be available as a matter of course and that it should not be difficult to apply for. The Minister also mentioned rent and expenses. Will she further clarify that point? Furthermore, the provision deals with a power for local authorities, but should not it introduce a duty? The new clauses give extra power and commitment to CAFCASS, but will it receive any extra funding? In the light of the Government new clauses and our short debate on the previous group of amendments, there appears to be a need to ensure that CAFCASS has some additional funding to enable it to take care of those additional matters.

On new clause 15 and care orders, I should like clarification on one specific point. Clause 113(2)(5), which refers to section 31(3A) of the Children Act 1989, deals with interim care orders. Do care plans always arise from care orders? I am not clear about that; will the Minister give a few more details? Otherwise, I support the Minister. She is right to introduce the new clauses, which are a very constructive response to the House of Lords judgment.

Mr. Llwyd: I, too, support the amendments, bearing in mind the decisions in A *v.* London borough of Lambeth and W *v.* London borough of Lambeth, which were different. There was a clear need to plug the gap and I am pleased that the Government have moved quickly to do so.

The hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) tabled new clause 12, to which I was pleased to sign up. The proposal appears to be yet another triumph for him, as the purport of Government new clause 7 is the same as that of his new clause, although it is

[Mr. Llwyd]

extended and more broadly drafted. I congratulate him once more on the assiduity with which he has pursued the Bill and the interests that underlie it.

I agree with the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham), who mentioned the issue of obligations as opposed to powers, that the Minister was careful to say that the new clause was intended to re-empower local government. She used the word "empower" several times. I would have preferred the word "obliged", but we will not go into the semantics now. In fact, this is about more than semantics. We had lengthy discussions about this in Committee, but there is no time to do the same today. I was mindful of the fact that the Minister was careful to use the word "empower" each time.

On amendments Nos. 132 and 133, I fully support what has been said by the hon. Members for Lancaster and Wyre and for North-West Norfolk about the need for independent advocacy. These are very helpful amendments, and I hope that, even if they are not accepted, the spirit of them will be, and that we shall see greater recognition of the importance of arm's-length, independent advocacy for youngsters in need. With those few words, I am pleased to support new clause 7.

Tim Loughton: I shall make just a few comments on the new clauses tabled by the Government, but first, I want to refer to the well-considered, well-put comments from the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson). He certainly need not cover his modesty, as the Minister exhorted earlier. The principles behind what he is saying are absolutely right, and his amendments would make useful, practical additions to the process. The suggestion of independent visitors—particularly unpaid outsiders—providing an advocacy service has some interesting merits, and the Minister could consider the hon. Gentleman's suggestions in more detail. I would certainly like to speak to the noble Lords in the upper House when the Bill moves on for their scrutiny, to see whether they might be able to fashion these principles into amendments to improve the Bill, if the Minister is not minded to accept them. We do not know whether that is the case; she may well allow the hon. Gentleman to make another hit for which he could claim responsibility. He has certainly raised some interesting points.

We welcome much of what the Minister has outlined regarding new clauses 7 and 15. She has responded to some of the fruitful debates that we had in Committee by putting the care plans into a statutory process and making sure that that process is constantly reviewed. Obviously, there is uncertainty at the moment following the case of W *v*. London borough of Lambeth, and the Minister has had to be mindful of that. It is good that care plans should be given a statutory basis, providing written evidence that a local authority has considered the needs of the children involved, and that they should be reviewed.

Care plans are organic things. A local authority cannot simply draw up a care plan for a child at a particular time, lock it in a drawer and forget about it. Children going through the adoption process, including damaged children with special educational needs, behavioural difficulties and all sorts of other things that particularly affect adopted children, will react differently to new scenarios. What may be appropriate at the time of the adoption may turn out not to be appropriate some months or years later. It is not good enough for a local authority to say, "We drew up a care plan." It must be able to say that it has drawn up a care plan and made sure that it continued to be the appropriate care plan, with the appropriate mix of care and support services that the child needed after all the legal adoption processes have been completed. This is an organic process.

We also welcome the appointment of the new reviewing officers, and I look forward to seeing exactly how they will carry out their role. My understanding is that although they will be independent of the child's case and its management, they will not be independent of the local authority. Indeed, they will be appointed by it. I would like the Minister to tell us how they will maintain their independence, and to assure us that there will be no problem over vested interests from the authority that has appointed them.

I think that I read in the Minister's explanation in an earlier note that certain local authorities already operate the independent reviewing officer system. Although it has no basis in this legislation, it might be interesting to know where it operates and with what success. The principle certainly seems right, so if it has worked it would be appropriate to take a more uniform approach across local authorities which are obviously dealing with the same problem.

The Minister also said that the reviewing officer would have the power to refer a case to CAFCASS if that were merited. The point was raised in Committee, particularly by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd), that CAFCASS has had problems and that there has been a haemorrhaging of its officers. One would need to be reassured again that, if a case is serious enough to merit referral to CAFCASS, the service will be in a position properly to deal with it, and that there will be sufficient officer-resource time to ensure that a suitable response is made and that suitable remedies are found.

In explanations that the Minister has given in correspondence on care plans, she has talked in terms of the need to protect children's human rights, which will be also a function of the reviewing officer. Of course that must be right, but such terms are very broad. One presumes that she is referring to something like article 8 of the convention for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, which states:

> "Everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence."

Those are fine but lofty ideals, and one would hope that legislation is predicated rather closer to home on more basic deficiencies in the care plan, such as the fact that it is not very good, has not been reviewed regularly and is clearly inappropriate. We need more domestic and earthy definitions instead of relying on a vaguer definition concerning breaches of the child's human rights, which are always difficult to pin down and become a case for the lawyers.

I do not want to be churlish; the new clauses reflect the Minister's work in response to concerns raised in Committee. Some serious, practical and new mechanisms are to be implemented. Subject to the relatively minor concerns that I have raised, we welcome the changes. At the same time, we ask the Minister to look charitably on the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre on the advocacy service.

Jacqui Smith: New clause 12, as my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) suggested, would have the effect of introducing an entitlement to after-care for a young person who is provided with accommodation under section 7 of the Children Act 1989, where that young person is not accompanied by an adult. My hon. Friend's speech rightly emphasised the importance of assessments for young people aged 16 and 17. I agree that proper assessment of young people is key.

5.45 pm

All children in need who present to local authorities should receive a proper needs assessment along the lines set out in "The Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families". That guidance, as I am sure my hon. Friend knows, was jointly issued to local authorities in March 2000 by the Department of Health, the Home Office and the Department for Education and Employment under section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970. It is therefore statutory guidance, and local authorities must follow it unless there are exceptional circumstances that justify a variation.

The guidance specifically mentions the special needs that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children may have and which the framework is structured to address. Local authorities have been reminded from time to time that the framework applies to those children as to all others, most recently in the practice guidance produced by British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering in consultation with the Department of Health and published last November as "Food, Shelter and Half a Chance", to which I contributed the foreword. That assessment, in the context of the Children Act 1989 itself, determines whether a young person needs the full range of support provided in the looked-after system or whether they need the less intensive help offered under section 17.

The guidance emphasises the importance of taking a child-centred approach throughout the process. Section 20(6) of the Children Act also obliges the local authority first to ascertain the child's wishes regarding the provision of accommodation and then to give due consideration to those wishes. It is not helpful to blur the line between the two forms of help available through the looked-after system and section 17, which is what the amendment would do.

However, I am as concerned as my hon. Friend that children seeking help without the support of an adult carer should receive first a proper needs assessment and then appropriate assistance from local authorities. I know that he and other hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker), have taken a close interest in the welfare of unaccompanied asylum seekers in particular. I welcomed the opportunity to meet my hon. Friends the other day to discuss that issue. As I said then, I shall continue to remind local authorities about their obligations to those young people under the Children Act.

I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre has read, if not contributed to, the recent Save the Children report, "Cold Comfort—Young Separated Refugees in England", which, among other things, highlights the fact that practice varies from authority to authority. The report found good practice as well as less good, which is why the Department of Health and the Home Office are jointly sponsoring a project on unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. That will give us much better information on current practice that we shall use to help to improve and standardise the care offered to the young people in the cases that he outlined.

I am not unsympathetic to the call to achieve the standard of care necessary to ensure that young people in those circumstances receive the proper assessment and the care that is necessary, but I disagree with my hon. Friend on whether conflating the needs dealt with by sections 17 and 20 is a satisfactory way to proceed. On the basis of those points, I hope that he feels able to withdraw his amendment.

My hon. Friend raised issues relating to amendments Nos. 132 and 133 and the use of independent advocacy in social services complaints procedures. Clause 112, which the amendments relate to, already amends sections 24 and 26 of the Children Act, which makes provision in respect of the Act's complaints procedure to respond to views expressed through the "Listening to People" consultation exercise.

On several occasions in Committee, we went through the improvements that that clause will make to the Children Act in correcting the anomaly in the complaints procedures for grievances involving children and ensuring that complaints about the discharge of local authority functions, including care supervision and child protection, are dealt with under the child-focused Children Act complaints procedure rather than the adult complaints procedure established under the 1970 Act. Clause 112 will enable regulations to be made to impose time limits and to introduce an informal resolution stage. All those provisions offer the potential to improve the complaints procedure in relation to children and young people.

Amendments Nos. 132 and 133 would make specific provision in respect of independent advocacy. As I said in Committee, the Government are very sympathetic to the issues that they raise. That is why we are engaging in consultation with providers, commissioners and users of advocacy services about the matters that we will need to deal with to make the provision of independent advocacy far more widely available—for example, funding, standards and training. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre that children and young people can be especially vulnerable when they want to raise problems or concerns and that they need support at such times. However, it is important to introduce the changes when we have done the work that is necessary to be sure about what we mean by independent advocacy services and about how best to provide them.

Mr. Dawson: My hon. Friend has drawn a clear distinction between sections 17 and 20 of the Children Act 1989 and has acknowledged that practice differs around the country. Is not the point at which young people refer themselves to a local authority, which then decides what sort of service to offer them, the crucial point at which they need some independent advocacy?

Jacqui Smith: Given what I said about being sympathetic to the principle of independent advocacy, I agree with my hon. Friend that that may well be the time at which someone would need support and advocacy. My argument concerns whether my hon. Friend's amendments—at this time, in relation to this Bill, and in this precise form—are premature and insufficiently flexible to deliver what we need to deliver throughout the

[Jacqui Smith]

whole system. I do not wish to be overly critical of the amendments, but during the debate interesting points were raised about what is actually meant by independent advocacy and about the range of people who can provide that service. For example, the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) wondered whether independent visitors would be included.

Using the term "independent advocacy" in primary legislation might be too restrictive, given that we have not yet determined precisely what it means or the range of people who might be involved in it. For example, we would not necessarily want to limit advocacy to a legally or professionally qualified person. Officials in the Department have carried out extensive consultation, including, importantly, with young people's organisations, and feedback from those groups has told us repeatedly that flexibility is important and that young people want the choice of who provides advocacy. It could be a relative or a friend from the local community. Peer advocacy and mentoring is popular among many young people. More work is needed to define what sort of service would best meet young people's needs and to clarify the roles of the different professionals involved in complaints procedures. At the moment, a range of people can be involved, including independent persons, complaints officers, independent reviewing officers, independent visitors and "listening to children" officers. We must be careful that those roles are not confused, especially during the early stage of the procedure when we want complaints or concerns to be resolved informally, because confusion is all too prevalent for many young people.

The Government's determination to get all these issues right is shown by the work that has already started to consult advocacy providers, commissioners of services, and children and young people's organisations. A consultation is under way to consider the funding of advocacy services, definitions of the different professionals who provide advocacy and the introduction of national standards and training for advocates. Those are all key issues. Until that consultation is completed, we will not be in a position to define what we want local authorities to deliver and how we want them to deliver it. Before that is done, we will not be sure that the amendments would provide what is needed.

We need to promote the use of national advocacy standards. We are consulting on the standards that have been developed by the Department, the National Youth Advocacy Service and the advocacy consortium. That will help councils and children's organisations to arrive at a definition of independent advocacy and to set clear models of practice.

Mr. Bellingham: Has the Minister or the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, the hon. Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton), liaised with the Law Society, which could certainly help in laying down guidelines or even in providing training and assistance?

Jacqui Smith: I do not close my doors to anybody who might be able to help us to develop our work on advocacy. Lawyers may often have an important role to play in the system of advocacy for young people, but perhaps not always as advocates. That is why we need to listen to what young people say is most effective for them. We have carried out several regional roadshows, which we are using to consult with advocacy organisations, young people's organisations and councils about how best further to strengthen advocacy for looked-after children. The consultation closes in July and we intend to publish the standards over the summer. Our work on advocacy services also links into the quality protects programme, through which we have made considerable progress in involving children in decision making. However, the provision and quality of advocacy services is still inconsistent, and that remains a development area for many councils.

Although we recognise the importance of the issues raised by the amendments, they are not necessarily the right way forward, especially in terms of timing. Work is already under way, but there is still more to be done before we can consider making the provision of independent advocacy services a statutory requirement. On that basis, I hope that my hon. Friend will feel able to withdraw his amendments.

I want to deal with a few points that hon. Members made about the new clauses. The hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) asked about the nature of care plans and whether they always related to court orders. I can tell him that the provisions on care plans come from section 31 of the Children Act 1989 where they relate to court orders and from section 20 of the Act where children are voluntarily accommodated. The new clause ensures that the Bill and reviews of care plans cover both those forms of care plan.

Hon. Members asked for more guidance about how the system will work in practice. Production of a care plan would be necessary in respect of a care order before the court considered what order, if any, to make. The court would consider the care plan and would be under a duty to do so before making that decision. Subsequently, the role of the reviewing officer would be to review the extent to which the care plan was being implemented. We believe that strengthening the independent reviewing function is important to ensure accountability and the achievement of the important milestones in the care plan.

The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) asked about the position on independent reviewing officers. In guidance, we shall make it clear that the local authority can employ reviewing officers, or that other organisations with expertise or other local authorities can provide them. That will enable local authorities that have invested time and training in staff and already have independent reviewing structures up and running to maintain their arrangements. However, that does not prevent other organisations from offering their expertise when appropriate. I envisage several organisations offering such expertise. I am keen to avoid over-prescription, which will dislocate good practice and mean a move backwards.

When a local authority builds on existing arrangements, the guidance will clearly set out that the reviewing officers' independence must be established. They must be independent of the child's case, but not necessarily of the local authority.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): In the light of the serious historic overspending of so many social services departments in local authorities, is the Minister confident that they can implement the care plans?

Jacqui Smith: I was about to deal with that point. First, let me finish the points on the guidance. The independent reviewing officer must be independent of the case management, the line management of the social workers who are conducting the assessment and perhaps social services departments. We have a precedent in the registration and inspection units being accountable to the chief executive. Under the new arrangements, that could be a part of the council's scrutiny function.

6 pm

Tim Loughton: In the letter that the Minister sent us on 10 May, she said that the reviewing officer would be appointed by the local authority either from its staff or under an arrangement with another local authority or body. She also said that some local authorities already do that. I asked for some examples of the way in which that works, especially with regard to independence. Although the independent reviewing officers have to be independent of the case, they may work for the same local authority and be shy of criticising their employers' care plans.

Jacqui Smith: I am sorry that I have not been able to provide specific examples of the way in which the arrangements are working. Perhaps I can write to the hon. Gentleman. I was outlining the nature of the regulations and guidance if the new clause is accepted. He makes a fair point when he says that we must ensure the independence of the reviewing officer. It is not impossible to set up a structure in a local authority whereby employees can maintain their independence. It is vital that reviewing officers are independent of the case management and perhaps the social services department in the authority. We will make that clear in the regulations.

The hon. Members for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) and for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) asked about resources. Dare I say it, the Government have recognised the historic—pre-1997—underfunding of social services departments through considerable real-terms increases. Future increases may be even larger; they may reach 6 per cent. in real terms in the next three years. I am confident that although we need to do more to ensure that the money is spent as wisely as possible, the Government are ensuring the necessary resources to safeguard children through the care plans and procedures that the Bill establishes.

The hon. Member for North-West Norfolk asked specific questions about the use of section 17 of the 1989 Act. To be honest, it depends on the circumstances of the case. It may be used to obtain accommodation from private sources or registered social landlords. It could take any relevant form that would help children to be brought up in their own families and avoid the need to come into care. As I suggested earlier, its use will differ.

Some hon. Members have suggested that we should place a duty on local authorities to provide accommodation. Although I am pleased that the new clause makes it clear that local authorities have the power to provide accommodation, I do not believe that it is appropriate to impose a duty on them. We do not intend to supersede the responsibilities of housing departments, provide a method of jumping housing queues or place the provision of accommodation above all the other services that may be provided for children in need and their families.

I believe that we have struck the right balance in ensuring that local authorities are clear about their powers under section 17. I hope that we have reassured local authorities and, more important, ensured that vulnerable families have access to the safety net provision of section 17. That and our changes to the provisions on care planning mean that we shall ensure better planning for our children, better independent review processes and more opportunity for considering the rare cases when care plans are not implemented in the way that we all support. I hope that hon. Members will support the new clause.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 15

Review of cases of looked after children

'(1) In section 26 of the 1989 Act (review of cases of looked after children, etc.), in subsection (2) (regulations as to reviews)—

(a) in paragraph (c), "to consider" is omitted and after "their care" there is inserted—

"(i) to keep the section 31A plan for the child under review and, if they are of the opinion that some change is required, to revise the plan, or make a new plan, accordingly,

(ii) to consider",

(b) in paragraph (f), "to consider" is omitted and after the second mention of "the authority" there is inserted—

"(i) if there is no plan for the future care of the child, to prepare one,

(ii) if there is such a plan for the child, to keep it under review and, if they are of the opinion that some change is required, to revise the plan or make a new plan, accordingly,

(iii) to consider".

(c) after paragraph (j) there is inserted—

"(k) for the authority to appoint a person in respect of each case to carry out in the prescribed manner the functions mentioned in subsection (2A) and any prescribed function".

(2) After that subsection there is inserted—

"(2A) The functions referred to in subsection (2)(k) are—

(a) participating in the review of the case in question,

(b) monitoring the performance of the authority's functions in respect of the review,

(c) referring the case to an officer of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service, if the person appointed under subsection (2)(k) considers it appropriate to do so.

(2B) A person appointed under subsection (2)(k) must be a person of a prescribed description.

(2C) In relation to children whose cases are referred to officers under subsection (2A)(c), the Lord Chancellor may by regulations—

(a) extend any functions of the officers in respect of family proceedings (within the meaning of section 12 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000) to other proceedings,

(b) require any functions of the officers to be performed in the manner prescribed by the regulations"'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 6

MEANING OF "HARM" IN THE 1989 ACT

'In section 31 of the 1989 Act (care and supervision orders), at the end of the definition of "harm" in subsection (9) there is inserted "including, for example, impairment suffered from seeing or hearing the ill-treatment of another".'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Clause 107

PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY OF UNMARRIED FATHER

Amendment made: No. 93, in page 55, line 38, after "18(1)", insert—

', and sections 18(2)(b) and 20(1)(a),'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 111

SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP

Amendments made: No. 94, in page 58, line 12, at end insert—

'(d) a local authority foster parent with whom the child has lived for a period of at least one year immediately preceding the application.'.

No. 293, in page 58, line 45, at end insert—

'( ) This section is subject to section 28(3B) and (3C) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.'.

No. 95, in page 59, line 3, after first "made", insert—

'(a)'.

No. 96, in page 59, line 4, at end insert—

'and

(b) any section 8 order in force with respect to the child should be varied or discharged.'.

No. 97, in page 59, line 14, leave out "later order made" and insert—

'other order in force with respect to the child'.

No. 294, in page 59, line 39, at end insert—

'( ) This section is subject to section 28(3D) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.'.

No. 98, in page 60, line 2, at end insert—

'(ca) any individual not falling within any of paragraphs (a) to (c) who has, or immediately before the making of the special guardianship order had, parental responsibility for the child;'.

No. 278, in page 60,, leave out lines 11 and 12 and insert—

'(3) The following must obtain the leave of the court before making an application under subsection (1)—

(a) the child;

(b) any parent or guardian of his;

(c) any step-parent of his who has acquired, and has not lost, parental responsibility for him by virtue of section 4A;

(d) any individual falling within subsection (1)(ca) who immediately before the making of the special guardianship order had, but no longer has, parental responsibility for him.'.

No. 279, in page 60, line 17, leave out—

'parent or guardian of the child'

and insert—

'person falling within subsection (3)(b), (c) or (d)'.

No. 231, in page 60, line 18, leave out "of" and insert "in".

No. 101, in page 60, leave out lines 20 to 22.

No. 102, in page 61, line 5, leave out—

'A local authority may, and in prescribed cases must,'.

No. 103, in page 61, line 9, at end insert—

'(c) any other person who falls within a prescribed description,'.

No. 104, in page 61, leave out lines 10 and 11 and insert—

'a local authority may carry out an assessment of that person's needs for special guardianship support services (but, if the Secretary of State so provides in regulations, they must do so if he is a person of a prescribed description, or if his case falls within a prescribed description, or if both he and his case fall within prescribed descriptions).

( ) A local authority may, at the request of any other person, carry out an assessment of that person's needs for special guardianship support services.'.

No. 105, in page 62, leave out lines 20 to 22 and insert—

'any person to whom they may provide special guardianship support services'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 113

CARE PLANS

Jacqui Smith: I beg to move amendment No. 259, in page 64, line 2, leave out from "a" to end of line 3 and insert "section 31A plan"".

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 260 to 263.

Jacqui Smith: This group of amendments is consequential on new clause 15, which we have just debated. They are minor amendments that are required to adjust the existing legislation because of the introduction of the new clause.

As I have explained, clause 113 inserts new section 31A into the Children Act 1989. It sets out the requirement that a court may not make a care order until a care plan has been prepared by the local authority and considered by the court. A care plan prepared under that provision is to be known as a section 31A plan.

We have developed that requirement through new clause 15, and this group of amendments is designed to establish a robust system that includes the process for reviewing care plans, and set down how recourse to court may be sought where the care plan is not being properly implemented. The requirement will apply both to children who are subject to care orders and to those who are accommodated by the local authority.

Mr. Brazier: Can the Minister clarify how the amendments will affect, if at all, the frequent complaint from family division judges that the court makes a ruling on a care plan and then, because there is no requirement to come back to court, there is no way of determining whether the local authority has completely ignored that ruling?

Jacqui Smith: These amendments, together with new clause 15, set in place a system to ensure that that does not happen. In summary, the court would consider the care plan and the order that it was due to make. Ongoing scrutiny would then be undertaken not by the court but by the independent reviewing officer to ensure that the care plan was being implemented in the way that had been agreed.

Of course, we hope that that scrutiny and independent review would ensure that the care plan was implemented as it should be. In extreme cases, the independent reviewing officer could take the view that that was not happening and that, for example, a child's human rights might necessitate returning to the court for consideration of the fact that the care plan was not being implemented. At that point, the independent reviewing officer could refer the case to the CAFCASS officer, who could then, so to speak, exercise that child's rights.

The case to which I referred earlier raised the concern that sometimes a child does not have a guardian or anyone else who can take up their case. At present there would then be no one who could enforce that child's rights in relation to the care plan. The system that we are putting in place ensures that in the very few cases in which the reviewing function has not worked and the care plan is not being implemented, there is a route back to court to ensure that that child's rights are protected.

Mr. Brazier: I am grateful to the Minister for her clear explanation, but I would like to ask her one further question. Let us assume that the system has failed, the mechanism that she has described cranks into place, it becomes clear to the independent reviewing officer that the court's wishes have been ignored, and the reviewing officer then takes action. The crucial question then is: what sanction is there? The problem at the moment is that there is no sanction against the local authority. The Minister has put the mechanism in place, but how does the sanction work?

6.15 pm

Jacqui Smith: It would be a pretty considerable sanction for a local authority to know that its care plan was being referred back to the court for review and a possible decision about the order. That would be a more significant sanction than currently exists.

Amendment No. 262 will remove from subsection (2) of new section 31A of the Children Act, as inserted by clause 113, the reference to a care order made on the application being in force. Where a care order is in force, the requirements for the review of care plans set out in new clause 15 will apply.

Amendment No. 263 will insert into new section 31A a new subsection to define a "section 31A plan", which is a care plan prepared for a child in respect of whom a care order is pending.

Taken together with new clause 15, this group of amendments is an important part of the framework that will ensure that local authorities address the needs of children in a systematic and robust way. The elements of assessment and care planning, implementation and review will all be vital if we are to get the corporate parent to act in a proper and flexible way to meet the needs of children.

The aim of new clause 15 and the amendments is to ensure that children, whether they are accommodated by the local authority or are subject to a court order, have a care plan, that the care plan is reviewed at regular intervals, that children have a say in the process, and that the review is overseen by an independent person, who has the responsibility of ensuring that the care plan is being properly implemented. These measures will also require action to be taken where none is being taken, and ensure that the case is referred to CAFCASS to take to court where the child has no one else to act on their behalf and it appears that a local authority's action or inaction is breaching the child's human rights.

These are important steps, which will promote the welfare of children in care, and I commend them to the House.

Mr. Robert Walter (North Dorset): I am neither a smart lawyer nor a dim lawyer, just a simple Back Bencher. As a member of the Special Standing Committee, I have followed the Bill through all its proceedings and I feel that we should be looking to make good law that is understandable to those who have to implement it. Before the Bill leaves this place and goes to the House of Lords, where there are some smart lawyers, I would like the Minister to explain, if she can, why it is an improvement on the current wording for amendment No. 260 to insert "(a care plan)" after the word "plan", which seems terribly clumsy, when the following amendment will delete the words

"(in this Act referred to as a 'care plan')",

which I would have thought were crystal clear.

Surely if we are going to mess about with the wording to make it clearer and more understandable, which I hope is the Government's intention, the wording in line 8 should be "prepare a care plan". We know what a care plan is because we have talked about it, defined it and everything else.

Alternatively, we should leave the wording as it is and the Government should remove their amendments Nos. 260 and 261. It seems unhelpful to the process of better understanding what we are about that we should mess around with the existing wording in proposed new section 31A, on care orders and care plans. The provision had begun to make some sense to me, but if the amendments are accepted it may not make as much sense to those outside this place.

Tim Loughton: We should never let my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) do himself down by describing himself as a mere Back Bencher; his contribution to the Bill throughout all its stages has been considerable.

I have little to say about this group of amendments because the subject was largely covered when we discussed the previous group, and new clause 15 in particular. I can only agree with the Minister that in theory, the system that will be put in place is a good one in terms of the regular and ongoing review of care plans. Enabling children to have a say in those plans is an issue that Conservative Members, at least, raised on many occasions in the Special Standing Committee. Children are at the heart of that process, and they have every right to a say in it. In considering the previous group of amendments we debated whether the review should be overseen by an independent person. We also raised various questions concerning the integrity of independence, the reference to CAFCASS, and the fact that action will be taken at the end of the process.

[Tim Loughton]

There is no point in delaying the House further, as we have no objection to the amendments. They are largely consequential on earlier new clauses that the Minister moved, and to which the House agreed.

Jacqui Smith: As I may not have responded as fully as possible to the question that the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) asked about the sanction, I shall do so now. At the point at which a case is referred to CAFCASS, it can use existing remedies under the Children Act 1989. For example, it can apply for discharge of the care order, or for contact between the child and another person. Under human rights legislation, it can seek to injunct the local authority from taking a particular step, such as removing the child from an established placement. It can also seek a declaration that the local authority's plans are contrary to the child's human rights. That would require those plans to be rethought, and the child might also claim damages in respect of the impact of a local authority's action or inaction. Those are considerable sanctions.

The answer to the question asked by the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) is that there are two different types of plan. Clause 113 relates to a plan in which a care order is pending, whereas a plan under proposed new section 31A relates to the looking after of a child by the local authority, subject to a care order. After that clarification, I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will feel able to support our amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 260, in page 64, line 8, after "plan" insert "("a care plan")".

No. 261, in page 64, line 9, leave out from "child" to end of line.

No. 262, in page 64, line 10, leave out from "pending" to "the" in line 11.

No. 263, in page 64, line 20, at end insert—

'(6) A plan prepared, or treated as prepared, under this section is referred to in this Act as a "section 31A plan"'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

New Clause 16

AMENDMENT OF ADOPTION (SCOTLAND) ACT 1978: CONTRAVENTION OF SECTIONS 29 TO 35 OF THIS ACT

'After section 29 of the Adoption (Scotland) Act 1978 there is inserted—

"29A Contravention of sections 29 to 35 of Adoption and Children Act 2002

(1) A person who contravenes any of the enactments specified in subsection (2) is guilty of an offence and liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months, or a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale, or both.

(2) Those enactments are—

(a) section 29(1), (2) and (3) (removal of child placed or who may be placed for adoption),

(b) sections 31(2)(b), 32(2) and 34(2) (return of child by prospective adopters),

(c) section 33(1) (removal of child in contravention of placement order),

(d) section 35(1) (removal of child in non-agency case), and

(e) section 35(5) (return of child to parent or guardian),

of the Adoption and Children Act 2002." '—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

Clause 101

EFFECT OF CERTAIN SCOTTISH ORDERS AND PROVISIONS

Amendment made: No. 271, in page 53, line 28, after "order" insert—

'or an order under section 25 of the Adoption (Scotland) Act 1978 (interim adoption orders)'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 102

EFFECT OF CERTAIN NORTHERN IRISH ORDERS AND PROVISIONS

Amendments made: No. 252, in page 54, line 8, after "order" insert—

'or an order under Article 26 of the Adoption (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 (interim orders)'.

No. 253, in page 54, line 9, at end insert—

'( ) An order made under Article 17 or 18 of the Adoption (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 (freeing orders), or the variation or revocation of such an order under Article 20 or 21of that Order, have effect in England and Wales as they have in Northern Ireland'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 104

ORDERS MADE IN THE CHANNEL ISLANDS OR THE ISLE OF MAN

Amendment made: No. 247, in page 54, line 30, leave out from "provide" to "any" in line 38 and insert—

'(a) for a reference in any provision of this Act to an order of a court to include an order of a court in the Isle of Man or any of the Channel Islands which appears to the Secretary of State to correspond in its effect to the order in question,

(b) for a reference in any provision of this Act to an adoption agency to include a person who appears to the Secretary of State to exercise functions under the law of the Isle of Man or any of the Channel Islands which correspond to those of an adoption agency and for any reference in any provision of this Act to a child placed for adoption by an adoption agency to be read accordingly,

(c) for a reference in any provision of this Act to an enactment (including an enactment contained in this Act) to include a provision of the law of the Isle of Man or any of the Channel Islands which appears to the Secretary of State to correspond in its effect to the enactment,

(d) for any reference in any provision of this Act to the United Kingdom to include the Isle of Man or any of the Channel Islands.

( ) Regulations may modify any provision of this Act, as it applies to any order made, or other thing done, under the law of the Isle of Man or'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 126

AMENDMENTS, TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS, SAVINGS AND REPEALS

Jacqui Smith: I beg to move amendment No. 280, in page 71, line 14, after "transitional" insert "and transitory".

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 295 to 297, 274 to 276, 264, 265, 284, 285, 269, 266, 286, 277, 287, 267, 288, 268, 289, 300, 248, 257, 249, 258, 228, 229, 238 and 242.

Jacqui Smith: We move on to a significant group of amendments, which includes several minor and consequential amendments. Many of them are technical, and some are consequential on amendments that have already been debated. However, this group does include some important provisions in respect of early implementation of certain key areas of the Bill. It is the amendments associated with early implementation on which I would like to concentrate.

On amendments Nos. 280 and 284 to 289, in Special Standing Committee, hon. Members debated the Government's plans for implementing the important provisions in the Bill. It is clear that we must await the conclusion of Parliament's deliberations on those provisions, and Royal Assent, before firm commitments about implementation can be made. However, I was able to give the Committee some idea of our intentions for implementing the provisions, and I am pleased to return to the matter today.

As I made clear in Committee, we expect to bring the Bill's main provisions into force in 2004, but we believe that there is a case for taking earlier action on some of them. In Committee, I proposed to introduce on Report any amendments that may be needed to bring the provisions into force before 2004. The amendments before us deliver on that commitment by enabling the Bill's priority changes to the adoption service to be implemented in advance of the Bill as a whole.

Amendment No. 280 amends clause 126(2), which provides for schedule 4 to have effect. It changes the title of schedule 4 from "Transitional provisions and savings" to "Transitional and transitory provisions and savings". As hon. Members will doubtless be aware, it is necessary to reflect the provisions in schedule 4—which amend the Adoption Act 1976 and the Adoption (Scotland) Act 1978—to allow for early implementation. The provision will be in place for a short time, until the Bill as a whole is fully implemented.

In Committee, I announced the Government's intention to introduce improved adoption support for new adoptive families from April 2003. Better adoption services will be a key means of ensuring the stability of adoptive placements, and of encouraging more families to come forward to adopt. To underpin the arrangements for improved adoption support for adoptive families and prospective adoptive families, which we will put in place from April 2003, amendment No. 286 therefore inserts a new paragraph 2A into schedule 4. In other words, we are inserting into the 1976 legislation the provisions that are necessary to put in place early implementation of the key provisions, which I outlined in Committee, before we begin implementing the Bill's other provisions. They enable regulations to be made setting out the arrangements that local authorities must make for the provision of adoption support services to prescribed persons as part of the adoption service that they currently maintain under section 1(1) of the Adoption Act 1976.

6.30 pm

It is our intention to use those powers to place an explicit duty on local authorities to make arrangements to provide adoption support services to adoptive families and prospective adoptive families. From April 2003, adoption support services will be made available to adopted children, children who are to be adopted, adoptive parents, prospective adoptive parents, adoptive siblings and prospective adoptive siblings, regardless of the local authority area in which they live. As we set out in our adoption White Paper, that is important to ensure the success of adoptive placements and to encourage more people to come forward.

Sub-paragraph (2) of new paragraph 2A provides that the regulations may also require a local authority to carry out an assessment, on request, of the needs of a prescribed person for adoption support services. We will use those powers to require local authorities to assess the needs, on request, of adoptive families and prospective adoptive families for adoption support services as part of this early implementation package. Following such an assessment of needs, regulations will require the local authority to decide whether to provide adoption support services to an individual.

In many cases, when a local authority goes on to provide adoption support services to an adoptive family following an assessment, it will be appropriate for it to draw up a plan to co-ordinate the provision of those services. Regulations will therefore be used to make it clear when a plan is required. It is also our intention to make regulations under new paragraph 2A setting out requirements for the process of assessing needs and for the provision of adoption support services following an assessment. Those regulations will be similar to those which will be made under subsections (6) and (7) of clause 4 on full implementation of the Bill.

We are also keen to make early progress on the independent review mechanism, which will be a key means of improving prospective adopters' confidence in the system of adopter assessment and approval and of encouraging more people to come forward to adopt. New paragraph 2B of schedule 4, as inserted by amendment No. 286, amplifies the general regulation-making power in section 9 of the Adoption Act 1976. The new provision is modelled on clause 12 of the Bill and will enable regulations to be made providing for the operation of the independent review mechanism in advance of implementation of the Bill as a whole. As I have made clear, it is intended that the determinations that the independent review mechanism will review during the initial period will be determinations made by adoption agencies about the suitability of prospective adopters.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): The Minister mentioned new paragraph 2A in amendment No. 286. One of the difficulties with which prospective adopters and siblings often have to deal is that of movement from one local authority to another. The local authorities do not always act in a joined-up manner when dealing with cases in which some of the people involved live in one local authority and some in another. What regulations can the Minister introduce to ensure that local authorities act together in such cases?

Jacqui Smith: I recognise the hon. Gentleman's concerns, and he may be aware that we had considerable

[Jacqui Smith]

discussions in the Special Standing Committee about the process that will be necessary to ensure that the requirement on local authorities to provide adoption support services does not leave a gap between them. The Government have undertaken to work with local government to introduce the necessary regulations to ensure that no gap exists. There will be a clear point at which responsibility for the provision of support to prospective adopters from one local authority ends and at which it begins for another local authority.

We considered whether it was possible to provide an easy cut-off point. For example, the local authority in whose area the child lived might be responsible for adoption support up to the point at which the adoption happened and the local authority in whose area the child went to live would be responsible after that. I am not sure that it is possible to make such a clear distinction. For example, a child might be receiving an intensive package of support—perhaps because of a disability or special educational needs—and it might be necessary for the original local authority to continue to provide that package after adoption. We are aware of the issues and we will ensure that they are covered in the regulations. Given the Government's intention to ensure that adoption support provides support for families and children and adds stability to placements, I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is important that people do not fall into the gaps in provision of support. I recognise that that sometimes happens now.

Regulations will be used to require adoption agencies to offer prospective adopters an independent review of their case where the agency has indicated that it is minded to turn down their application to adopt. It is intended that an independent body will convene a review panel to re-examine the evidence and make a fresh recommendation to the adoption agency. The agency will then be required to consider both its original determination and the determination of the review panel before making its final decision.

I will now turn to inter-country adoption. We believe that there are strong reasons for giving early effect to the restrictions on bringing children into the United Kingdom. We ordered an urgent review of the law in that area in January 2001 and believe that it would not be right to wait until 2004 to bring the new measures into force. Amendment No. 287 therefore inserts a new paragraph 7A into schedule 4 to the Bill. This paragraph inserts a new section 56A into the Adoption Act 1976, which reflects clause 81 of the Bill, which we discussed earlier today. This will enable the more extensive restrictions on bringing children into the United Kingdom included in clause 81 to be brought into force before the Bill is fully implemented.

As hon. Members will remember from a few hours ago, under new section 56A, it will be a criminal offence for a British resident to bring a child into the UK for the purposes of adoption unless they comply with prescribed requirements. It is intended that the requirements prescribed in the regulations will, as under the current system, make it a requirement that prospective adopters apply to a local authority or a voluntary adoption agency to be assessed and approved under procedures similar to those followed in domestic adoptions, and then to have a certificate of eligibility issued by the Secretary of State.

Like clause 81, new section 56A also extends the restrictions to include British residents bringing into the UK a child whom they have adopted outside the British Isles within the preceding six months.

Mr. Walter: The Minister will recall that in the Special Standing Committee we had much discussion on this provision with regard to the differing domestic legislation in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Can she assure the House that the regulations will apply equally to all parts of the United Kingdom?

Jacqui Smith: This issue was the subject of some of the amendments that we considered on Thursday. In the Special Standing Committee, we also discussed the fact that Scotland is undertaking a adoption law review and will want to introduce legislation on that subject. The need for the safeguards to be common throughout the country, and for orders made in one part of the UK to be recognised in other parts, will be covered in the necessary secondary legislation.

I was talking about inter-country adoption. The early implementation of the provisions involved is intended to catch individuals who, to avoid committing an offence in the context of the six-months limit, take a short leave of absence to live outside the British Isles and adopt according to the procedures of the country in which they are living.

Like the other provisions relating to inter-country adoption, new section 56A will increase the penalties for those found guilty of breaching the restrictions on bringing a child into the country, or causing a child to be brought in. We discussed that issue earlier.

We believe that the new restrictions applying to electronic advertising are important, and should not be delayed until 2004. Amendment No. 287 inserts into schedule 4 new paragraphs 7B and 7C, which tighten restrictions on advertising in the current legal frameworks for adoption in England, Wales and Scotland. New paragraph 7B makes it clear that the restrictions on advertising in section 58 of the 1976 Act also apply to advertisements on the internet; and it provides an increased penalty on conviction of an offence under that section. The maximum penalty will be three months in prison or a fine of £5,000, or both. New paragraph 7C amends section 52 of the Adoption (Scotland) Act 1978 to make equivalent provision for Scotland.

Mr. Bellingham: The Minister mentioned electronic advertising. Obviously we were all concerned about the infamous Kilshaw case, in which people used the internet to obtain information from the United States. The whole sorry saga caused those interested in the subject of adoption considerable grief. What measures can be taken to prevent such people from gaining access to information from abroad? Can these restrictions do it, or are they concerned only with electronic advertising in the British Isles?

Jacqui Smith: As we have established, there are limitations on the extent to which it is possible to restrict information on the internet that is provided by an internet service provider in this country but comes directly from overseas. The Bill, however, makes significant advances in terms of restriction of advertising through the internet.

When that is not possible, work can be done through international co-operation and the development of codes of conduct. That should help us to ensure that cases such as that cited by the hon. Gentleman do not occur again.

Amendment No. 322 is a relatively new addition. It adds a new paragraph 45A to schedule 3, thereby allowing the Adoption (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 to be amended to enable the making of regulations in respect of the registration in the adopted children register in Northern Ireland of convention and overseas adoptions. Article 53 of the order was amended by the Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act (Northern Ireland) 2001. The intention was to enable the registrar-general in Northern Ireland to register convention or overseas adoptions if the prescribed requirements were met.

6.45 pm

Article 53(3B) provides for applications for the registration of such adoptions to be made in the prescribed manner by a prescribed person, and to give the prescribed particulars. Article 53(3D) provides for the prescription of requirements that convention or overseas adoptions must meet in order to be registered.

In article 2(2) of the 1987 order, "prescribed", for the purposes of article 53(3B) and (3D) means, in this context, "prescribed by adoption rules". However, the issues relating to registration that I have just described need to be prescribed in regulations by the department of finance and personnel, which makes regulations for the registrar-general. Amendment No. 322 therefore makes the necessary amendment to article 2(2) of the 1987 order to provide that regulations under article 53(3B) and 53(3D)—

Tim Loughton: I am trying to be helpful. We are discussing a group of 28 amendments, and according to my reckoning the Minister has dealt with three of them, doing terribly well. She is now referring to amendment No. 322, which I cannot see in the group that we are discussing. Which amendment are we actually dealing with now? It is all very confusing.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is right. I do not think the amendment is in this group.

Jacqui Smith: I am sure that hon. Members were enjoying it, but I apologise if I was premature. I was so interested that I thought hon. Members would be as well. I thought this was a good opportunity to discuss the amendment.

I hope that this will not be a big disappointment, but I think that I have concentrated on the key amendments dealing with early implementation. I did not intend to discuss in detail the other amendments, which are largely technical and consequential. If pushed, I shall of course be willing to talk about them at length.

Tim Loughton: I am glad that someone noticed that we seemed to have strayed slightly, but I am still confused. I cannot find amendment No. 322 anywhere.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Perhaps I can help the hon. Gentleman. The amendment was debated on 20 March.

Tim Loughton: Of course. I am so sorry. How remiss of me, and of the Minister, not to remember that. Let us return to the mere 28 detailed amendments that we have in hand—but perhaps you did not notice either, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that amendment No. 322 was being discussed.

May we return to amendment No. 280, which I think appeared at the beginning of the Minister's tour d'horizon? There is a certain irony in a group of amendments described as minor drafting and transitional measures, given that amendment No. 280 would replace the words "transitional" with the word "transitory". [HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] I thought that it was quite amusing, anyway.

Jacqui Smith: I am surprised at the hon. Gentleman, who is usually so accurate. If he looks carefully, he will realise that the amendment would add the word "transitory" rather than substituting it for the word "transitional".

Tim Loughton: I will take the Minister's word for it. In fact, I see that she is right: the amendment would insert the words "and transitory". It is a double whammy. There was a certain irony, all the same.

Mr. Bellingham: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Tim Loughton: Indeed. Why not?

Mr. Bellingham: Can my hon. Friend tell me the difference, as defined by the dictionary, between "transitional" and "transitory"? Does he know what the technical difference is?

Tim Loughton: No, and I do not particularly care at this stage, although it was helpful of my hon. Friend to raise that important point.

Perhaps we can proceed to a slightly more substantial amendment, amendment No. 286. The Minister spoke of early implementation of many of the proposals forming the basis of the Bill, with which we agree. We certainly agree with the Minister that many of these things should have happened yesterday, rather than happening at some stage in the future. Her letter of 10 May gave some of the details of early implementation of matters relating to adoption support services in particular, and also to the independent reviewer. I gather that she proposes to do that by adding a new paragraph in schedule 4 and amending the Adoption Act 1976 with insertions.

The Minister wants early implementation of the independent review of determinations, as covered in amendment No. 286. This part of the Bill refers back to clause 12, on which the guillotine fell in Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) was orating on the legal technicalities of the clause when we were cut off without the opportunity of debating some of the substantial amendments to clause 12 that we had tabled. I am also mindful of the fact that neither have we debated clause 12 on Report.

This is very unsatisfactory. The Minister has acknowledged by her desire to bring forward its implementation that this is an important part of the Bill, yet it has not been debated by the House. It has not been debated in Committee or in this truncated Report stage. The Minister is presuming to implement legislation about which there has been not a word of debate in the House. I hope that the upper House will have something to say

[Tim Loughton]

about that. The hon. Lady may well be right, in the final account, to bring forward the implementation of these terms, but we wanted to take issue with and raise concerns about certain aspects of the provisions, and we have not had the opportunity to do so. It is a bad day when that happens.

The Minister talked about publishing the regulations. This has been a constant bugbear of ours. We are debating—although, in some cases, we have not had the opportunity to do so—clauses that rely heavily on regulations that have yet to be drawn up and published. If the implementation timetable is brought forward even further, that means even less time for regulations to be drawn up, consulted on, published and amended if the various practitioners in the field who have to work by them see flaws. We have not had the opportunity to see such flaws because we have not had the opportunity to debate the clauses and we have not had sight of the regulations.

We heard some pertinent questions from my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), who, although he did not serve on the Committee, has taken a close interest in the Bill and tabled amendments in Committee. He referred to the territorial gaps when a local authority may maintain a responsibility for special educational provision for children who are adopted and then placed with an adoptive family out of its area. These are big questions and big problems. The Minister acknowledged that, but we do not know the full answer because we have not seen the regulations.

Similarly, the Minister intends to bring forward some of the regulations on inter-country adoptions and restrictions on bringing children into the United Kingdom. As we heard this evening, when we had an opportunity to debate the relevant provisions, given the Kilshaw example and others of that ilk, there is a great deal of support for such measures. We have reservations because we believe that the restrictions will impact adversely on people bringing children into the country perfectly legitimately from some of the other countries mentioned earlier. Problems may occur because the system has been held up for so long. My hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) mentioned the problems of the provisions applying equally to all parts of the United Kingdom.

The Minister mentioned the new regulations on electronic advertising. From memory, debate on that part of the Bill was also curtailed in Committee, and we did not vote on it. We need to know exactly how the Minister is intending to marshal the internet. We see in many other pieces of legislation that it is all very well to set down good intentions that can be applied in the United Kingdom, but the internet is international—it is no respecter of boundaries, and we have no authority outside the boundaries of the United Kingdom. It needs rather more than a few regulations saying what is good or bad in the UK, because people are influenced by internet pages beamed into this country, which are outside our territorial remit.

Mr. Bellingham: My hon. Friend is right. We were on the cusp of debating these important points in Committee, but were cut short. UK citizens who place an advertisement on the internet through a UK-based internet service provider in this country will be committing an offence, but if they get someone else to do it for them abroad, they will not be. There are all sorts of anomalies in this area, and it is a pity that we could not have debated them in Committee. When the Minister replies to my hon. Friend, she should clarify some of these points.

Tim Loughton: My hon. Friend is right. We are all agreed on the principle and desirability of some of the restrictions that the Government want to impose, but that is worthless unless the practical applications have been thought through.

I am slightly at a loss; the Minister has spoken to three amendments out of a group of 28. Indeed, she spoke at length to one that is not even in the group, interesting though that was. I should appreciate responses to some of my points. For all I know, there may be similar questions on the amendments to which she has not spoken but for which there is still a little time if she cares to elaborate further.

Jonathan Shaw: I welcome the bringing forward of support services. The universal determination of right hon. and hon. Members to see the number of children placed for adoption increase was one of the pleasures of serving on the Committee stage of this Bill. We want to meet the target of a 40 per cent. increase, but what happens when those children are placed for adoption? This is not just about targets, throughput and speed—quality support is essential.

It is essential that local communities have confidence in adoption agencies providing post-adoption support. The dynamics change when a child is placed for adoption. One can only make a best assessment. As we have said a number of times in Committee and on Report, we are not dealing with pure equations. This is a dynamic process. Social workers, the panel and the courts are all involved in the process of adoption and in trying to make a vital decision for a child's future well-being and happiness in their adoptive placement. We know that things change—we do not know what will happen or how a child will react when he or she is placed with prospective adopters.

The test for adoption agencies is their willingness to respond to the crises, doubts and concerns experienced by the adoptive family and, of course, the child, as has been mentioned time and again. For placements to be successful, that is crucial.

7 pm

Mr. Hinchliffe: In my constituency, I am dealing with the case of a young man aged 19 who is severely disabled. He was adopted by his adoptive mother two or three years ago, at which time he was eligible for adoption allowances. His mother had to give up work due to the severity of his disability. Her income has been reduced, yet it appears that there are no longer any support mechanisms for him because he is now an adult. Has my hon. Friend come across similar situations, and does he consider that the measure could assist people in those circumstances?

Jonathan Shaw: My hon. Friend has a wealth of experience in such matters. Indeed, many of the Committee members had swapped corduroys for sharp suits when they entered this place—although my hon. Friend still has the beard; I think that he even has the sandals somewhere in his wardrobe.

My hon. Friend makes an important point: there are many variables. When we place older children with disabilities and a multitude of behaviour problems, we know that those problems do not end when they come of age. If we are to reach the targets, prospective adopters must feel confident that when they call the social services department or the adoption agency they will not be given the run around once their child becomes an adult. They need to be sure that the response will not be, "I am sorry but you no longer fit into the right bracket and we cannot help you." If that is the word on the street among prospective adopters, we will not hit our targets. All those factors are interdependent.

The point applies not only to severely disabled children or to those with extreme behaviour problems but also to children who are placed out of area. It is not satisfactory for a particular service to wash its hands of the child and say, "Sorry, you're no longer in our area so we cannot help you". There must be confidence in the system and I am glad that the measure will ensure that proper arrangements are in place.

Local authorities and adoption agencies have long realised their deficiencies when children from one part of the country are placed in another area. The adoptive parents are expected to trail halfway around the UK to get access to services.

Mr. Brazier: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point. There is also a wider financial point. It is anomalous that an authority can take a great deal of trouble and spend many thousands of pounds assessing a couple and including them on its list, yet there is no transfer of funding if the couple then adopt a child from another area. One authority does all the work, but another receives the budget relief.

Jonathan Shaw: My understanding is that there is support through the interplacement fee. If one agency prepares a couple for adoption and a child from another area is placed with them, there is an interplacement fee. My hon. Friend the Minister may correct me when she makes her remarks, but that was certainly my experience.

Problems arise when local authorities that have invested time and effort are reluctant to allow, or to encourage, prospective adopters to seek children from another part of the country. However, the national register and the consortium arrangements for authorities should stop those restrictive practices, although only time will tell whether they can be completely eradicated.

Mr. Brazier: I think that the hon. Gentleman was present when the Special Standing Committee heard testimony from voluntary organisations that they often make an enormous loss on those transfer fees, especially with severely disabled clients. It is much more expensive to scrutinise adoptive parents for such children.

Jonathan Shaw: The hon. Gentleman refers to a point that I touched on earlier and which was also highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe): it is difficult to place children with severe disabilities or behaviour problems. The BAAF publication "Be My Parent" lists more than 400 children every month and we heard from the BAAF that there is not even one inquiry about half of the boys aged more than five. That is not because they are disabled or have behaviour problems. For understandable reasons, people prefer to adopt babies, but they are in short supply.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the costs. Prospective adopters for some children are a rarity, but let us hope that we can make some economies of scale in our drive for such adopters—not least as a result of the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend. His proposals would widen the pool, so if there are more prospective adopters there will be economies of scale and the concerns raised by the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) will be reduced.

Mr. Dawson: My hon. Friend goes to the heart of the Bill when he refers to the fact that adoptive parents will need a huge amount of support if they are to take older young people out of the care system, especially those who have suffered the most distressing experiences of neglect and abuse and whose needs have not been met for many years. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Bill will provide a framework? We have a long way to go in respect of professional development, good practice and regulation so that we can build on its essential elements.

Jonathan Shaw: My hon. Friend is right: making the step change that we all want in adoptive placements will put heavy demands on local authorities—such as education and social services—that they will not have previously experienced.

Mr. Hinchliffe: Support services are a key aspect of the measure. In the past, I have been concerned that local authorities took the attitude that once an individual was adopted that was the end of the matter. Does my hon. Friend think that we can achieve a sea change in attitudes and a recognition that the local authority has a continuing role, especially as regards the placement of children with special needs? Does he think that we can bring about a revolution in that respect? I remain concerned that we may need regularly to remind local authorities of their responsibilities towards adopted youngsters.

Jonathan Shaw: I hope that we can achieve that sea change—or revolution; there must certainly be a dramatic change if we are to hit the Government's 40 per cent. target.

I would be reluctant to start prejudging local authorities because, in the main, all local authorities and adoption agencies think that this is highly desirable legislation, which rings true in terms of the type of child care policies that we want to develop, but it is important that the support services are responsive to a changing dynamic—post-adoption placements. If we get that right, people will have confidence in adoption services and more of our vulnerable children will be placed for adoption.

Jacqui Smith: The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) raised several issues in relation to this group of amendments. Indeed, despite being warned, he pressed me to go into a bit more detail on some of these amendments. I hope that he does not regret that.

I shall first deal with some of the specific points that the hon. Gentleman made. On the distinction between the words "transitional" and "transitory", the use of the word "transitory" is necessary because, as I explained, we need

[Jacqui Smith]

to insert provisions in the Adoption Act 1976 to bring forward the implementation of the provisions on adoption support, independent review and electronic advertising, which I have outlined. Of course the 1976 Act will be repealed under some of the amendments in this group when the Bill is enacted. To that extent, those amendments are transitory: they allow us to carry out the early implementation of those provisions, but for a limited time only, as that is all that is necessary in this case.

The hon. Gentleman also returned to his oft-stated concern about the lack of detail about the regulations. There is a bit of a conflict between our approaches. We want to ensure that the primary legislation includes the principles necessary to improve the adoption system, while making it clear that, because of precisely the sorts of issue that were raised on numerous occasions in the Special Standing Committee, we need to work with the stakeholders to develop, for example, the framework for adoption support, as well as the detail of the regulations. We have been working on that framework, and I hope that we will soon be able to put it out to consultation.

It is obvious to an extent that we could not do all that and produce a final version of the regulations before determining the principles and before the consultations and discussions had taken place. It is a function of the Government's consultative and inclusive approach to developing the Bill that we will develop the regulations in close consultation with the stakeholders when we have got through the first stage of agreeing the principles embedded in the legislation.

The hon. Members for East Worthing and Shoreham and for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) referred to internet advertising. Perhaps it would be helpful if I were to clarify the legal position. First, as I suggested earlier, if a United Kingdom internet service provider hosts such an advert from the United States, the United Kingdom ISP would be caught by the restriction. The ISP would have to remove the advert, if they were aware of it; otherwise they would commit an offence. However, if the United Kingdom ISP were just acting as a conduit, it would not be caught. Clause 115(3)(b) deals with ISPs that simply act as a channel, and the same approach has been taken in the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Bill.

7.15 pm

If the advert came from the European Union, however, the EU e-commerce directive would apply and the rules of the country of origin should apply to internet advertising. Although we may not be able to prosecute, we could certainly take up the issue with the relevant country to ensure that controls are in place.

Mr. Walter: The Minister is probably too young to remember the Marine, &c., Broadcasting (Offences) Act 1967, which covered similar concerns that the Government had about advertising coming into the United Kingdom from outside our frontiers, promoting products available in the United Kingdom and influencing consumer decisions in the marketplace. That legislation was singularly ineffective: such radio stations continued to broadcast for some 30 years after its implementation.

Will the Minister tell us whether an advert for a child or an adoption facility could be placed on the internet and someone could take up that advertisement and totally comply with the Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act 1999 and the Bill, so that the adoption itself was legal although the advertisement that started the process was illegal?

Jacqui Smith: The hon. Gentleman is right—I was not even at nursery school when that Act was considered. He makes an important point about whether an illegal advert would necessarily lead to an illegal adoption, but I suggest to him that of course hon. Members are right to be concerned about the extent of our legal powers to control advertising on the internet, but advertising—albeit unsavoury—is but the first part of a process that could lead to an illegal adoption. Important safeguards have been included and strengthened in the legislation: for example, international adverts might be significant in relation to inter-country adoption, and we have put in place the necessary safeguards to ensure that children are protected and that adoptions cannot take place on the basis of dodgy procedures.

My hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw) rightly emphasised the importance of adoption support. We have had discussions about such support in considering the Bill. All hon. Members recognise the fact, which my hon. Friend ably identified during his contribution, that adoption support services are important not only because they support individual families, prospective adopters and children, but because if people know that they can gain access to those services it can have a positive effect on their willingness to come forward to undertake adoption. For both those reasons, not only is the overall framework that we are developing important, but so is the fact that we are bringing forward that provision earlier.

As I suggested, I shall skip through some of the other Government amendments. Amendments Nos. 295 to 297 alter schedule 3 and make minor and consequential changes to the Marriage Act 1949 to determine and clarify who can consent to the marriage of a child under 18. As amended, the paragraphs also take account of adoption placements and special guardianship orders.

Amendment No. 274 corrects a reference in paragraph 23 to schedule 3 which should refer to clause 86, not clause 83. Amendment No. 275 also amends schedule 3 to ensure that orders made under clause 25 are recognised in Scotland and Northern Ireland under section 25 of the Family Law Act 1986. Amendment No. 276 provides that a court in England and Wales cannot make an order under clause 25, including orders varying or revoking a clause 25 order, unless the child is habitually resident or present in England or Wales.

Amendments Nos. 264 and 268 are consequential on the amendments to care plans. Amendment No. 269 amends paragraph 97 of schedule 3, and paragraph 97 amends section 14(2) of the Care Standards Act 2000. We have concluded that the Bill does not go far enough to deal with adoption offences, all of which can be serious, so we have decided that the offences in the Bill and the regulations made under it, as well as the offences in regulations made under section 1(3) of the Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act 1999, should be relevant for determining whether to cancel the registration of an establishment or agency under part II of the 2000 Act, and that is what the amendment delivers.

Amendment No. 277 is a technical amendment to paragraph 4 of schedule 4. It ensures that when the Adoption Act 1976 is repealed, an adoption agency in

England or Wales that is at that time under a duty to provide a progress report to former parents, continues to have that duty. Amendment No. 300 is consequential on amendments to clause 84, which deals with overseas adoptions.

Amendments Nos. 248 and 249 define "enactment", thereby ensuring clarity of that term in clause 131. Amendments Nos. 257 and 258, together with amendments Nos. 254 and 255, which were discussed on Thursday and earlier today, ensure that references to the word "prescribed" are consistent. The overall approach taken to the use of that term is that in the majority of cases it is obvious from the context whether it means in regulations, rules or an order. However, where that is not the case, the provision informs us of what "prescribed" means. Amendments Nos. 228 and 229 are consequential on amendments Nos. 191 and 192, which were also taken on Thursday. They deal with the relationship between placement orders and orders made under section 8 of the 1989 Act.

Amendments Nos. 238 and 242 alter clause 135, which relates to commencement. Amendment No. 238 amends subsection (1) to enable clause 124 and new clause 7 to come into force when the Bill receives Royal Assent. Clause 124 amends section 93 of the Local Government Act 2000, enabling grants to be paid to support local authorities, for example to pilot new ways of working in the innovative commissioning of children's services and consortium arrangements. We want to be able to make grants to local authorities for use in the current financial year, which is why we want the provision to commence from the day on which the Bill receives Royal Assent.

New clause 7 amends section 17 of the 1989 Act, which deals with the provision of accommodation by local authorities for children in need. Given what we said about the importance of the new clause to clearing up the lack of clarity that surrounds the responsibilities of local authorities, it is also vital that that commences when the Bill receives Royal Assent.

The group of amendments is large and technical, but it does include important provisions to ensure that the Bill works properly. They provide clarity and ensure that the provisions can be commenced and implemented appropriately. On that basis, I hope that hon. Members accept them.

Amendment agreed to.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I may have inadvertently misled the House about amendment No. 322. The amendment, which was starred on Thursday 16 May and therefore could not be selected that day, falls within the ambit of the group led by amendment No. 270, which relates to Northern Ireland, Scotland, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands. That group was debated on Thursday 16 May not on 20 March, as I said earlier. Amendment No. 322 will be put formally this evening.

Schedule 3

MINOR AND CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 295, in page 82, leave out lines 15 to 43 and insert—

'2 In subsection (1) for "person or persons specified in subsection (1A) of this section" there is substituted "appropriate persons".

3 For subsection (1A) there is substituted—

"(1A) The appropriate persons are—

(a) if none of paragraphs (b) to (h) apply, each of the following—
  (i) any parent of the child who has parental responsibility for him; and
  (ii) any guardian of the child;

(b) where a special guardianship order is in force with respect to a child, each of the child's special guardians, unless any of paragraphs (c) to (g) applies;

(c) where a care order has effect with respect to the child, the local authority designated in the order, and each parent, guardian or special guardian (insofar as their parental responsibility has not been restricted under section 33(3) of the Children Act 1989), unless paragraph (e) applies;

(d) where a residence order has effect with respect to the child, the persons with whom the child lives, or is to live, as a result of the order, unless paragraph (e) applies;

(e) where an adoption agency is authorised to place the child for adoption under section 18 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, that agency or, where a care order has effect with respect to the child, the local authority designated in the order;

(f) where a placement order is in force with respect to the child, the appropriate local authority;

(g) where a child has been placed for adoption with prospective adopters, the prospective adopters (insofar as their parental responsibility has not been restricted under section 24(4) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002), in addition to those persons specified in paragraph (e) or (f);

(h) where none of paragraphs (b) to (g) apply but a residence order was in force with respect to the child immediately before he reached the age of sixteen, the persons with whom he lived, or was to live, as a result of the order.".'.

No. 296, in page 83, line 6, leave out "by an adoption agency".

No. 297, in page 83, line 11, leave out from "adoption" to end of line 12.

No. 35, in page 84, line 8, leave out "or" and insert—

'sections 1 or 2(4) of the Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act 1999 or'.

No. 36, in page 84, line 14, at end insert—

'( ) in the entry relating to the Adoption (Intercountry Aspects) Act 1999—

(i) in the first column, for "Section" there is substituted "Sections 1 and",

(ii) in the second column, for "Article 9(a) to (c) of" there is substituted "regulations made under section 1 giving effect to" and at the end there is inserted "and functions under Article 9(a) to (c) of the Convention"'.

No. 313, in page 85, line 12, at end insert—

'20A In section 11 (restriction on arranging adoptions and placing of children)—

(a) in subsection (2)—
  (i) for paragraph (a) there is substituted—

"(a) a registered adoption society (within the meaning of section 2(2) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002)"; and
  (ii) for "section 1" there is substituted "section 3(1)", and

(b) after subsection (2) there is inserted—

"(2A) In relation to the provision of any particular service by an adoption society, the reference in subsection (2)(a) to a registered adoption society does not include a voluntary organisation unless it is registered under Part 2 of the Care Standards Act 2000 in respect of that service or a service which, in England, corresponds to that service."

20B In section 16 (parental agreement to adoption order)—

(a) in subsection (1)—

(i) in paragraph (a), sub-paragraph (ii) is omitted, and

(ii) after paragraph (a) there is inserted—

"(aa) each parent or guardian of the child has consented under section 19 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (advance consent to adoption), has not withdrawn the consent and does not oppose the making of the adoption order;

(ab) subsection (3A) applies and no parent or guardian of the child opposes the making of the adoption order", and

(b) after subsection (3) there is inserted—

"(3A) This subsection applies where—

(a) the child has been placed for adoption by an adoption agency (within the meaning of section 2(1) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002) with the prospective adopters in whose favour the adoption order is proposed to be made; and

(b) the child was placed for adoption—

(i) under section 18 of that Act (placing children with parental consent) with the consent of each parent or guardian and the consent of the mother was given when the child was at least six weeks old; or

(ii) under an order made under section 20 of that Act (placement orders) and the child was at least six weeks old when that order was made.

(3B) A parent or guardian may not oppose the making of an adoption order under subsection (1)(aa) or (ab) without the leave of the court.

(3C) The court shall not give leave under subsection (3B) unless satisfied that there has been a change of circumstances since the consent of the parent or guardian was given or, as the case may be, the order under section 20 of that Act was made.

(3D) The withdrawal of—

(a) any consent to the placement of a child for adoption—

(i) under section 18; or

(ii) under an order made under section 20,

of the Adoption and Children Act 2002; or

(b) any consent given under section 19 of that Act,

is ineffective if it is given after an application for an adoption order is made.".'

No. 274, in page 85, line 28, leave out "83" and insert "86(2)".

No. 314, in page 85, line 32, at end insert—

'24A Section 52 (restriction on advertisements) is omitted.

24B In section 53 (effect of determination and orders made in England and Wales and overseas in adoption proceedings), in subsection (2), the words "England and Wales or" are omitted.

24C After section 53 there is inserted—

"53A Effect of certain orders made in England and Wales

(1) An adoption order (within the meaning of section 44(1) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002) has effect in Scotland as it has in England and Wales but as if any reference to the parental responsibility for the child were to the parental responsibilities and parental rights in relation to the child.

(2) An order made under section 20 of that Act (placement orders), and the variation or revocation of such an order under section 22 or 23 of that Act, have effect in Scotland as they have in England and Wales but as if any reference to the parental responsibility for the child were to the parental responsibilities and parental rights in relation to the child.

53B Effect of placing for adoption etc. under Adoption and Children Act 2002

(1) If—

(a) a child is placed for adoption under section 18 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (placing children with parental consent); or

(b) an adoption agency is authorised to place a child for adoption under that section,

sections 24 (parental responsibility) and 27(2) to (4) (further consequences of placement) of that Act have effect in Scotland as they have in England and Wales but with the modifications specified in subsection (2).

(2) Those modifications are—

(a) in section 24, any reference to the parental responsibility for the child is to be read as a reference to the parental responsibilities and parental rights in relation to the child; and

(b) in section 27(2), the reference to the court is to be read as a reference to the authorised court.

53C Further consequences of placement and placement orders

(1) Subsection (2) applies where—

(a) a child is placed for adoption under section 18 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (placing children with parental consent); or

(b) an adoption agency is authorised to place the child for adoption under that section.

(2) No order under subsection (1) of section 11 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (court orders relating to parental responsibilities etc.) of a kind referred to in subsection (2)(c) (residence orders) of that section may be made in respect of the child.

(3) On the making of an order under section 20 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (a "placement order") in respect of a child, any order under subsection (1) of section 11 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 of a kind referred to in subsection (2)(c) to (f) (residence orders, contact orders, specific issue orders and interdicts in relation to parental responsibilities) of that section in respect of the child ceases to have effect.

(4) Where a placement order is in force—

(a) no such order as is referred to in subsection (3) of this section; and

(b) no order under section 55 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (child assessment orders),

may be made in respect of the child.".'

No. 307, in page 85, line 35, at end insert—

'25B In section 60 (orders, rules and regulations), after subsection (3) there is inserted—

"(3A) An order under section 65(2) shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of the Scottish Parliament.".'.

No. 315, in page 85, line 35, at end insert—

'25A In section 59 (rules of procedure)—

(a) in subsection (2)—

(i) for the words from "in relation to" to "adoption", where it secondly occurs, there is substituted "(except where an order has been made freeing the child for adoption)"; and

(ii) for the words from "every" to "Act" there is substituted "any person mentioned in subsection (2A)"; and

(b) after subsection (2) there is inserted—

"(2A) The persons referred to in subsection (2) are—

(a) every person who can be found and whose agreement or consent to the making of the order is required to be given or dispensed with under this Act or, if no such person can be found, any relative prescribed by the rules who can be found;

(b) every person who has consented to the making of the order under section 19 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (and has not withdrawn the consent) unless he has given a notice under subsection (4)(a) of that section which has effect;

(c) every person who, if leave were given under section 16(3B), would be entitled to oppose the making of the order.".'.

No. 316, in page 86, leave out lines 4 to 7.

No. 317, in page 86, line 7, at end insert—

', and

( ) in the definition of "order freeing a child for adoption", paragraph (a) and the word "and" immediately following that paragraph are omitted.'

No. 64, in page 86, line 16, leave out from "proceedings)" to end of line 18 and insert—

'(a) in subsection (1), "(other than proceedings under the Adoption Act 1976)" is omitted,

(b) in subsection (2)—
  (i) for "the Adoption Act 1976" there is substituted "the Adoption and Children Act 2002",
  (ii) the words following "(a) and (b)" are omitted.'.

No. 40, in page 86, leave out lines 26 to 29.

No. 275, in page 88, line 39, at end insert—

'(ab) an order made under section 25 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (contact), other than an order varying or revoking such an order'.

No. 276, in page 88, line 43, at end insert—

'(2B) A court in England and Wales shall not have jurisdiction to make an order under section 25 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002 unless the condition in section 3 of this Act is satisfied'.

No. 322, in page 89, line 15, at end insert—

'The Adoption (Northern Ireland) Order 1987 (S.I. 1987/2203 (N.I. 22))

45A In Article 2(2) (interpretation), in the definition of "prescribed" for "Articles 54" there is substituted "Articles 53(3B) and (3D), 54".'—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Jacqui Smith: I beg to move amendment No. 106, in page 89, line 23, at end insert—

'( ) after subsection (5) there is inserted—

"(5A) A local authority foster parent is entitled to apply for a residence order with respect to a child if the child has lived with him for a period of at least one year immediately preceding the application.",'.

The amendment removes an inconsistency between the Children Act 1989 and the adoption provisions as they relate to local authority foster carers. Under clause 41(4), a local authority foster carer may apply as of right for an adoption order for a child in their care, provided that the child has had his or her home with the foster carer for 12 months. The carers do not need the leave of the court or the permission of the local authority to apply to adopt. However, under clause 109, which relates to section 9 of the 1989 Act, if a child has lived with a local authority foster carer for one year, the carer may apply for a residence order, but needs the leave of the court to make the application. Stakeholders have drawn our attention to that inconsistency. We do not believe that it is right that there should be a leave requirement for residence order applications by foster carers after one year when there is not one for adoption orders, which have greater lifelong implications.

The amendment removes that minor inconsistency by making specific provision in section 10 of the 1989 Act in respect of residence orders. It makes it clear that the foster carer may apply as of right if a child has been with them for one year, up to the time when the application is made. I hope that the House will support that minor correction.

Tim Loughton: That is fine.

Amendment agreed to.

7.30 pm

Amendments made: No. 107, in page 91, line 4, leave out from beginning to "or".

No. 264, in page 91, line 17, leave out "care" and insert "section 31A".

No. 265, in page 91, line 17, leave out "31A(1)" and insert "31A(6)".

No. 284, in page 94, line 29, leave out "14" and insert "13".

No. 285, in page 95, line 3, at end insert—

'Section 14 (restriction on bringing children into the United Kingdom for adoption) is omitted'.

No. 269, in page 95, line 21, leave out from "1999" to the end of line 23 and insert—

'(e) an offence under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 or regulations made under it." '

No. 266, in page 96, line 11, at end insert—

In section 12(5) of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000 (meaning of "family proceedings" in relation to CAFCASS), paragraph (b) (supervision orders under the 1989 Act) and the preceding "and" are omitted'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Schedule 4

TRANSITIONAL PROVISIONS AND SAVINGS

Amendments made: No. 286, in page 96, line 40, at end insert—

'THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND COURT SERVICES ACT 2000 (c.43)

2A (1) The facilities to be provided by local authorities as part of the service maintained under section 1(1) of the Adoption Act 1976 include such arrangements as the authorities may be required by regulations to make for the provision of adoption support services to prescribed persons.

(2) Regulations under sub-paragraph (1) may require a local authority—

(a) at the request of a prescribed person, to carry out an assessment of his needs for adoption support services,

(b) if, as a result of the assessment, the authority decide that he has such needs, to decide whether to provide any such services to him,

(c) if the authority decide to provide any such services to a person, and the circumstances fall within a description prescribed by the regulations, to prepare a plan in accordance with which the services are to be provided to him and keep the plan under review.

(3) Subsections (6) and (7) (except paragraph (a)) of section 4 of this Act apply to regulations under sub-paragraph (1) as they apply to regulations made by virtue of that section.

(4) Section 57(1) of the Adoption Act 1976 (prohibited payments) does not apply to any payment made in accordance with regulations under sub-paragraph (1).

2B (1) After section 9 of the Adoption Act 1976 there is inserted—

"9A Independent review of determinations

(1) Regulations under section 9 may establish a procedure under which any person in respect of whom a qualifying determination has been made by an adoption agency may apply to a panel constituted by the Secretary of State for a review of that determination.

(2) The regulations must make provision as to the description of determinations which are qualifying determinations for the purposes of subsection (1).

(3) The regulations may include provision as to—

(a) the duties and powers of a panel (including the power to recover the costs of a review from the adoption agency by which the determination reviewed was made),

(b) the administration and procedures of a panel,

(c) the appointment of members of a panel (including the number, or any limit on the number, of members who may be appointed and any conditions for appointment),

(d) the payment of expenses of members of a panel,

(e) the duties of adoption agencies in connection with reviews conducted under the regulations,

(f) the monitoring of any such reviews.

(4) The Secretary of State may make an arrangement with an organisation under which functions in relation to the panel are performed by the organisation on his behalf.

(5) If the Secretary of State makes such an arrangement with an organisation, the organisation is to perform its functions under the arrangement in accordance with any general or special directions given by the Secretary of State.

(6) The arrangement may include provision for payments to be made to the organisation by the Secretary of State.

(7) Where the functions of the Secretary of State are exercisable by the National Assembly for Wales, subsections (4) and (6) also apply as if references to an organisation included references to the Secretary of State.

(8) In this section, "organisation" includes a public body and a private or voluntary organisation".

(2) In the National Assembly for Wales (Transfer of Functions) Order 1999, in Schedule 1, in the entry for the Adoption Act 1976, after "9" there is inserted "9A".'

No. 277, in page 97, line 12, leave out "20 and" and insert "19 to".

Independent review mechanism

No. 287, in page 97, line 41, at end insert—

'7A (1) For section 56A of the Adoption Act 1976 there is substituted—

"56A Restriction on bringing children into the United Kingdom

(1) This section applies where a person who is habitually resident in the British Islands (the "British resident")—

(a) brings, or causes another to bring, a child who is habitually resident outside the British Islands into the United Kingdom for the purpose of adoption by the British resident, or

(b) at any time brings, or causes another to bring, into the United Kingdom a child adopted by the British resident under an external adoption effected within the period of six months ending with that time.

The references to adoption, or to a child adopted, by the British resident include a reference to adoption, or to a child adopted, by the British resident and another person.

(2) But this section does not apply if—

(a) the adopters or (as the case may be) prospective adopters are natural parents, natural relatives or guardians of the child (or one of them is),

(b) the British resident is a step-parent of the child,

(c) the child is intended to be adopted under a Convention adoption order.

(3) An external adoption means an adoption, other than a Convention adoption, of a child effected under the law of any country or territory outside the British Islands, whether or not the adoption is—

(a) an adoption within the meaning of Part IV of this Act, or

(b) a full adoption (within the meaning of section 39(3A)).

(4) Regulations may require a person intending to bring, or to cause another to bring, a child into the United Kingdom in circumstances where this section applies—

(a) to apply to an adoption agency (including an adoption agency within the meaning of section 1 of the Adoption (Scotland) Act 1978 or Article 3 of the Adoption (Northern Ireland) Order 1987) in the prescribed manner for an assessment of his suitability to adopt the child, and

(b) to give the agency any information it may require for the purpose of the assessment.

(5) Regulations may require prescribed conditions to be met in respect of a child brought into the United Kingdom in circumstances where this section applies.

(6) In relation to a child brought into the United Kingdom for adoption in circumstances where this section applies, regulations may, in respect of a case where any requirements imposed by the regulations are not complied with, modify the reference to 13 weeks in section 13(1).

(7) If a person brings, or causes another to bring, a child into the United Kingdom at any time in circumstances where this section applies, he is guilty of an offence if—

(a) he has not complied with any requirement imposed by virtue of subsection (4), or

(b) any condition required to be met by virtue of subsection (5) is not met,

before that time, or before any later time which may be prescribed.

(8) A person guilty of an offence under this section is liable—

(a) on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months, or a fine not exceeding the statutory maximum, or both,

(b) on conviction on indictment, to imprisonment for a term not exceeding twelve months, or a fine, or both.

(9) In this section, "prescribed" means prescribed by regulations and "regulations" means regulations made by the Secretary of State, after consultation with the National Assembly for Wales".

7B (1) In section 58 of the Adoption Act 1976 (restrictions on advertisements)—

(a) after subsection (1) there is inserted—

"(1A) Publishing an advertisement includes doing so by electronic means (for example, by means of the internet).",

(b) in subsection (2), for the words following "conviction" there is substituted "to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months, or a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale, or both".

7C In section 52 of the Adoption (Scotland) Act 1978 (restriction on advertisements)—

(a) after subsection (1) there is inserted—

"(1A) Publishing an advertisement includes doing so by electronic means (for example, by means of the internet).",

(b) in subsection (2), for the words following "conviction" there is substituted "to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three months, or a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale, or both".'

No. 318, in page 98, line 20, at end insert—

Advertising—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Schedule 5

REPEALS

Amendments made: No. 319, in page 99, line 17, at end insert—

'Adoption (Scotland) Act 1978 (c.28).	Section 16(1)(a)(ii). Section 52. In section 53(2), the words "England and Wales or". In section 65(1), in the definition of "order freeing a child for adoption", paragraph (a) and the word "and" immediately following that paragraph.'

No. 65, in page 99, line 18, column 2, at beginning insert—

'In section 71(1) the words "(other than proceedings under the Adoption Act 1976)".

In section 71(2) the words following "(a) and (b)".'.

No. 41, in page 99, line 20, column 2, at beginning insert—

'In section 1(8), the words following "section 50"'.

No. 267, in page 99, line 40, column 2, at end insert—

'In section 26(2)(e) and (f), the words "to consider"'.

No. 42, in page 100, line 18, column 2, at end insert "Section 7(3).'

No. 288, in page 100, line 18 column 2, at end insert "Section 14".

No. 268, in page 100, line 29, column 2, at beginning insert—

'Section 12(5)(b) and the preceding "and"'.

No. 289, in page 100, line 30, at end insert—

'This Act.	In Schedule 4, paragraphs 2A, 2B, 7A, 7B, and 7C.'

No. 300, in page 100, line 30, at end insert—

'This Act.	Section 84(3A).'.

—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 127

ORDERS, RULES AND REGULATIONS

Amendment made: No. 234, in page 71, line 32, at end insert—

'( ) A statutory instrument containing regulations under section 61(2) made by the Scottish Ministers is to be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of the Scottish Parliament.

( ) The power of the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to make regulations under section 61(2) is to be exercisable by statutory rule for the purposes of the Statutory Rules (Northern Ireland) Order 1979 (S.I. 1979/1573 (N.I. 12)); and any such regulations are to be subject to negative resolution within the meaning of section 41(6) of the Interpretation Act (Northern Ireland) 1954 as if they were statutory instruments within the meaning of that Act.'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 128

RULES OF PROCEDURE

Amendment made: No. 226, in page 72, line 32, leave out from "19" to end of line 33 and insert—

'(and has not withdrawn the consent) unless he has given a notice under subsection (4)(a) of that section which has effect'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 129

SUPPLEMENTARY AND CONSEQUENTIAL PROVISION

Amendments made: No. 91, in page 73, line 3, at end insert—

'or of Her Majesty to make an Order in Council by virtue of section 116'.

No. 92, in page 73, line 10, at end insert—

'In relation to an Order in Council, "enactment" in this subsection includes an enactment comprised in, or in an instrument made under, an Act of the Scottish Parliament'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 130

OFFENCES BY BODIES CORPORATE AND UNINCORPORATED BODIES

Amendments made: No. 235, in page 73, line 26, at end insert—

'( ) Proceedings for an offence alleged to have been committed under this Act by an unincorporated body are to be brought in the name of that body (and not in that of any of its members) and, for the purposes of any such proceedings in England and Wales or Northern Ireland, any rules of court relating to the service of documents have effect as if that body were a corporation.

( ) A fine imposed on an unincorporated body on its conviction of an offence under this Act is to be paid out of the funds of that body.

( ) If an unincorporated body is charged with an offence under this Act—

(a) in England and Wales, section 33 of the Criminal Justice Act 1925 and Schedule 3 to the Magistrates' Courts Act 1980 (procedure on charge of an offence against a corporation);

(b) in Northern Ireland, section 18 of the Criminal Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 1945 and Schedule 4 to the Magistrates' Courts (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 (procedure on charge of an offence against a corporation),

have effect in like manner as in the case of a corporation so charged.'.

No. 236, in page 73, line 27, after "body" insert "(other than a partnership)".

No. 237, in page 73, line 31, at end insert—

'( ) Where an offence under this Act committed by a partnership is proved to have been committed with the consent or connivance of, or to be attributable to any neglect on the part of, a partner, he as well as the partnership is guilty of the offence and liable to be proceeded against and punished accordingly.'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 131

GENERAL INTERPRETATION, ETC.

Amendments made: No. 248, in page 74, line 12, at end insert—

"'enactment' includes an enactment comprised in subordinate legislation".

No. 257, in page 74,, leave out lines 24 and 25.

No. 272, in page 74,, leave out lines 35 and 36.

No. 47, in page 74, line 48, at end insert—

'( ) Any power conferred by this Act to prescribe a fee by Order in Council or regulations includes power to prescribe—

(a) a fee not exceeding a prescribed amount,

(b) a fee calculated in accordance with the Order or, as the case may be, regulations,

(c) a fee determined by the person to whom it is payable, being a fee of a reasonable amount.'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Jacqui Smith: I beg to move amendment No. 227, in page 74, line 49, leave out subsection (2).

This amendment covers the definition of where a child has his home or is placed and responds to a point raised in Committee by the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter), which I undertook at the time to consider.

Clause 131 sets out the correct interpretation of various terms used in the Bill. Currently, subsection (2) provides that, in determining where a child has his home or is to be placed, any temporary absence by the child at school, hospital or elsewhere is to be disregarded. The hon. Member for North Dorset was keen to ensure that the courts could also discount temporary absences by the adoptive applicants in determining where a child has his home or is placed. We have looked at this matter, and we agree that it is important to provide the flexibility sought by the hon. Gentleman, to ensure that temporary absences by other parties, such as the adoptive applicants, could be excepted where appropriate.

The advice that we have received is that the most flexible way of doing that would be to remove subsection (2) entirely, which would leave the question of where a child had his home and with whom as an issue of fact to be determined by the court in each case. Advice to me suggests that the current subsection (2), which dates from the Adoption Act 1976, is unnecessary and might indeed have a restrictive effect on references to a place where a child has his home that are not covered by the exceptions listed. That would also be a risk with any amendment that attempted to exclude temporary absences by the adopters on the same basis.

The case law on "had his home" has it that this is a matter of fact to be determined in each case. It presumes regular occupation with some degree of permanency, but does not require continuous presence. It allows the court to take account of, and disregard when appropriate, any temporary absence for whatever reason by the child or any other party, but also enables the court to consider, rightly, the impact of any very lengthy absence. Government amendment No. 227 therefore seeks to deliver the same objective as the amendments tabled by the hon. Gentleman in Committee, but in a more effective manner.

On that basis, I hope that the House will feel able to support the amendment.

Mr. Walter: I thank the Minister for acknowledging that Back Benchers can table amendments in Committee that have substance, and that the Government can take them away and bring them back for consideration before the House.

Amendment agreed to.

It being four hours after the commencement of proceedings on consideration of the Bill, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to Order [16 May], put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of business to be concluded at that hour.*

Amendment proposed: No. 158, in page 74, line 51, at end insert—

'(2B) In this Act, a couple means—

(a) a married couple, or

(b) two people (whether of different sexes or the same sex) living as partners in an enduring family relationship.

(2C) Subsection (2B)(b) does not include two people one of whom is the other's parent, grandparent, sister, brother, aunt or uncle.

(2D) References to relationships in subsection (2C)—

(a) are to relationships of the full blood or half blood or, in the case of an adopted person, such of those relationships as would exist but for the adoption, and

(b) include the relationship of a child with his adoptive, or former adoptive, parents,

but do not include any other adoptive relationships.

(2E) For the purposes of this Act, a person is the partner of a child's parent if the person and the parent are a couple but the person is not the child's parent'.—*[Mr. Hinchliffe.]*

Amendment proposed to the proposed amendment: (a), Line 3, leave out—

'whether of different sexes or the same sex'

and insert "of different sexes".—*[Mr. Lansley.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 174, Noes 301.

Division No. 246] **[7.36 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Bell, Stuart
Bellingham, Henry
Benton, Joe
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blizzard, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donohoe, Brian H
Drew, David
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Grieve, Dominic
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hepburn, Stephen
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark

Hood, Jimmy
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Kelly, Ruth
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McAvoy, Thomas
McFall, John
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McWilliam, John
Malins, Humfrey
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Mudie, George
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Olner, Bill
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickles, Eric
Pound, Stephen
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John

Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Roy, Frank
Ruffley, David
Savidge, Malcolm
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Sheridan, Jim
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tynan, Bill
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wray, James
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Desmond Swayne and
Mr. Charles Hendry.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barrett, John
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J

Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cairns, David

Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John

Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Holmes, Paul
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan

Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
  (Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Kevin Brennan and
Jonathan Shaw.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment No. 158 agreed to.

Amendment made: No. 273, in page 74, line 51, at end insert—

'(2A) In this Act, "Scottish adoption agency" means—

(a) a local authority, or

(b) a voluntary organisation providing a registered adoption service;

but in relation to the provision of any particular service, references to a Scottish adoption agency do not include a voluntary organisation unless it is registered in respect of that service or a service which, in Scotland, corresponds to that service.

Expressions used in this subsection have the same meaning as in the Regulation of Care (Scotland) Act 2001 (asp 4) and "registered" means registered under Part 1 of that Act'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 132

DEVOLUTION: WALES

Amendments made: No. 281, in page 75, line 2, leave out "reference" and insert—

'references to the Adoption Act 1976 and'.

No. 282, in page 75, line 3, leave out from "1999" to second "as" and insert—

'are to be treated as referring to those Acts'.

No. 283, in page 75, line 6, leave out "that reference" and insert "those references".—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Schedule 6

GLOSSARY

Amendments made: No. 249, in page 102, line 4, at end insert—

'enactment . . . section 131'.

No. 258, in page 102, leave out line 21.

No. 228, in page 102, line 21, at end insert—

'prohibited steps order . . . section 8(1) of the 1989 Act'.

No. 229, in page 102, line 32, at end insert—

'specific issue order . . . section 8(1) of the 1989 Act'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 135

COMMENCEMENT

Amendments made: No. 238, in page 75, line 16, after "except" insert—

'section 124, *[Accommodation of children in need etc]*'.

No. 239, in page 75, line 20, at end insert—

'( ) Before making an order under subsection (1) bringing sections 114 and 115 into force, the Secretary of State must also consult the Scottish Ministers and the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety'.

No. 240, in page 75, line 20, at end insert—

'( ) Before making an order under subsection (1) bringing sections 116 to 120, section *[Use of an organisation as agency for payments]* and section *[Territorial application]* into force, the Secretary of State must also consult the Scottish Ministers'.

No. 241, in page 75, line 21, leave out subsections (3) and (4) and insert—

'(3) The following are to come into force on such day as the Scottish Ministers may by order appoint—

(a) section 40(5) to (9), so far as relating to Scotland,

(b) sections 121, 122 and *[Amendment of Adoption (Scotland) Act 1978: contravention of sections 29 to 35 of this Act]*,

(c) paragraphs 20 to 26 and 74 to 76 of Schedule 3,

(d) paragraphs 7C, 12A and 15 of Schedule 4,

(e) the entries in Schedule 5, so far as relating to the provisions mentioned in paragraphs (c) and (d),

(f) section 126, so far as relating to the provisions mentioned in the preceding paragraphs'.

No. 242, in page 75, line 27, after "63" insert—

'paragraphs 13, 57, 58, 100, 101 and 102 of Schedule 3 and paragraphs 2A and 2B of Schedule 4'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Clause 136

EXTENT

Amendments made: No. 243, in page 75, line 35, leave out "40(5) to (9)".

No. 244, in page 75, line 35, after "61(2) to (5)" insert—

'63(2)(a) and (b) and (2A)'.

No. 245, in page 75, line 37, leave out subsection (4) and insert—

'( ) The following extend also to Scotland—

(a) sections 40(5) to (9),

(b) sections 116 to 120, section *[Use of an organisation as agency for payments]* and section *[Territorial application]*,

(c) section *[Proceedings in Great Britain]*,

(d) section 126, so far as relating to provisions extending to Scotland.'.

No. 246, in page 75, line 39, leave out "paragraph 15 extends" and insert—

'paragraphs 12A and 15 extend'.—*[Jacqui Smith.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members who are leaving the Chamber please do so quickly and quietly, so that we can get on with Third Reading?

Order for Third Reading read.

7.49 pm

Jacqui Smith: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

We have had more than two days of valuable and constructive debate on the Report stage of the Bill, conducted in the positive spirit that has characterised the Bill's passage up to this point. Since the Bill was introduced last October, we have had wide-ranging debates on its principles and on the detailed provisions.

The Bill was referred to a Special Standing Committee, which gave Members the opportunity to hear from key stakeholders in the adoption community and acknowledged experts in the field. That consultative approach was a very positive experience, and it provides an example for the future. Following the evidence sessions, the Bill was considered in detail by the Special Standing Committee. I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friends, particularly those who brought their considerable expertise to the Committee. May I say what a pleasure it was to be surrounded by so many ex-social workers? Other hon. Members brought to the proceedings important experience of constituency casework and even personal experience of adoption. It was invaluable to take part in such an informed debate, and the Bill has undoubtedly benefited from it.

Throughout the process we have had as our focus the aim of ensuring that all children have the best start in life. Adoption can have an important role in providing a new start for many children, and can make the difference between a child having a loving, stable and permanent family or being left in the care of the local authority.

The Bill overhauls the outdated Adoption Act 1976 and modernises the whole existing legal framework for domestic and inter-country adoption. It is over a quarter of a century since the legislative framework was last reviewed, and I hope that the Bill will set out a new framework that will last well into this century.

The Bill tackles the issues that have troubled the adoption service for many years. The fundamental change that it makes, which is welcomed on both sides of the House and by stakeholders, is that it puts the needs of the child at the centre of the adoption process. It also recognises that adoption, while bringing great joy and satisfaction to many people, is a tough job. It will help to ensure that the support that adopters and children need is available by providing for the first time a duty on local authorities to put in place a range of adoption support services.

The Bill will help to cut harmful delays through the introduction of the Adoption and Children Act register and through timetabling of court proceedings. Importantly, as we have heard today, the Bill strengthens the safeguards around adoption, inter-country and domestic, and introduces a new special guardianship order to provide permanent families for children for whom adoption is not appropriate.

In Committee, genuine concerns were raised and suggestions were made about areas in which the Bill could be improved. We listened to those, and as a result we have been able to make changes as the Bill has made its way through the House. On access to information, concerns were expressed about the access for adopted persons to information that would enable them to obtain a copy of their original birth certificate. In light of those comments I tabled amendments to ensure that information from adoption agencies, which is required to access birth records, will be provided. With the amendments made on Report, the Bill will now put in place a system for disclosure of information about adoption that is both comprehensive and fair.

Considering the sensitivity about adoption, it is not surprising that there was concern about consent. It was felt that the provision stating that consent had to be given freely did not reflect the fact that, although birth parents may know that adoption is best for the child, coming to this decision means struggling against their own feelings. Although we have not had time to debate that, we have listened to those concerns and amended the Bill to reflect that.

Today we made amendments to enable social services to provide accommodation or the means to secure it. I am pleased that the Bill establishes local authority powers in this area beyond doubt. We have ensured that the care planning process, which is so important for children, is placed on a statutory basis with proper independent review.

The impact of domestic violence on the child has not been fully considered when courts consider granting contact orders under the Children Act 1989. In response, we tabled an amendment on Report to extend the definition of "harm" in the Act to make it clear that it includes any harm that a child may suffer or is at risk of suffering as a result of witnessing the ill-treatment of another. As hon. Members will have noted on Thursday, that was due to the work of several of my hon. Friends, but also to a willingness to respond on the part of the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton). She should be congratulated not only on that, but on her efforts throughout the Bill's progress.

[Jacqui Smith]

While the Bill was in Committee, the Scottish Executive signalled that they wished to be able to participate in the Adoption and Children Act register. On Report, we tabled the necessary amendments to enable that to happen. The inclusion of Scotland in the register will benefit children and adopters throughout England, Scotland and Wales, and will provide an extensive infrastructure for finding families for children who need them.

Jonathan Shaw: I fully concur with my hon. Friend's comments about the Parliamentary Secretary. Will she join me in paying tribute also to my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran), who campaigned for those amendments to the Bill? The response from the Parliamentary Secretary was testimony to my hon. Friend's battle and to her work to bring together all manner of stakeholders to achieve that welcome change in the law.

Jacqui Smith: Certainly I commend, as the Parliamentary Secretary did on Thursday, my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran) and others for their work and their approach to this important issue. I also pay tribute to other hon. Members, on the Standing Committee and in the House, who have not always made my life easy but have worked very hard to ensure that the concerns of stakeholders are expressed and reflected in the Bill.

The free votes on amendments concerning unmarried couples showed that there was significant support for a change to current legislation. The amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), and supported by the House, help us in our aim to give more vulnerable children the chance of the permanent, secure and stable family life that adoption can provide. As I promised on Thursday, in the other place we will table the necessary amendments to the rest of the Bill to deal with any legal and technical implications of that change. The Bill now moves on for consideration by the other place. I am confident that it goes there in an improved state thanks to the work that we have done here.

The Government are determined to press on with our programme to restructure and improve adoption services. Unlike the 1976 Act, it will certainly not be more than 10 years before this Bill is implemented. Once it has gone through its remaining stages and received Royal Assent, we intend to bring its main provisions into force in 2004. However, as we have discussed today, it is important that some measures are introduced before that. The new framework for adoption support services and financial support will be brought into effect in 2003, as will the independent review mechanism in respect of adopter assessment.

The restrictions on bringing children into the UK should be brought into force as soon as possible, and they will be implemented in advance of the rest of the Bill. We therefore intend to bring these provisions into force in advance of the rest of the Bill. As part of the package of safeguards to be put in place for children, we intend in 2002 to amend section 58 of the 1976 Act to make it clear that the restrictions on advertising of adoption services cover electronic advertising.

Ensuring that the Bill is passed is, of course, only the first step. Once it receives Royal Assent, the real work to make changes on the ground will begin. We intend to continue the consultative approach that we have taken throughout progress on the Bill. We will hold full public consultations on each set of regulations and consult widely on the detail of the rules to be made under the Bill.

In conclusion, I am pleased with how far we have come with the Bill, whose aim is to ensure that all children have the best start in life. I hope that the Bill that we now have as a result of our efforts provides the very best start that we can give and makes our contribution to that crucial change.

8 pm

Tim Loughton: At last we have reached the relative calm of Third Reading. I am glad that we have sufficient time for all hon. Members who served on the Committee to contribute. I urge the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw) to feel free to intervene on me; he will get a positive response.

It seems only yesterday that we started the Committee stage. The ability to hear witnesses was a good innovation, as the Minister said. More than 30 expert witnesses gave us their views, but the problem was that we did not have much time between listening to them and starting the Standing Committee procedure proper. There were 24 Standing Committee sittings, ending on 17 January, and there was an abortive start to the Report stage—all two hours of it—on 20 March.

Today and last Thursday we have seen a mêlée of 319 amendments—320 if one includes amendment No. 322, which crept back in for a repeat performance—and 16 new clauses. Many of those proposals have had to be agreed to when a guillotine has come down, as you will know, Mr. Deputy Speaker; you and your colleagues in the Chair have often sounded like up-market bingo callers as the knife comes down. All that came on top of the 270 amendments and 17 new clauses that were debated—again, the time was curtailed—in Committee.

We have covered everything from adoption support services to the implications of the sperm of Members of the House of Lords for adoption law, and from CAFCASS to terminology in respect of British colonies, or rather British overseas territories, as they should now be called. We have certainly had an extensive debate before waving this Bill off to the upper House, although I suspect that a welcoming party may greet its return to this House.

We have had an extensive debate, but I fear that it has been curtailed on too many occasions. I do not think that there was any need for a programme motion on the Bill, which had cross-party support. It was radical in terms of updating the 1976 legislation with the introduction of some very positive measures, many of which we agreed with. In Committee, the programme motion meant that 43 clauses were completely untouched by debate, seven clauses were unfinished and two whole schedules were not debated—measures that amounted to a third of the Bill.

As I said, much of that provision has not been debated on Report, either, which is a shame. On Thursday we failed to finish discussing 62 amendments on the operation of placement orders, eight amendments and new clause 5 on arrangements for adoption at birth, 11 amendments on contact, 17 amendments on special guardianship orders, 25 amendments and three new clauses on unmarried couples, on which many other hon. Members wanted to speak, and so on. Today we have made slightly better progress, largely because the issues were less contentious. Even so, we have had to get through 63 amendments and four new clauses.

So much has been left unscrutinised. I am sure that interested parties outside the House will wonder why everything had to be crammed into Committee in two months only for us then to twiddle our thumbs for the subsequent four months and then cram 319 amendments and 17 new clauses into only two days and two hours—but alas, that is the way Parliament works.

I wish the Bill well in the upper House. It will continue to enjoy the Opposition's support, as it has done throughout its passage. As the Minister said, we have achieved an awful lot. The number of Government amendments tabled on Report shows that the Government have been willing to make many changes. To give them credit, they have responded to many of the concerns that we expressed in Committee, including those relating to the three-year limitation, which we discussed earlier, and to CAFCASS support services, and also the latest spectacular hit by my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) in relation to the addresses of adopted children.

All those contributions were positive and I am grateful to the Minister for graciously attributing some of those proposals—if not all of them—to us. We had some very good debate and good Back-Bench engagement on both sides of the House, which is welcome. At least, that has been the case when Labour Members have not been trying to outdo each other on the subject of how many years they served as social workers before coming to this place; we have been up against exceedingly competitive Government Back Benchers. None the less, it has all been done in good humour, greatly enhanced by the Minister's flow charts—although I regret to say that those have failed to make a reappearance on Report.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, the fragrant hon. Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton)—alas, she is not present for the finish of our proceedings—made very welcome offers to write to us, as she has done at length on many occasions in response to matters raised in Committee. The recent letters that we have received from both Ministers on speeding up adoption support services and on independent review mechanisms show that the Government have listened, which is to be welcomed.

We have also enjoyed the great expertise of the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd), even if he has yet to honour his offer of a bottle of wine in the contest for the best pronunciation of his constituency. Of course, this is his last opportunity not to welsh on that deal.

I also pay tribute to my colleagues. My hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly), speaking in his debut performance in Committee, made serious contributions made from a legal perspective, drawing on his background. My hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset has great experience in this field and scored more hits than other Opposition Members put together in getting his amendments accepted. My hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) brought his own characteristic and idiosyncratic—but most entertaining and informed—contribution to the debate. I pay particular tribute to the speaking Whip, my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), who is more of an expert on adoption than most of us. We have all greatly benefited from his expertise and experience, and from his knowledge of many cases, reflecting just about every clause, all of which seem to have happened in his constituency; it all happens in Canterbury.

It is also fitting that we should pay tribute to the enormous amount of work done by the Minister's officials at the Department of Health, and to Tom Goldsmith, the Clerk to this Bill, who has given enormous help on the technical and tricky matters with which it deals. Of course, it would also be churlish of me not to say that the Liberals have also made the occasional appearance.

I have learned a lot about the subject of the Bill during the past few months. All of us have had experiences of constituents affected by adoption, and many of us have been greatly touched by them. We are also grateful for all the input from pressure groups, including the Adoption Forum and Liv O'Hanlon, the National Organisation for Counselling Adoptees and Parents and Pam Hodgkins, who campaigned so hard on the retrospective nature of the legislation, the Children's Society and Julia Feast, the women's refuges, and the Catholic Children's Society and Jim Richards. All of them are mentioned in *Hansard*.

We have achieved an awful lot in the Bill, of which all of us can be proud. That is why we are very happy to support it, even if it came slightly late in the day. We should also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman), who promoted her own private Member's Bill on adoption and kick-started the Government process that resulted at last in the introduction of the Bill before us.

The Bill is much more than parts of part 1 chapter 3, especially clause 47, and the question of who should be allowed to adopt. Most of us, on whatever side of argument, would agree that it is a great pity that the media have focused only on that aspect of the Bill, which has dominated all the headlines as if it were the only issue at stake in a Bill with 137 clauses and six schedules. I am sure that that subject will be revisited in another place, but I hope that the media and the world outside will take a more balanced view of the Bill and everything else that it contains.

There is wide agreement that clause 1(2) lies at the heart of the Bill. It states:

> "The paramount consideration of the court or adoption agency must be the child's welfare, throughout his life."

We have all have kept that very much at heart while we have been dealing with all the clauses and amendments, and quite rightly so. Principal to our consideration was the axiom that a father and a mother are best for a child, even if we have a debate about their marital status, and even if that situation is not always achievable.

The overriding consideration must be how we can help the 58,000 children who are looked after in care at the moment. That figure has risen alarmingly recently—by some 17 per cent. over the last few years. We must also consider the increasing complexity and complications involved, and the severe learning and behavioural requirements of some of those children. Only about 200 of the children adopted are babies.

There is currently an enormous amount of delay and bureaucracy in the system, and there are many shortcomings in the support available for damaged

[Tim Loughton]

children, for vulnerable families and their relatives, and for the willing adopters, of whom we need many more. We need to speed up the process, and to increase the number of volunteers from 3,000 to at least 5,000, perhaps 8,000, in the next few years.

We also need to ensure that adoptions work first time, and are good quality placements that will give the best prospects for a second chance to those damaged children. The hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford is right: this is not just about targets. It is about quality placements for individuals, every one of whom has a real life experience and a real life problem that needs to be addressed. They are not just numbers.

The Minister was right to say that the real work of the Bill will begin when it becomes law. This is not just a question of banning something or making something illegal, as are many other pieces of legislation. This is about starting an enormous process to set up new structures, and to ensure that those structures work so that the Bill can achieve what we all agree that it should achieve.

We have made great progress in certain areas. On clause 1, we may have arguments about welfare considerations being put above political correctness, but we all agree that we need to avoid delay. The adoption support services are an enormous benefit of the Bill, because the key to a good adoption is to provide support, understanding and information before, during and after adoption, continuing until the child reaches adulthood. That involves dealing with education, behavioural problems, housing and general health.

The principle of the Bill is absolutely right, but the proof of the pudding will be in the eating, because the principle will be worthless unless local authorities—which will have responsibility for many of these services—are properly resourced. I argue with the Government over the resourcing levels of social services, because there is still an enormous £1 billion gap in social services departments' funding throughout the country, and the biggest increase in that shortfall has been in children's services. That is where social services are the most stretched, and where there is the biggest shortage of skilled professional children's workers.

We have expressed the fear before that local authorities often have to retrench to their statutory responsibilities simply because they do not have the resources and the manpower to go round. That is why we were so keen that so many of the provisions in the Bill should be a requirement rather than an optional extra that local authorities could opt out of even if they did not want to, because many of them are really stretched.

We have achieved a lot with regard to greater clarity in the legal process relating to placement and adoption orders. It is essential that all parties know what to expect of the system, what their rights and responsibilities are, and how they can reverse the process if they have a change of heart. The better independent review panel is also to be welcomed, although we still have concerns about how it will operate.

We shall not go back over the discussions about disclosure of information, but it was enormously welcome when, after the Christmas break, the Government had a change of heart on this issue. We had all found it a complete mystery that they had sought to retreat from the provision in the Adoption Act 1976 concerning providing information to birth parents and to children trying to find their birth parents. We still think that these measures should be retrospective, particularly to give an older generation of women what will probably be their last chance to find the children whom they gave away for adoption, often under enormous pressure, back in the 1940s and 1950s in an adoption climate very different from the one that exists now. I know that the Minister addressed the amendments that we, and the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan), tabled the other day, but this is still a serious problem.

We have improved the provisions for disclosure of information on many other fronts, particularly the disclosure of information before an adoption is effected. The Government responded to our concerns, not so much in the Bill but with regard to regulations, which will provide that as much information as possible should be made available to prospective adoptive parents before they make the decision to adopt, so that the right decision can be made.

There have been improvements to the provisions for the adopted children register, and the adoption contact register has been put on a statutory footing. There are still problems with inter-country adoptions, as my hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury mentioned earlier. That is a matter that will go on exercising our minds. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran) and to the fact that there is a response in the Bill to issues of domestic violence, which we all wanted. There is still a long way to go on that, but this is a useful first step.

It is right to improve the provisions on offences relating to people running adoption services without being properly authorised, or bringing children into the country without the right to do so, in very unpleasant circumstances. The innovation of special guardianship orders is another positive aspect of the Bill which we did not get to debate at length, but which, by and large, has widespread support.

In conclusion, we have achieved an awful lot. It is increasingly important that this legislation should go through swiftly and be put into effect properly and practically. A short time ago, the horrific case of Victoria Climbié, and the case of John Smith in my constituency a couple of years ago, brought home to us just how many gaps there are in child support services, and how there are still too many vulnerable people out there whom the system has failed. Such horrendous failures must not be allowed to happen again.

There is much good in the Bill. It is good that the Government have listened in many cases. It would be even better if they listened a little more to the questions that will arise in the upper House. I shall finish, as the Minister did, by saying that the Bill is intended to reach, and to a great degree succeeds in reaching, the target of giving all children, particularly those who have had a damaged beginning in difficult circumstances, the best start in life.

8.17 pm

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): I particularly welcome the Bill, and it has been a pleasure to be involved with it during my first year in Parliament. Sometimes it is hard to believe that, only 18 months ago, I was in the position of making exactly the kind of decisions dealt with in the Bill. They were some of the most important and difficult decisions that I made during my social work career.

I have always been a strong advocate for adoption. It is not the answer for all children, but it is a positive option for very many. I was in social work for a long time—I shall spare the House the details of the length of time, because this is not a game about who has been in social work the longest—and I also know that many children experience problems, particularly in their teenage years. It is important for us not only to provide support for those children and their families, but to do so in a way that does not stigmatise. The Bill does a lot to put in place adoption services that will be there for children and their families and will take away the stigma and the concern that so many families experience that asking for help may mean admitting failure or the risk of a child feeling insecure, or that they might again end up in care.

Some of those services are particularly important at this stage, because many of the children looking for placements today have enormous psychological and emotional difficulties, and if support can be provided to them and their families, there is a much better chance that they will find appropriate adoptive placements.

It was a particular pleasure in Committee to hear Members of all parties arguing for more resources for social services—of which I have of course been a supporter for many years. Unlike some Opposition Members, however, I would say that the Government have done a great deal for social services. The extra money that has been put in over the past few years has been extremely welcome.

It is a great pity that, on Report, some Opposition Members used throw-away lines about "politically correct" social workers, as if that were the norm. I hope that I and my fellow ex-social worker colleagues on the Labour Benches have demonstrated that we, too, can be conservative—albeit with a small C—and pragmatic, but that above all we have the interests of children at heart. In bringing adoption into line with the Children Act 1989 and making the needs of the child paramount, the Bill is extremely welcome.

Like everything else, social work practice moves on, and our understanding of adoption will increase. I hope that the Bill will provide a positive basis for the development of adoption practice which will benefit all those involved in the adoption triangle. More importantly, I hope that the publicity that has surrounded this Bill—I share the concerns of the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) about the fact that only certain aspects have been publicised—will encourage more people to come forward as adopters.

It is right to say that there are very few babies available, but many older children need homes. I for one will never forget the teenager who argued on television last year that she should be given the chance to become part of a family. After all, real families are for life, not just for the duration of childhood. I sincerely hope that all children who need to be adopted will have that opportunity. I believe that this Bill should help that process.

8.21 pm

Sandra Gidley: This has been a long haul. There is much good about this Bill, but we seem to have been a long time getting to this stage. For some of us, the process started way before last year's election, when evidence gathering on the previous adoption Bill was destined to continue for many more sittings than just three, had the election not intervened. The Bill presented at the beginning of this Session was much improved on the one on which we had worked. I am pleased to say that the Bill now going to the House of Lords is an even greater improvement.

The spirit of co-operation and obvious dedication and commitment of most Members who served on the Committee has been heartening. By commitment, I do not mean commitment to a political party or a political ideology, but commitment to the Bill and to trying to get it right for the children who need such services.

I particularly appreciate the fact that the Bill has benefited from the Special Standing Committee process. What struck me powerfully during the evidence-gathering sittings was the huge consensus among a wide variety of agencies. It has been refreshing in some ways not to have had to balance the arguments of a wide range of vested interests. For the most part, people have spoken with one voice. That is simply because they are thinking of the child first. Hopefully, that feeling is shared among Members of all parties.

The Bill was also a welcome departure from what I understood to be the accepted practice of not selecting Members to scrutinise a Bill if they knew anything about the subject. As I said in Committee, Gyles Brandreth described in his diaries how he said to the Whips that he wanted to serve on a Bill concerning entertainment because he knew a lot about the subject, so they put him on a transport Bill. I have therefore been delighted that, to help us on our way, there have been several social workers—politically correct or otherwise—who have been able on occasions to say, "Get real; life's not like that," and to tell things how they are. They often couched that sentiment in different terms. I sincerely hope that we have got this Bill right, because if we have not, we will probably have to wait another 25 years for an opportunity to do so.

One problem, which has been highlighted, is that in some ways we have before us only the bones of the legislation. The flesh is yet to come, in regulations. That has presented some difficulties, as we have had to take a lot on trust, which is not always easy for an Opposition party. The fact that the regulations have not been available for scrutiny is a matter of regret. I therefore hope that, as the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) has said, we shall have time to study the regulations and comment on them, and will not end up with rushed legislation.

I also want to comment on the timetabling. I am generally in favour of timetabling, but the Government must admit that they got it wrong with this Bill. Much of interest was not discussed fully in Committee owing to lack of time. In addition, we did not get the chance to get round to many issues of great interest that were timetabled for Report on Thursday. That was partly because proceedings on Report were dominated by one issue. That is regrettable, because it diluted the Bill's wider message. Hopefully, we will learn lessons and not chop and change things at the last minute just because they look as though they will fit in more conveniently as a result. I am pleased that on the whole the Government have listened and adapted to our concerns. There has been a lot of consultation and information from various Ministers,

[Sandra Gidley]

for which I thank them. It has been helpful to know that concerns have been taken on board and are being addressed.

It remains for me to wish the Government well with this Bill, for which there is support on both sides of the House. We hope that we will be consulted further, but the most important thing is that support is provided. Some of us have been banging on about this subject for some time. The fact remains that three years' funding was announced and allocated to adoption services in December 2000, but by the time that the Bill reaches the statute book, that funding will have disappeared. It would be good to have some commitment here and now that that funding will continue. Again, we must take such issues on trust.

None the less, at this stage, I hope that I am not being foolish and that I am proved right in trusting that the Government will provide the money. Money has gone into social services but has been aimed very much at services for older people, at the expense of children's services. That should not be allowed to continue. I wish the Bill well.

8.28 pm

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): I feel very privileged to have the opportunity to contribute to this debate. My first comments are most definitely that the Bill has been brilliantly piloted through the House by the Minister, and that it is long, long overdue.

The Bill has many qualities, foremost among which is that it places the child's needs at the centre of all processes. Importantly, in so doing, it places centre stage the needs of often very vulnerable children. This is indeed a very important Bill. For me, the interpretation of such needs ultimately means the achievement—hopefully after a short time—of placing all children in loving, stable homes. That is the aim of the Bill. I say that knowing that there are thousands of children longing and hoping to hear that they will be placed with an adoptive family and become a member of it. The fact that there are thousands of such children explains the urgency behind the Bill.

Alongside the needs of the child, an important characteristic of the Bill is its provision on care plans, which are to be followed and adopted by local authorities or voluntary agencies. Such plans will not only encapsulate a time frame but allow young people to comment on and direct the way in which the plan should be established. When that plan is not put in place within the time frame, a robust review by an independent body is available. For me, that is crucial.

I worked in care as a young woman, and I was overwhelmed by the number of children who seemed lost to the care system until they were 16, when, frankly, they were turned out with little support—if any. I hope and believe that the independent scrutiny will be robust and tough and that it will ensure that the best for the child is always achieved. Throughout our consideration, we have said again and again that the needs of the child are at the forefront. Those needs have been carefully determined and outlined, and we must achieve them.

One of the most important areas of the Bill—the debate about who wants to adopt and those who it is felt should have that privilege—hit the headlines in a way that most of us felt it should not have. It is a privilege to bring up a child and a privilege to be given the opportunity to bring up another person's child. Inevitably, there was a lot of tension around that issue, and perhaps it was always going to be the most difficult question for many people involved in considering the Bill.

For me, the introduction of new clause 13 helped to resolve that issue. It ably, knowledgeably and compassionately defined how we, as a group of people in this Chamber, should think about others who are, or who want to be, in the process of adopting a child. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), who introduced the new clause in a way that defined the real situation in which we all live in today's society. It extends legal rights to couples who seriously want to be involved in the adoption process—not one person, but all persons who want to bring up a child.

My hon. Friend acknowledged in the House a point that I have made time and again, as a Christian and a happily married female who has had the privilege of adopting: marriage and heterosexuality can offer the most loving and permanent home. I believe that mine has done so, but I make no prejudiced statement. I also believe that if social services and other bodies conclude, following a thorough investigation, that equally long-term non-marriage relationships between heterosexuals or homosexuals can also offer a permanent and loving home, those people should not be excluded from the right to enjoy the privilege of bringing up an adopted child.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): I am following the hon. Lady's argument and, as a parent of adopted children, I concur with her views. Does she agree that what has to be evaluated is not one kind of partnership against another, but all those partnerships against living in a children's home? The choice is easy to make.

Ms Taylor: I could not agree with the hon. Gentleman more. I have seen children waiting at the door on a Saturday when visitors are coming, hoping and praying that mum, an auntie or someone will visit, and I could not prise them from that door. That is what makes me say that the hon. Gentleman is so right. Children want someone who thinks that they are special—No. 1 in their lives.

I am conscious that time is against me and that lots of Members want to speak, but let me say that there is much in the Bill that I want to praise—independent scrutiny, counselling support, a 40 per cent. increase in adoptions and inter-country adoptions involving the best for the child. All those are important qualities.

With two colleagues in the House, I have had the joy of being co-chair of the all-party adoption group. It has been a privilege to work with the many voluntary organisations that are part of the group. They have given us excellent advice and their considerable experience has been invaluable. It is worth recording all that Liv O'Hanlon and many others have given, including a perspective that is so important. They, like us, want one thing: an effective Bill that ensures a stable, loving family home for the thousands of children who long to be part of a family.

Owing to my personal experience, my enthusiasm and my emotional sense, my commitment to the Bill is absolute. I have had the privilege of adopting a beautiful daughter. As I have told the House once before, social services turned us down—we were too old and not good enough. That nearly destroyed my life, so I am very pleased that we have provided for independent scrutiny. Without my daughter, my husband and I would not have had the family that we desperately wanted.

I support the Bill completely and I am delighted with its content. I congratulate Members on both sides of the House on their involvement, especially my hon. Friend the Minister, who has ably piloted the Bill to Third Reading.

8.36 pm

Mr. Llwyd: I recall saying on Second Reading that the Bill had the potential to be a landmark Bill, and I still believe that. I value the excellent Special Standing Committee procedure, which I found very interesting. We spoke with knowledgeable people, so we did not have to rely on the green ink brigade and a huge number of letters—some, although not all, of which were perhaps uninformed.

Clause 1 says that the interests of children are paramount throughout their lives, and that is absolutely right. Members have said that the timetable provisions bring the Bill into line with the Children Act 1989; I remember being in practice when it was introduced. The Children Act revolutionised child law and I hope that the Bill does the same through the ambitious target of increasing adoptions by 40 per cent.

We have, of course, widened the pool of potential adopters, and much has been said about that over the past few days, but it is important that there is no ban on potential adopters. If people are fit to adopt, so be it. The only ban should be on those who are unfit to adopt. I echo the hon. Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor): it is indeed a privilege to bring up children and whether they are our own, adopted or someone else's does not matter. Adoption is a great privilege, and with that privilege come serious obligations.

I am extremely pleased with the way in which the Bill has been amended. When Ministers say in Standing Committee, "We'll get back to you," or, "We'll write to you," one sometimes has to take it with a pinch of salt. Refreshingly, the Minister and her colleague sent those letters, and I pay tribute to her for that. Changes have been made and further serious consideration has been given to the arguments put. More than that, one cannot really expect.

I welcome the provision of special guardianship orders as a helpful tool in the armoury. Care plans and the independent review are also most welcome.

I add my voice to that of hon. Members who congratulated the hon. Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran) on her crusade concerning contact by people who have been involved in domestic violence. She has worked very hard and the fruits of her labours were obvious in the amendments that came forth last week.

On inter-country adoption problems remain, but the Bill is a good, positive step forward. The appeal procedure for those who have been turned down for whatever reason is right and proper.

I must, however, sound a note of caution as regards CAFCASS. We know that CAFCASS will play an all-important—indeed pivotal—role. I would go as far as to say that it must succeed if the Bill is to succeed. Over the past few months, I have spoken to many practitioners, including senior judges, who are worried that the additional work load on CAFCASS will create problems if it is not followed by additional resources. We all know what the old children's guardians ad litem are there for. I know, as a practitioner, that the quality, independence and experience of guardians is extremely important. I have no reason to say that such people will not be as good in future as they have always been, but I urge the Government to ensure that the resources are there to enable sufficient numbers of them to do the job so that they do not have to rush to produce reports without doing the work properly—otherwise we will fail those whom we seek to serve.

I shall now draw my remarks to a conclusion.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Before the hon. Gentleman does so, I pay tribute to him, as a fellow Welsh Member, for his contribution to the Bill—something that we do not often do across the Floor of the House. Will the hon. Gentleman now defend the honour of our nation by announcing who has won the prize that he promised in Committee for the best pronunciation of the name of his constituency? Can he confirm that he has a reputation for being knowledgeable not only about adoption, but about wine, and that whoever has won can expect a significantly expensive and very good vintage bottle of wine?

Mr. Llwyd: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman's antennae have been working overtime, but he was in the frame for the bottle of wine, and he has been sufficiently gushing this evening to qualify for it. I shall ensure that he has it before the end of the week—inevitably without the cork, but we shall not go into that now.

Mr. Justice Wall, a very experienced family judge in the High Court, recently said:

> "I find it disappointing that one constantly hears rhetoric that children are at the top of various agendas but when it comes to the nitty-gritty of a judge saying to Cafcass 'I want this child represented and/or an urgent report', one"—

is told that it has not got the resources. That is a warning sign that we should consider. CAFCASS is vital in the process. I am sure that it will be possible to provide the necessary wherewithal for it to do its work, and I am sorry to end on a sour note, but I urge the Government to ensure that it has all the resources ready at its disposal. CAFCASS had a rather inglorious birth, but I am sure that the genuine people who work for it will unite with one voice to say, "Give us what we need to do the work."

With those few caveats, I am very pleased with the way in which the Bill has been amended. It will prove to be a landmark Bill, and I am pleased to have played a small part in the deliberations.

8.43 pm

Mr. Dawson: It is a pleasure to take part in this stage of our consideration of a very good Bill. I join all hon. Members in speaking warmly of the good and positive relationships across the Floor of the House. I welcome the positive contributions that Members have made, from whatever background they come, and the care with which they have addressed the crucial issues.

[Mr. Dawson]

I, too, pay tribute to the voluntary and statutory organisations that helped us during the Special Standing Committee stage and continue to do so. I strongly support the Bill and the Government's aim of increasing the number of adoptions from care by 40 per cent. It is a good, if relatively modest, aim, with which the Bill will greatly assist.

I want to consider the way in which hon. Members have dealt with the measure. I am disturbed that people's enthusiasm for adoption can lead them to denigrate residential and foster care—that has happened in the past hour or so—yet residential and foster care are important elements of the care system that can lead to good outcomes for children. I am worried that some of the first-class people who work in residential and foster care and in social work will read some of the contributions that seemed to place adoption on a pedestal. It is a good option for children, but it is no panacea and it is not the only choice; extended care in the child's family is another important option.

As the Bill progresses, further discussions will be held behind the scenes. I hope and trust that they will refer to the contribution that family group conferencing can make to decisions about where children and young people live. Families often have tremendous resources, which they can bring to bear on problems if they have the opportunity to do so.

I want to comment on children and young people in care. Again, it is important that, in our enthusiasm to stress our anxiety about those who have been grossly neglected or abused, we do not overlook young people's potential, quality, resilience, courage, strength and intelligence. Every third Wednesday, the all-party group on children and young people in care meets; children and young people from care or those who have left care usually outnumber parliamentarians. I recommend attending a meeting to hon. Members who have shown an interest in the care system during the Bill's passage. Those young people know more about the care system than we will ever know, whatever our social work backgrounds. They have great qualities. After listening and talking to them, hon. Members are more confident and optimistic about children and young people in care.

We usually emphasise the negative side of care. That changes on meeting some of the young people who have been to university and are studying for PhDs, and the young person who, after being corporately parented by his local authority, became a member of that local authority at 21, two weeks ago. That is something to conjure with.

This is a good Bill. It addresses the fundamental aim of increasing options for care by improving the support available to those involved in adoption; by ensuring the availability of information about children who need to be adopted; and by clearing away work which is important in itself but which gets in the way of a lot of the adoption work of family placement teams. Step-parents being able to acquire parental responsibility for their step-children much more easily will be a boon to many teams, which will be freed to do their work by the establishment of the new status of special guardianship.

Above all, it has been a good Bill because of the way in which Ministers—the Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), and the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton)—and their team of civil servants have responded so positively to the issues of concern. We have seen that today, too, in the way in which they have responded over issues relating to section 17, to advocacy for children and young people and to the role and status of parents in legal proceedings.

There is still a way to go. I regret that a process that has been largely positive has not given us enough time to debate important issues about parental responsibility, consent, placement orders and contact. The Bill brings adoption together with the Children Act. I regard the Children Act as great, balanced, profound legislation that goes to the heart of important issues affecting children. More work needs to be done on bringing the Bill in line with that Act. I am concerned that, in getting rid of issues such as freeing children for adoption, we may have created a category of children subject to placement orders who are not looked after, who are not accommodated or who are not on care orders. There is more work to be done on that.

I am disappointed that in the course of this Bill we did not deal with the vexed question of private fostering, which remains for another day. I am confident that the Government will get to grips with it. The biggest issue of all in making sure that the Bill works follows on from what the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) said—the number, status, pay and standing of the social work profession within CAFCASS, local authorities and voluntary organisations. We must get that right.

We have a very long way to go, but this is a good Bill. It sets us on a good track and I wish it well.

8.53 pm

Jonathan Shaw: It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson). In fact, it is tremendous to follow my hon. Friend, who made a fundamentally tremendous speech about children in care, about whom he speaks so passionately. Perhaps he should get a prize, another bottle of wine from the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd), for the number times he mentions "tremendous" and "fundamental".

The Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), stands tall because she has delivered this Bill. We have had White Papers and various attempts by Governments of both parties to deliver an improvement on the Adoption Act 1976. She can be proud.

My hon. Friend mentioned the fact that she was surrounded by social workers during the Bill's consideration—a fact that may not always have curried favour. Perhaps she should be an honorary social worker. The brown corduroys are in the post, but we do not expect her to grow a beard or to drive a 2CV.

The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) invited me to intervene on his closing statement, but I did not do so because it was a fine speech that encapsulated his response throughout our deliberations—apart from last Thursday, when he let himself down. In talking about political correctness, he demonstrated the right-wing version of it to which I referred in Committee. That apart, he has made a good contribution, and has introduced proposals that my hon. Friend the Minister accepted. Such consensus has been the Bill's hallmark, and it has made for a better measure. I also pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton).

Such was the atmosphere created by the presence of so many former social workers in Committee that the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) felt the need to share some of his pain with us. According to *Hansard*, which I was able to consult during our proceedings, he said that he had suffered as a statistician, and I responded that we had all done so.

Mr. Brazier: That was very cruel.

Jonathan Shaw: Indeed. I was in the Corridor with the hon. Gentleman—we are both Members for Kent constituencies—discussing certain parts of the Bill. I was quite annoyed, but I got even angrier when he kindly told me to calm down. He has also made a contribution, and no one can deny the genuineness of his belief in adoption as a means to provide a better future for children. He has consistently spoken on that issue, and although we hold differing views on several matters, I take my hat off to him: he has shown commitment throughout. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear".] The same can also be said of other hon. Members.

This has not been a unique experience, however. After my former job as a social worker, I, like other hon. Members, arrived in this place hoping to bring about change. I have been privileged to play a part not only in the Adoption and Children Bill, but in the Care Standards Bill and the Children (Leaving Care) Bill. All three Bills sought to bring about change for some of the most vulnerable children in our communities by making their lives better. Given my background, to have been involved at the coal face of such legislation has been an immense privilege.

The Bill will provide greater opportunity for children and young people to be adopted. My hon. Friend the Minister deserves praise, but we should also acknowledge the many agencies outside the House that have helped us all. I pay particular tribute to Felicity Collier and Deborah Cullen, of British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, who campaigned and lobbied hard for the Bill before it came before the House. The Bill is testament to their hard work, but most of all to the children who want adoptive placements. That is what our proceedings on Second Reading and in Committee have been about, and the consensus that we have found bodes well for the future of adoption.

8.59 pm

Liz Blackman (Erewash): I regarded myself as a junior member of the Special Standing Committee—I have no background in social work, social services or adoption—but I learned a great deal from my colleagues who are former social workers. I should point out that most of them are not politically correct, but they are very knowledgable. I also learned a great deal from my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), and from the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier), thanks to the evidence that he brought before the Committee.

The whole process was fine and outstanding. I know that we had two bites of the cherry initially, with two Second Readings and two lots of evidence, but that was valuable because it helped to refine what is now a fine piece of legislation. We were given first-rate evidence by all the groups and individuals who appeared before us. I have sat on other Committees that have taken evidence, but the quality was not as outstanding, crisp and meaningful. That was a great privilege.

As I have said before, I did not have a background in adoption practice, but a couple came to see me because they could not obtain information on a child whom they were considering adopting. They were blocked at every step of the way by the local authority. In the end, out of sheer frustration and upset, they backed off. I have pressed to put rigorous provision in the Bill that will make local authorities provide detailed information to prospective adoptive parents. The children can be difficult, and parents need to know as much about them as possible to know whether they can give them a stable, loving home. Throughout the process, my point was listened to and the Minister has said that it will be addressed in regulations. Indeed, all the hon. Members involved have beavered away and chivvied the Minister, and she has been so receptive that we have made progress. I praise her for that.

One of the groups that gave evidence to the Special Standing Committee was the Nottingham Catholic Children's Society. I live in Nottingham, so I took up the society's invitation to visit. Staff took me through the practical measures that they take in the lead up to an adoption and described the post-adoption support they provide. They are responsible for some very fine practice. As several other hon. Members have said, we must ensure that the legislation is put into practice on the ground. We must implement it with the best possible practice, network it and ensure that it happens. The finest piece of paper in the world does not mean much to children who want to be adopted if the procedures are not working.

The Bill is excellent and it was a privilege to serve on the Committee. We must get this right for all those children who are in care and who want to be adopted.

9.2 pm

Mr. Bellingham: It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Erewash (Liz Blackman). Like her, I learned much from the progress of the Bill. I declare an interest, because I am the father of an adopted child. I declared that in Committee, and I declare it now, because that is the right thing to do. Having been through the experience of adopting, I know quite a lot about it, but I have learned much more from Labour Members and their experience of social work. It was a fulfilling Committee on which to serve.

The Bill is long overdue and I hope that it will be implemented as soon as possible. The Minister touched on that subject earlier on Report, but I hope that final implementation will be brought forward even further.

As the Minister pointed out, the Bill's overriding priority must be the interests of children. My hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) mentioned permanency, security and stability, which are critical. It is crucial that the interests of the child are put first. A moving article in today's *Evening Standard* tells the story of a man called Paul

[Mr. Bellingham]

James, who pursued a council for its failure to have him adopted. The council had to give him his notes, which stretched back over many years. Paul James is quoted as saying:

> "I wanted to know why I was a loner, why everyone else seemed to have a loving family and I didn't."

Anyone who gets the chance should read that article, because it sums up what the Bill is about. It is about the lives of people such as Paul James. It is also very much in the country's interests, because children brought up in a secure and stable family are much more likely to fulfil their own potential and then go on to contribute more to the country.

I thought that Thursday's debate was all too short. As an adopter myself, I feel that adopters make a lifelong commitment to the children they adopt. Indeed, they probably make even more of a commitment to someone else's child than they would to their own. That is why I felt it was equally important for the person concerned to make a lifelong commitment to the partner with whom they are adopting a child. Obviously the debate will go on and on—it will continue in another place—but of course I accept the result of Thursday's votes, and indeed the results of any votes tonight.

I understand the concern felt by many Members about inter-country adoption. In Committee, I tabled an amendment to allow private social workers to compile projects such as private home studies under licence to local authorities. There are many private social workers out there, most of whom are former public sector social workers. We must try to harness that resource. Unfortunately my amendment was not accepted, despite being supported by Plaid Cymru and the Liberal Democrats, but I hope that it will be resurrected in another place and given serious consideration.

Local authorities are already stretched, and, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham pointed out, many are retrenching towards statutory responsibilities. The one thing they do not want to take on now is inter-country adoption. I have spoken to a number of social workers, who made their point very clearly. Many of them cannot join voluntary agencies, but a sensible solution might be to contract them to local authorities and introduce a licensing system.

I hope that the other place will also return to another amendment tabled in Committee, which would enable adopted children to inherit titles. There was a certain amount of sneering from Labour Members in Committee, but the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department did not sneer, because it was important. Adopted children are allowed to inherit everything else. They are on a par with other children, with the exception of inheriting titles. It would surely be appropriate for the amendment to be considered again in another place. As I said in Committee, 15 peers and 15 baronets have adopted children. It seems absurd that those children can inherit a home or, for instance, a picture, but cannot inherit a title—especially at a time when the Government are so keen to remove all hereditary peers from the other place.

It is a pity that the Bill has been subject to so much timetabling. As the last three days have shown, there is great interest in it, and we have engaged in a series of constructive, worthwhile debates during that time; but in Committee the axe descended on swathes of it, and those debates fell by the wayside. That does not reflect well on the House. While I agree with all who have described the Committee stage as excellent and fulfilling for all who participated, the curtailment of so much debate was extremely frustrating. I am sure that, in their heart of hearts, Labour Members agree. When a Bill is not particularly controversial and has attracted all-party agreement, why timetable it? In fact, we might even have made quicker progress in Committee if the Bill had not been timetabled. We would have had less of an artificial framework in which to pursue the debate, which would have meant quicker progress in some areas. We could have focused the debate on areas that we have not been allowed to debate at all.

I join my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham in the tribute that he paid to Tom Goldsmith, who was quite superb. The Opposition team went to him with a number of amendments. Some of mine were certainly not as expertly drafted as they might have been. I went to see Tom Goldsmith, who provided a great deal of patient help, assistance and understanding.

I also pay tribute to the Minister's civil servants. I appreciated the letters that both Ministers sent us—I raised a number of quite technical, legal points in Committee, but both Ministers always replied; they were extremely conscientious. I also thank the Minister of State, Department of Health for the lengthy letter that she sent on 10 May—it was about 10 pages long. That sums up the attitude of the civil servants who worked on the Bill. They worked tirelessly, they were extremely professional and they served all members of the Committee equally. Finally, I wish the Bill well as it goes to another place.

9.11 pm

Kevin Brennan: I should like to add my praise to everyone associated with the Bill. I should feel a fraud if I accepted the bottle of wine offered by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd). As a fellow countryman, I disqualified myself from the competition. If it does come my way, I will pass it on to one of my colleagues from the other side of Offa's dyke. I feel that my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor) would be wrong to accept it, as she was born in Ynyshir in the Rhondda and is a fluent Welsh speaker.

This is the first Bill with which I have been associated and taken through its stages. I was honoured to be associated with the Special Standing Committee procedure, which was very welcome. Now that I am serving on the Committee stages of two other Bills, I know that, as I suspected, it is not common practice for us to legislate on the basis of evidence. It is a process that we should use more often.

I have sometimes felt like an impostor. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Liz Blackman), I am not a social worker, and it has occasionally been lonely admitting to that on the Labour Benches. However, I have been tremendously impressed by contributions from all right hon. and hon. Members, particularly from those who have an enormous amount of experience, commitment and passion. As a relatively new Member, I suspect that however long I remain in the House, I will not very often see the kind of expertise or quality of evidence and debate that have been apparent during the proceedings on this Bill.

There have been one or two lighter moments in our proceedings. One or two hon. Friends have suggested that the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) looks a bit like Mr. Burns from "The Simpsons". That is an unfair comparison, because I know that, unlike Mr. Burns, the hon. Gentleman is a very nice man. One of our more interesting debates came about when he moved his amendment to allow adopted children to inherit titles. It was extremely brave of him to come out as a republican on that occasion and threaten the line and the hereditary principle of the monarchy. I compliment him on his bravery.

Jonathan Shaw: Particularly in this jubilee year.

Kevin Brennan: Indeed.

I very much enjoyed all the contributions of the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk, particularly his most recent one. He showed tremendous courage in talking about the hereditary principle, peers and the guillotine in the same speech. I compliment him on being a true radical.

I also thank the Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), for piloting the Bill so well, with the able assistance of the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton). My hon. Friend the Minister for State has shown great sticking power, as well as tolerance of Labour and Opposition Members. The Bill has been improved due to her receptive attitude to suggestions.

I am disappointed that the question of access to information for birth relatives remains unresolved. If a free vote had been allowed on that matter—as it was on another matter last week—perhaps the result would have been different. That is not meant as a criticism—hon. Members are entitled to their views. I am sorry that the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) pressed the matter to a Division. He was perfectly entitled to do so, but I had hoped that we should not need to establish a view in this place before the Bill went to another place. However, that has been done and I am sure that the matter will be further discussed in another place. Indeed, I hope that we can find ways to discuss it further.

I welcome the Minister's announcement last week of a national focal point for intermediary services. I hope that organisations such as the National Organisation for Counselling Adoptees and Parents will be considered for that role, and that the funding that my hon. Friend pledged last week will be sufficient to make the role meaningful so that there will be genuine help to solve the problem.

I read the Committee reports for the legislation introduced in the 1970s, especially the sections on access to information. Access was granted retrospectively so that people could find out about their origins. Some of the attitudes towards access to information at that time are still reflected 25 years later, so I hope that further progress can be made on that point elsewhere. None the less, the Bill is excellent and I wish it well during the remainder of its passage through Parliament.

9.17 pm

Mr. Andrew Turner: I feel like an intruder among Members who have seen the Bill through all its stages in this place, so my contribution will be modest—as were my contributions at earlier points in the progress of the measure. As hon. Members have already observed, it is unusual for us to legislate on the basis of expertise and evidence, and I note that both are available on the Labour and the Opposition Benches.

Third Reading is the time to congratulate those who have successfully taken the Bill through the House, and I congratulate Members who served on the Committee on taking evidence as they did and on bringing the Bill to Report in such good shape. It has, of course, been improved on Report.

I am especially grateful that care plans will be put on a statutory basis and that there will be an opportunity to review their implementation. I am glad that there will be seamless local authority support for adoption. I represent an authority where no one, as a matter of policy, is adopted within the authority of their origin, so I know it is especially important that the Government produce—as I am sure that they will—regulations to make that transition seamless. I thank them for that.

The interests of the child are paramount and I perfectly understand why the interests of children going through the adoption process are so important to Members on both sides of the House. However, I hope that in another place the interests of those who are equally affected by the adoption process will be given a little more thought.

This is a good Bill and I and my hon. Friends welcome it. I congratulate the Minister of State on bringing it to Report.

9.19 pm

Mr. Brazier: I am delighted to have served on the Bill, which the Opposition have welcomed throughout. There is no time to reiterate at length the Bill's merits, on which we have dwelled during most of the last two and bit days on Report, but I should like to congratulate Ministers, especially the Minister of State, Department of Health, the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), on announcing so many concessions today, many of which, as she generously said, had their origins on this side of the House. She has engaged in lively discussion in Committee and throughout the consideration of the Bill.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) on carrying the burden single-handedly, often at the same time as serving on a Committee that was considering another Bill. He has brought considerable energy and intelligence to a very difficult and complicated subject.

I congratulate three Conservative Back-Bench Members: my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham), who has just made such an interesting speech, bringing out, once again, the very strong commitment that he has to the issue because of his personal position; my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly), who was with us earlier this evening and is the former chairman of a social services committee; and my hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter), who has also been so energetic.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd)—I never thought I had a chance of winning that bottle of wine—brought real expertise to the Committee. I hope that, even at this late stage, the Minister will take on board the very strong plea that he has made, based on his experience as a family lawyer, about CAFCASS, without which much of the Bill cannot succeed.

[Mr. Brazier]

I congratulate a number of Labour Members on making lively contributions throughout the consideration of the Bill. In most cases, their contributions have been based on tremendous personal experience of social services. In particular, I should mention the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), with whom I have been debating this subject, on and off, for almost five years now.

Although he mentioned some anecdotes, the hon. Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw) did not comment, in pulling my leg on a variety of subjects, on my visit to the barber, when I had to suggest that he was perhaps short of materials for the makeover that I was seeking. Perhaps he was thinking of glass houses and all that. He has also made a great contribution. He has mentioned my being a statistician, for my sins. A couple of days ago a single table crossed my path that brought home to me, just like that, what the Bill is all about. It was a horrifying table showing the number of moves among the 25,000 children who left care in 2000. Just over a fifth of them had been moved five or more times in the previous 12 months. Some 16,000 of them had been moved more than 10 times in that time. What sorts of lives do those children have? That is why adoption is so vital.

A girl from care visited me for a day's work experience, organised through one of the campaigning groups with which the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre is involved. Very sadly, at the end of the day, she said, "Yes, I would have loved to have a family of my own, but my mum objected to it." I asked when she had last seen her mother, and the answer was when she was aged five. That is what this is all about.

The national register has been put on a statutory basis, and independent review is important. The targets for delay, which had already been announced, will now be backed up by changes in court procedure, but please think, "CAFCASS, CAFCASS, CAFCASS"—we have got to get it right. There is some extra money, but we shall see whether it is enough. Adoption support services have been changed. All those are achievements.

I should like to spend the last two or three minutes of my speech focusing, without sounding sour, on two points that have not been considered so far, both of which are very important, and I hope that they will be considered in another place. The first relates to contact.

Several hon. Members made the point that we are introducing new safeguards on contact. However, the group led by amendment No. 182 could cause problems. That amendment states:

> "the court may make an order under this section requiring the person with whom the child lives, or is to live, to allow the child to visit or stay with the person named in the order, or for the person named in the order and the child otherwise to have contact with each other."

There is a serious danger that the amendments on birth families, which were tabled at the last moment and not debated, will restore the contact that in many cases it is so important to cease. There is not time for me to dwell on the many harrowing examples of that, although I mentioned a case in my constituency in which fresh contact with birth parents destroyed the adoptive relationship. I hope that those amendments are considered in another place.

My second concern relates to placement orders. Many of us welcome the move from freeing orders to placement orders. Although time prevents me from going into the matter in depth, some of the better informed pressure groups—I refer in particular to Sue James of the Adoption Forum and her briefing—are worried that placement orders are in danger of becoming freeing orders by another name. I see the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre nodding. The problem is that the orders do not necessarily involve placements. Although the amendments legislate for placements, the orders are not tied to them. That is why we hope that the amendments that were not reached here will be tabled in another place so that we can at least bring the matter back to court if the situation is drifting.

I do not want to end on those two sour notes, however. I know that another place will have a chance to consider the amendments that we did not debate. I end, therefore, where I started. The Bill is excellent. I am proud to have served on the Committee and I very much enjoyed working with the Committee on it. We commend the Bill to the House.

9.26 pm

Jacqui Smith: This debate has been conducted with the same good temper and in the same constructive way that all the Bill's stages have been considered.

In my introduction, I spelled out the important ways in which the Bill has changed. The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) referred to those changes. I must emphasise the attempt that we have made to listen to the experts who have been involved in the process, many of whom were mentioned by hon. Members. We have also tabled amendments to ensure that we not only have a consultative process, but act on it.

However, making changes as we go along brings considerable pressure to bear on the officials responsible for supporting Ministers. I certainly want to add my voice to the comments made by several hon. Members who thanked my officials for their work. They have put in long hours and sterling work, for which they deserve our congratulations, whether they are in the Lord Chancellor's Department or the Department of Health. I also want to commend the way in which the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham led the Opposition, ably assisted by the hon. Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier).

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) once again used her experience of social work to inform her contribution. I share her view that we should not be quick to criticise social workers because they improve children's lives every day across the country. We should recognise that crucial work.

The hon. Member for Romsey (Sandra Gidley) rightly emphasised the need for support and resources. I assure her that the Government will continue to invest in social services to an even greater extent than we have done since 1997.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor) brought her considerable experience to the debate, both personal and as a result of her work with the all-party group on adoption. It is worth while putting on the record our support for the work done by all the stakeholder groups involved and by the excellent all-party group, before which I appeared at least twice, and it was a stimulating experience.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) referred once again to his legal expertise, which has been useful during consideration of the Bill. He emphasised the need to do all that we can to widen the pool of adopters and the important role of CAFCASS. Had it not been for the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan), there would have been a bitter turn to this evening's events, with allegations being made of a Welsh stitch-up when it came to the bottle of wine. I am still not completely sure that everything is above board, but at least my hon. Friend has agreed to give away his bottle of wine.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) emphasised the key target to increase by 40 per cent. the adoption of children from care. As he has done throughout the process, he stressed the need to listen to the voice of young people in care as the real experts about the system. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Chatham and Aylesford (Jonathan Shaw) for his kind words. Now that the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton), is back in her place, I reiterate my thanks for her ministerial role, her support and her hard work as we have taken this Bill through the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Erewash (Liz Blackman) should not talk down her role. We have had many experts on this Bill, but there have also been many people who did not start as experts but rapidly became experts, and she falls into that category. She rightly re-emphasised the importance of provision of information to prospective adopters when such improvements have been possible to the legislation.

The hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) once again emphasised the need to ensure effective implementation, and reminded us, as did other hon. Members, about the significant position in the Bill of the paramountcy of the child, which is at its heart. As I suggested earlier, that has received support on both sides of the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West should probably have won a prize for the best jokes—never mind his pronunciation of Meirionnydd Nant Conwy—during the passage of the Bill. He was also able to be extremely serious, as he showed this evening, when once again he campaigned and pressed hard on the issue of access to information.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) should not be sorry about coming late to the Bill, as, although I have not necessarily agreed with him, he made an interesting contribution today and last Thursday.

The hon. Member for Canterbury spelled out why children need the stability provided by adoption. He raised some concerns about contact, which will undoubtedly be discussed further in another place. I want him to recognise, however, that the special nature of contact in adoption is the reason why we have put forward these provisions.

Last August, when I launched the Government's national adoption standards, I was privileged to meet several adopters and their adopted children. During the event, I was able to watch the children and their adoptive parents. They laughed together, they argued and there were tears, but there were also hugs. That is what being in a family is about. Adoption can offer that opportunity to more children. The Bill will ensure that it does so, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. We are about to decide on the draft Health Service (Control of Patient Information) Regulations 2002, but what advice can you give to those Members who, although they support the substance of the regulations, are very concerned about the lack of scrutiny that the House has been able to give to the Government's proposals? The one and a half hour debate in Standing Committee descended into what might be described as organised chaos with a welter of points of order. Neither the Conservative party's Front-Bench spokesman nor myself, as the Liberal Democrats' Front-Bench spokesman, were able to speak and to ask questions of the Government, because there was so little time and because of the confusion surrounding the regulations. We are now being asked to approve these important regulations even though they have not received adequate scrutiny. Do you have any advice for hon. Members?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I understand that the Committee considered the regulations and reported in accordance with Standing Orders. I do not therefore think that there is anything that I can do to assist the hon. Gentleman. Standing Order No. 118(6) requires me to put the Question now, and that is what I must do.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

National Health Service

That the draft Health Service (Control of Patient Information) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 26th March, be approved.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

The House divided: Ayes 301, Noes 126.

Division No. 247] **[9.36 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bennett, Andrew
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*

Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
[illegible]ser Kemp.

NOES

Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, J[illegible]es
Clifton-Brown, [illegible]eoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Flight, Howard

Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Desmond Swayne and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Chocolate Production

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

9.48 pm

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): When some colleagues heard that I planned to raise the issue of chocolate slavery in the House, they thought that I wanted to share my concerns about addiction to chocolate. As a nation, we are to some extent all slaves to chocolate. Each of us in Britain consumes 7 kg of chocolate every year, and we spend a cool £4 billion annually on the product. It takes about 6,000 cocoa beans to make up our individual annual consumption of chocolate.

My purpose in calling for this debate is to persuade us to pause between mouthfuls to think where those beans come from and at what cost, for consumers are not the only slaves to chocolate. In many countries of west Africa, as we now know, thousands of children and young people work as forced labour on the cocoa plantations.

The scandal was dragged into our consciousness last year when a vessel, the Etireno, was found to have 40 children and young people aboard, most of them aged under 15, who were being trafficked to work in Gabon. Shocking though that was, it was not an isolated incident. UNICEF tells us that between 10,000 and 15,000 children a year are trafficked into Côte D'Ivoire alone, the largest of the cocoa producing countries of west Africa.

We are told that a fit young man can be bought for the equivalent of £20 or less. He might then be forced to work for 80 to 100 hours a week, never be paid, rarely be fed and frequently be beaten. Anti-Slavery International, with which I have had the privilege to work over the years, has done much to keep the issue in the forefront of public attention. It relates the story of a child it names as "ID", who is now 15 years old but who was trafficked at the age of 13 to work on a coffee and yam plantation in Côte D'Ivoire:

> "Our day began at 5 am. Carrying heavy tools on our head, we had to walk six kilometres through mud and stones in bare feet to reach the fields. By the time we reached them, we were soaked through and exhausted. Once we arrived, the overseer showed us an area we each had to plant before the day's end. We were afraid of what he would do to us if we could not finish the work. This threat and the threat of being denied food if we could not finish in time forced us to work quickly . . . If we were ill and couldn't work, we were afraid that we would be tortured to death. One day I witnessed two of my colleagues being tortured for trying to escape. They became seriously ill and died".

Outrage that fellow humans can be subjected to such exploitation is a natural response, but outrage is not enough. Outrage alone will not help the people living in the poor countries of west Africa, many of whom depend for their very existence on the cocoa industry. In Côte D'Ivoire, which is responsible for almost half the world's cocoa production, more than 7 million people are estimated to be dependent on the cocoa industry. Their conditions are made worse by the fact that the world price of cocoa is unstable and has been falling sharply. Today, it is little different from the level at which it stood 30 years ago.

We have a responsibility to tackle exploitation, and, in particular, to make sure that the International Labour Organisation convention 182 on the worst forms of child labour is enforced. I am pleased that the UK Government

[Mr. Chris Pond]

have been taking a lead by supporting the work of the ILO and non-governmental organisations such as Save the Children and Anti-Slavery International in a number of west African countries. But we also have a responsibility to do that in such a way that we work with those nations in a joint effort to protect and build a fair trade in their products, allowing them to eliminate child slavery without also eliminating the industries on which their economies depend.

That is why I also pay tribute to the Minister's predecessor at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for bringing together almost exactly a year ago the largest cocoa producers, representatives of the Governments of Ghana and Côte D'Ivoire, the cocoa and chocolate industries, and non-governmental organisations to address the question of exploitative labour practices in west African cocoa production. The meeting resulted in the creation of a taskforce and a commitment to undertake research into the extent of exploitative labour practices in west African cocoa production. I hope that the Minister will be able to give us an indication tonight of the results of that research, or of when those results can be expected. I am sure that the House would also welcome a progress report on the work of the taskforce. Industry leaders have told me that they believe that the UK Government have an important role to play in promoting a continuing dialogue leading to action on this matter.

The chocolate industry has also reacted constructively to the adverse publicity surrounding revelations of chocolate slavery, and I am grateful to the industry association, the Biscuit, Cake, Chocolate and Confectionery Alliance, and to Cadbury Schweppes itself, for providing me with briefings on their attempts to improve cocoa working practices. It should be made clear that the industry comprises not only the makers of chocolate bars—themselves leading world brand names—but the major food manufacturers, which purchase cocoa for the production of biscuits, cakes, breakfast cereals and a range of other foodstuffs that find their way into our shopping trolleys.

The problem for the industry is that much of the cocoa is purchased on world markets, without any means of tracing its original source. The cocoa produced by the hundreds of thousands of smallholdings in countries such as Côte D'Ivoire is combined with that supplied from elsewhere. As a result, it is impossible for us to be sure that the products of slavery are not lurking in our kitchen cupboards and fridges.

I should emphasise that the exploitation is not confined to countries such as Côte D'Ivoire and Ghana, whose Governments have joined others in actively working to tackle the problem. This is a problem that taints all products using cocoa, other than fair trade and most organic products.

The industry's response has been constructive, as I have said. In September, it established a protocol for growing and processing cocoa beans in a manner that complies with ILO convention 182. The protocol sets out an action plan and defines a series of steps to eliminate the worst forms of child labour by 2005. It also establishes an advisory group and a joint foundation to act as a clearing house on best practice. The protocol provides for a series of independent surveys of child labour practices in west Africa. The industry is also seeking to help and encourage farmers in the producer countries to form themselves into co-operatives so as to increase their bargaining power on the sale of their products.

I welcome those initiatives, and I know that hon. Members will welcome them. I hope that the Minister will be able to tell the House tonight that his Department is in regular contact with industry representatives to ensure that the protocol is being implemented effectively and vigorously. I hope that he will tell me that the Government are backing the fair trade movement as one way of ensuring that producers receive a fair price for their product. Does he support a demand for chocolate products to carry a "slavery free" label, so that consumers who wish to exercise their purchasing power to reject exploitation and reward corporate responsibility can do so?

There may be good reasons for not calling for immediate direct action by consumers. Perhaps we should wait to see whether the industry, working with Governments and NGOs, can meet its own target of 2005 for the elimination of illegal labour practices. However, the economy of Côte d'Ivoire is fragile enough, and many people depend on cocoa to earn a legitimate, albeit meagre, living.

The patience on our part must be dependent on making genuine progress; our patience must be strictly conditional if it is not simply to become an excuse for once again turning a blind eye to practices that had no place in the 18th century, let alone the 21st, and in the process turning our backs on people who need and deserve our protection.

The industry can only ensure that its products are slave-free in one of two ways. Either it must source its raw materials directly from individual producers whom it knows are not using exploitative labour practices, or it must work with Governments and NGOs to ensure that those practices are eliminated throughout cocoa production.

To do that we shall have to tackle the evil of child slavery at its root—and that root is poverty and debt. I applaud the work that this Government are doing to raise the standards of life for the poorest people in the poorest countries. This country has taken the lead in tackling the burden of debt that helps to trap people in a vicious spiral of poverty and indebtedness. I hope that the Minister can tell us what progress is being made in tackling the debt burden of countries such as Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana.

The extent of modern-day slavery in the production of cocoa and chocolate is not yet known, but that it exists is not in doubt. The production of chocolate may not be the only, or even the main, industry using child and adult slaves. Other products that we use in our everyday lives, such as coffee and cotton, also account for a significant number of the 8 million children who the ILO believes are the victims of extreme exploitation. However, chocolate, as a luxury product with brand names that we can all identify, presents us with the starkest contrast between the comforts enjoyed by those of us in the richer countries and the hardship and exploitation in the poorest countries of the world on which that comfort depends.

9.58 pm

Mr. Tony Colman (Putney): I asked the permission of my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond), of yourself, Madam Deputy Speaker and of the Minister to participate in this debate.

I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate on slavery in chocolate production—an area in which I have been interested since it was first raised with me in 1997 by a constituent, Professor Kevin Bales, who was then and still is the professor of sociology at the University of Surrey Roehampton, which was formerly known as the Roehampton institute. He went on to write the seminal book on current-day slavery, "Disposable People", which was nominated for the Pulitzer prize in 2000. He is director of the United States NGO, Free the Slaves, and a trustee of Anti-Slavery International. He was very keen that I should be able to speak in this debate in support of the protocol, which he has had a hand in negotiating, to ensure that slavery in cocoa production ceases.

Professor Bales e-mailed me today to say

> "the Protocol . . . is a very good thing. It is the first time that an industry has taken social, moral, and economic responsibility for their entire product chain. The Anti-Slavery movement has been seeking such an agreement for something like 160 years (since the cotton and sugar industries were so heavily dependent on slave labour)."

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

Mr. Colman: The e-mail continues:

> "It is truly an historic agreement . . . The Protocol sets out three key steps, and a series of agreed dates for their achievement . . . The industry funds, but has no control over, fully independent research into the precise extent and location of abusive child and slave labour in the Ivory Coast. This research is now ended, the data are being analysed, and results will be available at the end of the month."

The Minister may have early information, however.

The second step is that

> "an independent foundation will be established to fund the NGOs or other bodies that will do the liberation and rehabilitation work necessary to remove children and adults from abusive situations. Agreements have been reached on the shape of this foundation and its establishment is moving ahead on schedule. The industry will fund it."

Thirdly, an

> "independent system of inspection and verification will be established, again with industry financial support, but completely independent of them, to randomly inspect farms to root out any abusive practices."

As my hon. Friend said, the

> "protocol is not restricted to the Ivory Coast, but all areas around the world where cocoa is grown. So far, the cocoa industry has been delivering on their side of the agreement on time and in full. It is possibly the best and biggest public-private initiative on human rights ever. It is a model for other industries . . . this is sorely needed since similar conditions obtain in coffee, sugar, cotton, and several other commodities."

Professor Bales believes that the way forward is exactly what is happening—a true partnership of industry, human rights organisations, other NGOs and Governments to bring all our different expertise to bear in working out lasting and, I hope, permanent solutions. As my hon. Friend said, this situation is a stain on chocolate eating in this country and I am pleased to understand from my involvement with Professor Bales over the past five years that it is coming to an end.

I was privileged to be on the Inter-Parliamentary Union visit to Côte d'Ivoire last September and on the International Development Committee visit to Ghana in March. On each occasion, the matter was discussed extensively with parliamentarians, NGOs and cocoa farmers.

When the Select Committee visited Ghana, we became aware of a report on child trafficking in that country produced by Tengey and Oguaah on behalf of the Danish International Development Agency, published in February 2002. The conference took place in March while we were there. Interestingly, the work being done by trafficked children includes fishing, selling, home helps, truck pushing and farming, but the latter accounts for only 3 per cent. of the total work carried out by those children.

I hope that the report truly reflects the results of the research—it is a stain on humankind that such trafficking ever happened—and that child trafficking has now ceased in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana in the field of cocoa production.

10.3 pm

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): First, I draw the House's attention to a declaration in the Register of Members' Interests and inform Members that I am the chair of the all-party group on the chocolate and confectionary industry. That may seem to many people to be a strange and perhaps indulgent group to be involved with, but I assure the House that the group was established not to allow Members purely to debate the interesting and tasty products that we have in this country, but to consider the range of issues that affect the chocolate and confectionary industry. This issue is one of the most important at present.

Indeed, not long ago the group held a meeting in which it was interesting to hear industry representatives who had come to talk about their work on developing the protocol, as well as representatives of Anti-Slavery International, who explained their work on highlighting issues in Côte d'Ivoire and other west African countries. What was important about that meeting was not only the interest showed by Members, but the fact that we had in our midst the great-grandson of Lord Wilberforce. It is strange that centuries later we are here discussing slavery despite Lord Wilberforce's ancestor having put so much time, effort and dedication into abolishing it.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond) on securing the debate, which is important not only for the industry in the United Kingdom in terms of the economy and the jobs that rest on its work, but for the livelihoods of producers and workers on cocoa farms, especially those who are exploited. In the past 18 months, the industry has worked across the world with non-governmental organisations and the Government to develop the protocol. That is a significant step forward both in recognising some of the problems that affect the industry and in seeking ways in which they can be dealt with.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham mentioned the development of the protocol and the introduction of independent surveys of child labour practices in west Africa. I hope that the results of those surveys will lead to objective and positive steps forward in the work that is being done on the protocol.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): Although it is obviously fantastic that the industry has recognised the problem, it goes far beyond what the industry can do.

[Ms Oona King]

Given the volatility of cocoa prices in particular and commodity prices in general, we need to consider how to eliminate the double standards that plague our trading systems around the world.

Ms Ward: My hon. Friend is right to identify that one of the industry's problems is the fluctuating cost of cocoa, which naturally increases the pressures on cocoa farms. That is a matter that the whole industry needs to consider. Its work with NGOs and the Government to secure the protocol and to agree what else it can do to encourage co-operatives and to provide additional assistance in cocoa production is a positive step that we should welcome.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham talked about direct action. I hope that consumers do not take direct action at this point, because that would not be helpful. It is important to recognise the work that has taken place so far.

I thank my hon. Friend for providing this opportunity to debate an important subject that has brought many hon. Members into the Chamber. All sorts of frivolous comments may be made about the fact that we have such an all-party group and that we are discussing chocolate and cocoa production. Most importantly, however, we are discussing the rights of human beings in this world and the action that we can take to support those who are involved in the industry to ensure that we abolish slavery for good. We should promote what is in my view, as a significant consumer of its product, an important industry and deal with this important issue which it faces.

10.9 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): It is unusual for an Adjournment debate late at night to be so well attended. Perhaps the spirit of Sir William, later Lord Wilberforce, who made many of the same points about slavery 170 to 200 years ago, can be felt through the ages. It is good that so many Labour Members have attended the debate, and it is interesting that the Opposition Benches are empty. I hope that the great William—part Whig, part Tory—will look down from wherever it is that hon. Members go, and see that at least one party in our country is committed to the principles by which he made Britain great.

Hon. Members made several different points, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend and fellow London marathon runner, the Member for Gravesham (Mr. Pond), for choosing the debate. I agree with the points made by my hon. Friends the Members for Putney (Mr. Colman) and for Watford (Ms Ward), and I commend their temperate comments, and the fact that they did not urge action that could damage the people whom we are trying to help. It would satisfy all of us who enjoy our chocolate to know that we can eat it without the taint of the accusation that it was made using slavery, child labour, or forced or abducted labour.

I used to work in Switzerland, and am partial to the chocolates of Lindt, Nestlé and Suchard. Those of us who are familiar with Belgium know the great chocolates of Neuhaus and Côte d'Or. Since I was three years old and ate my first Crunchie bar, I have had a weakness for that unique British product. It would be good to know that all the chocolates that we enjoy eating were made in fair conditions.

My hon. Friends have referred to fair trade, to which the Government are committed. A few years ago I took my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development to Tesco in my constituency at Christmas, and we filled our shopping basket with fair trade goods to try to set a modest example of, "Do as I do, not as I say." In my office, my hon. Friends are served with fairly traded tea and coffee.

However, I insist on sensitivity. In the United States the steel lobby insists that its protectionism operates in the interests of fair trade. The powerful agriculture lobby that got Congress to pass measures that will further deny the agricultural products of Africa and Latin America access to the American market claims that it is acting in the interests of fair trade. We must be careful to ensure that one person's fair trade is not another's excuse for protectionism. Hon. Members who have taken part in the debate do not intend that.

We must place our discussion in the context of the wider Government policy, to which the Foreign and Commonwealth Office is committed, of opening up trade in the richer markets in Europe to the agricultural products of the developing world. That is at the core of what the Prime Minister has been preaching—if I may use that verb—around the world. I heard the Prime Minister convey that message in Latin America last year and I heard him again in Madrid at the European, Latin American and Caribbean summit. He will take the message to Johannesburg and the world summit on sustainable development.

Ms King: Did some people not believe that the industry had not moved quickly enough on fair trade chocolate? We are pleased about the current movement because we are now considering people's dignity and rights as human beings, not their right to a job in, for example, the American steel industry.

Mr. MacShane: My hon. Friend is right. Her commitment and passion on this subject are well recognised by the House and the wider public. As hon. Members have said, the cocoa industry and chocolate producers in our country and the United States have risen to the challenge put to them by public opinion and by organisations such as Anti-Slavery International. In that sense, they may be ahead of international commodity production and manufacturing organisations in other nations. Again, the leadership from the United Kingdom and from American senators, American NGOs and American companies shows that although on some issues we have much to criticise about aspects of what the United States does, in this regard, the United States and the United Kingdom are ahead of the game compared with many other players in Europe and elsewhere.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): I apologise for interrupting the Minister, but I wonder whether he could share some information about what specific action Her Majesty's Government are taking on the implementation of the protocol.

Mr. MacShane: I am coming to that very point.

The issue hit the headlines last year when there were reports of a ship off Benin, the Etireno, having a full cargo of slaves and being refused entry at different west African ports. Britain responded to the plight of the Etireno and sent HMS Glasgow to the bight of Benin to help to find out exactly what was going on.

We know that that particular incident has been somewhat exaggerated. The children on board were in a terrible condition, but there were not 200 of them, and there was little evidence of a link between the Etireno and the cocoa industry. However, the publicity and the action of diverting a Royal Navy vessel to the area helped to draw attention to the problems of child trafficking and child labour in west Africa.

Shortly after the Etireno incident, my predecessor at the Foreign Office, who is now the Minister for Industry and Energy, called a meeting of representatives of the cocoa trade, the Governments of Côte d'Ivoire and of Ghana, the chocolate industry here, and leading NGOs to discuss the issue. A follow-up workshop was held last summer, at which a taskforce was set up.

In parallel, there was a push in the United States by Senators Harkin and Engel to commit the cocoa industry to a global protocol. That protocol seeks to ensure active efforts by the industry to ensure that International Labour Organisation convention 182 on the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour is applied.

The United States chocolate industry signed up to the protocol on 19 September 2001. CAOBISCO, the association of the chocolate, biscuit and confectionery industries of the European Union, the European Cocoa Association and the International Cocoa Organisation, currently based in London but to relocate to Abidjan, all formally endorsed the global protocol. It has the support of the International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers Associations, and of the ILO. It has been welcomed by the NGOs campaigning in the sector. Anti-Slavery International says:

> "Anti-Slavery welcomes the commitments made, particularly the acceptance of industry responsibility to protect all workers not just children".

Indeed, responding to the complaint that the protocol was focused exclusively on child labour and failed to address the possible problem of forced labour by adults, key industry and non-governmental actors agreed a joint statement extending their co-operation to include identifying and eliminating forced labour in line with ILO convention 29. That reinforces the role of the ILO and its vital tripartite negotiations on these grave social issues globally.

As for the points raised by hon. Members, the first step in implementing the protocol was the establishment of an advisory group—the broad consultative group—which was established on 1 December last year. Industry-financed surveys are in progress on the ground, because it is vital that we establish the facts. The attention that the media rightly draw to the problem is to be welcomed, but a headline report—even a very professional broadcasting report—does not obviate the need for proper investigation of the facts.

Three surveys are being conducted, under the auspices of the United States Agency for International Development, the International Institute for Tropical Agriculture and the International Labour Organisation. The surveys—of farms and farmers, of communities, and of small-scale producers and workers on the farms—should provide the most authoritative assessment so far of the scale of the problem of exploitative labour in cocoa production. We expect the results to emerge shortly—before the end of the summer, we hope. The taskforce does not belong to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, but we expect members of it to reconvene to examine the outcome of the surveys, and to take their conclusions to a major conference review—planned by the Côte d'Ivoire—on the findings. Indeed, the ILO is fully involved in shaping a response to the survey.

As we know, the global protocol has set the ambitious target of establishing by July 2005 an industry-wide scheme to certify that cocoa beans and their derivative products have been grown and processed without using any of the worst forms of child labour. There is a long way to go before that is achieved, but I believe that the chocolate industry's response to international concern about the use of child labour in cocoa production provides a good example of what we now call corporate social responsibility.

None of us should be in any doubt about the difficulties involved in ensuring that there is absolutely no abuse of child labour in cocoa production. About 70 per cent. of the world's cocoa comes from west Africa. The four largest producers are Côte d'Ivoire, which produces 40 per cent., Ghana, which produces 15 per cent., Nigeria, which produces 7 per cent., and Cameroon, which produces 4 per cent. Cocoa is grown in some of the least accessible forest areas of west Africa. It is a very small-scale industry. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gravesham noted, there are well over 500,000 producers in Côte d'Ivoire alone.

Cocoa grows naturally in west Africa, so minimal inputs are needed. At harvest time, middlemen—many of whom are Lebanese—drive to the forest areas in trucks and purchase the cocoa from the producers. The cocoa beans are then dried in Abidjan before being sold on. Most are sold to large cocoa bean traders and pressers—such as Cargill, Barry Callebaut and Arch Daniels Midland—before being sold on again to the chocolate companies whose names we all know. So there is quite a long chain: from small farm production to the sale in shops of chocolate bars and boxes of chocolates. In this respect, cocoa differs from the tea or coffee industry, in which it is more common for multinational companies to own the farms directly.

Local ownership of cocoa farms has many advantages. For example, it gives local producers greater discretion to take their own decisions in the light of their own interests. However, the long chain between producer and consumer makes it more difficult to monitor production, and to ensure that there is no use of exploitative labour. Tomorrow, Cadbury's European works council will meet in Birmingham. Although some chocolate producers in Britain have trade union organisations, the chance of creating such organisations on the small farms of the Côte d'Ivoire is, alas, virtually nil. We must seek the means to address that problem.

There is one point of principle that the House should be aware of. Whatever the level of child labour in cocoa production—I hope that the surveys that I mentioned will

[Mr. MacShane]

soon provide better information on that—there is no doubt that child trafficking in its broadest sense is a considerable problem in west Africa. Typically, children are lured from, or sold from, very poor countries—notably Mali and Burkina Faso—to other west African countries to work in domestic service, as beggars, or in other areas of the economy.

Britain has had a leading role in establishing the legal framework to prevent abusive child labour. We played a major part in ensuring agreement in 1999 on ILO convention 182 on the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour. That convention, on which the cocoa industry's global protocol is based, outlaws in particular all slavery, sale and trafficking, debt bondage, serfdom and forced or compulsory labour of children.

We have worked hard, and diplomats from the Foreign Office are asking Governments to work hard, to ensure that the convention is ratified. Senegal, Ghana, Mali and Niger ratified in 2000. I am pleased to report that the Gambia, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde and Benin ratified in 2001 and Cameroon ratified earlier this month. The Côte d'Ivoire Government tell us that ratification has completed its parliamentary procedures, and that deposit of their instrument of ratification is imminent.

Work on child labour is an important element of the Department for International Development's partnership framework with the ILO. The Department is also supporting the anti-slavery international project to develop the capacity of local NGOs to end the trafficking and abuse of child domestic workers in Benin, Burkina Faso, Gabon, Ghana, Niger and Togo.

As hon. Members have pointed out, it is the economic framework within which the abuses take place on which we need to concentrate much of the Foreign Office's policy. In some cases, labour by young family members on a farm is not necessarily bad. However, the root cause of child labour and child trafficking is poverty, and that is what we must tackle. That is why I am proud that the Government are leaders in the poverty reduction instrument known as the HIPC—heavily indebted poor countries—initiative.

Burkina Faso has gone through the HIPC process and reached completion point, thus receiving irrevocable debt reduction, and Ghana, Cameroon and Mali have reached decision point, so are receiving some interim relief on their debt servicing.

We must also try to develop fair trade systems for poor countries. At the moment, the combined subsidies for agriculture in the EU, North America and Japan amount to more than the combined GDP of sub-Saharan Africa. We give about $50 billion a year in aid worldwide, but we provide $360 billion dollars in subsidies to our farmers, thus crowding out the produce of the poorest of the world. We need to keep fighting to ensure that the terms of trade are fair, and that there is, for example, no tariff or subsidy escalation.

The combined pressure of my hon. Friends, NGOs, concerned individuals in the industry and, above all, consumers has achieved a great deal. The taskforce set up by the Foreign Office last year has helped to bring together producer countries, the industry and NGOs. The industry has been spurred into action and, to its credit, has accepted and started to shoulder its responsibility. Much has to be done. It is no use simply having meetings in London if on the ground local managers and representatives are not responding to the wishes and desires of the industry leaders in the taskforce.

Consumers can continue to play a role in demonstrating their preference for products that have been produced fairly. The fact that they are prepared to pay a little more sends an important message, but ultimately the goal must be to ensure that all production is fair. I am glad that my hon. Friends stressed the point that boycotts would only damage the most vulnerable growers, increasing the problem of poverty, and so increasing the likelihood of abuse of children.

There is no immediate or easy solution to the problem of exploitative labour practices in cocoa production, but I believe that a good start has been made to tackling it. That is a small but vital part of what the Foreign Office does on behalf of the people of Britain. I end, as I began, by thinking that William Wilberforce would heartily approve of the action we are taking, and I thank hon. Members for the contributions that they have made to the debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 21 May 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Affordable Homes

1. **Mr. David Rendel** (Newbury): If he will make a statement on the number of new affordable homes built in the UK in the past 12 months. [55527]

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): In England, a total of 19,535 new affordable homes were built by registered social landlords and local authorities during 2001-02. Over the same period, 10,311 dwellings were acquired, converted or refurbished by registered social landlords and local authorities for use as affordable housing.

Mr. Rendel: I am sure that everyone would agree that that housebuilding figure is far too low. Indeed, I understand that overall housebuilding is at its lowest since 1927. However, some local authorities are trying in their district plans to set minimum proportions of affordable housing for all major new housing estates. Has the Secretary of State set any maximum at which that minimum percentage can be set by local authorities, because my local authority certainly believes that it cannot set a level anything like that which I would like?

Mr. Byers: I agree with the hon. Gentleman when he says that there must be concern about the very low number of housebuilding starts last year. The good news is that, for the latest quarter for which we have figures, there has been something like a 10 per cent. increase compared with the quarter the year before. Indeed, in London new starts have doubled compared with the quarter the year before. The good news for affordable housing is that there has been an 18 per cent. increase compared with the quarter a year ago.

That is partly because local authorities are now using their powers under the planning regime to insist as a condition of granting permission that affordable housing be provided. I would certainly encourage local authorities to do that. We have provided guidance as a Department to encourage local authorities to look clearly at how they can secure additional social housing—affordable housing—as part of granting planning applications.

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that the average income in Tower Hamlets is £12,000 a year but the average cost of a house in Tower Hamlets is £180,000, which effectively means that no normal person in my constituency can afford to buy a house? Will he look, therefore, at the intermediate housing market and at, for example, increasing the cash incentive scheme, so that people in Tower Hamlets and elsewhere can afford to live in a house?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is right to point out the particular difficulties which I know she has in her constituency and which occur in Tower Hamlets more generally in relation to the dramatic increase in the value of properties in that part of London and, indeed, London and the south-east generally over the recent period. Cash incentives are one of the levers that can be used. The Government are looking very closely at how we can make that scheme even more attractive than it is at the present time.

To refer to the point that I made to the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), because the value of land has also increased dramatically in Tower Hamlets, one real lever is to attach a condition to planning applications that affordable homes be made available. That is one of the most effective ways in the short term of providing additional housing that people can afford to buy. That must be at the heart of what we are trying to achieve through the planning regime.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Will the Secretary of State join me in congratulating West Oxfordshire district council on spending £20 million over the next five years on social housing? Is he aware that the constraint that it faces is the shortage of land for sale? Will he look at two specific proposals to try to help in that respect? One is to allow local councils to pay slightly over the odds for land where social housing is involved, and the second, further to the point made by the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel), is to consider reducing the number of houses that need to be built before a council is allowed to insist on social housing. That change could make a real difference and lead to more affordable housing in constituencies such as mine.

Mr. Byers: I certainly applaud any local authority that is able to provide additional housing that people can afford or housing that is available for rent. On the hon. Gentleman's first specific point, I want to give local government the freedom to invest in capital without needing the approval of central Government. That is part of giving local government more power, and his point is a good example of how local authorities can determine their own priorities. I certainly want that to happen, but we will need primary legislation to enable it to occur.

On the second point, I believe that local government should look constructively and with some imagination at how it can use its present powers under the planning regime. There is one constraint that I want to change. At the moment, it can attach conditions on affordable housing only to applications for residential development.

It would be far better if it were also able to apply such a condition to retail and commercial development. That would clearly create an opportunity to make more affordable homes available. There are ways forward. It is a serious issue and one which we are taking seriously.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will my right hon. Friend turn his attention to the terrible problem in London, where 50,000 families are in bed-and-breakfast or hostel accommodation? Hardly any council housing is being built and there is a net deficit in the construction of social housing. Will he insist that all development sites include at least 50 per cent. affordable housing, if he has any power to do so? When will the borrowing restrictions on local authorities be lifted so that they can invest in new council housing for people in desperate need?

Mr. Byers: It would be wrong to have a fixed percentage of affordable housing; my own view is that each application should be judged on its merits. In some cases, therefore, it might be less and in others it might be more than 50 per cent., but each application should be judged in relation to each site. On housebuilding, my hon. Friend is right that for 10 or 15 years there has been a small increase—in fact, a reduction—in the affordable homes and social housing being built. The good news, particularly in London, is that there is now an increase, certainly in the last quarter for which figures are available.

On the specific point made by my hon. Friend about bed-and-breakfast accommodation, it is scandalous that, for example, 6,600 children are brought up long-term in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. We are going to tackle that. By March 2004, there will be no need for any child to be in bed-and-breakfast accommodation apart from in emergency situations.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The Secretary of State will no doubt recall that before the 1997 election the Prime Minister said that

> "there is no doubt that the homelessness problem has been increased by the shortage of affordable rented housing . . . our approach will be founded on the basic aim of ensuring that everyone has the chance to a decent home."

Why, then, has the number of social housing units plummeted from 150,000 in the three years prior to the 1997 election to 95,000 now, causing a disastrous rise of 11 per cent. in homelessness, including 11 per cent. child homelessness? The number of people housed in temporary bed-and-breakfast accommodation has trebled since the last election. When is the Secretary of State going to get out and do something about that serious problem, and sort it out for some of the most vulnerable people in our society?

Mr. Byers: I was interested to note that the Conservative spokesman did not refer to a comment that he made in our interesting debate in Westminster Hall last Thursday. For the information of the House, I shall relay it; I wonder to what extent it reflects Conservative policy. He challenged me and said:

> "What is the Secretary of State doing about the scam of right to buy?"—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 16 May 2002; Vol. 385, c. 355WH.]

Whether or not that is Conservative policy I do not know, but I want 100,000 affordable new homes to be built or refurbished by March 2004 and made available. We will double the amount of money made available to the Housing Corporation for affordable homes to £1.2 billion and we will increase local authority capital allocations by £500 million. Those improvements will make a real difference and provide housing opportunities for people who need them.

Antisocial Behaviour

2. **Mr. Anthony D. Wright** (Great Yarmouth): What effect neighbourhood and street wardens are having on curtailing antisocial behaviour in towns and cities. [55528]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): Since 2001, 84 neighbourhood warden schemes have been put in place. This year, we are introducing 123 street warden schemes. Most schemes have tackling antisocial behaviour as one of their key objectives. The wardens have been extremely successful in curbing antisocial behaviour by using a variety of measures.

Mr. Wright: I thank my hon. Friend for her answer. Recently, three street wardens started work in Great Yarmouth town centre, and I could tell her dozens of good news stories that have occurred during this short period. On antisocial behaviour, however, yesterday there was an incident in the town that caused problems for the wardens. The general public have a particular perception of their powers, and they have difficulty getting across the reality. Will my hon. Friend take up the question of their powers, which are distinctly different from those of the police, so that the public are aware of what they can and cannot do?

Ms Keeble: My hon. Friend is right to focus on enforcement powers. At present, the wardens' enforcement powers belong to the local authority although there is provision, some way down the line, for the possibility that they may get policing powers. One reason why wardens are successful is that the public perceive them as being on their side. By operating in the way that they do, not only have wardens contributed to substantial drops in crime in certain areas, but they have been successful in getting antisocial behaviour orders and acceptable behaviour contracts agreed, so they have brought about a big improvement in behaviour in particular neighbourhoods. I am sure that people in Great Yarmouth, too, will see an improvement in their town centre.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): Does the Minister agree that restricting the access of under-18s to products used by graffiti vandals would be one of the most effective tools that neighbourhood wardens could be given?

Ms Keeble: I believe that that has been tried in some areas. It is interesting that some neighbourhood wardens go out with anti-graffiti spray paints. Several neighbourhood wardens have been successful in working with young people and have got them to take part in constructive activities in the area, instead of graffiti and vandalism. The engagement with that group has been extremely important.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): Will my hon. Friend join me in praising the work of the north Paddington neighbourhood warden scheme, which was one of the first and which has been an extremely successful project that has made a major contribution to reducing the fear of crime and improving community cohesion? Thanks to the Government's neighbourhood renewal fund, we hope to extend the warden scheme to two other deprived parts of my constituency. Can my hon. Friend assure me that she is monitoring the mainstream programmes, such as mainstream policing or other projects delivered by the local authority, to make sure that the existence of Government-funded schemes such as wardens in deprived areas is not an excuse for the diversion of other resources to less needy parts of the community?

Ms Keeble: My hon. Friend is right. I shall make sure that those figures are monitored carefully. The money spent on neighbourhood wardens—more than £40 million, in total—has been a success in putting in place a new range of people to look after public spaces. The public have been enormously supportive and the schemes have shown tangible results, as reflected in the crime figures. I am sure that we shall see neighbourhood warden schemes as a permanent part of our public services.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): In the borough in which the Minister used to be the leader of the council and which I partly represent, neighbourhood wardens have been introduced and are welcome and successful. If, next week, when I anticipate that my Liberal Democrats will take over the administration of Southwark, they wish to extend the community warden scheme across the whole of the borough, can the Minister make sure that money will be available for that from one Government pocket or another? Will she and her colleagues seriously consider allowing the community wardens to take over the responsibilities of traffic wardens, so that the local policing of the lower-level offences will be done by one group of people, rather than by two separate and rather restricted organisations?

Ms Keeble: I believe that the neighbourhood wardens in Bermondsey have been successful in getting 10 acceptable behaviour contracts agreed, to control behaviour in that area. As I understand it, the Liberal Democrat administration is in place only with Conservative support—the Liberal Democrats do not have an overall majority. One of the things that make the wardens so successful is the fact that the public perceive them generally to be on their side. If wardens started issuing parking tickets, that might quickly deter public support. Although it remains an option for wardens to take on some enforcement powers from the local authority, in many places that has not happened because neighbourhood wardens have been so skilful in controlling behaviour and improving public spaces.

Postal Voting

3. **Mr. Bill Tynan** (Hamilton, South): If he will make a statement on his plans for the use of postal voting in future elections. [55529]

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): The Electoral Commission is evaluating the recent electoral pilots, which included a number of all-postal ballots. We will wish to consider the commission's evaluation and to make any necessary changes ahead of next year's local elections. In due course, we will need to consider the benefits and disadvantages of moving to all-postal ballots for a national election—for example, elections to the European Parliament to be held in June 2004.

Mr. Tynan: I thank my right hon. Friend for that response. Obviously, any process that would be useful in eliminating voter apathy would be welcomed in all parts of the House, but the recent postal experiment was very small and it is difficult to assess whether it was successful. Does he agree that we should further roll out postal voting in 2003 for the Scottish parliamentary elections, the Welsh elections and the local council elections to obtain concrete evidence about whether it can be successful and remove the problem of voter apathy?

Mr. Byers: My hon. Friend is right to point out that the pilot has been small scale—only 13 local authorities in England opted for all-postal ballots in the local elections in May. The Electoral Commission is considering carefully the experience in relation to turnout and also whether there has been malpractice or fraud. It is very important that those matters are fully investigated by the independent Electoral Commission. We would probably be moving too quickly if we were to adopt all-postal ballots for the Scottish and Welsh elections next year. Once again, we should use May 2003 and the local elections for further pilots. As I said, we might then reach a position in 2004, perhaps in the European Parliament elections in June, in which we can conduct a national postal ballot.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Does the Secretary of State accept that in conventional voting methods, people's ability to go into a private booth to cast their votes is an element of privacy and confidentiality that is very important? Is he not concerned that the introduction of postal ballots on a mass scale will mean that that element of privacy is lost and that those who wish to vote privately from their own households will not have the same safeguards that people have traditionally enjoyed in casting their votes in the traditional way?

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to refer to the safeguards that we hold dear in terms of how we cast our votes in elections. That is one of the issues to which the Electoral Commission will want to give proper consideration. We must take this matter slowly and we must get it right; we will not be rushed into taking early decisions. We must use the pilots and learn from them, and we must then make decisions that are in the interests of the democratic process.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I welcome the progress made by my right hon. Friend in this very important area, but is he aware that many people are reluctant to take up their right to a postal vote, even though they may sometimes have difficulty in getting to a polling station? Would he consider it appropriate for his

Department to produce some promotional material explaining to people how they can apply for a postal vote and use it once they have it, and how easy it is to do so?

Mr. Byers: That is something to which the Electoral Commission should again give detailed consideration and I shall draw my hon. Friend's comments to its attention. It will report to me on 2 August on its evaluation of this year's pilots. No doubt, it will want to say something about the question of publicising not only the entitlement to have a postal vote if that is desired, but the process that somebody must follow to use such a vote, which can be rather confusing in some areas. We need to ensure that, in our desire to make voting more convenient and easier for people, we do not disadvantage particular groups. In particular, pensioners may find postal voting more difficult and prefer to exercise the vote as they have done for generations. We need to consider all those factors if we are to move to a situation in which all-postal ballots are held. In practice, that means that people will not have a polling station to go to on what we call polling day, which needs to be explained to them.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): Of course, all-postal ballots were used in some of the mayoral elections on 2 May, in which Robocop was elected in Middlesbrough, a monkey was elected in Hartlepool, and the voters of North Tyneside, which covers the Secretary of State's constituency, elected a Conservative mayor—perhaps the first sign of the Secretary of State's impact on Labour's poll rating. Does he still intend to impose mayoral votes, by post or otherwise, on certain cities?

Mr. Byers: We have always said that we want to provide communities, cities and towns with the option of voting for a mayor if that is what they desire. They can vote for monkeys—perhaps Conservative monkeys, who knows? That is the choice that the people of North Tyneside had, but had there been a Conservative Government they would not have had that choice.

Mrs. May: Postal voting was discussed by the Secretary of State at his lunch with women journalists last week, when he told them, as he told the House today, that postal voting could be used for the European elections. Of course, he also referred to the euro referendum and told them when it was to be held. Since then, the euro referendum has been denied by Downing street, his position on road tolls has been rejected by Lord Birt and his poll rating is sinking fast.

The Secretary of State claims postal ballots as one of his successes, but will he not accept that voter apathy stems from the Government's arrogance, from people's contempt for spin, and from a distrust of politicians who fail to deliver on the issues that matter to them, such as transport? Given his record low rating in the polls, does he take any personal responsibility for that?

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Just ignore her and she will go away.

Mr. Byers: I thank my hon. Friend.

I take the fact that turnout doubled in areas such as Crawley, Gateshead and South Tyneside as an indication that all-out postal ballots are welcomed by the electorate as being more convenient and more appropriate to the modern world in which we live.

If the hon. Lady wants to talk about the policies that the Government are pursuing, I simply say this—people will judge what we have done on the improvements that they see. They understand that if there are to be changes in the transport system, they will not happen in a handful of months, but will take time. What we have done in the past 11 months during which I have been Secretary of State for Transport is to make the difficult changes that are necessary to lay the foundations for a transport system that will go from strength to strength. The improvements will be there for people to see, and they are aware of that. I want to be judged on improving the services that people get, whether in local government, transport, planning, housing, urban regeneration or balloting systems, not on one opinion poll in one newspaper.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): My right hon. Friend mentioned Gateshead. Will he confirm that there was a turnout of 59 per cent. in the highly successful postal ballot that was held there? In fact, turnout was higher—I am not sure whether I take much comfort from this, as the general election candidate—than in last year's general election. Many people told me that postal balloting fits in very well with today's lifestyles, especially for those who do not work in a nine-to-five routine and may, for whatever reason, find it difficult to get to the polling station. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that it was possible on the day in Gateshead to hand in a postal vote at the library, the civic centre or any of the other centres that had been arranged, and as had been explained to people during the campaign?

Mr. Byers: My right hon. Friend makes an important point about the benefits that were evident in Gateshead as a result of using all-out postal ballots and providing people with the opportunity on the day to go to vote not at a polling station, as they perhaps would have done in the past, but at civic buildings. The Electoral Commission will want to consider that when it undertakes its evaluation of this year's pilots.

It is rather odd that, at the beginning of the 21st century, we still vote with stubby black pencils in a makeshift booth. Some Conservative Members may be attracted to that, but we need to consider the way in which people cast their votes to make it more convenient for the lives that they lead. That is what we are trying to achieve. We will do it on an all-party basis because we have a shared agenda of ensuring safeguards for the electoral process. However, we cannot get away from the fact that this year's postal ballots have been a success in dramatically improving voter turnout.

County Councils

4. **Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): If he will make a statement on the future of county councils. [55530]

The Minister for Local Government (Mr. Nick Raynsford): Our proposals for county and district councils, where an elected regional assembly is to be established in future, are set out in chapter 9 of our White

Paper, "Your Region, Your Choice", published on 9 May. Any move to a wholly unitary structure would apply only in those regions which vote in a referendum to establish an elected regional assembly. We have no proposals to change the structure of county and district councils in other circumstances.

Mr. Osborne: Does the Minister agree that people in England identify with their city, town or county, but not with an amorphous, vast administrative region? Will he confirm that, even if every voter in Cheshire, Lancashire and Cumbria in the north-west region votes against a regional assembly, they can be outvoted by Manchester and Merseyside? Is that local democracy?

Mr. Raynsford: People in many regions of the United Kingdom identify strongly with their region. If the hon. Gentleman visited the north-east, he would find that out. On elections, we have always operated on the simple principle that majorities prevail. That will apply in any referendum.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the White Paper does not provide for a third way? The electorate will have a choice between staying as they are or voting for a unitary structure supported by a regional assembly. Does he also agree that, in the context of Cheshire, voters should consider the successes of the unitary authorities in Halton and Warrington, and cast their vote on that basis?

Mr. Raynsford: The purpose of a referendum is to judge public support for creating an elected regional assembly, but when people cast their votes, they should consider the likely consequences for the reorganisation of local government to create a wholly unitary structure. That is why the White Paper proposes that that should be identified, through a study by the boundary committee, before people cast their vote in the referendum, which will rightly determine the outcome for their region.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): In the light of the Minister's answer, what precisely did he mean on 5 March, when he said,

"there is no agenda for the abolition of county councils"?—[*Official Report*, 5 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 148.]

In view of his reply to the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller), what advice would he give to a voter in a referendum for a directly elected assembly if that person not only supported an elected assembly in his or her region, but wanted to retain a county council?

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman has not been listening carefully. I made it perfectly clear that people's primary consideration in the referendum is whether they want an elected regional assembly. The Liberal Democrats have advocated regional assemblies for a long time, but the hon. Gentleman has suddenly become rather coy about it. We have made it clear that people should be conscious of the implications for local government if they vote for a regional assembly. That is why we are asking the independent boundary committee to consider the appropriate structure for a wholly unitary pattern of local government. We have no agenda for abolishing county councils.

Mr. Tony Clarke (Northampton, South): The hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) champions the case for the status quo but many hon. Members would like the rights of unitary, one-stop local governments to be afforded as soon as possible to electors in England, as it is in Scotland and Wales. What does my right hon. Friend say to the electors of Northampton, who were promised and denied unitary government in 1996? The then Secretary of State said that it was a mistake and that there would be a review. My right hon. Friend's answer today does not give us hope that the review is forthcoming.

Mr. Raynsford: We are aware that in some areas—Northampton is one—many people strongly believe that a unitary structure of local government would be of benefit to them. Having said that, the Government's view is that, over the next few years, the overriding priority should be to deliver on our local government agenda for raising the standard of service delivery, and that a widespread review of local government structures would not help to achieve that objective. That is why we are saying clearly that there should be such a review only in the regions in which people wish to establish an elected regional assembly. Without such a review, there would be an unnecessary third tier of government below the national level. That is why we are approaching the issue in an extremely sensible and pragmatic way with a view to ensuring that local government concentrates on the primary objective of raising the standard of services.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): It really is time the Minister came clean and admitted that county councils will no longer exist in their present form if and when regional government is introduced. As the condition set by the Government for regional government is that councils should be reorganised into unitary councils, will the Minister confirm that such a reorganisation could cost up to £2 billion if all eight regions opted for regional government? For that huge cost, we would get not one extra teacher, not one extra social worker, and no improvement whatever in local councils' basic services. So what is the point?

Mr. Raynsford: It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman should seek to dredge up figures in the usual Conservative way to imply that there will be huge costs involved in reorganisation. The only pointer that I can think of for his figures is the extraordinary waste of time and money during the Banham review, which his Government set up in the 1990s and which created exactly the climate of chaos and confusion in local government that we are determined not to replicate. It is pretty rich of the Conservatives, who have an extraordinary record—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. Gentleman will contain himself, I will answer his question. It is pretty rich of the Conservatives, who abolished county councils in Humberside, Avon, Cleveland and Berkshire, to accuse this Government of having an agenda for abolishing local government. We do not.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): I am a keen supporter of regional government, and I look forward to the prospect of unitary local government in shire counties. When the boundary commission considers this matter, however, I would urge it to consider unitary county councils, and a strengthened role for town and parish councils. What discussions has the Minister had with his colleagues at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, who have responsibility for parish councils—bizarrely, in my opinion—on the future of town and parish councils under a regional government structure?

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend rightly highlights the important role that the boundary committee will have in determining the appropriate and best structure for unitary local government in those regions that opt for elected regional assemblies. Clearly, this will best be determined by an independent body, which is why we have given the task to the boundary committee. It will need to consider whether a structure based predominantly on the county or on the district is the most appropriate in each circumstance. This will therefore be an entirely objective and fair appraisal with no presumption one way or the other. On the role of parish councils, I am sure that the concerns of parishes can be brought to the attention of the boundary committee wherever it is conducting such a review.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): As the Minister believes so strongly in regional government, will he give three reasons why any voter in rural Staffordshire or any other shire county should abandon county hall for government by 25 elected people in a vast region with which they cannot identify?

Mr. Raynsford: I will give the hon. Gentleman three very simple reasons. First, it could well help to achieve more effective regional co-ordination on matters that are best dealt with at a regional, rather than local, level. For example, transport planning cannot logically be undertaken at county level. It is best undertaken at a regional or national level. Secondly, it will help to ensure that there is proper regional accountability for services that are currently discharged in that region by quangos and other bodies which the Conservative party loved but which are unaccountable. Thirdly, it will help to ensure economic development, which should be the priority in every region. It is the Government's priority to help all the regions to prosper.

South West Trains

5. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): If he will make a statement on the progress of new franchise negotiations for South West Trains. [55531]

The Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Stephen Byers): The Strategic Rail Authority remains in negotiation with Stagecoach Group plc, which operates the current South West Trains franchise.

Dr. Cable: South West Trains is probably even less popular in my constituency than the Secretary of State. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that it needs certainty to plan long-term investment? How has he responded to the specific proposal made more than a year ago that the operating companies take over track maintenance? Unlike the subcontractors, who have every incentive to cut corners, the operating companies have a long-term incentive to maintain safe and reliable trains over a 20-year franchise period.

Mr. Byers: The South West Trains franchise is of particular importance because it is the biggest rail passenger franchise that operates in the United Kingdom. The negotiations are taking time because the franchise process must be used to drive up standards and improve the reliability of the service for the hon. Gentleman's constituents and other passengers who use the South West Trains franchise area.

On the specific point about the integration between the franchise operator—the franchise holder—and the maintenance and renewal of the track, Stagecoach Group plc has said that it is interested in taking on that responsibility. The Strategic Rail Authority is giving that proposal some consideration, but we need to work through the detail of exactly what is being proposed before any final decisions are taken. However, in the light of what happened at Potters Bar—although it is too soon to prejudge the conclusions of the Health and Safety Executive investigation—and in view of the Transport Committee's recommendations following the Cullen report, it is very clear that there needs to be a fundamental review of the role played by contractors and subcontractors in the maintenance and renewal of railway track.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the history of the franchise is a difficult one. I ask him to guarantee that whoever gets it will demonstrate an absolute commitment to producing very high-quality services for the passengers which has frankly not been the situation in the immediate past.

Mr. Byers: I agree with my hon. Friend that the South West Trains franchise is not being operated as well as anybody would like. Its performance levels are not acceptable. I want the Strategic Rail Authority to use the franchise renewal as an opportunity to secure real improvements for the travelling public. The SRA recognises that the franchising process is one of the key levers that it has to improve the standard of service offered to the travelling public. The existing franchise is due to be concluded; it comes to an end in February of next year and can be extended by a further seven months. The Strategic Rail Authority must use the time over the next few months to negotiate an agreement with South West Trains—with Stagecoach Group plc. If the SRA cannot negotiate a franchise renewal that puts the interests of the travelling public first, it will be prepared to seek a new franchise operator which will put the interests of the travelling public first, drive up standards and improve reliability.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): What the Secretary of State has just said is very interesting. Prior to his announcement, there was an assumption in the industry that the negotiations would be concluded by July of this year. Now it is clear that they will drag on, possibly for a further year. Already we have had 14 months of indecision. The Secretary of State suggests that this is a natural process, but anybody close to the negotiations will tell him that they are bogged down. The result is that there will be considerable delays in introducing passenger benefits, replacing the mark 1 slam-door trains and increasing capacity. The Government are having to underwrite the cost of new trains. These delays are damaging the confidence of the industry. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with the Strategic Rail Authority's statement that the franchise negotiations are like "treading in treacle"? As a man who has delivered more than a dollop of treacle to the railway industry, what is he going to do to get himself out of this mess?

Mr. Byers: The position is that the negotiations with Stagecoach Group plc are continuing. The point that I was making is that, if they are not concluded, there is time for the Strategic Rail Authority to negotiate with a new franchise holder if appropriate. The negotiations are not delaying improvements, which are being introduced. The programme for replacing slam-door trains is on schedule, and new class-458 trains are being introduced to increase capacity. The negotiations are taking time because we need to make use of this opportunity. In terms of passenger numbers and revenue from ticket sales, we are talking about the biggest franchise in the whole of the United Kingdom, and this is a golden opportunity to improve the standard of service for the travelling public.

The Conservative party would sign up to anything, and we have seen the consequences of that approach. This is an opportunity to bring about real improvements for passengers who travel on South West Trains. We want the Strategic Rail Authority to deliver real improvements to the travelling public, and it will.

Merchant Ships

6. **Mr. Ivan Henderson** (Harwich): How many British merchant ships have registered under the red ensign since the Government introduced the tonnage tax. [55532]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): Since the tonnage tax was introduced by the Finance Act 2000 in July of that year, a total of 173 merchant ships have joined the UK shipping register.

Mr. Henderson: My hon. Friend paints a much better picture than that pertaining during the years in which Conservatives waved Union Jacks at their party conference with one hand while lowering the red duster on hundreds of Merchant Navy ships with the other. Is he monitoring the companies that are benefiting from the tonnage tax to ensure that they deliver on training and jobs for the Merchant Navy fleet? If not, perhaps he could begin by monitoring P&O, Lord Sterling's company, to ensure that he not only reaps the benefits but delivers the goods.

Mr. Jamieson: My hon. Friend always takes an assiduous interest in maritime matters on his constituents' behalf. The tonnage tax places an obligation on companies that enter into it to train one new cadet for every 15 existing officers. So far, 58 companies account for 510 training places. I can assure my hon. Friend that we will monitor the situation carefully to ensure that the companies comply. He is right: in five years in government, we have re-established the United Kingdom flag, and the Union Jack flies on more vessels now than it did five years ago. The UK is now a force to be reckoned with in the maritime world, after years of neglect under a Conservative Government.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): Does the Minister agree that the significant improvement in the amount of tonnage sailing under the red ensign is not enough in itself? Does he share the view of NUMAST, the ships' officers union, that more job security is needed for British officers, and that greater emphasis must be placed on training UK cadets? Given that crews on some UK ferries are operating under contracts that prohibit them from joining unions such as NUMAST, will he ensure that proper social and employment conditions are enforced on ships that come under the red ensign as a result of the tonnage tax?

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman half-heartedly notes our success in getting ships on to the UK register. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency has done an excellent job in providing a service to the shipping companies and others, thereby ensuring high environmental safety standards for those ships, and the highest safety levels for those who man them. Our commitment extends beyond training, and we will monitor the situation carefully. We have also ploughed a considerable amount of money into the smart training scheme to ensure that there is a proper training base in this country. The Government have done more in five years to enhance training than probably any other Government in the past 50 years. I am glad to see the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) nodding in assent.

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): Does my hon. Friend remember [illegible] warm welcome that Jeffrey Sterling gave to the introduction of our tonnage tax when he told us at a Labour party conference that this Government had done more for the merchant fleet in our first 18 months than the Tories had done in the past 18 years? However, can my hon. Friend assure me that the production targets, the targets to increase cadets by 25 per cent. year on year, and the targets mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Harwich (Mr. Henderson), will be met? What sanctions can the Government take against those companies that fail to deliver?

Mr. Jamieson: The answer is simple: if companies do not comply with the conditions of the tonnage tax, they will be taken out of that tax regime. I echo my hon. Friend's comments and commend him on the work that he has done on maritime matters. He has always spoken vigorously in favour of the maritime industry and its interests. The work that we are doing and what we have achieved in the past five years have considerably enhanced the UK flag and our standing in the maritime world. I assure my hon. Friend that the issues he raises are at the forefront of our minds.

Canal Network

7. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): If he will make a statement on his Department's policy on expanding the canal network. [55533]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. David Jamieson): Questions on this matter would usually be answered by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, but I should like to take this opportunity to say that the Highways Agency has carried out work on that and has reached a satisfactory outcome in some cases where there is an intersection of canals and highways in the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

Michael Fabricant: May I take this opportunity to thank the Minister on behalf of the Lichfield and Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust Ltd? I also thank the 2,500 people who walked the route of the canal with me. The Minister will be aware of the difficulties that have arisen because the canal will be bisected twice by the Birmingham northern relief road. What guidance will his Department issue to ensure that future canal routes are not bisected by roads? May I also thank the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions for his intervention with respect to the guidance on roads and bridges, and for the help that he has given for all modes of transport that travel at under five kilometres an hour?

Mr. Jamieson: Well, what can I say? I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments and note his kind remarks about the Secretary of State. I am not sure whether he has cleared them with his Front Bench, although it seems clear from the reaction of the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) that he has not.

I am aware that there has been a particular success in the case of the Lichfield and Hatherton canals and the bisection of the Birmingham northern relief road. That came about as a result of undertakings given in the 1998 Transport White Paper in which the Government ensured that environmental needs are a key consideration for the Highways Agency when it makes improvements. In the particular case mentioned by the hon. Gentleman, a bridge and foundations for an aqueduct have been put in place to allow the Lichfield and Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust to restore the canal. That is a shining example of joined-up government. I look forward to the hon. Gentleman sailing down the canal, perhaps in a barge, to raise funds for the party in government that allowed that to happen.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): May I thank my hon. Friend for his support in developing the canal network? Will he ensure that when restoration takes place, planning will be such that no development will take place over disused canals and that restoration can proceed without difficulties? Will he also ensure that there is full consultation on restoration and development with those voluntary organisations that have a great interest in the canal network?

Mr. Jamieson: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. I am sure that the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will very much take note of his comments. Where canals intersect roads, and where that affects the work of my Department, we have put in place guidance, in the Department's design manual for roads and bridges, that ensures that those canals are not locked out for ever and that they can be redeveloped in the future. That probably has widespread support on both sides of the House.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): As vice-president of the Worcester-Birmingham Canal Society and the Droitwich Canals Trust, may I say to the Minister how delighted we are with the progress being made by British Waterways on the reopening of the canal network? May I draw his attention in particular to the proposed reopening of the Droitwich junction and barge canals, which, again, are receiving marvellous support from British Waterways? Will he pledge the support of his Department to the reopening of the spectacular three-day cruising ring between Worcester and Droitwich, particularly with regard to closing trunk roads to enable engineering work to be conducted? Will he help in that specific regard, please?

Mr. Jamieson: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I look forward to joining him on one of those canals—perhaps I am on the boat—and I shall make sure that those matters that affect my Department will be attended to assiduously.

Road Traffic Speeds

8. **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): What action his Department is taking to reduce road traffic speeds. [55534]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): The measures being taken by the Government to reduce excessive and inappropriate speeds are contained in the road safety strategy, "Tomorrow's Roads Safer For Everyone", which was published in March 2000.

Helen Jackson: Does the Minister agree that proper enforcement of speed limits is not anti-motorist, as some people think, but pro-safety? Does he understand that, where digital cameras have been introduced and proper enforcement used, there has been a dramatic reduction in deaths and serious injuries? Will he therefore accelerate the programme—not of speed but of digital cameras—to include not only the A616 Stocksbridge bypass, which he knows is a particularly dangerous road, but other particularly dangerous roads in urban and rural areas?

Mr. Spellar: I thank my hon. Friend for that question and for the delegation that she brought to make representations to me about the Stocksbridge bypass. She rightly identifies the success with cameras. In terms of the pilot projects, on average, at camera sites, the number of people killed or seriously injured fell by 47 per cent. compared with the average over the previous three years. Twenty-six police force areas have now been accepted for the scheme, and, it is hoped, all who want to join will do so in the next 18 months. It is appropriate to stress that one of the key elements of the scheme is that, in order to ensure that reduced speed leads to reduced accidents, cameras are clearly visible, clearly painted and clearly signed. That has been widely recognised and appreciated by motorists across the country who understand the need for cameras but want to ensure that they are not out to catch motorists but to save lives.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): Does the Minister agree that one of the important factors with regard to speed limits is appropriate signage? Will he therefore undertake to introduce legislation that will enable repeater signs to be put up to make sure that motorists know what the speed limits are?

Mr. Spellar: As the hon. Gentleman knows, that is a slightly difficult issue in terms of whether having repeater signs in some areas and not in others leads to confusion for motorists. I am particularly concerned about roads where the speed limit has changed—for example, where a road that used to be subject to a 40 mph limit is now subject to a 30 mph limit, as happened, for example, on the Chester road in Birmingham. I am particularly anxious that that should be clearly signed, and, where there are cameras, that the prevailing speed limit should be clearly indicated. There are balanced arguments on the other issue that the hon. Gentleman raises, which we are examining at the moment.

Transport Multi-modal Studies (Midlands)

9. **Mr. Mark Todd** (South Derbyshire): If he will make a statement on the progress of the multi-modal studies on the M1 and east midlands/west midlands movements. [55535]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): On the west midlands to east midlands multi-modal study, there has been recent public consultation across the corridor on the emerging strategy, and the consultants will be working towards option identification over the coming months. The final report for the study is due in April 2003.

The final report for the Ml multi-modal study has just been published by the consultants, W. S. Atkins, and copies will be placed in the Library of the House. The East Midlands Regional Local Government Association will be carrying out consultation on the report before presenting advice to Ministers later in the year. The Government will give very careful consideration to the report and the views of the region before reaching their conclusions.

Mr. Todd: May I commend the methodology employed in the studies, which has been innovative, and specifically some of the schemes that affect my area? The National Forest line featured in discussion of the M1 study and will feature in the west midlands to east midlands study, and it certainly deserves further support. The opening of the Donington loop from Willington to Nottingham will significantly improve east-west links. However, there have been shortcomings in the process of resolving the issues regarding the parkway station south of Derby, which would improve the access of Midland Mainline customers to London. There have been obstructions that the Strategic Rail Authority could assist in overcoming.

Mr. Spellar: I thank my hon. Friend for his observations and suggestions, which he has made not only today but on previous occasions. He is rightly representing the views of his constituents. It would be a little imprudent for me to be seen to endorse any particular suggestions before the examination by the East Midlands Regional Local Government Association. However, I will take serious note of them.

Point of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you had a request from the Foreign Office or the Ministry of Defence to make a statement on what Klaus-Peter Klaiber, the European Union's envoy in Afghanistan, has said about prison camps? He told Agence France-Presse that

"people have nothing on their bones any more".

There have been horrific pictures and, if the west is really responsible for the prison camps, it is a matter of shame and it is something about which the House of Commons should be told.

Mr. Speaker: I have had no approach from any Minister.

Area Child Protection Committees

3.32 pm

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish local authority responsibility for area child protection committees; to specify the functions of such committees; to require agencies charged with responsibilities for child protection to provide senior representation on such committees; to make provision about the funding of such committees; and for connected purposes.

The Bill seeks to establish a framework for child protection that will be based on best practice and be uniform throughout the country. I acknowledge support and assistance in the Bill's drafting from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the Association of Directors of Social Services and the Local Government Association.

The recent tragic case of Victoria Climbié has demonstrated that there is an urgent need to strengthen the current child protection system in this country. The huge cross-party support for the early-day motion on an end to child cruelty that stands in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley) is a reflection of the House's determination to move child protection into a new era. The Bill seeks to do just that.

The Children Act 1989 and the Department of Health guidance that accompanied it set out the basis for a system whereby all the main agencies involved in child protection, ranging from local authority social services to the local NSPCC, should work together to protect children in a defined local area. The mechanism to carry out such a multi-agency approach is the area child protection committee, or ACPC. In theory, it should ensure that the different agencies co-operate effectively. The committee should use the combined knowledge and expertise of professionals to set appropriate procedures and protocols to identify and protect every child at risk from abuse.

In some instances, where authorities such as my own in Sandwell have the commitment and a culture of partnership working, the committees have worked well. However, research carried out by Christine Hallet, professor of social policy at Stirling university, and the NSPCC has shown that the situation is not uniform throughout the country. There is a huge gulf between theory and practice in different areas.

That was clearly demonstrated in the evidence from phase one of the Climbié inquiry. If there had been a strong, effective ACPC for the London boroughs, it is more likely that representatives from the agencies involved with Victoria Climbié would have collectively identified the abuse, assessed her correctly and prevented her death. As it was, the system failed her. That has led to overwhelming demands to strengthen ACPCs in a range of submissions to phase two of the inquiry. The time has come to end the lottery of postcode protection for children.

The key problem lies with the absence in the Children Act of a defined legal obligation for local authorities to set up a committee. It is mentioned in the section and guidance that accompanies the Act, but crucially there is no statutory obligation on the local authority or other agencies involved to fulfil their functions in relation to the committee. The wording of sections 27 and 47 of the Act compounds that problem. Neither the police nor GPs are named as a necessary part of the ACPC. There is also a "get out" clause for other agencies. They are required to participate only

> "if it is compatible with their own statutory or other duties and obligations and does not unduly prejudice the discharge of any of their other functions".

From that gap in legislation a number of problems have arisen. The two most important are, first, that it reinforces the view that child protection is mainly a social services responsibility and that the other agencies involved are marginal, both to the development of child protection policy and in their consideration of individual cases. That may be reinforced by the professional isolationism in some social services departments where partnership working has not been fostered.

Secondly, the gap in legislation permits those agencies with a wide range of professional responsibilities to downgrade their role in child protection. It becomes an add-on responsibility, not central to the work of the agency and therefore not justifying the same level of resources, time or professional commitment as others. To work, ACPCs effectively rely on the good will of professionals. Without a strong level of commitment from other agencies it is all too easy to leave things to the perceived expertise of the social services professionals without inputting the specialist skills or information that other agencies can bring to the deliberations.

My Bill seeks to change that. It would place an obligation on every local authority to establish an ACPC. It would also place a statutory responsibility on the local authority chief executive to appoint an independent chair of the committee and to agree that appointment with the social services inspectorate.

The reason for that is to ensure that, although the chair would be of a level of competence commensurate with his or her responsibilities, no one agency would dominate the committee and, in the event of a failure of any of the agencies involved to live up to its professional responsibilities, the independence of the chair would ensure that subsequent inquiries were conducted in a suitably impartial manner.

The Bill defines the agencies to be involved, and it would place upon them an obligation to be represented by a person of appropriate professional competence and status. It would provide flexible arrangements so that the committees' boundaries could cover more than one local authority where the boundaries of the other agencies involved made that a more suitable basis for organisation. It would commit the committees to providing staff with training and policy development opportunities.

In short, the Bill would place a statutory obligation on local authorities to set up committees that would be independent, representative, inclusive and proactive in the protection of children. Those committees would actively develop local child protection strategies in an environment where all professionals could work effectively. It recognises the concerns outlined by the many who gave evidence in the Climbié inquiry, and it would give ACPCs the strong role needed to make child protection work at a local level.

As politicians, we should use the legacy of the Victoria Climbié case as a spur to put in place legislation that will do everything possible to prevent a recurrence of such a tragedy. We must accept responsibility for child abuse across all sectors of our society and work together to end it.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Adrian Bailey, Mr. Hilton Dawson, Ms Debra Shipley, Mr. Tom Watson, David Wright, Mr. Paul Burstow, Mrs. Gillian Shephard, Mr. David Hinchliffe, Rev. Martin Smyth and Mr. Andrew Lansley.

AREA CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEES

Mr. Adrian Bailey accordingly presented a Bill to establish local authority responsibility for area child protection committees; to specify the functions of such committees; to require agencies charged with responsibilities for child protection to provide senior representation on such committees; to make provision about the funding of such committees; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 21 June, and to be printed [Bill 142].

Opposition Day

[14TH ALLOTTED DAY]

School Discipline

Mr. Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

3.43 pm

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I beg to move,

> That this House condemns the Government's failure to meet its 1998 Public Service Agreement to cut truancy levels by one third; regrets that unauthorised absences from secondary schools have risen under this Government; further regrets that an estimated 50,000 children are absent from school on a typical day and that another 10,000 children of school age do not attend school at all; is concerned by the decline in standards of discipline in schools and notes evidence from the Association of Teachers and Lecturers which shows that assaults against teachers have risen fivefold in three years; deplores the Government's conduct in first removing from head teachers and governors the power to exclude disruptive pupils from their schools, and then failing to collect evidence on the number of assaults by pupils on both other pupils and teachers; believes that the Government's current approach to these problems is flawed; is concerned that the problems of rising unauthorised absence and declining discipline particularly damage the education of children from deprived and inner city areas; and calls on the Government to provide a serious response to the problem of vocational education, while giving more power to head teachers as a first step to reversing the decline in standards of discipline.

As we pass the fifth anniversary of this Government's arrival in power, the threadbare nature of their claim to have made improvements in education is increasingly apparent. Today, the Opposition will pay particular attention to their failures on truancy and discipline because they lie at the heart of so many other failures. Without effective discipline, there can be no effective teaching. Without regular and willing attendance, there can be no effective learning. If the Government cannot solve this crisis, they will be doomed to fail to solve the other crises in our school system, such as demoralised teachers, the widening gap in standards between the best and worst schools and, in particular, the Government's complete failure to give effective support to schools in our inner cities.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): My hon. Friend mentioned regular and willing attendance. If we are to combat truancy by the example of what we do in the House, is it not a shame that, in a debate of this importance, there are so many Liberal Democrat truants? Only three of them have bothered to turn up.

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend makes a valid and important point. The Liberal Democrats have in their time claimed to be a party that cares about education: they were to spend and re-spend the proceeds of the famous, magic 1p on income tax on education. However, they clearly do not care enough about the subject to turn up in the House of Commons to debate the real problems in education today.

It is clear that the Liberal Democrats are not in a position to take anything away from today's debate, but I hope that the Government will take away one message: the underlying, basic problems of truancy and discipline will not be solved by the usual gimmicks that the Department for Education and Skills loves so much. Grabbing the headlines for a morning may delude Ministers into thinking that they have done something effective, but it does not delude teachers, parents and pupils.

Let us take this morning's headline-grabber by the Government, which is on drugs in schools. I do not suppose that there is anyone in the House who does not want tough measures to eliminate drugs from schools and to warn children about the dangers of drugs, but the Government are sending very mixed messages about their attitude to drugs in our society. This morning, the Department for Education and Skills announced a crackdown and that it would be tougher on drugs, yet for months the Home Office has been espousing a softer line on drugs. That is a mixed message; nobody can know what the Government really want.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): My hon. Friend is right. When the Government announced their proposal to reclassify cannabis, the first people to write to me were the head teachers in my constituency. I wrote to each and every secondary school head, and they all replied saying how concerned they were about the proposal and that it would add to their problems of truancy, particularly after midday. There is no remorse from the Government or any attempt to support head teachers on the issue.

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend is right, as ever.

Quite apart from the mixed message on drugs, the Government are sending a mixed message about exclusions. Today, the Secretary of State and her colleagues have been talking tough. They are to insist that head teachers exclude pupils who are caught drug dealing. There will be no appeal; such pupils will be straight out on their first offence. That is a very tough message, but I seem to remember that four years ago the Government sent out exactly the opposite message. They were instructing head teachers to exclude fewer pupils.

The confusion does not only date back four years. If the Secretary of State had made an honest U-turn, we would have applauded it, because today's policy is better than yesterday's policy. Unfortunately for the Government, I have taken the trouble to read the amendment that they have tabled to our motion—*[Interruption.]* Before the Minister for Lifelong Learning becomes too excited, I shall quote it. It is fascinating. I assume that it was written yesterday, presumably at the same time as the Department was writing its press releases on how exclusions need to be increased.

The amendment boasts:

> "exclusions have fallen by approximately 28 per cent."

since 1996-97. At the press conference this morning, the Government said that a rise in exclusions is a good thing; yesterday, as their amendment shows, they said that a fall in exclusions is a good thing. There is a central confusion. The Government cannot know what they are talking about. It is clear that head teachers across Britain do not know which message the Government are trying to send. The reason is that the Government do not know. All they know is that they must say something tough about drugs.

The Department for Education and Skills is always one of the most willing Departments to say, "You want an announcement, we'll make it. Never mind the policy, coherence or implementation, we'll write the press release for you." Not even the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions would have the gall to say that that central confusion over the attitude to exclusion shows consistency of purpose. I pay tribute to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills by saying that she is a considerably more honest and straightforward politician than her right hon. Friend.

Everyone in the House and outside it and everyone connected with education hopes that the Government's new policy on drugs in schools will work, but we are right to be suspicious that a Government who rely on spin and announcements rather than substance will not drive through an effective anti-drugs policy.

Let me turn to truancy. Again, there is no difference between the two sides of the House. We all agree that truancy deprives children of their best chance in life and that the Government have a duty—which they share, most notably with parents but also with schools—to ensure that children attend school. Let us look at the facts of what has happened since the Government came to power. In the 1998 comprehensive spending review, the Government promised to cut school truancy drastically. They said that they would reduce the percentage of half-days missed a year through unauthorised absence from 0.7 per cent. to 0.5 per cent. That was a clear and unambiguous promise, but the result is complete failure. There has been no reduction in the percentage of half-days missed through unauthorised absence, which remains 0.7 per cent. In secondary schools, where the problem is most serious, it has risen since 1997 from 1 per cent. to 1.1 per cent.

I have taken those figures from the Department's own survey of pupil absence and truancy, but Ofsted too revealed growing problems. Unsatisfactory attendance is up from 22 to 30 per cent. in primary schools, and from 29 to 37 per cent. in inspected secondary schools. Those are not abstract figures on the number of children missing school. Truancy Call, a charity that tries to deal with the problem of truancy, estimates that, on a typical school day, 50,000 children are truanting, their life chances disappearing. Most schools, it says, do not have the time or resources to undertake first-day contact with those children. *[Interruption.]* The Minister for Lifelong Learning says that she does not believe it. I do not know who else she is going to try to call a liar. Stephen Clarke, the director of Truancy Call, is extremely respected in the field.

Perhaps the hon. Lady will believe the previous head of Ofsted, who was appointed by the Government. Mike Tomlinson said:

> "Statistics suggest that there are 10,000 children who should be in school but are not."

Does the hon. Lady want to disagree with Mike Tomlinson as well? He found that statistic worrying and continued:

> "I wonder about what they are up to when they are not in school."

He is right to worry, as we know what too many of those children are doing when they are not in school; they are climbing on the conveyor belt of crime, which will damage their lives and communities, particularly in the inner cities.

I shall cite someone whom even the hon. Lady will believe—the Secretary of State, who said that official figures showed that 40 per cent. of street crime, 25 per cent. of burglaries, 20 per cent. of criminal damage and a third of car thefts are carried out by 10 to 16-year-olds at times when they should be in school. By any standard, that is a catalogue of failure by the Government, who have not met promises that they made in their early, happier days in office.

The Government have noticed that they have got a problem and have recently introduced a series of measures to reduce truancy. They announced that they want to put policemen in schools; they have half-announced that they are thinking of taking away child benefit from parents of persistent truants; and they announced £66 million to tackle truancy in the recent Budget.

Having policemen in schools is a sensible idea, and I welcome the Government's initiative. If head teachers want that, it is perfectly reasonable. I would be fascinated to know what the Secretary of State has to say about taking child benefit away from the parents of persistent truants, as the initiative appeared to emanate from the Prime Minister and No. 10, and volunteers in the Cabinet were called on to support it. It was notable that every other Cabinet Minister took a smart step backwards, leaving the right hon. Lady out at the front to defend the policy. I therefore hope that she will tell us later whether she still thinks that it is a good idea and, if so, when the Government propose to introduce it. I am afraid that if she cannot give us a date by which the Government are willing to do so, we will conclude once again that the announcement was made just to grab the headlines.

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that opposition is not just about opposing, but about providing constructive alternatives. Can he give the House his view on withdrawing child benefit from parents?

Mr. Green: Our solution to truancy covers a number of aspects, which I shall come to shortly. If the hon. Gentleman will be patient, I shall make some positive proposals, as I have done already by supporting the Government's initiative on policemen in schools.

I am fascinated to discover whether the Government in power are capable of taking the decision on child benefit, or whether they are simply floating tough-sounding ideas.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) *rose—*

Mr. Green: I want to carry on with the series of measures announced by the Government recently to reduce truancy, then of course I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman, particularly after his sterling performance in his Select Committee, which produced a report on individual learning accounts that exposed yet another cataclysmic failure of Government policy.

The third issue is the £66 million to tackle truancy in schools across Britain. What the Government have not told us is that the means by which they are funding that—the increase in national insurance contributions—will take £150 million out of school budgets, year after year. The Budget therefore did not put money into schools but took it away.

Mr. Sheerman: The hon. Gentleman might like one of my Committee's reports, but he might not like the fact that the very weekend that that was being discussed, our report on our interview with Mike Tomlinson, the former

[Mr. Sheerman]

head of Ofsted, pushed the chief inspector to discuss a range of methods that could be used to bring the truancy figures down. There was an interesting debate over those few days. I wish the hon. Gentleman had joined it in a positive way.

Mr. Green: One of the purposes of this debate is to use the Chamber of the House of Commons, which is a debating chamber, to carry on the debate constructively. I hope and expect that the hon. Gentleman will make his own authoritative contribution later.

The Government are coming up with tough-sounding gimmicks. They know as well as everyone now—notably Mrs. Patricia Amos, who has been sent to jail—that an extremely tough range of measures is already available in the criminal law to stop truanting. This is part of the answer to the hon. Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell). Some of those measures were put in place by the present Government, and some by the previous Conservative Government, so there is no partisan politics involved.

It is clear that when Governments and courts have powers that can end up with a parent being jailed for allowing children to truant persistently, even tougher new measures are not necessarily needed. The Government already have all the tough measures that they could want to deter parents from allowing their children to truant. The Government are trying to pretend that those tough measures are not available, but their cover has been blown by the jailing of Mrs. Amos. That shows how tough the measures already on the statute book are. I hope that they work, and that every parent with a child who persistently truants looks at Mrs. Amos being sent to jail and thinks, "I don't want to go that way. I'm going to do something about my child now."

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): It is interesting that the day that Mrs. Amos went to jail, her children went to school. That is to be welcomed, but it was preceded by two years of activity by those in the education service, the school and others, in an attempt to get those girls into school. It took two years and ended in court. Surely we should be looking for measures that could nip the problem in the bud much earlier.

Mr. Green: If the measures were shown to be practical, of course that should happen. The jailing of one parent will send a shock wave round the country. Let us hope that, for once, the deterrent effect of a court sentence works.

The underlying problem is that the children who are let down most badly by the Government's failure on truancy are those who are most vulnerable and least able to defend themselves. Many of those children, as we know, live in our inner cities and therefore attend inner-city schools. The figures are terrifying. Between 2000 and 2001, in several inner-city areas, truancy rose by as much as 16 times the national average. At the same time, GCSE standards—a strongly related issue—are far below the national average in such areas. Growth in truancy has persisted throughout England, where it has increased by an average of 1.7 per cent. in recent times, and the average proportion of pupils achieving the good GCSE score of five grades of A* to C is 50 per cent. It is terrifying to compare with those averages the figures for some of our inner-city areas. In Hackney, truancy is up 27 per cent. and the average GCSE score—the proportion achieving five or more A* to C grades—is 33.5 per cent. In Liverpool, truancy is up 26.2 per cent. and the average GCSE score is 35.1 per cent. In Sheffield, which was run until so recently by the Liberal Democrats, truancy is up 24 per cent. and the average GCSE score is 41.9 per cent. In Leicester, truancy is up 21.7 per cent. and the average GCSE score is 36.9 per cent.

Those figures tell a stark story. The Government are failing our inner-city children; their rhetoric is not matched by action. They are tough on truants and on the parents of truants, but they are soft on the causes of truancy. Let us consider what they could be doing. The basic challenge on which they have failed is that of making every day at school relevant to every pupil. If pupils think that nothing that they do at school will be relevant, useful or interesting, they will start bunking off. Clearly, the long-term policy must be to reduce the number of regular truants to the hard core. There will always be a hard core, but we need to reduce truancy so that only that hard core remains. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that Government Front Benchers agree; perhaps they will adopt the policy that I am about to put to them.

The first and most widespread thing that the Government should do is make a radical improvement in the provision of vocational education in our education system. *[Interruption.]* If the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis), really believes that the Green Paper on 14 to 19-year-olds will lead to a radical change in anything, I suggest that he reads it. The first and most important radical change that should be made is that of rewriting the Green Paper in English, instead of the current jargon. The Green Paper is not remotely adequate to cope with the crisis in vocational education.

The Government do not need Green Papers; they need to do what we do and learn from some other countries. *[Interruption.]* Clearly, they are so perfect that they have nothing to learn. Let me tell them about the experience in Holland and Germany. In Holland, for example, I visited classes in which 13-year-olds were rewiring rooms and plastering real brick walls. They were non-academic children in a non-academic stream—the sort of children who are failed by the school system far too often in this country and go out truanting. They were doing something at school that they could see was relevant, which they enjoyed and which they were good at. That was what got them into school, made them do the other lessons and allowed them to leave school having worked on a balanced curriculum and learned something useful, instead of taking the path of truancy and then crime to which far too many of our young people are condemned by the inaction and complacency of the Government.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): Will the hon. Gentleman therefore take this opportunity to apologise for the introduction in 1988 of a grammarian national curriculum that drove vocational education out of every single school in the country? Does he now accept that that was a total failure and will he apologise to the thousands of youngsters who fell through the system because of those policies?

Mr. Green: No. I congratulate the previous Conservative Government on introducing the vocational initiative in education in 1983. The policy was a serious attempt to get to grips with the issue that was opposed by the Labour party. I cannot remember what the Lib Dems did. They probably opposed it, as they oppose most good ideas. The hon. Gentleman has tried to go back into history—indeed, many of us think that he might live in history—but he did not go back far enough.

The problem is not new and is not even one of the past 20 years; it a problem of the past 140 years. Let me break the habit of a lifetime and quote Lord Callaghan, who rejected 25 years ago the idea that we should fit

> "a so-called inferior group of children with just enough learning to earn their living in the factory".

He was right that children who need a vocational education need more than that. That is pure common sense, and I am surprised that Government Front Benchers are so exercised by it. If those children are looking to the world of work, that is what we should prepare them for, by providing both the basic academic tools and proper vocational training when they are still willing to learn. Too often, the tragedy is that we wait too long, and by the time we seek to engage children who would benefit from a vocational education in proper vocational training, it is too late—they have got out of the habit of learning and into the habit of truanting. In five years, the Government have done nothing to help that dangerous lost generation.

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): The hon. Gentleman's argument seems to be that most of the children who truant are those who would not benefit from the normal curriculum—in his words, they are not suited to an academic curriculum. What evidence does he have for that? Under his Government, schools that did badly at GCSEs were overwhelmingly concentrated in the inner cities. This Government have tried to tackle that through the excellence in cities programme, which provides benefits for all children, whatever their talents. What is his solution for those who are truanting and who are bright?

Mr. Green: I am afraid that the hon. Lady may not have been concentrating as hard as usual. I just cited facts from the Government's own statistics showing that despite all their initiatives truancy has gone up, and by more in the inner cities than anywhere else. Whatever the situation that they inherited, what they have done has been relatively worse in its effects on inner cities. They have let down all children, but they have particularly let down those in the inner cities. I hope that she will reflect on that in her calmer moments. If she wants to talk about initiatives, I remember that education action zones were one of the great initiatives launched by the Secretary of State's predecessor and junked by the right hon. Lady as soon as she had the chance.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the biggest victims of loss of education are not truants, but those who are permanently excluded and get perhaps one day's education a year? Those people make up 70 per cent. of the prison population. Does he accept that in 1997 the number of people excluded was 30 per cent. higher, and does he endorse the Government's strategy of providing a permanent place for all children in education from this September?

Mr. Green: I think that that intervention may have been written by the Whips yesterday. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman has not noticed that the centrepiece of the Government's anti-drugs in schools strategy, which was announced today, is to increase the number of permanent exclusions. Of course, he is right that a significant percentage of the prison population is made up of those who are permanently excluded from school. That is not surprising. He and his Government Front Bench need to get together on the issue that I mentioned at the beginning—the coherence of their message. He may be right about the problems of permanent exclusion, and the Government may have been right in the policy that they announced in 1998, but that is not their policy today. I suggest that he takes that up with the Secretary of State.

Let me move on to the wider problem of discipline. The hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies) wants permanent exclusions to keep coming down. The Government used to set targets on that. One reason why disciplinary problems in schools have increased under this Government is precisely that the authority has been taken away from head teachers to exclude those whom they want to exclude. Teachers, not only heads, are unhappy with the situation. The Government always get cross when I quote the National Union of Teachers at them, so let me quote the Association of Teachers and Lecturers instead. It says that in the past year it received 120 complaints from teachers about physical abuse at school and that assaults on teachers rose fivefold between 1998 and 2001. That is terrible.

If the ATL is another trade union to which the Government do not want to listen, perhaps they will listen to Ofsted. It points out that the poor behaviour of a minority of pupils is cited as the major reason for teachers leaving the profession. If that is true, it is a great shame that the Government have spent much of their first five years in office encouraging the undermining of head teachers' authority and therefore encouraging the increase in violence in schools.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): Let me reinforce that point by bringing to hon. Members' attention the deep frustration of at least four secondary head teachers in my constituency. They told me that they feel that their hands are tied by a Government who are constantly trying to tell them how to do their job, especially its discipline aspects.

Mr. Green: My hon. Friend is right, but I resist the temptation to consider the Government's wider interference in the day-to-day work of schools. They have done enough damage through their interference in disciplinary systems.

It is extraordinary that, although the Government have so much information at their disposal, they do not bother to collect facts about the scale of violence in schools. My colleagues and I have asked the Government for some weeks for the number of teachers who are assaulted each year, the number who are assaulted by pupils and the number of assaults on pupils by pupils. The Government do not know the answer.

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): Oh no.

Mr. Green: The Secretary of State says, "Oh no". I refer her to written answers from her colleagues that

[Mr. Green]

state that they do not collect that information. Why do not the Government collect it? They know that matters are getting worse and are trying to disguise the fact rather than dealing with it.

We propose giving power over exclusions back where it belongs—with heads and governors. If they have the power to discipline children, discipline in schools will improve. That would send clear signals to unruly pupils and irresponsible and potentially violent parents that they cannot get away with their behaviour any longer. The Government have spent too long undermining heads and teachers; it is about time that they got behind them.

The Government's never-ending stream of initiatives has failed to tackle the two fundamental crises in our schools. Until they use something more substantial than summits, press conferences and initiatives, our most vulnerable children will never receive the education that they deserve. That stands as an indictment against the Government for five wasted years. They are betraying the hopes of a generation of children. They will not be forgiven and they do not deserve to be forgiven.

4.12 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

'applauds the fact that policies to reduce truancy and tackle poor behaviour are central to the Government's strategy to transform secondary schools; notes that, since 1997, the Government has spent over £600 million to support measures to tackle truancy and poor behaviour and that this has been supplemented by a further £66 million from this year's Budget, that behaviour is satisfactory or better in 11 out of 12 secondary schools and 49 out of 50 primary schools, that there are now over 1,050 Learning Support Units and 3,420 Learning Mentors in schools and that there are 331 Pupil Referral Units whose quality Ofsted reports to be steadily improving; welcomes the fact that the Government is promoting multi-agency initiatives such as Behaviour and Education Support Teams and Connexions that are crucial to addressing this issue, that exclusions have fallen by approximately 28 per cent. to 9,200 from their peak of 12,700 in 1996–97; supports the right of Head Teachers to govern their schools as they see fit; further notes that all permanently excluded pupils will receive a full-time education from September this year and that whilst overall truancy levels remain a cause for concern, action is being taken; further notes that children have a right to education and that parents have a duty to ensure that their children are educated; and believes that the Government's policies will deliver lasting improvements in pupil attendance and behaviour which will support the achievement of higher standards and prevent social exclusion.'.

I spotted two ideas from Tory Members. The first was our idea of taking away the child benefit from families who do not send their children to school. The second dealt with vocational studies and I shall deal with that later.

Mr. Willis: That is a Liberal Democrat idea.

Estelle Morris: It may be. In that case, it may be unanimously supported.

The speech of the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) was rather sad. The subject of the debate is genuinely important and we all need to tackle it. That applies not only to politicians but to every member of the education service and of society. As I shall show, we have done a great deal to deal with the problem in the past five years. However, the hon. Gentleman was bereft of ideas. Indeed, his analysis was so poor that it is not surprising that he has not reached the stage of devising ideas.

I listened to the radio this morning and it became clear that the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) is so bereft of ideas that the hon. Member for Ashford hardly referred to them. Apparently the hon. Gentleman will talk about the way in which the Tories want to concentrate on education provision for the disadvantaged. What a cheek. After 18 years in power, it is a cheek for the Tories to come to the House and even murmur a word about the most disadvantaged, those in the inner cities, the poor and the deprived. I shall outline the exact position of that group of young people in 1997, when we took over.

Nearly half the 11-year-olds did not achieve the expected standard in English and maths. That half did not consist of the sons and daughters of Members of Parliament; 20 per cent. of pupils who did not obtain GCSEs came from only 203 schools.

When we looked at literacy and numeracy, children in the most deprived areas—on deprived estates, for example—were going into secondary school not being able to read or write. At age seven, 90 per cent. of pupils from better-off families were reaching the expected standard; it was 63 per cent. from the families of the worse off. That is the record of the Conservative party, which now lectures us on the needs of children and their families in the most deprived areas and the most challenging circumstances.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight) *rose—*

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton) *rose—*

Estelle Morris: I will give way eventually. I want to make progress on this first point.

In 1997, the link between social class and educational attainment was more stark in this country than in any of our competitor nations. That is what we have taken on, and we have a tough task. If the Conservatives are interested, as the hon. Member for Ashford claims, in concentrating on education provided for the disadvantaged, he should have stood up today and applauded the fact that, after six years of a Labour Government working with the education service, the percentage of pupils from working-class families reaching the expected standard in English has risen from 34 to 58 per cent. Which is the most improved borough in England, in terms of literacy and numeracy? It is Tower Hamlets. The next most improved boroughs are Darlington—*[Interruption.]* They were starting from a low base, but they had remained at that level year after year, and decade after decade.

The factor that has blighted our nation's education system is that Government after Government—of both political complexions—have failed to break the historic link between social class and educational attainment. We are beginning to change that.

Mr. Andrew Turner *rose—*

Estelle Morris: I will give way in half a second.

I will not take from any Tory Member, in the House or outside, any lecturing on their care for the education of disadvantaged children, when we can see their record and we can see the record of our progress.

Mr. Prisk: As a former chairman of an inner-London education establishment, I had to fight tooth and nail against a Labour local education authority that was trying to shut a school down. The Secretary of State's colleague, the Minister for School Standards, will know precisely the school to which I am referring, because he was leader of the council at the time. It is unacceptable for the Secretary of State to lecture hon. Members, saying that support for vulnerable children can come from only one side of the Chamber. All hon. Members on both sides of the House care about children, and to be lectured by the Secretary of State in this patronising manner is unacceptable.

Estelle Morris: Care does not get people a job; care does not get them into university; and care does not give them the skills that they need to earn a living. We get care from the Tories and action from Labour; that is the difference between the two sides in this Chamber. I do not deny that the Conservatives care. Care is not the preserve of any one political party.

Mr. Prisk *rose—*

Estelle Morris: If the hon. Gentleman had listened carefully, he would remember that I have just said that Governments of both parties have failed to break the historic link between social class and educational attainment. That describes past Labour Governments as much as past Tory Governments, but every time that Labour has been in power, we have taken the action and made the investment to close that gap. The reality is, however, that in 1997, the link between social class and educational attainment was strong. A poor kid of 11 had less chance of being able to read and write. A poor kid of 16 had less chance of getting five grade A to C GCSEs. A poor kid of 18 had a one in 15 chance of going to university, while a middle-class kid had a 70 per cent. chance of doing so at that age.

Okay, the Conservatives care, but this is about anger. This is about being furious that, historically, we have had a system that has not delivered for the poor. There is a difference between me and the hon. Member for Ashford. He says that he now cares for those in deprived areas, and that none of the action that we have taken in the past five years has had any impact. I shall stop talking about this issue, because it is not the main point of the debate. We inherited a system in which the children of the less well off were performing at a lower rate than those from the middle classes, and that gap was wider than in any of our competitor nations. We are beginning to close that gap. If the Conservatives do not believe us, they should look at the standard assessment test results, and at what Ofsted says. They should look at the results that the children are achieving.

I shall talk about truancy.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire) *rose—*

Estelle Morris: I shall take one last point on this, then, with permission, I should like to move on to the main subject of the debate.

Mr. McLoughlin: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for her attack on Labour local authorities. When the policy of child benefit removal comes into being, who will make the decision to remove child benefit from a family?

Estelle Morris: I was interested to hear that the hon. Member for Ashford has decided that the head teacher will have that power. That needs a lot of thinking about. With respect, perhaps it would be better if I answered that question towards the end of my speech.

This is a serious issue. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members can ask questions in the way that they see fit; I will answer in the way that I see fit. The hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) raises an important issue. My view is clear: there are many other steps that we can take before we get to that point. However, because the consequences of truancy are so dire for children who miss school, we have to contemplate not only the withdrawal of benefit but imprisonment, as a magistrates court did last week. Talking about withdrawing child benefit has started a debate, and it is right that it has.

On the hon. Gentleman's specific point about who would withdraw the benefit, it could be a number of people or agencies, including head teachers and courts. When we have consulted on the issue, we will come back, as the Prime Minister said, with suggestions.

As far as I am concerned, such a measure is the end of the line. We hope that things work before such action is taken. I hoped that things would work before that mother was imprisoned, but they did not. There had been two years of intervention, investment and support that had been ignored. It is a difficult issue, but given that it could be one more weapon in our armoury for getting to grips with the problem, I think that it deserves the widest consideration in a mature way from people of all political parties and the nation as a whole.

I should like to make some progress on truancy and exclusions. It is right to say that the truancy figure has not budged—it has stayed stubbornly the same. Most of my Department's other public service agreement targets have moved in the right direction. I am immensely proud of what has been delivered by the education service, but the one PSA target on which we have not made any progress has been picked out for debate. I have no objection to that, but before we discuss the causes and what can be done, we should look further at the figures.

Before 1997, the truancy figures tell a different story. In fact, they have not budged since 1994. The hon. Member for Ashford may use the word "crisis" about figures of 0.7 per cent. in schools as a whole and 1.1 per cent. in secondary schools, but the figures have not increased between 1997 and 2001, and were the same in 1994. They are steady and sustained—they have not budged from when they were first collected in 1994 to 2002. Indeed, the figure for unauthorised absence in 1996 was 6.9 per cent., and we have managed to get that down to 6.5 per cent. In a debate about which party has the best set of figures, we win and the Tories lose. However, it is more serious than that. The truth is that ever since truancy and exclusion figures were first collected, no Government have managed to reduce the figures of 0.7 per cent. and 1.1 per cent.

Mr. George Osborne: The difference between this and the previous Government is that this Government had a

[Mr. George Osborne]

target to reduce the figures by a third. It is no good the Secretary of State saying that the figures have not budged—the Government have not kept their promise.

Estelle Morris: I am speechless. So this debate is not about boys and girls whose life chances are being ruined because they truant from school. Apparently it is about a Government target that has not been met. Let me tell the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) that the Government have targets so that we can be publicly accountable and transparent, we can monitor our progress and, at the end of the day, we can make life better for boys, girls, pupils, students and their families.

It does not matter, apparently, that the Tories did nothing to improve attendance—the fact that they did not have a target makes everything all right. That is the most pathetic excuse that I have ever heard for four years of Tory inaction.

Perhaps I might add to the tale of woe by agreeing that the consequences of not attending school are more dire than we might care to imagine. We can all make a long list of such consequences. Some 30 per cent. of current prisoners were truants. Truants are 10 per cent. more likely to be arrested, and 15 per cent. more likely to receive a formal police caution. Excluded pupils are more likely to offend than others. The list goes on and on, and there is the additional obvious point that those who are not at school cannot learn, and if they cannot learn they cannot pass exams. We live in a world where examination success is increasingly the currency that opens doors to life chances and earning a living.

I agree that this issue is important, and that we have found it very difficult to budge the figure, but we have made progress in many areas. I want to talk about some of the things that we have tried to do, the successes, and where we might go from here. However, I want to make the important point that most schools are orderly and disciplined places in which children and teachers are safe and a good standard of education is provided, and in which each and every one of us would be pleased and proud to have our children educated. It is right that we concentrate on the small but growing number of schools in which behaviour is a real problem, but in doing so we must acknowledge the good work that is done and positive ethos that exists in many of our schools.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I am rather worried about the message that might be sent to our young people by the Government telling businesses that employees should be given time off to watch the World cup. Should we also be telling kids that they should have time off to do what they want to do?

Estelle Morris: What employers tell their employees is a matter for them, and I am not going to intervene in that issue. I accept that such situations can arise, and—with the greatest respect—the Queen Mother's funeral was an example. Head teachers debated whether to allow their pupils to miss lessons on the day of the funeral, and such decisions are best left to individual head teachers. I do not mean to sound evasive, but these are difficult issues for employers and head teachers. Of course, the World cup takes place every four years. Thankfully, more serious events do not occur that often, so I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman's point is particularly pertinent to today's discussion

Geraint Davies: My right hon. Friend mentions the link between exclusions and crime, and as I have pointed out, 17 per cent. of current prison inmates were excluded from school. Does she accept that such people reoffend within two years of leaving prison? It costs this country £34,000 a year to keep someone in prison, and we have the largest prison population in Europe, excluding Portugal. Would not that money be better spent on education, and is not her Department therefore right to focus on permanent education for all our children from September?

Estelle Morris: My hon. Friend is right: the best investment that we can make is in education—not only to help individuals, but to reduce social incohesion and ensure that such people get back into work and stay out of prison. That is a short, medium and long-term investment, with short, medium and long-term results.

Exclusions were rising in 1997. They fell to 8,000 last year, but they are rising again, as the formal figures will show when they are published later this week. However, the difference is that some of the 12,000 children who were excluded in 1997 were limited to as little as two, three or four hours' education a week. That was a national disgrace. Anyone who is genuinely interested in providing education for our most disadvantaged children—who have so much to lose by not remaining in education—should remember that the previous Tory Government's willingness to tolerate excluded children receiving so little education was a cause not for national concern, but of international disgrace.

The difference is that we have done two things. First, we have said to heads that they have the right to decide whether to exclude a child. Secondly, from September, we have set a target, which will be met, that if heads decide to exclude a child, that child will receive full-time education. That does not sound like too much to ask, but it has taken a Labour Government, five years of investment and a target that has been met to deliver that opportunity for excluded children, and we have done that by giving head teachers the choice about whether they exclude.

Mr. Andrew Turner: I welcome the fact that the Government expect to achieve that target, but how many of those 12,000 excluded pupils in 1997 who failed to be provided with full-time education were the customers of Labour education authorities?

Estelle Morris: I despair. When there is full-time education for excluded pupils in every local education authority in September, it does not matter whether it is provided by the Tories, Labour or Liberal Democrats. A Government have a responsibility—*[Interruption.]* I can tell the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) that we are achieving the target by investing and spending money. We ask every LEA what they should be providing and what shortage they are experiencing. We then put in the capital so that they can build pupil referral units and provide the revenue so that they have the staff. That is why there are 1,000 more places in pupil referral units and 600 more staff than there were in 1997. It does not matter whether the authority is Tory or Labour; the investment is spread throughout the country. If the hon. Gentleman is saying that every Conservative-controlled local authority provided full-time education in 1997 for excluded pupils, I will take a risk and bet that he is wrong.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Surely the right hon. Lady must realise that the drive to reduce exclusions and to leave troublesome pupils in school, often by overruling head teachers and governing bodies, has made matters worse because it gives the message to troublemakers that they can get away with it. Many of today's problems have been caused by the drive to leave troublemakers unsanctioned in schools.

Estelle Morris: The issue is difficult. Front-Bench spokesmen, including myself, have made speeches about the problems of truancy and children not being in mainstream school. When exclusion meant as little as two, three or four hours' education a week, I believe that it was responsible of us to ask head teachers to think carefully about whether they should exclude because of the consequences of that decision, but the right to exclude was never removed. I think what happened was that as we were the first government to ask head teachers to think carefully before excluding, they felt a pressure not to exclude. Nothing was written down. There was no law. They were not directed not to exclude. However, I know from talking to heads that they were never happy excluding because they knew the nature of the provision that the child would then receive.

The key difference that we have made is that heads now have real choices. They can be assured that if they come to the end of the line and do not want a child in school for whatever reason—perhaps because of drug dealing, which the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis), has been dealing with today, or because of an assault on a member of staff—that child can be out of school but will still receive full-time education. Unless we do that, head teachers have no choice and there is no deal for young people.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Estelle Morris: No, I have been generous in giving way and this is a short debate.

Head teachers need other forms of support between telling a child off and excluding them. The hon. Member for Ashford said that no action had been taken in five years. We are now spending 10 times as much—£600 million—on truancy, exclusion and pupils' behaviour than the Tory Government did. That is why there are more than 1,000 on-site learning units that were not available in 1997; 3,500 learning mentors who were not available in 1997; 1,000 more places in pupil referral units that were not available in 1997; and 600 more staff than there were in 1997. In addition, the Connexions service serves all children from 13 upwards and we have provided more money for truancy sweeps so that education welfare officers can work with the police. Those improvements were not available in 1997. That is the nature of the investment, and that is the nature of our approach.

There is a real issue about whether that investment—which is massive, and there are always tough choices for Departments and Ministers about where the money goes—has been effective. I think that it has. Although the global figures show that truancy does not budge much, and we have found it really difficult to move, the figures for the excellence in cities areas, which are the most disadvantaged—some people feel sorry about the children there, while some are determined to do something—show a decrease of 0.25 per cent., whereas the England average has increased by 0.2 per cent. I am not putting those figures to the House, saying, "There, we've found all the solutions, we've found the panacea." I am seriously saying, however, that an investment of £600 million, the introduction of initiatives that did not exist previously, and full-time education for children who are excluded have brought about real and better life chances in this most difficult of areas.

We have accepted the problem, and we have been very upfront about our difficulty in making the truancy target figures budge. This Government, more than any other, have, working with the profession, tried new and innovative ways of ensuring that we make progress. We have made progress, but not enough. In the years to come, however, we shall continue to evaluate carefully what works, and make sure that we spread that good practice to all our schools throughout the country.

4.36 pm

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): May I commence my speech, which I promise the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) will be fairly brief, by thanking the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) for introducing this debate? As the Secretary of State said, it is about a very important issue, and it saddens me enormously that part of the debate descended into farce—we stopped talking about the real issues that affect long-term and even short-term truancy and exclusions, and were reduced to petty point-scoring across the Chamber.

I am unique on the Front Bench at the moment, as I spent the whole of my career as a teacher, particularly as a head, in schools that served the most demanding communities—in Middlesbrough, in east Leeds, in Chapeltown in Leeds, in Seacroft and in Gipton—where crime is especially high. I find it galling when I hear Front-Bench Conservative spokesmen talk about what the Government are failing to do. I can say with my hand on my heart that throughout my whole teaching career, very little changed for a significant proportion of those youngsters. There are no simplistic solutions—and with all due respect to the Secretary of State, I must add that if she believes that by introducing draconian solutions we can suddenly put an end to this problem, she does herself and her Government a disservice. The Conservatives need to look at some other countries to find a solution.

There is no doubt that the hon. Member for Ashford is right to say that the incidence of violence—pupil-on-pupil, pupil-on-teacher, and particularly parent-on-teacher—has increased alarmingly over the last four or five years. That issue was not part of my experience as a head or as a teacher. I remember a lady hitting me over the head with an umbrella on one occasion, because she was annoyed that her daughter had not been allowed to go to a school disco. I presume that that was a spur of the moment action, however, and I am sure that she intended the umbrella for somebody else.

It is important to echo what the Secretary of State said—and, sadly, what the hon. Member for Ashford did not say—that the vast majority of children, in the vast

[Mr. Phil Willis]

majority of our schools throughout the United Kingdom, not only in England and Wales, do not face a daily diet of violence, and teachers do not face a daily diet of assault. Most children achieve exceptionally well in our school system.

Chris Grayling: Although I recognise that, as the hon. Gentleman suggests, we are fortunate in this country in that the incidence of violence in schools is not great, does he not accept that recent research, particularly that published last year by the National Union of Teachers, highlights the fact that antisocial behaviour, threatening behaviour and abusive language in the classroom go far beyond the so-called problem schools and can be found right across society?

Mr. Willis: As ever, the National Union of Teachers has carried out splendid research. Those on the Conservative Front Bench frequently rely on it in their speeches, which is an interesting phenomenon. The hon. Gentleman attends these debates and always makes interesting interventions. I accept that there is an increased incidence of such behaviour in schools, but that is a reflection of society as a whole. We would find exactly the same behaviour in the village pub, in the supermarket and on the streets, whereas we might not have found it before. We must not single out schools; they are a microcosm of society.

Mr. Andrew Turner: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willis: How dare I not?

Mr. Turner: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his customary courtesy and good humour in allowing me to intervene. I am sure that he will acknowledge that people are not forced to go to pubs or supermarkets—although I accept that one may be forced to walk along the streets—but children are forced to go to school. Low level indiscipline is as of as much concern to many parents as the more elevated ill discipline about which we read in the press.

Mr. Willis: That is an interesting comment, but I do not think that I need to respond to it.

It is worrying that we are now seeing something that I did not see for most of my career. There has been a huge increase in street crime perpetrated by school children. We must address that issue, which relates to the point made by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner). However, to suggest, as the hon. Member for Ashford did, that the problem appeared during the life of the present Government simply beggars belief. In 1991 there were 3,000 exclusions, but by 1996–97 the figure had risen to 12,700. If things were so fine in schools at that time, why was there more than a fourfold increase in the number of exclusions? It is wrong to suggest that we are dealing with a new phenomenon.

The hon. Member for Ashford too readily confuses different issues—truancy, poor behaviour, exclusions and crime—and ties the whole lot together, giving the impression that they are all one and the same. All four issues are connected at some point in time, but if we want to find long-term solutions, we must not draw convenient conclusions.

The Secretary of State was right when she said that over the past 10 years the incidence of truancy has hardly risen. It was also honest of her to say that the Government had missed a target. It was a foolish target that was badly set, and although she did not admit that, it was good that she admitted that it had been missed.

The House must also recognise that a significant proportion of truancy—probably 80 per cent.—is condoned by parents. The vast bulk of it is the result of holidays taken not by the ne'er-do-wells in the inner-city areas that the hon. Member for Ashford described, but in well-heeled constituencies such as mine, when parents take their children out of school for their two-week annual holiday, or even longer. We have to accept that that is part and parcel of condoned truancy.

Truants are not necessarily criminals, however, and the House must recognise that there is a plethora of reasons why children do not attend school. School-phobics present a real problem for teachers, but they appear in the statistics as children who play truant. Four per cent. of all children who play truant are being severely bullied, and I know from personal experience how difficult that can be within the family. Children may truant because of peer group pressure or dislike of lessons, particularly PE. Those factors are as prevalent now as they were when hon. Members were at school.

What is not in dispute is the fact that a vast increase in juvenile crime occurs when children are truanting or are excluded, and there is a massive problem that has to be addressed. The Metropolitan police point to alarming statistics: 40 per cent. of robberies, 25 per cent. of burglaries and 20 per cent. of thefts in London are performed by 10 to 16-year-olds during school hours. Even more disturbing is the picture painted by the recently published 2002 youth crime survey, conducted by MORI, with one in four schoolchildren saying that they have committed a crime in the past 12 months. We must address the fact that crime, especially low-level crime, is acceptable to young people.

We must, however, draw a distinction between children who occasionally truant and those who are long-term truants or have been excluded or expelled from school. Another interesting statistic from the youth crime survey is that of those children who commit crime, the number who did so before they truanted from school is almost the same as the number who began committing crime after they started truanting. That supports the point, which I was making to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight, that this is a societal issue, and there are real problems that must be addressed.

What is particularly damning about the new survey is that two thirds of children excluded from school have been responsible for a recorded crime and that permanently excluded children are responsible, on average, for 44 crimes a year each. Those are two staggering statistics, and they must be addressed. Permanently excluded children are more likely to drink, to take drugs, to damage property, to handle stolen goods, to commit assault and to carry a weapon. However, the biggest problem arising from long-term truancy and exclusion is the damage that those young people do to themselves. The future for them, far from being bright, is distinctly dismal.

Equally dismal is the fact that the same categories of children who were excluded 10 years ago are at the centre of today's exclusion bonanza. They include children in care and children from minority communities, particularly Afro-Caribbean boys and Bangladeshis. They include children who have special needs, who are seven times more likely to be excluded than other children, and children with low levels of attainment, many of whom, as the Secretary of State rightly said, end up in our prisons. Eight per cent. of persistent truants achieve five good GCSEs, compared with 54 per cent. of children who do not truant at all. Three quarters of homeless teenagers on the streets today were either permanently excluded or were long-term truants before they ran away from home.

None of those issues was addressed by the hon. Member for Ashford, who spoke for the Conservatives. Yet his party leader made a speech this morning about connecting the Tory party with real communities and offering solutions. That is the sad thing about where the Tory party is, as opposed to where it would like to be. MPs talk glibly about getting tough—with respect, I must point out that Members on both Front Benches have done so—but I hope that they will stop and think that for many of the young people about whom they are talking, life is already very tough indeed.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): As always when I intervene on the hon. Gentleman's speeches in such debates, I pay tribute to his knowledge and his commitment to the subject. I am disappointed, however, that he should pour scorn on what the leader of the Conservative party said this morning, because my right hon. Friend was making some of the same points that the hon. Gentleman makes about our responsibility and duty to address such issues in a non-partisan way for the benefit of those who are least able to speak for themselves. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will have the courage and integrity to pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for making that speech this morning.

Mr. Willis: I, too, have great respect for the hon. Gentleman—we have been friendly adversaries for some time—but with all due respect to him, may I say that words come easily, but it is actions, and providing resources to support those actions, that really matter? Not a single word from the Leader of the Opposition this morning, nor a single word in the book recently written by the hon. Member for Ashford, refers to any solution, with real answers and real resources, to attack real problems; what comes from them is just words.

Geraint Davies: I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman's interesting speech. Does he agree that the real challenge for the Government is to provide the right sort of specialist educational facilities, properly resourced, to match the real needs of excluded children in a way that will deliver educational success and lower crime? In particular, he says that the Afro-Caribbean community is disproportionately affected by exclusion. That difficulty is in turn reflected in the prison population, and then spirals back on itself through reoffending. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that difficulty can also be addressed by providing the right sort of educational opportunities, not just pupil referral units, which sound a bit like borstals, but proper intensive education to get people back on the straight and narrow?

Mr. Willis: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and I am grateful to him for making that point, with which I shall deal—although briefly, because although we would like to spend more time on such issues, I am mindful of my promise to the hon. Member for Huddersfield.

I was about to say that the Government have introduced several interesting initiatives in the past five years to tackle some of the inherent problems. What saddens me is that of late, the Government have gone for the *Daily Mail* approach of removing benefits from families, which affects the whole family rather than an individual. I find the imprisoning of a single mother for 30 days totally unacceptable. The Secretary of State and her colleagues—and, indeed, the hon. Member for Ashford—supported that move. We differ fundamentally there; I do not believe that that mother was a danger to society. We must strip away some of those issues and find coherent wholesome ways to treat some of the problems.

The Government have put a significant amount of additional resources into tackling some of the issues. Electronic registration, pupil referral units, in-school behaviour units, mentors, the Connexions service and even bringing in the police and other agencies are all issues on which the Government have our broad support. However, I find it difficult to understand why the Government have not attacked some of the central reasons why children do not attend school. The evidence is before us: the most significant reason that children give for not attending school long term is that they do not like it; they do not like the lessons.

Liz Blackman (Erewash): Speaking as one person who has spent all their former life in education to another, and accepting that the problem is very complex, I must ask the hon. Gentleman whether he agrees that one of the fundamental necessities in motivating children is the quality of the teaching offered in schools. Often children muck about or refuse to go to school because there is nothing on offer. I am not denigrating the majority of teachers, who provide a good service, but I spent a long time in school and I knew, by looking along the corridor, where children would be well served and where they would not. I could see bad behaviour forming as children walked down the corridor. Are not good teaching and the standards that we have driven up an absolutely core element?

Mr. Willis: If the hon. Lady believes that, she must be ashamed of her own Ministers, who have done even more than the Conservative Government to demoralise teachers during their five years in office. I agree with her overall sentiments. I certainly agree that quality teaching is at the heart of the agenda. But if she believes that putting up all those hurdles for pupils to fall over—introducing initiative after initiative in classrooms, and subjecting children to 87 different tests between the age of five, when they start school, and 19, when they leave—is improving the lot of youngsters, I disagree with her.

Liz Blackman: Will the hon. Gentleman give way again?

Mr. Willis: I am too generous; I will.

Liz Blackman: Ofsted has found that the quality of teaching has risen significantly over the past few years. With all due respect to the hon. Gentleman, I think that he has made a pretty cheap point. The evidence is there: teaching is improving, and the results that pupils are achieving are improving as a consequence.

Mr. Willis: I did not mean to be disrespectful to the hon. Lady; it is just that, like her, I feel passionately about this subject.

It is true that for a significant number of young people in a significant number of schools, both the product offered and the results achieved are improving—but the gap between high-performing and low-performing schools is widening, and it is the kids whom we are discussing today who continue to get a poor deal at the bottom of the pile. I am glad that the hon. Member for Ashford agrees with the Liberal Democrats about the curriculum currently on offer. The diet presented to a significant number of our youngsters is entirely inappropriate; in 2002 it is not possible to provide a 1988 grammarian's national curriculum handed down from on high, with a "one size fits all" examination structure, and sustain the belief that children can be reconnected.

We must listen to young people. We must listen to the reasons why so many of them have been turned off school. What is being offered to numerous young people is unacceptable. That is not a criticism of our schools; it is a criticism of successive Governments who have been increasingly telling schools what to do, and when and how to do it. We must break out of that spiral.

It is sad that we should allow ourselves to reach a point at which permanent exclusions are seen as the only answer. The Secretary of State half fell into that trap today, and the hon. Member for Ashford constantly makes the same claim. All that the Tories had to say in their 2001 manifesto was that they wanted to give head teachers an instant ability to kick kids out of school. That is not the final solution. *[Interruption.]* With respect, the hon. Member for Ashford said very little else in that manifesto. Free schools and kick kids out of schools—that was about the sum total.

The subject of exclusions is crucial. It goes right back to an issue raised earlier by the hon. Member for Isle of Wight; it is a society issue. A head teacher may exclude a child from a school, but the child cannot be excluded from the community in which he or she lives. Members who represent deprived communities know that only too well. The kids I excluded from my school ended up at the school gates every day, because they had nowhere else to go. Providing full-time education for the kids who are excluded today is important, but it must be the right type of full-time education.

Members visiting Slough today would be able to observe an experiment involving an exclusion-free zone. Children's next port of call is organised before they actually need to be excluded. That goes back to the point made by the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies): we have to make the right provision. It is not merely a matter of giving children five, six or 10 hours a week—we have to offer them the right provision.

Geraint Davies: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willis: I am sorry, but I cannot give way; I must conclude my speech—otherwise I shall be shot.

I meet many young people, especially in Lambeth, where I spend time at present, and in Islington. When they talk about school they say that no one ever listens to them. They talk about school as though it were an alien institution. I leave the Secretary of State and the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis), with this thought: if we genuinely want to make inroads into the problems of truancy and exclusion, we must listen to young people. If we listen to why they opt out, ultimately we shall find a solution.

5.1 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I feel rather guilty after making the jocular suggestion that the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) make a briefer contribution than normal, because I was really enjoying his speech. It was thoughtful, as ever. The hon. Gentleman's experience in education is almost unparalleled in the Chamber. When he is not making hardline political points, he addresses the question and it is very good to listen to him.

I experience a sense of disappointment on these occasions, however, because we are constricted by these Opposition day debates. The Opposition have to choose a subject; they have to be controversial and they have to be nasty about the Government. Sometimes that knockabout style works well, but it is really not right for the subjects of truancy and discipline which are important educational issues. An enormous amount of thought, research and activity are needed to address the problems.

Every Member who has contributed to the debate—apart from the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green)—agreed that most of our students attend school regularly, enjoy quality teaching and perform pretty well. We know that standards have been rising during the past six years—as we hear in the Select Committee on Education and Skills when we interview Ofsted officials. That is not a partisan political point.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that the number of unauthorised school non-attendances has not budged; it is 0.7 per cent. There is a slight change in the numbers when we compare primary and secondary schools, but by and large the level is constant. When the Select Committee visited France to study the parallels between our system and the French one, the chief inspector of schools in France said that the problem was similar—the truancy rate is persistent. From my American connections, I know that that is true in the United States; it is also true in Germany. The problem is not unique to the United Kingdom.

The percentage is small but the problem can be made to sound like the end of the civilised world by tabling an early-day motion or an Opposition motion on it. To say that there are 5 million or 6 million unauthorised non-attendances in an average year sounds horrific, but that ignores the fact that although the problem is persistent, the rate is constant.

The Government were unwise to set a target on that most difficult matter. They are satisfied that they have met some of their targets, or have at least made some progress, but they have not met their target on truancy. It is a very difficult problem, all of whose aspects are interconnected. If one talks frankly to teachers about non-attendance, some of them—quietly, yet wisely—say that if the 0.7 per cent. who should be in school were there, it would make life in the classroom much more difficult. That is the truth of the matter. So we must consider such people and decide how to tackle them.

We are not going to get everybody to go to school. Indeed, I confess that there were one or two days on which I did not go to school in Hampton—at that time in my career it was probably because of the lure of taking a boat out on the Thames. That was not with my parents' approval. I feel guilty now about the days that I missed, but let us consider the serious parts of the problem.

Some of the research is very interesting. In his book, "Tackling Truancy in Schools", which is published by Routledge, Ken Reid has broken down the causes of truancy into social, psychological and institutional factors and conducted in-depth research into those who are truants.

Under social factors, the domestic lives of those asked—family circumstances, and so on—account for 16 per cent. of truancy. Peer-group influence accounts for 10 per cent., and going out for a bit of entertainment, as I did for a couple of days, accounts for 2 per cent. Employment is cited as a cause in 1 per cent. of cases. On the psychological side, the figure for illness is 9 per cent., and for psychosomatic disorders it is 1 per cent. Pure laziness accounts for only 2 per cent., which I thought was refreshing. So, the picture is complicated.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough disagreed with one of my hon. Friends on the subject of quality of teaching. I do not think that truancy is a question of the quality of teaching. We have heard much criticism of inner cities, and I note that the Opposition have today criticised the Government on that matter and that the Leader of the Opposition has launched an initiative highlighting problems in those areas. The truth is that teaching in the inner city is difficult in particular because of the transient nature of the population. If one talks to teachers just down the road from these Houses of Parliament, they say "For goodness sake, we do not know on any day who will be there to be taught." That is not because of truancy but because of the nature of the moving populations in our inner cities. According to the research, school transfers, which are listed under the institutional factors relating to truancy, account for 16 per cent. of cases.

Another very worrying figure in the research is that 15 per cent. of truancy is attributable to bullying, and I know that the Government have taken initiatives on bullying. In reflecting on the comments of the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough on the matter, I think that violence in schools, whether against teachers or pupils, is a no-go area, and that exclusion should be used in response to it.

Only 10 per cent. of truancy is caused by unhappiness with the curriculum and examinations, which is significant, and I entirely agree with other speakers in this debate on that subject. I know that I sometimes become tedious when, in reflecting on my own school experience, I comment on the number of children who were sat at the back or in the middle of a class, not excited by the curriculum or the diet of education that they received at school. Many such pupils always felt that only the pure academics in the class received all the stars, the brownie points and the encouragement. The other pupils felt disheartened and lacked self-esteem as a result. The Government are starting to address the problem—but not fast enough—of exciting the imagination of all the young people in a classroom. I know that the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough agrees with me on that.

Only 6 per cent. of truancy is caused by school rules and punishment. Only 5 per cent. of those asked said that the teachers put them off school and made them play truant. The desire to leave accounts for 4 per cent. of truancy. I have gone through that research because it shows the complexity of the subject. We asked Mike Tomlinson, the former chief inspector, which were the best ways of tackling that complex area. He came up with a range of proposals that Ofsted is considering; I am surprised that the hon. Member for Ashford did not mention any of them. Ofsted has been looking at absences condoned by parents who do not value school attendance highly; poor resistance to, and recovery from, illness, especially among low-income families, where there is a higher rate of illness; disaffection with the curriculum offered at school, particularly key stage 4; and difficulty coping with school work because of underdeveloped literacy skills, which is very important indeed. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough made a political point about central direction from the Government and the Department. Of course there is a balance, but if four out of 10 pupils are not reaching literacy and numeracy targets, the Government know that that is important. Any Secretary of State would realise that they must do something.

Liz Blackman: My hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head. Does he agree that children without reasonable literacy or numeracy skills cannot access the curriculum, whatever its content?

Mr. Sheerman: Absolutely. I was about to make an even stronger point: if children feel embarrassed because they have not learned to read and write, that quickly becomes apparent to their peers in the classroom. Lack of esteem and self-worth can lead to fear of going to school. There is a lot of evidence that children who do not attain basic literacy skills become school-phobic.

Ofsted also looked at poor relationships with school staff; poor relationships with fellow pupils at key stages 2 and 3; and difficult home circumstances, including lack of parental discipline and control.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman has made a number of important points; I was particularly struck by the one that he just made about self-esteem in the classroom. He referred to the transient nature of some school populations. Does he accept that society probably needs to look again at the parental behaviour towards children that it is prepared to tolerate, and the transient lifestyle that moves children from one school to another, week after week? That kind of behaviour does not allow children to develop properly, so should we take steps to prevent it?

Mr. Sheerman: Absolutely. Figures published this morning on drug addiction show that there are 40,000 drug addicts in the country, but some people reckon that that is an underestimate and the true figure is four or five times higher and is about 200,000. A lot of those people are parents; children in Huddersfield, and elsewhere I

[Mr. Sheerman]

am sure, have been brought up by drug-addicted parents. The relationship between drug addiction, drug dependency and quality of home life is horrible to contemplate. We should also think about alcohol abuse by parents and many other deficiencies in children's home background.

The methods that we use to get children to come to school, stay there and get the education that will fulfil their potential are a sensitive issue. It is a crime to say that there is a one size fits all solution because there is not. We know that different parts of our constituencies and different communities have different problems. I, too, am horrified by the fact that a woman has gone to prison for not sending her child to school. However, I disagree with the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough, as I believe that the sentence was correct. We have a system in which people worked with a parent—I do not want to mention her name—for two years. Given the cost to society of working with that family, in which there are five children, and the fact that that still resulted in failing to get the parent to co-operate and send her children to school, a sentence is needed that makes the public realise that the responsibility rests with the parent.

It hurts me that there should be such a sentence; I hate it. In a former life I was the shadow Minister for Home Affairs, and I remember campaigning about the large number of women who went to prison in the mid-1990s for not paying their television licences. There were hundreds of them, every year—800 in the mid-1990s. The courts did not know how to deal with their refusal to pay, so they went to prison. Some went to prison willingly, having refused to pay the fine. Now there are just a few—the last statistic was 30 or 40, mostly women—who go to prison for not paying their television licences.

Some of the laws of our society conclude with a prison sentence. I feel bad about that. Of course we do not want any more people to go to prison for failing to send their children to school, but that must remain a last resort.

We pushed the chief inspector to suggest other ways of making sure that children come to school and that parents co-operate and understand the importance of a child attending school. There has been a great fuss about even contemplating the withdrawal of child benefit, but we should not exclude that as an option. Most of the resources—90 per cent.—must be devoted to encouraging children to go to school, making it a good experience for them. But perhaps someone in society must say to parents, "You are receiving benefit, so perhaps you have a responsibility to act like a responsible citizen."

I shall give the House one example. I do not want to pick on one part of the community, but we know that there is a problem of non-attendance among Afro-Caribbean boys. There are also problems of discipline and non-attendance among white working-class boys in many inner-city constituencies. There is also the example of Asian girls; I have a particular problem in west Yorkshire, where parents take young girls out of school for long periods. The girls might end up as domestic drudges at home or be taken back to Pakistan or Bangladesh for a long time, and come back only when their education is utterly destroyed, sometimes two or three years later. It is not acceptable to destroy someone's life chances like that.

For different communities, there should be a range of measures to show that society expects parents to bring their children to school and to encourage them to attend school. In any community, some behaviour which results in the children being kept out of school is not acceptable. I am not saying that withdrawal of child benefit is the right answer, but we should consider all the options and the difficulties in the various communities, and make sure that we get it right.

Mr. Willis: I have been listening intently to the hon. Gentleman. May I inform him that under a Labour Government there are 4,000 women in prison on short-term sentences, which is the largest number since the Victorian era? Is the hon. Gentleman proposing that Asian parents whose children go back to Pakistan or Bangladesh for six months would come before the courts for sentencing because their children had been deliberately excluded from school? Is that under consideration? The hon. Gentleman is very honest, as he usually is, in supporting the proposal to remove benefit. In a family of four, if the benefit for one child is removed, how does that improve the life chances of that family?

Mr. Sheerman: The hon. Gentleman knows that, as Chairman of the Select Committee, I am trying to be as thoughtful as possible about the issue. I am trying to underline its complexity. I do not want to throw out of consideration anything that will help in tackling the diverse problems and in handling the different reactions in communities. The discussions and research that have so far occurred have raised some new issues. We may consider the option of child benefit withdrawal and then discard it. As I said, I would hate imprisonment routinely to be considered, as it should be the end of a long journey and is to be avoided at every cost.

Of course, I come back to the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough quickly and say that there must be incentives—and perhaps penalties—for people who take their children out of education for long enough to damage their long-term life chances. The House does not know what the right balance is, but it has every right to consider that question in terms of the real people whom we represent in our constituencies and not some unreal set of people and circumstances.

Let us consider all the circumstances. For example, we have all been rather quiescent about the size of schools. Some very interesting American research suggests that truancy and reluctance to go to school are very much related to the size of the institution. We have all been part of the conspiracy that believes that big schools are cheaper and more efficient and effective. I remember visiting a school that I thought to be pretty large as it had 700 pupils; unfortunately, in those days, they were all boys. However, when I now visit comprehensive schools of double that size, I wonder what sort of community can be built in a school that has more than 1,000 pupils.

Chris Grayling: Does the hon. Gentleman therefore share my concerns about the future of small sixth forms, which can also provide the sense of community to which he refers and deliver excellent results?

Mr. Sheerman: That question may be relevant, but I want to concentrate on smaller schools. The building of communities is very important in any institution. Some sixth forms are far too small and some are too large. A sixth form must be of a viable size if a community is to be built; equally, schools should not be so big as to make it very difficult for that to happen.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough was absolutely right to finish on the note of listening to pupils—something that is often left out in education debates. We must also remember, however, that the essence of a school is a community. The people in a school work and live together for a large part of the week and have all the hallmarks of a community. If we cannot build a community in a school, we are in trouble. Some of the schools that I have visited are struggling on the problem of building a community.

Yes, there are some answers. We should look to smaller schools, homework clubs, family literacy classes and, yes, truancy officers. We need good practice on identifying the problems of truancy and working at them. The difference between good and average practice is dramatic. I have visited schools where staff have been working as a team to identify problems early. The most important thing about truancy is to nip it in the bud early, and there is a need to watch carefully which pupils are likely to play truant and check very quickly when they start failing to appear. That means staff visits; of course, we can all almost hear the National Union of Teachers saying, "So you're expecting members of staff to trail round to people's homes." In the best schools, good practice on truancy also happens in terms of team work, early identification and nipping problems in the bud. The educational welfare officer will be considering the individual circumstances of the child and family and tackling them by finding out whether the problem is bullying or whether the school is not as approachable as it should be.

I suspect that not much progress will be made on getting the awful 0.7 per cent. truancy level down—let us realise that it is only 0.7 per cent.—through central direction, which will not deliver easy and quick results. Indeed, we have already seen that it has not done so. What will work most effectively is to find out what is good practice and who uses it, then to network and spread it as fast as we can. That is not dramatic, nor is it probably what the Government are looking for, because all Governments want to be able to say, "Look what we did, and we did it through this miracle piece of legislation." The work will be much harder than that. It will mean working in partnership with schools—a whole range of people, including governors—to ensure that this difficult problem, which will not go away, is resolved.

5.25 pm

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): I am always delighted to follow the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), who brings a particular and extraordinary insight to these matters. If he had been able to continue for even longer with his sensitive remarks about incarceration, he would have begun to engage the interest of the whole House.

Mark Twain said that he never let his schooling get in the way of his education. Behind that piece of wit lies an important truth. Education is not solely about the work of schools, and it is certainly not solely about book learning—it is also about attitudes and values. I guess that most hon. Members would agree with that sentiment, but some might not want to continue on the journey with me when I say that schools' concentration on that which is measurable has obscured much of the central purpose of education—to produce young people who are well balanced, well rounded, positive and have a clear sense of responsibility towards their fellow men and of duty towards their communities and their nation. If education is reduced to a factory process designed to manufacture a product to a common standard, the currency of education is debased and the role of the educator is minimised. That is the temptation for Governments of all political persuasions. They like targets on which they can be measured and on which they are able to champion their achievements, and shy away from dealing with more complex aspects of education such as the measurement of attitudes or values—if indeed those can be measured in any definitive way.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) said, if one forces people by law to go to school for 11 years and endure education for at least that long, one has certain responsibilities and duties towards them as regards the ethos of the school that they attend, the attitudes of the people who educate them, the behaviour of their fellow students and, ultimately, the quality of life that they can expect to enjoy. This debate is principally about the quality of life, not the measurables that politicians dwell on too much.

The critical issue concerns our expectations about the quality of life that all students should be able to enjoy at school, regardless of whether they happen to be born and educated in an inner city, a leafy suburb or a rural backwater. I would never describe any part of my constituency as a backwater—although water is pretty prevalent in the fens—but historically in some rural areas, including the Lincolnshire fens, educational expectations have not been as high as they should be. It is not easy for teachers in such places, with very small schools and communities, to raise the horizons of individual students. However, that is the task in which they are engaged, and they do sterling work.

Regardless of background, children should be able to expect a decent quality of life in the statutory period of schooling. When that does not happen, it is too easy for parents and communities to blame teachers, and for teachers to blame the people at home. I do not believe that good teachers or sensible parents do that, but it is an easy route to take. We have all heard, "If only they had sorted him out at school and got a grip on the situation, Johnny wouldn't be in the mess he's in today." Similarly, teachers sometimes say, "Why don't we have more support from home? If we could do something about the parents, the problem would disappear." Everyone who takes a keen interest in the subject, including educators and responsible parents, understands that there is a partnership between home and school: the one is inseparable from the other.

Society has wider expectations of standards of decency and responsibility, and Members of Parliament have a duty to pay attention to them. Just as Governments are fond of limiting education to its measurable aspects, so politicians shy away from discussion of attitudes and values because they are hard to measure or change through legislation. However, if we do not deal with them, we ignore important aspects of the human condition that extend beyond standard of living, beyond material self-interest and beyond individual attainment to the quality of life that we should expect not only in schools but in society more generally.

[Mr. John Hayes]

Against that background, I want to make three points. None is especially partisan; I am sure that the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) will be pleased to hear that as he criticised my honourable, noble and distinguished colleagues on the Front Bench for being too partisan.

Standards of behaviour in our schools are undoubtedly declining. I do not pretend that that started in 1997, and it may be a product of lower expectations and the brutalisation of society. Conservative Members who are conservative to our very core instinctively believe that things were once better than they are. Perhaps that sentiment is in every true Conservative's heart. Perhaps the progressives and radicals who occupy the Labour Benches—I hesitate so that someone may correct me—similarly mislead and deceive themselves that things are inevitably getting better. That is part of the tension between ideas in this House. Yet it is palpably true that standards of behaviour in our schools have declined. We have evidence for that from several sources, including Ofsted. Its annual reports repeatedly draw attention to its anxieties about standards of behaviour. Teaching unions and representatives draw attention to the quality of life that their members and those whom their members teach have sadly to endure. Earlier in the debate, we heard about the increasing incidence of violence in schools, by pupils against teachers and pupils against pupils. They are all causes for sadness and regret, but they must be acknowledged. We should not pretend that everything in the garden is rosy.

I am not a sycophant, but I make no apology for quoting my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith). I admire the comments that he made earlier today:

> "In some of our inner cities, as many as one in 10 pupils leave schools without a single GCSE and truancy is rocketing. Compare this with places like Redbridge or Buckinghamshire where more than 90 per cent. of children gain five or more GCSEs . . . For generations too many experts have told us all it is unfair to expect children from inner cities to strive for the same standards as everybody else. I say it is unfair to expect anything less."

This issue is also centred on particular parts of the country. We know that there are profound problems in some of our inner cities, and among certain social groups. We also know that the standards that can be expected by parents and students on some estates in some parts of the country are all too low. So this is not simply a problem; it is a problem that disproportionately affects some of our most vulnerable citizens, and we have a particular and special duty to those people to address it.

Similarly, truancy is increasing, and it is all very well for the Chairman of the Education and Skills Committee, the hon. Member for Huddersfield, to suggest that this is a matter about which we can be relatively complacent. I was surprised to hear him suggest that we could, because he is a responsible chap who takes his role on that Committee very seriously. The truth of the matter is that truancy is increasing. The Government's own figures tell us that it has increased in each and every year since 1997. The hon. Gentleman will know that the incidence of truancy is disproportionate in certain parts of the country and that it affects certain schools very seriously. I obviously have figures different from those that the hon. Gentleman is using.

Mr. Sheerman: The House of Commons Library, which I normally rely on, has given me the figures for unauthorised absence in all schools for 1993–94, right through to 2001. Those figures do not change: they are 0.7 per cent. for each year. There is a little difference between maintained secondary and maintained primary schools, but that same figure of 0.7 per cent. applied for nine years.

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Gentleman masks the truth using statistics, as people who are trying to mask the truth often do. Let me tell him the numbers. They have risen consistently, year on year. The number of days lost at all schools in 1997–98 had increased by something like 10 per cent. by 2001. We can bandy figures about, but it is unfortunate that the hon. Gentleman does not recognise that truancy is a significant problem, when Members on his Front Bench do. They recognise that fact, which is why they have set targets, made speeches about the problem, and believe that measures need to be introduced to address it. I do not want to open up a gulf between Labour Front Benchers and the Chairman of the Education and Skills Committee, so I suggest that he look at some of their speeches, study some of the measures, and hold further discussions with his ministerial colleagues.

Ofsted certainly recognises the problem of truancy. On 6 February 2002, it suggested that 10,000 children are missing from state schools, and that no one knows exactly what they get up to when they should be in class. Mr. Tomlinson, the chief inspector of schools, suggested that some might be working "in the black economy". Unfortunately, many of them stray into criminal activity. Of course, there is no direct correlation between truancy and crime, but we know, from what the local constabularies and the social services departments of councils tell us, that there is a relationship between truancy and crime, and that should be a matter of grave concern for Members throughout House. Truancy is a significant and growing problem.

Most significant of all, perhaps, is the fact that teacher demoralisation is a real problem. This is, of course, related to the quality of life that teachers can expect to endure in our schools. Given a choice between teaching in a comfortable school somewhere in the leafy suburbs of London or teaching in the inner city, it would take a brave, devoted and committed person to teach in the inner city. *[Interruption.]* I think that the hon. Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) wants to intervene to tell me about his teaching experiences in the leafy suburbs.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): No, I am just listening.

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Gentleman does not want to intervene; that was just a sedentary intervention. I know that he had an extremely distinguished career as an educator in the leafy suburbs—

Vernon Coaker: It was not in a leafy suburb.

Mr. Hayes: Just a distinguished career, then.

Given the choice, most teachers would, not unnaturally, opt for the quieter life. We have a responsibility to ensure that they are motivated, encouraged and rewarded for taking on the difficult challenges involved in educating the children who may not necessarily have the same support from home, and who will not necessarily come to school as well prepared, as their contemporaries out in the leafy suburbs, in which the hon. Gentleman certainly did not teach but which he equally certainly now represents.

Geraint Davies: In my constituency there is an economically challenged area which contains an education action zone. The Good Shepherd Catholic school in the education action zone had the highest level of unauthorised absences in the country last year, at 7.7 per cent. I am pleased to say that this year, the figure for unauthorised absences is down to 0.2 per cent., when the national average is 0.5 per cent. The secret is that the head teacher has been telephoning the parents on the first day of absence, asking why the pupil is not at school and working through the problems—which are varied, as has been mentioned—with the parents. The local authority is now employing people to do that. I mention this to make the point that even in the most challenging area that has the worst history of absenteeism—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The hon. Gentleman's intervention is very lengthy.

Mr. Hayes: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I want to be the first and possibly the only person to pay tribute to the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies) for his contribution to that improvement in the school, for no other reason than the fact that he has raised it in the House. It is important that we celebrate good work, because that is part of re-instilling a sense of pride and purpose in our teachers and our head teachers when they face challenges and difficulties.

Chris Grayling *rose—*

Mr. Hayes: I know that other hon. Members want to intervene to seek the very same kind of praise so that they can issue local press releases.

Chris Grayling: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. I am not planning to issue a local press release but merely to ask him whether he believes that the amount of initiatives and paperwork that head teachers routinely deal with makes it more or less likely that they will have the time to do what the head teacher in the constituency of the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies) has done.

Mr. Hayes: I said that I would not be unnecessarily partisan, but part of the agenda in terms of maintaining the morale of head teachers and classroom teachers is to ensure that they focus on their role as educators and are not taken down the tributary of becoming managers. Of course, there has always been a management function associated with running any school, but it is also true that there has been excessive red tape in schools. I am less concerned about the pen pushing than about the confusion created by a succession of initiatives—some are contradictory and many overlap—that sap the energy, initiative and drive of head teachers, teachers and governors. That is the real problem that lies at the heart of my hon. Friend's question. However, to avoid accusations of not being balanced, I pay tribute to him as well for the work that he has done in highlighting that important matter on behalf of his constituents.

The problem of discipline in schools is acknowledged by the Government and by the hon. Members for Gedling and for Croydon, Central. Only the Chairman of the Education and Skills Committee does not acknowledge it, but I think that on this occasion we can regard him as a noble exception to the rule.

I suggest that there are five things that we can do about the problem. I thought initially of four ideas, but four does not sound as good as five, so I thought of another one. First, we should be bold and brave enough to give schools more power to deal with these problems in ways they feel appropriate. In different situations, different parts of the country and different communities, different solutions will apply. In schools with a significant proportion of pupils from ethnic minorities, where Afro-Caribbean or Asian pupils may form the majority, solutions to problems will be entirely different from those relevant to disaffected, white working-class pupils. Of course there will be similarities and parallels, but such schools may well have to adopt different solutions that involve working with local communities and being sensitive to local needs and differences. It is appropriate to be much more bold in devolving power to local communities and institutions, so that they can sort out such matters.

The second solution is to re-elevate the role of the educator. Every great civilisation throughout history—ancient Greece, ancient Rome, the Persians, the Chinese—has valued and revered educators, yet early 21st-century western society demeans and diminishes them. What does that say about our faith in the future of our nation and our children? We should not only give our teachers more authority and the power to adapt to local needs to sort out such problems, but support them when they get into difficulties. One of the great cries of teachers is that they do not feel properly supported when parents and pupils subject them to legal challenges and other such difficulties. If we believe in teachers and we want others to do so, it is essential that we support them when they have problems with discipline.

We need also to develop a curriculum that is more relevant to people's needs. As the hon. Member for Gedling will know—he probably experienced what I am about to describe, although not in the leafy suburbs—it is no fun taking out a battered textbook on a wet Friday afternoon and trying to teach the French revolution to a group of dissolute 16-year-olds who want to go home and do something much more exciting. Many teachers are faced with that prospect, and we must be more sensitive to the differing needs of pupils and groups of pupils. We need a curriculum that is relevant. If education is not relevant, we cannot expect to engage a significant number of those who do not see their future as academic and involving further and higher education. We need to provide an education that they regard as relevant to their real potential.

We certainly need more inter-agency work. We must work much more creatively with the different agencies involved with truanting students and their families. In that regard, there is significant overlap between police, social services, other local authority departments, the voluntary sector and schools. Information is not always exchanged

[Mr. Hayes]

as effectively as it could be, and the experts involved do not always communicate well with each other. Parents and communities do not feel that such problems are being approached holistically. Labour and Conservative Governments have failed to grasp that nettle, but given that we are discussing the current Government, it is the Under-Secretary who had better grasp it—and with both hands.

We need to be absolutely clear about what happens to pupils when they are excluded. As truancy has increased—I am surprised that the Chairman of the Education and Skills Committee is no longer here to challenge my figures, but he can do so later—exclusions have diminished. They have diminished because the Government took the wrong decision. They set unrealistic and deeply unpopular exclusion targets that took power away from governors and head teachers, and did not enable teachers to follow their instincts on excluding pupils, even when such instincts were entirely justified and right.

Part of the problem is that excluded pupils are often sent into a black hole. I have already mentioned the 10,000 pupils whom we know nothing about. Reports to the local education committee of which I was a member on what was happening to excluded pupils were usually summarised by the phrase: "Work is being set." We never heard what that work was, how it was going to be marked, whether it got there, whether it came back, or at what level it was set. All we knew was that work was being set and we were meant to satisfied with that. The hon. Member for Nottingham, East (Mr. Heppell) and I did not have a chance to consider that further in our local education committee because of the lack of time. However, I am sure he was as concerned as I was that those pupils who were excluded sometimes—perhaps often—disappeared from the system.

Pupil exclusion units often do a fine job, but we must be more certain about what education is being offered to excluded children. We need to have faith that exclusion does not mean permanent banishment to outer space. There should be more opportunity for children to move in and out of the system. There is a feeling that once children are excluded permanently from a single school, they are banished for ever. The approach needs to be more flexible so that people have another chance. We need to give them another bite of the cherry so that they can be brought back into the system to fulfil their potential.

I have cited five ideas, none of which is partisan or, I hope, too negative. It is a pity that the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough is not in the Chamber to hear my non-partisan speech. If he were, he might have to revise his stereotyped ideas about the Conservatives. It is right that we should raise our sights beyond the partisan debate to a more glorious future, not least because, as Aristotle said:

> "Educated men are as much superior to the uneducated men as the living are to the dead."

We do not hear Aristotle quoted often in the House, so I hope that hon. Members pricked up their ears at that. Although I would not go as far as Aristotle, I would go as far as Plutarch, who said:

> "The very spring and root of honesty and virtue lie in the felicity of lighting on good education."

It is because of that that we have to raise our sights beyond the party political squabble.

I know that hon. Members on both sides of the House are committed to providing decent quality education for all our children. I make no apology for saying that that applies disproportionately to the most vulnerable; nor do I apologise for saying that it is my responsibility and, I believe, the responsibility of the House to devote disproportionate time and energy to that group. We must bring all our skills to the problem so that our children get a fair and decent chance, especially those who are most disadvantaged.

That is certainly our duty; let us make it our mission.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. If contributions are kept brief, perhaps a greater number of hon. Members will be successful in catching my eye.

5.53 pm

Colin Burgon (Elmet): I hope that my brief contribution will also be effective and continue the non-partisan approach set by the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes).

It is necessary to retain a perspective about truancy and discipline in school. The overwhelming majority of kids in our schools are well behaved and do not truant, and the overwhelming majority of teachers do a highly effective job. As an ex-teacher of 16 years' standing, I was interested in the comments of the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), who told us that an irate parent had hit him over the head with an umbrella. I taught just down the road, and umbrellas were a luxury.

It is obvious to anyone with any awareness that truancy is a problem for society. The figures have been mentioned, but they are worth repeating. It is deeply worrying that some 50,000 young people in England alone deliberately truant from school every day. Official figures show that 40 per cent. of street crime, 25 per cent. of burglaries, 20 per cent. of criminal damage and 30 per cent. of car thefts are carried out by 10 to 16-year-olds during school hours. Those figures are disturbing. We must all acknowledge that something needs to be done to change that and the attitudes that go with it.

In my distant, although I hope not too dim, past as a schoolboy on the Gipton estate in east Leeds, to which the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough referred, kids who legged it from school kept a low profile to avoid both their parents and the board man. What disturbs me so much is that today young people who truant—I know that they are a tiny minority—feel no need to keep a low profile. Indeed, they flaunt their behaviour. Worst of all, in many cases the truanting is done with the support of adults who masquerade as parents.

When we talk about truancy, we must acknowledge that we must vigorously address the depressing cycle of underachievement, apathy and the almost inevitable slide into antisocial behaviour and crime—a cycle that will be stubbornly perpetuated if we do not attempt to get to grips with the problem. That is why I welcome the Government's recently announced plans to base uniformed police officers in up to 400 schools in England's worst crime hotspots as part of their £90 million crackdown on truancy.

Geraint Davies: My hon. Friend may be interested to know that recent research discloses that the majority of the crimes committed by such youths on other youths take place outside the school gates after school. Children who have been excluded or who are truanting intimidate children when they leave school. They meet up with their mates, press drugs on them and take mobile phones. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a case to be made for having police at the school gate when schools break up to ensure that the perpetrators are caught and to prevent such crimes from being committed?

Colin Burgon: I agree with my hon. Friend. Indeed, I was going to cover that later in my contribution.

I also welcome the response of John Dunford, the general secretary of the Secondary Heads Association, to the Government's support for schools in their attempts to combat truancy. He said:

> "Headteachers use a wide range of measures to improve attendance, but too much truancy is condoned by parents".

Parents are key to the problem. Unfortunately, the role of parents is not mentioned in the Opposition motion, and that is one of its great weaknesses.

Similar support was given to the Government's measures by Steve Pilkington, from the Association of Chief Police Officers. He said:

> "This approach is not part of the police taking a soft option . . . youth crime is a complex issue and there is a need to adopt a range of responses—from working with children and young people in and around schools . . . to effectively targeting and dealing with serious and persistent offenders".

I am pleased that the Select Committee on Education and Skills discussed that problem. It called for a review of the penalties faced by parents of truanting children who assist in letting 6 million days of education go to waste every year. No one, whether it be the Government, schools, teachers, parents or taxpayers, can condone that appalling statistic and its negative knock-on effects.

Bringing parents into the equation is vital. The teachers I regularly talk to go along with that, although some are uneasy about the case of Patricia Amos, the parent who was jailed in Oxfordshire. However, I notice that that liberal organ *The Guardian* today reports that Ms Amos was visited 71 times in 12 months by social workers who tried to ensure that her daughters went to school. No one can say that an effort was not made to help that woman in those circumstances.

The other issue that I have discussed with teachers—some of them are iffy about this, too—is the consideration of the plans to restrict child benefit to families whose children consistently truant and misbehave. All the teachers I speak to accept that we have to act decisively to address that problem, and I very much share that view.

The Select Committee estimates that 80 per cent. of truants caught in sweeps of shopping centres were accompanied by an adult, often a parent. I congratulate the city centre truancy sweep that took place last October in Leeds, my home city, organised jointly by Education Leeds and the West Yorkshire police force, operating under section 16 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which deals with truants. It was a well-planned and organised sweep that took place over five days. The city centre was swept—figuratively speaking—daily, and a patrol allocated to cover other well-known high-risk truancy areas. During the operation, over five days, 328 children of varying ages from schools throughout the city were stopped. Significantly, the police reported a marked reduction in city centre crime over that week.

Some of the excuses given by children who were wandering round the city centre were interesting. One claimed that she had a virus, so she should not have been walking around Dortmund square. Another claimed that she had sickness and diarrhoea, so I would not have advised her to walk round the Merrion centre. A third said that he had a hernia, but it did not stop him walking up the hill at Briggate, so he was doing very well. It is not surprising that the top three sites for apprehending truants were in Leeds city centre. In a way, that is a backhanded compliment to the council's work to make the heart of our city a more attractive place to visit.

A study of those statistics yields much useful information. As I said, one glaring fact is that a high proportion of those 328 truants were accompanied by parents or adults. Clearly, we must therefore factor into our equation parents and their attitudes on this subject.

I commend to the Minister yet another initiative being taken in Leeds—the authorised pupils pass scheme. Under the scheme, pupils who use local shops and amenities, or who visit public areas during normal school lesson time, can be asked to show a pass. The pass carries the name of the school and the pupil, and is entitled "Time Out—Authorised Absence Pass". The pass gives details of the pupil's absence from school, including reasons for the absence, the time out and the expected return time to school. The initiative is funded via private sponsorship and has enabled Education Leeds and West Yorkshire police to get the scheme up and running in the south Leeds area. The aim—thanks to new money from the Government—is to expand the scheme to the whole of Leeds. I ask Ministers to monitor and evaluate the scheme and, if it is successful, provide further funding to refine and enhance the project in the years ahead.

No doubt we have all been watching "Coronation Street" over the past few weeks, as Ken Barlow has struggled with a difficult pupil, but the reality in schools is very different. I find myself in total agreement—not that I am after a job—with the Education Secretary's recent comment:

> "we will do what we can to support heads and teachers but without parents taking their responsibilities seriously we will not make the progress we want. Parents have a duty to make sure they are doing all they can to instil discipline in their children".

Anybody who has read the university of Warwick study carried out on behalf of the National Union of Teachers entitled "Unacceptable Pupil Behaviour" will realise the debilitating situation that faces too many of our teachers across the country. There is considerable dissatisfaction among classroom teachers about the lack of support that they feel they get from senior management teams when faced with low-level but frequent disruption. Serious incidents, such as violence from pupils and threats from parents were less frequent but highly disturbing to teachers, who felt that they were being blamed in a climate in which parents were unprepared to take responsibility for their children.

As a teacher who was pursued by a large and irate parent who had an even larger dog, I know that discretion is sometimes the better part of valour, and that one should keep out of the way and let somebody else take the responsibility. In many cases, however, the problems were reported as being due to a minority of children who take up a massive amount of teachers' time and effort. It is a minority of pupils who are responsible. It seems to many teachers that there are no effective sanctions in place, and

[Colin Burgon]

that is why I welcome current Government thinking, which I hope will soon be turned into action, on such policies as the withdrawal of child benefit from the parents of severely disruptive pupils. If that debate has done nothing else, it has made people focus on the role of parental responsibility.

Teachers do not go into the job to become experts in crowd control or unarmed combat, but because they want to teach, they want to open up pupils' minds to the opportunities before them, and, in many cases, because they have a love of their subject. To make sure that teachers can teach and pupils can learn in a calm and civilised atmosphere will cost money. We must face up to the fact that the solution will not come cheap. My view is that no classroom teacher should have to put up with violent and threatening pupils. When that situation arises, it places great stress on the teacher and also deprives other pupils of their right to learn. To exclude those who make teaching and learning impossible because of their behaviour must be our aim. As I said, however, that is a costly exercise.

The system in Leeds of learning support units on site at nearly every high school, with properly trained staff, is expensive to maintain, but it is a cost that we recognise we must meet. Those pupils who cannot even be taught in a learning support unit are referred to a pupil referral unit, of which I think there are four in Leeds. I have nothing but admiration for the work that the staff do with some extremely difficult children, and they are worthy of our support. I am glad that the Government support both of those units with excellence in cities money and standards fund money.

As a result of talking to teachers in my constituency, I have a few suggestions for the Minister—at least to match the five proposed by the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings—that could help create a more disciplined environment in schools. I hope that they are practical. First, there should be increased funding for and an expansion of pupil referral units so that violent and disruptive pupils can be removed from mainstream schools straight away. Secondly, there should be an enhanced pay and career structure for those who work in pupil referral units with our most difficult pupils—those who do the most difficult job should have the best career and pay structures available.

Thirdly, a framework should be introduced that requires parents to exercise their responsibilities in relation to their children's behaviour in school. That should come at the end of a wide public debate, so that the conclusion reached carries widespread public support. Fourthly, we should make sure that, where possible, all schools have a secure site, that is, for example, effectively fenced. I remember refereeing a football match during which three kids who had hijacked a car drove across the pitch four or five times. Unluckily for me, my school was just about to score a goal. Nevertheless, such incidents—many of which are caused by outsiders wandering on to school premises and creating serious problems—can be addressed fairly simply and effectively.

I have also spoken to teachers—my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies) who made this point is no longer in his place—who welcome the presence of the police at school gates at the end of the day. That has also had the beneficial effect of lessening shoplifting and other crime-related incidents in the surrounding area at going home time.

Fifthly, increased liaison with the police in schools will help to reinforce the message that we need coherent and joined-up thinking to address all our problems. Sixthly, we should make sure that all senior management teams in schools place the greatest emphasis on supporting teachers in the classroom when it comes to discipline.

Finally, will Ministers consider the effectiveness of a system of staff training in management of unruly pupils? Staff in pupil referral units are trained in a programme called Team Teach, which many teachers consider to be highly effective. If that is judged to be a useful tool for teachers, could we make sure that each secondary school had at least a couple of staff trained in Team Teach so that they could control effectively some fairly aggressive pupils?

The suggestions that I have made are not partisan but I hope that they are practical and effective.

6.8 pm

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Elmet (Colin Burgon). I shall respond in a moment to some of his remarks.

All Members, on both sides of the debate, have recognised the confluence of issues that lead to difficulties in and out of schools: truancy, discipline and bullying. Bullying leads to school refusal, truancy leads to crime, disorder and, in some cases, pregnancy, and discipline leads to exclusion and the possibilities of solving those problems. That is a complex web of conditions, into which I suspect that outsiders, among whom I number Members and Ministers, should tread with trepidation.

That is why I want to comment on the contribution of the hon. Member for Elmet. He seemed to suggest a range of solutions that were exactly the sort that one would like implemented in schools. I would hope, however, that the profession would already be recognising and implementing—or at least influencing—such solutions, and that we would not be approaching the problem of indiscipline in schools and truancy on a top-down basis.

I am sorry if that point is slightly outside the non-party aspirations of the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), who is not in his place, but I recognise that Ministers feel compelled to do something. I am sure that we welcome many of the things that they have tried to do, but the final responsibility for ensuring the effective management of a school must surely rest with the manager of that school. A balance must be struck between the desires of Ministers—and, for that matter, Opposition Members—to find the right solution and the tendency to micro-manage. I hope therefore that we will show humility in our approach to the issue. We should not dole out just prescriptions, or even money. We should dole out responsibility and real power to those who have the difficult jobs of running our schools and looking after the condition of our communities.

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of targets and statistics. It was evident from the friendly dispute between my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) and the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) that statistics are as open to manipulation and misunderstanding as any other form of debate. When reducing unauthorised absence becomes a target, schools are tempted to authorise absence.

I have been told of a case involving a friend of mine whose daughter persistently truanted from a very reputable school. The solution that the school adopted was to ring her parents and ask them to authorise the absences retrospectively. Otherwise, they would damage the school's statistics. I recognise that schools do not commonly adopt that approach, but anyone presented with the difficulty of solving such problems will search for a range of solutions. One of them is to fiddle the statistics.

We have wonderful figures for registration, but pupils have resorted to post-registration truancy. There has also been a shift from one kind of exclusion to another. If a school cannot exclude permanently, it opts for a series of temporary short-term exclusions until the Government clamp down on the number of days allowed for short-term exclusions. All absences relate to a figure that Ministers have in mind.

I congratulate the Secretary of State on alighting on a target for attendance. I welcome that approach because, without such a target, we cannot achieve the successful education at least in the narrow sense of the two senses that my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings mentioned. We will not be successful if pupils are not in class.

We must place more faith and confidence in, and offer more support to, the good sense and professionalism of head teachers and governors. We must also consider the local reputation of a school. Good discipline depends on clear signals from all levels in society backing those who are placed in authority. I recognise that those in authority can make mistakes, but it is incumbent on us—and particularly on those who sit on appeal panels dealing with exclusions—to recognise the relative importance of backing those who may have made mistakes from time to time. The good head teacher backs those of his staff who occasionally make mistakes and the good leader backs those of his supporters who occasionally make mistakes. It is important that we adopt such an approach because we must not undermine people responsible for those lower down the chain.

We give head teachers an extremely difficult job to do and the least that we can do is back them. Therefore, I would like an end to the system by which appeal panels undermine head teachers. Governors must set the policy, head teachers must manage its implementation and an appeal panel should overturn the implementation of the policy in relation to an exclusion only if there has been a clear failure of process. The panel should then refer the matter back for further consideration. Nothing could be worse than leaving a head teacher red faced and impotent, sometimes in the face of a pupil who has persistently flouted the discipline of the school and perhaps acted to endanger the well-being of other pupils. *[Interruption.]* I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger) for his support.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough said that schools are only a reflection of society. Of course they are, but they are extremely important not only in reflecting society but in developing it. I hope that society will support schools and offer more support to parents and carers by being less damning of those who do not measure up to our, the Government's and the media's prescriptions of how they should bring up their children. We should be less condemnatory, particularly of those who make a serious effort in the face of difficulty to bring up their children in a decent and honourable way.

I wonder why the Frenchman was hauled off Princes street in Edinburgh and put before the Scottish courts simply because he slapped his child. I wonder why a Scot was similarly treated for slapping his daughter in the dentist's surgery. That is not the approach to discipline that I would have chosen but, fortunately, I do not have to make such decisions because I do not have children. I would not have made a foul-mouthed son or daughter wash his or her mouth out with soap and water, but I am not convinced that doing that just once is a matter that should be taken before the courts. We must support parents in the incredibly difficult job that they are trying to do.

We should also support the police more effectively in the difficult job that they do. Therefore, I congratulate Labour Members on moving from the position that some of them and some of their predecessors took when they were in opposition. They recognise more than they did 10 years ago the difficulties that the police, parents and schools face.

The case of Mrs. Amos in Oxfordshire shows clearly the extent to which liberalism has failed. A huge number of interventions by social services for more than a year failed to persuade Mrs. Amos to send her daughters to school. I found it almost heartbreaking that she should be imprisoned for her failure to do so, but we must accept that it was the right response in this case. However, we must also recognise the difficulties that cause children to stay away from school. Sometimes the problem is as obvious as the failure of school transport or the failure of the school. As the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough pointed out, the curriculum sometimes fails. However, well before the introduction of the national curriculum, my friend, Dennis O'Keeffe, identified the problem of post-registration truancy.

Bullying in schools is a real problem that schools have acknowledged only recently. They have yet to deal with it successfully. I do not refer necessarily to high-level racist bullying, but to low-level intolerance of those who look different or speak differently. Appallingly, there is sometimes intolerance of the very able or of those who are very pretty. Such pupils are bullied, and that type of low-level disorder makes parents lose their faith in schools. It is no wonder that parents sometimes condone truancy because they need the child at home and feel that it is not worth their going to school.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Turner: Of course I will give way, although I was about to say that I do not intend to speak for much longer because I can see that other hon. Members want to take part in the debate.

David Taylor: Does the hon. Gentleman share the disappointment of many hon. Members on both sides of the House that the motion tabled by his party makes no

[David Taylor]

mention of parents when it refers to tackling problems of truancy and bad behaviour? Should not parents, as well as schools, be a central part of the motion?

Mr. Turner: I do not share any such feeling because I have referred to parents in many of my remarks. However, we must recognise that parents have an incredibly difficult job to do in society.

We have to offer escape routes for pupils for whom school is not a satisfactory experience. We have to enable them more easily to go to smaller schools, to go to different kinds of schools and to go into further education, perhaps before the age of 16. Perhaps they could take time out of school and return later. We have to be imaginative in the opportunities that we offer. If we do that, we will at least begin to be successful in tackling this most difficult of problems.

6.21 pm

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I am pleased to say that in his last few contributions the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) has been agreeing with most of what the Government are trying to do. We can see from this debate that all parties care about truancy and want to do something about it, but it is fair to point out that the Conservatives had 18 years in government. The children who were truanting during the Thatcher years are now the grandparents of today's truants, so others must take some responsibility for the rot that has set in.

This debate is not all about inner-city areas; it is about areas such as Doncaster and Barnsley in South Yorkshire, where a whole industry was wiped out and nothing was put in its place. The children who thought that they could follow their fathers into a job down the pit found that there was no industry to employ them. I make no excuses for mentioning that because today, with objective 1 funding and other support from the Government, we have a chance to turn that situation round. However, those neighbourhoods were left without a lifeline, and the rot set in because there was no support for them.

Mr. Andrew Turner *rose—*

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire) *rose—*

Caroline Flint: I will not give way because I have only just started my speech. Hon. Members can ask any professional in Doncaster who works with kids who have offended or with vulnerable families, and they will say that they now have countless opportunities to try to tackle those issues.

I sit on the board of sure start in Denaby and Conisbrough, and we have funded five staff members to work with schools and families before kids even start nursery school. They try to make sure that there is a connection between the school and the parents. In some cases there is only one parent and in others it is the grandparents who look after the children. We hope that if we can create a good relationship with carers when children are three, we shall be able to sustain it throughout their time at school. That is part of the process of connecting parents to schools, which we are striving to do. Some parents do not respond to such support, and I will return to that subject in a moment.

I want to bring some fresh evidence to the debate. I congratulate Doncaster council and South Yorkshire police on beginning a two-week operation of truancy sweeps, deploying 16 police officers and 16 education welfare officers in a targeted campaign. The interim figures from those sweeps show that during the first week alone, 291 pupils who were not in school were stopped; 96 were immediately returned to school, and 101 were in the company of a parent, but 63 of them had no valid reason for not being at school. During the first week the officers visited an additional 163 homes to confront parents whose children's attendance record was less than 85 per cent.

One benefit of the campaign has been the high-profile and visible police presence, which I believe will depress the level of street crime in shopping areas in and around my constituency. I am delighted that constituents have mentioned seeing police vehicles marked "Truancy Patrol", which means that a wider message is being communicated to the public. Doncaster council is very willing to prosecute parents using the new aggravated offence introduced by the Government.

Inevitably, as the sweeps took place in May, some of the 291 pupils stopped were on exam leave. However, schools must try to reinforce the message that such leave is a time for quiet preparation for exams, not for shopping, and it is not an extension to school holidays. We must ensure that there are opportunities for pupils on exam leave to study, if not in schools then perhaps with the library service, and parents must support them in that.

There remains a problem with young people who are not sitting exams and therefore have no studying to do. Many have historically poor attendance at school, and during exam leave they have a lot of time on their hands. The situation of those who are excluded from the exam process reinforces the case for the Government to widen the curriculum to include work-based and vocational study from age 14. The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) claims responsibility for that policy, but I know from my time on what was then the Education and Employment Committee that many Labour Members have been involved in campaigning for 14-plus options for a very long time. I welcome the Government's moves in that direction.

A further problem exposed by the sweeps is that if children are in the company of a parent, the truancy team has no power to return them to school, even if they have no valid reason for being absent. The team can only give the parent a letter explaining the consequences of non-attendance and send a form to the school for the school and the education welfare officer to follow up. We should consider how we can strengthen the law in that respect.

We have heard many contributions about the role of parents in relation to children's attendance at school, and I acknowledge that there are many reasons why children fail to attend school. The problem is multi-faceted, by any stretch of the imagination. Many parents need support, and although it may take some time, they become open to the idea of accepting it. Undoubtedly, however, there are hard-core parents who are given a huge amount of support but do not really give a damn. The level of parental connivance in truanting is extraordinary.

I commend Doncaster council for its tough stance on poor attendance. It welcomes the additional powers made available by the Government, and in Doncaster the first parent is about to be prosecuted for the new aggravated offence. The council wants to guarantee that parents who do nothing about truanting—by which I mean that they do nothing to co-operate with any of the services that are available—will make their first court appearance within 18 weeks of a pattern of non-attendance being established. The council is obliged to provide the court with evidence of poor attendance over 13 weeks to prove a pattern. I hope that in Doncaster we will not see a case like that of the mother in Banbury, in which it took two years of work before a conclusion was reached. Stronger action, taken earlier, should achieve a result sooner.

I know from talking to colleagues that there is concern about the removal of benefits. I welcome new powers such as parenting orders, and we need to think about how we can use them. I shall share an anecdote with the House. Discussion with a child who was truanting revealed that he felt that his mother did not give him much time. He was asked, "In return for your going to school, what is the one thing you would like your mother to do?" He replied that he would like her to sit and watch a football match on television with him. That seems ridiculously trivial, but when the mother was told that her son simply wanted to spend more time with her, she complied and the boy went to school. That is an example of imaginative use of a parenting order.

There are, however, some families who are not doing their children justice, and deduction of child benefit may be a way forward. It is erroneous to suggest that that policy is an attack on the poor. If children do not attend school they will not achieve, and they will be relegated to a life of poverty. Along the way, they will set an example for their younger brothers and sisters. We should consider withholding child benefit until parents improve their attitude and their approach to working with the services, and then give it to them if they co-operate. That is all about having policies that provide support and take account of the complexities, but at the end of the day, it is about putting the child's interests first.

People should not kid themselves that we do not consider deducting benefits for other reasons. If people refuse to work they can lose their employment benefit. If people park their cars on double yellow lines they will get parking tickets, regardless of their income. We have to consider poverty in the long term. We cannot give up on such children; it is important that we develop a sense of responsibility among parents. Schools exist to provide a quality service and a good education, but parents are responsible for their children. They have to take up that challenge, and we must ensure that they attend to it.

6.30 pm

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): I am pleased to have the chance to speak in this important debate, and to follow my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes), who plays a significant role in my life in so far as he prevents me from truanting from the House—if I were ever to think of doing so, which, of course, I do not—because he is the pairing Whip. It is largely thanks to him that I am here.

I came into politics in the hope, of course, that my ideas might change things. I dreamt that a policy that I conceived might one day influence the Government—so imagine my surprise when on 22 March this year I heard that the Prime Minister was proposing to dock benefits from the parents of truanting children. I thought that I had seen that policy somewhere before, and looked up *The Daily Telegraph* of 17 January, where I found an article that had evidently inspired new Labour. The resounding penultimate paragraph said:

> "If parents will not inculcate discipline in their children, there seems no reason why there should not be a graded and means-tested system of fines, on the parents, for the results of their neglect and irresponsibility."

I looked to see who had written those words, and I was astonished to see that it was me.

I tackled a friend of mine, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), and asked him whether I had inspired the Government's policy, and he all but confirmed it. The Secretary of State is not now in her place, but perhaps other Ministers will be so good as to authenticate my paternity of that policy. It is a better solution than locking up Patricia Amos for 60 days. When the Minister winds up the debate, I should like him to tell me how he thinks the policy might work.

Before we reach that solution, however, we need to consider seriously why we have been driven to those desperate expedients. The reason, of course, is that the position is bleak. I do not know what figures Labour Members are relying on, but our evidence suggests that truancy has risen by 11 per cent. since Labour came to power, and that violence against teachers has risen fivefold. I do not want to be partisan; I agree with the line taken by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis). This has been a useful debate, but the Secretary of State was perhaps excessively complacent. Her line seemed to be that this was a chronic problem that had been going on for many years, so she could be forgiven for not attempting to solve it.

There is no room for complacency; 50,000 children a day are truanting. They are blighting their own lives. We all know the figures: 30 per cent. of prisoners are ex-truants. They are blighting the lives of the rest of us. Society is now living in exaggerated terror of feral children. We are now so frightened of children on trains that when we see them mucking around, swearing and threatening people, we cower in our seats and we do not even intervene. Too often in this day and age, we pass by on the other side. That is ignominious and a poor reflection on all of us. The problem must be addressed, and it begins at school. That is why this debate is vital.

What are the causes? I agree with the hon. Members for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) and for Harrogate and Knaresborough about the causes. Many hon. Members have said a lot about children being fed up with school and not being interested in their lessons. That may be part of the problem, but it is not all the problem. It is not enough to demand that teachers be so electrifying in their performance as to keep the attention of the likes of the hon. Member for Huddersfield and prevent them from goofing off, as he rather alarmingly said he did, thus setting a poor example to his constituents.

It is not enough to ask teachers to pep up their lessons; the central problem is a loss of parents' and teachers' authority. The key reasons for that have been well adumbrated by my hon. Friends. Head teachers' power to exclude was taken away. Exclusion is a terrible thing, but it was a severe diminution of head teachers' authority to circumscribe them in that way.

[Mr. Boris Johnson]

I talked to the head teacher of a primary school who has lost a great deal of authority over his own staff. He cannot decide whether to promote a teacher up the pay spine, as it is called, without a 27-page document from the teacher herself and an independent Whitehall assessor to decide whether that promotion is justified. That is a ridiculous piece of Whitehall bureaucracy, and it should be got rid of.

Head teachers no longer have sufficient authority to discipline either teachers or pupils. That is ridiculous, and I agree with the tenor of much of what was said by my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner). It is a shame that a head teacher in my constituency cannot even ask children who have broken several school rules to pick up crisps during break by way of punishment.

It is true that there are no simplistic solutions. We cannot ignore the final point that teachers make to all hon. Members, which is that their problems and difficulties with discipline are very largely passed on—or subcontracted out—to them by the parents who refuse to discipline their children. Of course there are many reasons why parents may not be providing their children with adequate discipline. I am sure that Labour Members will be swift to leap to their feet to blame Thatcherism and 20 years of Tory misrule. Aye, they will blame society.

David Taylor: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Johnson: I do not want to take interventions. *[Interruption.]* Go on then, blame society.

David Taylor: I accept part of what the hon. Gentleman says, but when his own children are old enough he may find that in fact, it is quite difficult to give teenagers sufficient constraints and incentives to go along with their parents' wishes, whether in terms of school attendance or any other aspect of their behaviour. Things are not always the fault of the parents, although they may be.

Mr. Johnson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for warning me of my fate when my children reach their teenage years. I listen to him with all humility and sincerity, but it is grossly patronising to many people who live on very low incomes and none the less produce polite, well-mannered and law-abiding children to say that everything is the fault of society.

David Taylor: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Johnson: Hang on; hear me out, old boy. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry; I mean I ask the hon. Gentleman to hear me out.

It strikes me that the fault must lie fundamentally with the parents. In the past 20 to 25 years, we have seen a revolution in the relationship between children and adults in our society as fundamental as the revolution in the relationship between the sexes. Children no longer respect adult authority as they used to. There are many reasons for that, and in some ways it is a good thing, but in some ways it is a bad thing. We need to restore the chain of responsibility between child and adult, and if that means fining the parents of truanting and undisciplined children, I say that that is fine.

I am reminded of a friend of my family—a single mother from Bridlington in Yorkshire—*[Interruption.]* Is Bridlington in Yorkshire? *[Interruption.]* Yes, it is. When we were discussing the fall of the Berlin wall, she said that she did not know about that because when she was at school her mother used to say, "Don't worry about history. Let's go off shopping." If some measure, such as the one envisaged by the Government, could stop that casual truanting, it would be a very good thing.

It would be nice to find that the Government are prepared not just to filch an idea from a Tory paper, but to produce some serious ideas about how to carry it out. I genuinely believe that there is no problem more central to many of the ills of our society than that of truanting children and ill discipline in schools. I very much hope that the Government have taken those ideas on board and that they will produce practical solutions. If not, they can, of course, make way for those who will.

6.39 pm

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): It is a great pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson)—which I think I did!

This has been an important if short debate. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) launched a typically trenchant attack on the Government's failures, which was succeeded by—I am afraid—a typically complacent response from the Secretary of State. The tenor of her remarks was "The problems of truancy and indiscipline are being addressed"; but, as even she was prepared to accept, those problems have become worse rather than better. She says that educational opportunities are being improved in inner cities. If that is so, why are the Government determined to lower standards of admissions to universities?

On cue, the Minister for Lifelong Learning, the hon. Member for Barking (Margaret Hodge), enters the Chamber. Why are the Government focusing on lowering admission standards for pupils from inner-city schools, rather than concentrating on raising standards in those schools to give such children as good a chance of entering higher education as everyone else?

There is a crisis in discipline in our schools, a crisis that is driving teachers out of the profession. It is making it impossible for other children to learn. According to the National Union of Teachers, 45 per cent. of those leaving the profession cite behaviour. Labour's response has been not to tackle discipline, but to prevent heads from excluding violent and disruptive pupils. A teacher from a private prep school whom I met recently made it very clear that he had left his job in a state school entirely because of problems involving discipline and behaviour. He told me that he would rather have swept the streets than remain in his former job. That represents a dismal failure—something with which we cannot be satisfied, and something of which the Government should be ashamed.

Labour's response has been to set a target to reduce the number of exclusions, possibly the only target that the party has met. What has been the cost of meeting that target? The number of exclusions was reduced from 12,668 in 1996–97 to 8,600 in 1999–2000, but only as a result of the then Secretary of State's publication of Department for Education and Employment circular 10/99, which stated:

> "A decision to exclude should be taken only: in response to serious breaches of the school's disciplinary policy; once a range of alternative strategies have been tried and have failed".

It was shockingly disingenuous of the Secretary of State to claim earlier that heads had always had freedom to exclude. They have not—and the present Government took away that freedom, through circular 10/99, when she was a Minister in the Department. The fact that they have performed a U-turn and recognised the failure of the policy and the damage that it did is no excuse, and does not absolve the Secretary of State of responsibility. Moreover, for her not to admit—today, in the House of Commons—to what she did was unacceptable.

What prior strategies had Ministers in mind for dealing with a pupil who had threatened his teacher with a knife, or sexually assaulted another child in the classroom? What right did Ministers think they had to interfere with a head teacher's ability to maintain proper discipline in a school—to protect the safety and dignity of his staff, and of the children in his care? Their policy was clearly wrong; only someone who was detached from reality could ever have considered it appropriate or reasonable.

Yet even when the policy had been changed—even when Ministers were saying that it was wrong to focus solely on reducing the number of exclusions, rather than concentrating on tackling the underlying problems—Ministers boasted in the House about reductions, hoping that they would continue along the same lines. In April last year, the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), then an Education Minister, said:

> "Permanent exclusions have fallen by 18 per cent . . . and we expect further reductions. There is no evidence that that has been at the expense of other children's learning."—[*Official Report*, 27 April 2001; Vol. 367, c. 621.]

There is such evidence, and Ministers have belatedly accepted it—although one or two Labour Members still do not appear to appreciate it. The hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies) boasted earlier about the reduction in the number of exclusions, although it had been achieved at the cost of massively increased indiscipline and disruption in schools and a huge blow to morale in the teaching profession.

A one third cut in the amount of truancy has not been achieved. In fact there has been no cut whatever, and in secondary schools truancy has increased. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford pointed out, it has increased most in inner-city areas—the areas at which most of the Government's gimmicks and initiatives have been directed, and to which most of the money has gone. The number of days lost in schools because of truancy has increased in all big inner-city areas. All that has happened while the Secretary of State has been a Minister in the Department. She cannot blame it all on her predecessor; she must share the blame.

What does Labour propose to do now? What will it do to tackle the results of truancy, about which we have heard today? What will it do about the 50,000 children who play truant on a typical school day? What will it do about the fact that 40 per cent. of street robberies and 25 per cent. of burglaries are committed by truant children who should be at school? I will not recite all the figures that have already been given by Members on both sides of the House.

What are the implications for child drug abuse and teenage pregnancies? At least the Chairman of the Select Committee was only punting on the Thames when he was not at school, as he was supposed to be. We are grateful for that.

The latest foray—the latest proposed gimmick—is the docking of child benefit. The Secretary of State was the only Cabinet Minister who was prepared to come out as a supporter of the scheme after the Prime Minister floated it—perhaps because, as the Manchester press reveals, Dame Jean Else, head teacher at the Secretary of State's old school, claims that it was her policy. Perhaps she offered it to the Secretary of State, and the Secretary of State brought it to the Government. I am sorry to disappoint my hon. Friend the Member for Henley: the parentage of the policy is obviously extremely doubtful.

The key question is "Will this really happen, or is it just another attempt to grab a headline, like the absurd chaos of the Government's policy on drugs in schools?" The Government are swinging wildly from one extreme to the other. Just a few months ago, in January, the *Daily Mail* produced a report from DfES sources—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Dudley, South (Mr. Pearson), who is a Government Whip for the time being, at least, should not disparage the *Daily Mail*, which the Prime Minister regards as the main yardstick of the success or failure of the present Government.

According to the *Daily Mail*,

> "Schools could be told to rewrite their rules on cannabis to fall in line with the relaxation of drug laws and growing tolerance of 'recreational' drugs.
>
> Education Secretary Estelle Morris signalled her endorsement yesterday for changes which would end tough punishments such as suspension as expulsion for pupils who take cannabis.
>
> Officials in her department said schools should 'take account' of the move by Home Secretary David Blunkett to downgrade cannabis from a Class B to a Class C drug when deciding their drugs policy."

Also in January, there was an exchange on the subject of policy to control drug abuse in schools. The Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis), will recall that he said:

> "It is unacceptable to take any illegal substance to school, but it is right that head teachers are allowed the discretion to make judgments about the powers at their disposal, whether that is no action, fixed-period exclusion or a permanent exclusion."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee G*, 10 January 2002; c. 370.]

There is a huge shift between that and what is now being spun by the Government in the media. We read and hear that they are getting tough on dealers in schools, and that there is zero tolerance for those caught supplying drugs within the school gates. In Committee, the Under-Secretary made clear the Government's belief that this was a matter entirely for head teachers. He refused to issue guidance to schools saying whether those dealing in or taking drugs would be permanently excluded.

Labour's policies on discipline and truancy have ~~been~~ an abject failure. Ministers lurch from gimmick to gimmick, abandoning each failed policy in turn. They swing wildly from one prescription to the opposite. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford highlighted the contradiction between the Government's amendment and this morning's announcement from the Department for Education and Skills. At a time when there is an intense focus on the difference between what the Government

[Mr. Graham Brady]

spend on public services and what they actually deliver, it is remarkable that their amendment notes that £600 million has been spent on

"measures to tackle truancy and poor behaviour".

The Secretary of State admitted that truancy rates have not improved while violence in schools has mushroomed. There can be no better example of the Government's failure to deliver than the words of their amendment: £600 million has been spent, yet the truancy rate has stood still—as the Secretary of State pointed out—and behaviour has got worse.

The torrent of gimmicks and directives has failed. It is time that we had a Government who backed up heads and allowed them to maintain discipline. It is time that we had a Government who had real aspirations to raise standards in all communities throughout our country. Labour has failed for too long. In two or three years, they will be permanently excluded from office.

6.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): On the whole, the House has been at its best during this debate. We have heard many important contributions and there has been a great deal of consensus on both sides of the House. There was only one exception: Opposition Front-Bench Members did not propose one new idea, one policy or one original thought to tackle something that is fundamentally important to the quality of education in this country.

My hon. Friends the Members for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) and for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) and the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) recognised that complex issues are involved: home, school, peer relationships and relationships in communities. There are no quick-fix, easy solutions. There are social problems, educational under-achievement, low aspirations and family relationship issues.

We heard much about the role of parental responsibility where, interestingly, many Members shared a consensus. I am sorry to disappoint the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson): new Labour may be a broad church but it will never be so broad as to suggest that one of our ideas originated from him. However, I am willing to suggest to the Prime Minister that he adopts the novel idea of getting children to pick up crisps as a solution to discipline problems in our schools.

There was consensus among Members on the importance of parental responsibility, with one exception—an hon. Member for whom I have a great deal of respect: the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough. He rightly talked constantly about prevention, support, early intervention and so on. He talked of people's right to dignity and equality of opportunity—all those aspirations are shared by Labour Members—yet he never talked about responsibilities; he talked only of rights.

Today we have heard descriptions of situations where parents are given intensive support, unimaginable levels of resource, incredible tolerance and compassion, but despite all that they do not fulfil a basic responsibility—to get their children to school. In those circumstances, it is right that we tell parents that, as citizens, they have a responsibility.

The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough made valid points about the curriculum and about listening to young people. He knows that our proposals for 14 to 19-year-olds make clear the need to reconfigure the curriculum, building it around the needs of individual pupils, and to raise the status of vocational education, which we have been unable to do in this country, under successive Governments.

The hon. Gentleman said we must listen to young people. There has never been a Government who were more committed to engaging in a two-way dialogue with young people. We recognise that they are consumers and users of education and youth services and we have introduced a variety of initiatives. We held an open day this week. We have published a Green Paper on 14 to 19-year-olds. Young people were involved in the development of the design and evaluation of the Connexions service from the beginning. The hon. Gentleman was right to make his points, but he must accept that the Government are making more progress on curriculum reform and listening to young people than has occurred for many a year.

The hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) rightly talked of the need to back head teachers, yet the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) criticised us for making absolutely clear where we stand as regards those who deal and supply drugs in our schools. We pointed out that when head teachers decide permanently to exclude such pupils, those decisions should be respected and should not be overturned on appeal. I should have thought—

Mr. Brady: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lewis: I will not give way.

I should have thought that we were backing head teachers with exactly the support that they suggested we should give them.

We heard an excellent contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Colin Burgon)—

Mr. Brady: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lewis: I will not give way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Elmet referred to the importance of staff training. We must give our teachers and the adults in our schools the confidence and the skills to manage behaviour effectively in a modern classroom. We are investing in that staff training.

My hon. Friend and my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley gave us examples of good practice in their constituencies. It is important to shine a light on good practice and to spread it, because in many parts of the country individual schools are tackling ill-discipline and truancy effectively.

I want to make particular reference to the speech of the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes). It was a quality contribution which ended with five specific policy proposals—more than were made by either of the Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen. The hon. Gentleman's contribution was measured and objective. I realise that the Leader of the Opposition has just entered the Chamber so I am sorry if I am irretrievably damaging the career of the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings, but I have some serious points to make about his speech.

The hon. Gentleman talked about our responsibility to support the development of all-round citizens. I could not agree more. That is one of the reasons why, from September, we shall be introducing citizenship as part of the statutory curriculum in our schools. That is one of the reasons why the Green Paper proposes a matriculation diploma at 19, which would recognise voluntary work, citizenship activity and participation in wider activities.

The hon. Gentleman also said that in debates such as this one politicians shy away from discussion of attitudes and values. The hon. Gentleman is right—this is all about attitudes, values and principles. However, he will stop enjoying my contribution at that point. At the end of the day, we cannot shy away from the fact that for 18 years we heard the philosophy that there was no such thing as society and that we were simply a collection of individuals.

That philosophy consigned whole families, whole communities and a whole generation of young people to the margins of society. One in three children grew up in poverty. Our aspiration for the same period of office is to eliminate child poverty. Those are the differences in values and attitudes that influence the Labour Government.

The hon. Gentleman constantly pointed out that truancy is increasing. With all due respect, I must correct him: because the Government were so ambitious in their objectives, they set themselves the challenge of significantly reducing truancy. What is true is that truancy rates have remained static for seven or eight years. We are not content with that and we are determined to tackle it.

I shall close my remarks by responding directly to the Front-Bench spokesmen for Her Majesty's official Opposition, who did not offer us a single original idea. I have several rhetorical questions for them. It is a good job that my questions are rhetorical because no answers would come from the Opposition.

During 18 years of unbroken rule, where were the sure start initiatives? Where were reduced class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds? Where was the literacy and numeracy strategy? Where was the reform of secondary education? Where was the strategy to tackle problems in the early years of secondary education? Where were the proposals to reform the curriculum for 14 to 19-year-olds? Where were the learning mentors, the classroom assistants and the Connexions personal advisers? Where were the learning support and pupil referral units? Where was the commitment to ensuring that all permanently excluded pupils have access to a full-time education? Where was the message to parents that they have a duty to ensure—

Chris Grayling: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for a Minister to ask questions of Conservative Front Benchers and then refuse to give way to them?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): The Chair is not responsible for hon. Members' speeches.

Mr. Lewis: Do Conservative Members not want to hear the message?

The difference between Her Majesty's official Opposition and this Government is that, as behaviour in schools deteriorated and truancy remained too high, the Conservatives did nothing. In contrast, we are waging war on bad behaviour in schools, because it undermines standards and leads to crime on our streets. Their legacy was one in three children growing up in poverty; we will eliminate child poverty. They consigned thousands to the margins of society; we will rebuild society.

I urge hon. Members to reject the motion. It does nothing for pupils, it does nothing for parents, and it does nothing for teachers.

Question put, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 180, Noes 334.

Division No. 248] **[7 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey

Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Charles Hendry and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura

Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Mr. Tony McNulty.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments), and agreed to.*

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House applauds the fact that policies to reduce truancy and tackle poor behaviour are central to the Government's strategy to transform secondary schools; notes that, since 1997, the Government has spent over £600 million to support measures to tackle truancy and poor behaviour and that this has been supplemented by a further £66 million from this year's Budget, that behaviour is satisfactory or better in 11 out of 12 secondary schools and 49 out of 50 primary schools, that there are now over 1,050 Learning Support Units and 3,420 Learning Mentors in schools and that there are 331 Pupil Referral Units whose quality Ofsted reports to be steadily improving; welcomes the fact that the Government is promoting multi-agency initiatives such as Behaviour and Education Support Teams and Connexions that are crucial to addressing this issue, that exclusions have fallen by approximately 28 per cent. to 9,200 from their peak of 12,700 in 1996–97; supports the right of Head Teachers to govern their schools as they see fit; further notes that all permanently excluded pupils will receive a full-time education from September this year and that whilst overall truancy levels remain a cause for concern, action is being taken; further notes that children have a right to education and that parents have a duty to ensure that their children are educated; and believes that the Government's policies will deliver lasting improvements in pupil attendance and behaviour which will support the achievement of higher standards and prevent social exclusion.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I must inform the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Prime Minister.

7.14 pm

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): I beg to move,

That this House is concerned about the provision of education for children with Special Educational Needs; notes that last week was Autism Awareness Week; also notes the publication of reports by the National Autistic Society which shows that two-thirds of teachers in England and Wales believe that there are more children with autism disorders now than five years ago and that one in three children in special schools has some form of autism; notes a survey carried out by the Conservative Party showing that one quarter of special schools feel threatened with closure; is concerned by the alarming rise in teacher vacancies in special schools; condemns the threat to SEN services in the Education Bill; and calls on the Government to set out clearly its plans for this sector and remove the uncertainty which harms the education of children with Special Educational Needs.

Special educational needs are not a glamorous subject; I get that feeling as the Chamber empties at their mention, which is sad. They are not a glamorous subject, but they are important. This is not an occasion for witty party political banter; it is too serious for that and, I am sure that the Minister for School Standards would agree, too sad—*[Interruption.]* I see that he is repeating what I said with disdain, so I shall say it again; it is too serious and too sad. The problem is the thousands of quiet, private little tragedies unfolding all over the country. I believe that the Minister genuinely wants to do his best for the many children who need special help in their education, but unfortunately he is constrained by his Government's dogmatic approach.

We all care about children with disabilities. I was tremendously annoyed whenever the word "care" was used today to hear Government Members laughing—as if Opposition Members are here for any reason other than that we care about vulnerable people in our society. That is certainly why I am here.

Children in Need, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, Mencap, the National Autistic Society and many other charities do wonderful work and are brilliantly supported by millions of people throughout the country who care about the disadvantaged in our society. There is no doubt that individual teachers and learning support assistants who work in special schools or look after special needs children in mainstream schools do a remarkable job. I have recently seen many of them in action; their patience and perseverance are astounding. I could not do their job. It is no exaggeration to say that the achievements in the schools and special schools that I have visited sometimes bring a tear to the eye; those people have a difficult job and an uphill struggle, and many of them are trying hard to achieve so much. Much more, however, could be done if the Government put aside their rigid, dogmatic approach and faced the reality of the enormous challenge before them.

The Opposition have chosen to debate this subject because it is often at the bottom of the list. One goes through the topical issues in education—exams, exclusions, expenses and so on—and at the end one says, "Oh yes, what about special needs?"

Phil Hope (Corby): You might say that.

Mrs. Laing: I am saying exactly the opposite; it has often been said, and one cannot help but feel that it has been said by the Government for many years. Local authorities, too, often say, "Oh, but what about special educational needs?"

Phil Hope: The hon. Lady criticises the Government for not doing anything about special educational needs. Naturally, she is aware that funding for special educational needs has increased dramatically under the Government. We published the first comprehensive White Paper on support for special educational needs and are implementing the key principles of inclusion and partnership. To describe that as not delivering is to misrepresent the situation.

Mrs. Laing: No, the hon. Gentleman is wrong; I did not say that that was not delivering. The last Conservative Government did a lot on special educational needs, but not enough; more still needs to be done. The hon. Gentleman talks about not delivering; I have not got to that yet, but he has correctly guessed that I am going to say that the Government are not delivering. Producing papers and having ideas are not the same as delivering, but I shall come to that later.

We want to give more prominence to the problem of providing a good education for children with special needs, because no one is more vulnerable or in need of help than a child who cannot communicate and wants to do what the other children are doing, but cannot understand—nor can his parents or teachers—why he cannot. That is what I mean by the thousands of private little tragedies unfolding throughout the country. We all know that they are taking place, but how can we try to alleviate them?

The number and proportion of special needs children is increasing all the time. We accept, and Ministers will no doubt say, that that may be partly because of better diagnosis, but it cannot be entirely a product of diagnosis. The statistics, particularly those produced recently by the Medical Research Council and by the National Autistic Society, warn us beyond doubt that educating children with special needs is not just a problem, but a growing problem. I hope that the Minister will accept that.

Knowing that the problem is growing, we are negligent if we do not heed that warning, or rather—I said that the debate was not an opportunity for party political banter—we are not negligent: Ministers are negligent if they fail to take the necessary action, having received the warning. I fear that that is what will happen.

The Secretary of State's amendment to our motion states that we should applaud

> "the Government's strong record on supporting pupils with special educational needs, notably through providing a clear vision for their education and welfare".

Will the Government never learn that vision does not mean the same as action? Having a vision is fine, as the hon. Member for Corby (Phil Hope) said, and it is sometimes necessary, but publishing bits of paper does not mean that anything has been achieved.

I feel sorry for Ministers, who have it drummed into them all the time that it is what they say that matters, not what they do. But if they are led by a Prime Minister who believes that saying something three times is tantamount to having achieved it—"education, education education"—[*Interruption.*] The Minister for Lifelong Learning is muttering away, as usual. Is she too repeating it three times? It is time the Government recognised that merely issuing words and documents is not enough. It does not actually produce results. Let us look at the facts.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Has my hon. Friend discovered, as I often do in constituency cases, that caring parents who have a child who needs special assistance often have a good understanding of the child's problem and a clear view of which local education institution would be best at handling it, but that the council often blocks the parents' preferred choice? Often they are told that there is not sufficient Government money coming through for that purpose. Does my hon. Friend think that parental choice should be better respected, and would she want the Government to make sure that that was possible? In my view, caring parents are often the best judges of what is needed.

Mrs. Laing: Unsurprisingly, my right hon. Friend is correct. In my constituency alone, I have seen so many tragic cases of parents who have spent months, and sometimes years, looking for the right educational establishment for their child, because they know their child's needs, only to find that the funding is not available or that, for some other bureaucratic reason—such as the fact that the establishment in question might be over the county boundary or in another region, or that the transport costs cannot be met—the child cannot get the best education available to him or her.

There is no doubt that this happens. If I have seen that many, many times in my constituency, I assume that the problem is multiplied by at least 650 times around the country, and those are only the cases known to us as Members of Parliament. There must be many more.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): How does the hon. Lady square her remarks with the fact that under the Conservative Government, funding per pupil fell in real terms from 1992 to 1997, whereas under the present Government, funding per pupil has increased by £200 per child? Surely that means that children now have a better chance of receiving the proper education for their special educational needs than they had in 1997?

Mrs. Laing: No—all it means is that the hon. Lady is bandying statistics. What we are talking about is people. [*Interruption.*] I do not see what is funny about that. It does not matter what the last Conservative Government did, and it does not really matter what the Government said they would do two or three years ago. What matters is that out there, in the real world, there are thousands and thousands of children who need more help than they are getting. If all the hon. Lady can see is some figures that she got from her Whips Office, that is very sad indeed.

I shall examine the facts, starting with the increasing problem of autism. Last week was autism awareness week. I pay tribute to the National Autistic Society, which has done so much, not just last week but throughout this year—this is autism awareness year, as I am sure hon. Members know—to bring the problems of autism into public focus.

There is no doubt that, for whatever reason, the incidence of children with autism spectrum disorders is increasing. I think the Minister for School Standards will agree with me on that point. I shall be interested to hear his comments. No matter how one looks at it, the problem is increasing. It is noticeable that the rate of autism occurring in primary schools is more than three times that in secondary schools, which is an unusual statistic, unless it means that autism is increasing exponentially, which it probably is not. That leads us to further questions, and they are difficult questions. I do not claim to have the answers, but we must consider the questions.

It is possible that there may be many more pupils in secondary schools who have an autism spectrum disorder but who have not been diagnosed, and who have therefore spent their time in education failing to achieve, failing to communicate and being classed simply as disruptive. I wonder how many of the truanting pupils about whom we argued in the earlier debate this evening are, in fact, pupils with special needs which have not been diagnosed. Should not pupil referral units have specialist expertise in special needs and, indeed, in autism spectrum disorders? That is a genuine question. I think they should, but they do not. It will be interesting to hear the Minister's comments on that.

There is, however, no doubt that all the experts and even the Government recognise the importance of early diagnosis and early intervention, because children with unsolved problems grow up to be adults with unsolved problems. That is much more difficult to deal with. The cost to society—I do not mean in financial terms—in so many ways is so very much greater if someone who could be contributing to his or her community is, instead, excluded from it, and is therefore tragically seen as a burden, rather than as the asset which he or she could have been if the right help had been there at the right time, with early diagnosis and early intervention.

Despite some good recent work by the Medical Research Council, which I accept was commissioned by the Government—not by the Minister's Department, but by the Department of Health—we still do not know the extent of the problem or the rate at which it is likely to increase.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): After 11 or 12 minutes, the hon. Lady is now making some interesting points. Does she agree that despite the importance of early identification of autism, especially mild autism, both it and conditions such as dyspraxia and dyslexia are all difficult to treat? Most children are individually different within the definition of those conditions. Trying to find educational solutions is incredibly difficult. To blame the Government or even the previous Government for that is not fair.

Mrs. Laing: The hon. Gentleman makes a perfectly reasonable point. The subject is extremely complex. Simple answers cannot be given to simple questions. The questions are complex, the answers are complex, and the hon. Gentleman is right. Every child who is in need of special help in his or her education needs it for a different reason. Each one is an individual, which makes it extremely difficult to deal with the problem.

[Mrs. Laing]

I partly agree with the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis): I am not blaming the Government—I am warning them about what must be done. I am not blaming the Government for what has not been done so far; I am warning the Government that if they do not take heed of what we now know and take action now for improvement, the problem will get considerably worse. As I said, special educational needs are not a matter for party political banter. The hon. Gentleman makes a genuine point and I agree with his comments. I am sure that the Minister will proceed in the same genuine way.

The problem is real, but one of the issues is that we do not know its extent. Again, I am not blaming anyone for that. Medical science is producing new ideas and evidence all the time, but we do not know the extent of the problem. A few weeks ago, I asked Ministers what percentage of children with statements of special educational needs were categorised as autistic last year compared with 10 years ago. The Minister answered that the information was not available. I accept that this Government were not in power 10 years ago, although they were in power last year, but it seems that nobody anywhere has collected the statistics even to let us know the extent of the problem.

The statistics should be available. Whatever has happened in the past, I hope that Ministers will pledge today to continue to carry out further research. That is the pledge that I am seeking. Perhaps some of the enormous sums that are currently spent on sending out to teachers, head teachers and local authorities circulars and glossy colour brochures on a huge variety of subjects would be better spent on finding out more about the causes of the problems faced by some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): My hon. Friend makes a very telling and interesting point. She and other hon. Members throughout the House will know that a very clear identification of need is critical in the statementing process if the education that is provided by special schools or in the mainstream is to be pertinent and relevant to the child's needs. If she is telling the House that this Government, perhaps like the previous one, do not know how many autistic children there are despite the statementing process, she is also leading us to suspect that they may not know how many children have various other types of special needs. That is very worrying information and the Minister must address it when he responds.

Mrs. Laing: My hon. Friend is right. That is exactly what I am telling the House. Nobody knows the extent of the problem; all that we know is that it is increasing. I respect the Minister's attitude on this matter. I hope that he will pledge to find out more and put Government resources into this important research.

Mr. Willis: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way. It is important to point out that in the Warnock report of 1979 and the Education Act 1981—a good measure that was introduced by the Conservative Government—the emphasis of statementing was to categorise children on the basis not of their condition, but of their educational need. The principle was to try to de-stigmatise children with special needs, and it is important that we maintain it. Once we go back to identifying a condition and applying resources only in relation to that condition, we will fail to take on the essence of what the Warnock report said and the principle to which successive Governments, including the previous one, have steadfastly adhered.

Mrs. Laing: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. As I said earlier, and as I will always say, we must treat children with special needs as individuals and not statistics. We must not simply consider them in terms of name of the disease from which they suffer, but treat them as individuals.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): The hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) made a very good point about children's individual characteristics and needs, but my hon. Friend is making a point about diagnosis of those needs. That is her point, and it explains the need for research to allow such needs to be diagnosed. I do not think that there is much distance between her and the hon. Gentleman.

Mrs. Laing: My right hon. Friend is absolutely correct. We are trying in this debate to emphasise how much more must be done from now on. I am interested not in repercussions, but in what has to happen from now on.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Laing: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I want to make some progress. I shall give way to him later.

I suspect that the Government had no idea of the extent of the liability that they were imposing on local authorities by introducing their policy of inclusion. I forgive them for that, because the information was simply not available. None the less, although inclusion may have sounded like a fine policy when it fitted the general Labour jargon, it does not work in practice. While the Government have been relying on integration in mainstream schools for the vast majority of children with special educational needs, sadly, they have closed 167 special schools in the past five years. That seems a horrific loss of expertise and resources.

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): My hon. Friend mentioned the number of special schools that have been closed. Is she aware that in Gloucestershire, the Lib-Lab pact that runs the county council has a programme to close every single special school in the county? It is closing five schools because of the Government's policies.

Mrs. Laing: That is a disgrace. There are children who need the schools to which my hon. Friend refers and whose futures will be utterly blighted because they cannot go to them. I cannot imagine why the Government want to close those schools and put other special schools under threat of closure, creating enormous doubt in the minds of parents whose children are already taught there.

David Taylor *rose—*

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green) *rose—*

Mrs. Laing: I must give way to the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) before the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe), but I must then make some progress.

David Taylor: The hon. Lady complains, perhaps rightly, about the paucity of the special needs statistics that might help in the development of appropriate policies. She also said that parents were best placed to know about their children's needs. Is she interested in a statistic from the National Autistic Society, which suggests that more than 75 per cent. of parents are either satisfied or very satisfied with the provision made for their children? Is that not an important base on which to build?

Mrs. Laing: Yes, that is very important, but to me it means that 25 per cent. of parents are not satisfied. They are the ones about whom I am most concerned in this debate.

In talking about the policy of inclusion, I accept that in some cases involving mild autism or Asperger's syndrome, it is good for children to attend a mainstream school. Inclusion is right in many cases because it is good for social integration and allows a child to play with children of his or her own age. It is absolutely right in some cases, but not in all of them. The almost total reliance on integration has simply not been backed up with the necessary resources.

Mr. McCabe: I happen to agree with the hon. Lady, as I believe that we should keep open particular special schools, although we would be well advised to close others. Indeed, we have done some young people a service in closing some schools. Before making the charge that schools have been improperly closed—and in addition to asking for statistics about diagnosis—do we not need to know how schools that are engaged in the inclusion programme spend the special targeted resources provided in the delegated budgets? We need to know which local education authorities are spending that money appropriately and which are not. Should we not be collecting that statistic?

Mrs. Laing: Yes, we should. Even if the Minister will not listen to my requests for that information—I accept that he may do so—I hope that he will listen to the hon. Gentleman. Resources are often earmarked for special needs by the education authority, given to the school and then spent on something else. We know that that happens; I know of instances in which it has occurred and so does the hon. Gentleman, and there must be hundreds more examples throughout the country. That is another problem and another area where the Government simply do not have the necessary information. Now I must make some progress.

The almost total reliance on integration has not been backed up by the necessary resources, so the issuing of a statement of special educational needs, although it theoretically confers on a child the right to a certain amount of time, expertise, therapy and care, is not implemented in practice. That is why people become cynical about politicians, and it is not surprising. No doubt Ministers see the statistics about the number of statements and the amount of money that is supposedly earmarked for their implementation. That may look good on paper, but sadly it does not work in practice.

We spend hours in Parliament having theoretical discussions about statements of special educational needs. I hardly have one constituency surgery where there is not at least one parent, often more than one, who is almost in tears of frustration from fighting the local authority to have the terms of a statement turned into action—or, indeed, to have a statement issued in the first place; for many children it takes far too long to start the ball rolling. Parents have their expectations raised by the rhetoric of the Government, then have their hopes dashed by the reality of provision that is just not there.

When one is looking after a special needs child, life is already difficult enough. The uncertainty that arises out of current policy and its piecemeal implementation makes it very much worse. What frightens me most is that the parents whom I usually see are able and articulate. They have managed to come to see their Member of Parliament, and have folders full of papers, reports, assessments and so on, many of which they have had to pay for themselves, yet even they cannot get the help that their children need. So what happens to the children of parents who are not articulate, do not know how to insist, and are so tired from looking after a disabled child that they do not have the energy to fight?

I do not know what the Minister for Lifelong Learning is sneering at. This is not a matter for sneering. I am describing—*[Interruption.]* It is not patronising. I am describing what I see in my own constituency. I am describing real people, and the hon. Lady is sneering at them. I have their names written down here, but I will not embarrass them by using them. The hon. Lady is sneering in a disgusting way—it is totally intolerable. [HON. MEMBERS: "Apologise!"] She should indeed apologise. I am sure that the Minister for School Standards, who is sitting next to her, will not take that attitude.

For real people looking after children with real needs, it is a tragic situation. Getting help for one's child should not be an adversarial contest. If the Government are saying that every child has a certain right, they must set up a system whereby that right can be enforced. It does not happen like that in the real world. Parents should not have to fight year after year to get the education that their children need, deserve and, apparently, have a right to.

The fact is that the resources are not there to fulfil all the obligations to the increasing number of children who need special help. I do not suggest for a moment that the solution is simply to throw more money at the problem—we know that it is not. There are not enough specialist teachers, speech therapists, special schools, classroom support assistants or training opportunities for mainstream teachers. There is insufficient infrastructure to help all the children and their families who need help. It is not even clear to most parents where they should begin to look for assistance. Some aspects are dealt by the health authority, some by the social services department and some by the education department, and much time and energy are wasted in convening meetings of all three authorities before a decision that will actually help a child can be reached. The inequality of provision throughout the country is almost incredible. I know of one instance where two little boys who go to the same mainstream school

[Mrs. Laing]

each require about the same amount of speech therapy each week, but one gets three times more than the other because they live in different health authority areas.

What no one wants to hear from the Minister tonight is a complacent list of apparent achievements. That would be an insult to the thousands of families who are currently waiting for help. In the real world, special needs provision is in chaos. This is not a matter for party political banter, and it is very disappointing—

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) *rose—*

Mrs. Laing: No, I will not give way to the hon. Lady. It is time for others to have their chance to speak. Labour Members who keep sneering at a genuine attempt to ask genuine questions of a genuine Minister are doing their Government and the people they serve as Members of Parliament a great disservice. I am sure that the Minister will not reply in the tone that his hon. Friends who are doughnuting behind him are adopting at present. It is far too sad a situation for that, and I do not know why hon. Members are laughing. It is ridiculous to laugh or sneer. The situation matters too much to families who desperately need help.

We all want to give every child in Britain today the best possible opportunity to develop his or her talents to their fullest potential. That is much more difficult in the case of children with special needs, so much more effort must be put into helping them. I believe that the Minister has, personally, the best of intentions, and I pay every respect to him for that. But good intentions are not the same as action, and it is action that we now need from the Government.

7.46 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

notes the Government's commitment to helping all pupils release their potential; supports the development of an education service that provides equality of opportunity and raises achievement of all children, including those with special educational needs; welcomes the Government's recognition of the important role of special schools and the forthcoming work to review and develop that role; further welcomes the recent report by the National Autistic Society and recognises the importance of early intervention to help children with autism; applauds the Government's strong record on supporting pupils with special educational needs, notably through providing a clear vision for their education and welfare in its 1998 Green Paper "Excellence for all children" and implementing an ambitious programme of action resulting in this House's approval of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, despite strong opposition from the other side of the House; commends the introduction of the new SEN Code of Practice and the principles of inclusion and partnership that lie behind it; further notes the development of national standards for specialist teachers and a range of training programmes and materials to support them; acknowledges the substantial increases in funding through both SSA and Standards Fund to support these and other initiatives; further notes that the Government will continue to ensure that the rights of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities are protected; and looks forward to the forthcoming Code of Practice to reinforce the rights of pupils with disabilities.

The hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) said that she wanted to avoid party point-scoring in the debate. That was a laudable objective, but unfortunately she wavered in her determination on that score on several occasions. This is not a party issue, because there is enormous interest in special educational needs across the House, and in the other place as well. I counsel the hon. Lady against patronising some of the people we are talking about and their parents. That is a temptation that we need to avoid.

It is essential that all children, whatever their circumstances, should have the opportunity to develop to their full potential as individuals, to contribute economically to our society and to play a full part as active citizens in their communities. That is our conviction, which will be shared across the House. That is why we made it clear, right from the start of the Government's term in office, that we wanted substantially to improve provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. It was not by any means at the end of any list. As my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Phil Hope) said, the Green Paper on special educational needs appeared early on—in October 1997, less than six months after the general election. It was a high priority, reflecting the importance that we attach to the whole matter.

The hon. Lady referred to the publication of the National Autistic Society's report for autism awareness week, which adds helpfully to our understanding of the developing picture on autism and raises some important issues. We are working closely with the society, which is doing important work. Several of the matters covered in the report will be addressed in the guidance to be issued by the autism working group, on which the National Autistic Society is represented. We expect that to be published in the summer.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): On autism, I have been horrified by the stories that I hear parents tell of the battles that they have with, in my case, Norfolk county council's education department in trying to get funding for the Lovaas scheme and the Son-Rise programme. When they get somewhere near the point of securing funding, the health authority tells them that it will not fund the health element, or that speech therapy, which is part of the statement, will not be funded by the education department. There is no attempt to co-ordinate the efforts of the health authority and the education department. Will the Minister look into that to ensure that there is proper co-ordination and joined-up government?

Mr. Timms: The hon. Gentleman is right that some parents struggle to get satisfactory provision for their children. Anxieties about that lie behind our recent changes, to which I shall refer shortly. It is especially important that we join up the various sources of support and ensure co-operation to fulfil parents' needs. He is right to draw attention to the difficulties that many people have encountered.

Mrs. Laing: The Minister agreed with the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), and therefore with me, that many parents have a struggle. Will he acknowledge that some parents are less able to struggle than others? It is not patronising to say that; I am simply stating the facts because I want to do the best for the most vulnerable.

Mr. Timms: We must ensure that the special educational needs of children are met, and that is the aim of our changes.

The hon. Lady referred to the policy on inclusion, which the Conservative Government initiated in some respects. I was pleased that two thirds of the respondents to the report by the National Autistic Society believed that inclusion worked for children with autistic spectrum disorders. As my hon. Friend the Member for Corby said, that confirms the society's earlier findings. However, I accept that several pressing issues must be tackled.

Mr. Roger Gale (North Thanet): During the passage of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, I raised teaching the deaf. I referred to a school in my constituency that had a superb unit for the hearing impaired. Does the Minister seriously believe that it has been effective to dissipate the energy and talent in that school and spread it thinly around a group of less specialist schools in the name of inclusion?

Mr. Timms: Those decisions should be made locally. I shall comment on special schools because the hon. Member for Epping Forest mentioned them in her speech. Support should be provided in a variety of ways, depending on the resources available in each area, and the decisions should be made locally.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: The Minister says that decisions should be made locally. He knows that the school adjudicator in the case of the first special school in Gloucestershire to close lived in Darlington. How was that decision local?

Mr. Timms: Arrangements for dealing with such matters, including appeals to the adjudicator, are well known. In 1990, just over 99,000 pupils were enrolled in special schools; in 2001, the figure was just under 96,000. Conservative Members must bear the figures in mind. They give a different impression from Opposition Members.

After the publication of the Green Paper in 1997, we issued the SEN programme of action in the following year. That led to the publication of a new SEN code of practice in November last year. Hon. Members will recall that we debated it twice in the House. At the end of last year, we also published additional guidance in the form of the SEN toolkit, which offers advice, for example, on writing statements, encouraging effective partnership with parents, and the role of health and social services working alongside education services. The Teacher Training Agency published material to help to identify teachers' training needs. All that constitutes a large package of support for those who deal with SEN on the ground.

The new code has several key themes, which were widely welcomed in the consultation that we undertook. The first is identifying needs as soon as possible. I believe that we all agree that we have made much progress in recent years and that identification is important in ensuring that we fulfil the needs of as many children as possible. The second key requirement is improving partnership with parents and the third is taking account of the child's views. The fourth key requirement is promoting effective school-based provision and the fifth is reducing unnecessary paperwork for teachers.

The code of practice is the cornerstone of our approach to SEN: a detailed framework in which people can operate and that is designed to promote a consistent approach by placing children with special needs at the heart of the process.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I worked in special needs for 10 years, and I was always impressed by the infinite patience of the parents of children with learning disabilities. The Green Paper in 1997 raised expectations and it was disappointing that it was ultimately resource-driven rather than needs-driven. Many parents feel bitterly let down because their expectations were raised only to be dampened because the resources were not forthcoming.

Mr. Timms: I shall comment on resources shortly, but the code took effect in January, and I expect parents to experience the benefits of the changes as they are implemented from now on.

Our approach has been consolidated and extended through the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. It strengthened, with effect from January this year, the right to a mainstream place for children with special needs when the child and the parents want one.

The hon. Member for Epping Forest wrongly described our approach to inclusion. It is pragmatic; the social and educational benefits of learning in a mainstream environment are undoubtedly significant both for the children and those around them. However, it will not be right for all children and families. In some cases, a mainstream place will not be appropriate and parents will request a specialist placement. We believe that pupils should be included in mainstream provision when their parents want that, subject to protecting the learning and safety of other children.

Schools and local education authorities need support to implement a policy of inclusion, and the statutory guidance that was published last November establishes the new statutory framework for inclusion. It includes practical advice on some steps that schools can take to include special educational needs children successfully. We published support materials and a training package, which have been well received. They set out the way in which inclusion and school improvement can go hand in hand.

The 2001 Act represents a big step forward in strengthening arrangements for collaborative working with parents. That is the key theme of the code. Hon. Members recognised that it was an important subject on which we needed to make progress. We have therefore introduced a new legal duty on local education authorities to provide parent partnership services and provision for resolving disputes when they arise. Of course, parents have a unique understanding of their children's needs and circumstances and we must give them the ability to play a key role in securing effective provision for their children and dealing with some of the frustrations that have arisen in the past.

We have worked closely with others in implementing the SEN action programme. Ofsted produced guidance and training materials on inclusion for inspectors. Schools will be required to show the effective provision that they make for all their pupils, including those with special educational needs and disabilities. The revised national

[Mr. Timms]

curriculum was effected from September 2000. It provides for a statutory inclusion statement, which is supported by the curriculum guidelines of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority for pupils with learning difficulties. The revised P scales are the performance criteria for children who work below level 1 of the national curriculum. Again, they implement another proposal in the 1997 Green Paper. Both were issued in March last year.

Guidance on supporting children with special educational needs has also been issued for the literacy and numeracy strategies.

Mr. Redwood: Is the Minister worried that the policy of inclusion and co-education for these different types of pupil is made more difficult by the regularity and persistence of academic and quasi-academic testing under this Government? Perhaps the Government have overdone the number and regularity of tests, which we now discover from some of the research are not very effective. They end up teaching the better pupils how to pass them, but we then discover that those pupils do not know very much about English or mathematics after all, while some of the other children about whom we are concerned tonight feel even more excluded because of this persistent testing.

Mr. Timms: I do not agree with that. I advise the right hon. Gentleman to visit some of the schools that have made a huge success of implementing a policy of inclusion, while also making a great success of raising their standards as measured by the assessment process that we have in place. There are some superb examples where both are being achieved simultaneously, and I do not agree that there need be a conflict between them.

We have established the 11 SEN regional co-ordination projects to bring together LEAs, health and social services, voluntary agencies and others to share good practice, and to develop their working together as they undoubtedly need to, in this area above all. Effective joint working is of key importance to young people with special educational needs.

The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 is also making a big contribution to securing fair treatment for disabled young people. It extended the coverage of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 to education, outlawed discrimination by disability in education for both teachers and students, and placed a duty on schools and LEAs to plan ahead for disabled pupils and to increase accessibility to schools' premises and to the curriculum. Those changes take effect from September. That is another major step forward, a further realisation of the Government's commitment to make a reality of better provision.

Mr. Willis: Before the Minister finishes this section of his speech, will he tell the House what the involvement of the Learning and Skills Council is? Whether or not we think that the Government are delivering on SEN provision for children up to the age of 16, many of us fear that when children move into further education, they do not get the same support as before, and parents do not feel that they have the same rights as before. I would be interested to know what the Minister feels about that function of the Learning and Skills Council.

Mr. Timms: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for acknowledging that progress has been made in schools. There is still a good deal further to go, but good progress has been made. We want comparable progress in further education. The duty arising from the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 also applies to the activities of the Learning and Skills Council. We have supported that by funding and by capital, and I think that we can be optimistic that we shall see comparable progress in that sector; it may be following a little distance behind, but not very far.

Mr. Willis: I raise this issue because I understand that the Government are now considering removing sixth forms from schools, creating sixth-form college provision throughout the country, and removing 14-to-19 provision from further education colleges. If that is the case, it is a significant change of policy, which will affect special educational needs. I would be grateful if the Minister could either scotch that rumour, confirm it, or at least tell us what the relationship between these new organisations and special needs provision is to be, when he has got his Minister's briefing.

Mr. Timms: I am very happy to scotch that rumour. I am not sure quite what its source was, but it is certainly not in any of the proposals that we have put forward, as the hon. Gentleman would know if he had read carefully—as I would expect him to—the documents that we have provided. There will, of course, be a role for the LSC in planning, but the suggestion that we are going to take the sixth forms out of schools is entirely erroneous. Indeed, the Green Paper refers to ways in which we can simplify the expansion of sixth forms, where that is appropriate.

We have ensured that better resources are available to support the active policy of inclusion that we have introduced. This is a key part of this debate, and my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) has referred to it already. Education spending as a share of gross domestic product fell from 6.5 per cent. in the mid-1970s to not much more than 4.5 per cent. in the mid-1990s. Last year, it was back up to 5 per cent., it will rise to 5.3 per cent. by next year, and the Chancellor has foreseen further rises beyond that in his Budget statement. The resources that we need to make a success of the policy are becoming available.

That is certainly the case with recurrent funding, and the average recurrent funding per pupil will have risen in real terms by more than £760 a year by 2003–04, compared with 1997–98. The support that we provide for SEN under the standards fund has risen year on year, and it is running at record levels, supporting expenditure of £91 million in 2002–03, which is more than five times the amount available in 1997–98.

Mr. Hancock: While I accept that many parents welcome the opportunity provided by inclusion and have seen its benefits, an increasing number do not regard it as the ideal solution to the educational needs of their children. There is a great worry that the choice of those parents will be ignored, and that they will be forced into a corner and have to accept what they consider to be the second-best method of achieving their child's full potential. Where does the Minister rank parental choice in the pecking order of priorities when placing someone in education?

Mr. Timms: I assign to it absolutely pivotal importance in these decisions, and that is the basis for the framework that we have put in place. There is undoubtedly an enormous amount to be gained from mainstream provision for disabled children and children with special educational needs, where they can benefit from it. It is also undoubtedly the case that many young people who have not been in mainstream provision would have benefited greatly from it. We want to ensure that it will be possible for those benefits to be available in the future. But that does not apply to all children and young people by any means. There will, therefore, continue to be provision in special schools and elsewhere for those who will benefit from that. The role of the parents in contributing to those decisions is central.

Mr. Hancock: What would the Minister say to an LEA that believes that inclusion is the only solution for the long-term educational needs of such young people, closes special schools and denies a choice to those parents who would have liked their children to stay in special schools, the ethos of which has existed for decades and which have provided great educational benefits for children? What will happen to LEAs that deny their responsibility to provide parents with that choice?

Mr. Timms: That option is not available to LEAs. Parents who are unhappy with a decision made by an LEA can go to the Special Educational Needs Tribunal, and the tribunal's decision will be binding. I have already referred to the parent partnership requirements that we have imposed on LEAs, and all this will ensure that parents play a key central role in contributing to these decisions.

In resourcing all this, we have also made a lot of progress on capital spending. Capital spending on schools has more than trebled since 1997–98, and it will go up again this year and next year. Within that, the schools access initiative is providing £220 million over the current three-year period. In the current financial year, £70 million is being provided to improve access to mainstream schools for pupils with disabilities. That includes lifts, ramps and disabled toilets, of course, but also carpeting and the acoustic tiling of classrooms to benefit hearing-impaired children, and the provision of blinds and paint schemes to benefit visually impaired children. These are real practical benefits that will widen opportunities for pupils, and that level of capital investment is about 10 times that of 1997.

Mr. Willis: On capital investment, I have Henshaw's school for the blind in my constituency. It deals with young adults, from 16 upwards. Most are deaf-blind and come to the college from all over the country. The school is an independent charity that desperately needs to provide new facilities to meet the new Care Standards Act 2000. What access does that school, and others that offer what the Government require as alternative provision, have to capital funding to meet the requirements of another piece of legislation?

Mr. Timms: I should be happy to look at the position of the hon. Gentleman's local school. About 10 times more capital is being invested in making the changes that we need than was the case a few years ago.

Mr. Gale: The Hampton hearing-impaired unit in my constituency was a state-of-the-art, purpose-built unit with specialist teachers, concentrated on one site but within a mainstream junior school. The effort has been dissipated, and no amount of capital will replicate all those resources in every school and the teachers to go with them. It simply does not make sense.

Mr. Timms: Clearly, a decision has been made that the best way of providing support for the children in the hon. Gentleman's area is through the new configuration that has been introduced. I am not familiar with the circumstances there, but I emphasise the enormous benefits for children of being in mainstream education, where that is possible, and of being given the support to make a success of that. Opposition Members are losing sight of that in some of their interventions.

We are committed to ensuring that staff have the skills to recognise and address the special educational needs of their pupils. To obtain qualified teacher status, all trainee teachers must demonstrate that they can identify pupils with special educational needs, know their responsibilities as teachers under the SEN code of practice and how to seek advice from specialists. From September, all those who are awarded QTS must be able to demonstrate that they can differentiate their teaching to meet the differing needs of pupils, including those with SEN.

John Mann (Bassetlaw): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Timms: I need to make some more progress, if my hon. Friend will allow me.

For teachers already in post and other staff, we are promoting the creation of new or enhanced training opportunities through two £1 million funding streams in the current financial year supporting training activity by special voluntary organisations and higher education training providers. We are intending to commission new training resources directly in a number of areas, for example, ensuring greater access for pupils with disabilities to PE and sport, and providing a training video for school governors linked to the SEN code of practice.

We have also recognised the importance of investing in the early years to make sure that children get the right help early on and have the best possible start to their education. This is a fundamental change. As the hon. Member for Epping Forest said, significant numbers of children are entering secondary education without their needs being met, and we do not want that to continue.

In March last year, we announced a £25 million package in support of SEN in the early years, including support for establishing SEN co-ordinators—SENCOs—in early years education settings and area SENCOs, with a target of one area SENCO for every 20 non-maintained settings by 2004.

[Mr. Timms]

We announced last year that we were drawing together a range of agencies to develop guidance for professionals working with children with disabilities in the birth to two age range and their families. That guidance is ready and will be issued shortly for consultation. There will be a separate but linked document on early intervention and support services for children whose hearing impairments have been identified early, and that will be produced in conjunction with the Royal National Institute for Deaf People. Those two sets of guidance will make a big contribution to addressing the needs of very young children and will reinforce the importance of effective partnerships with parents.

In everything that they do, schools rightly want to ensure that the work that they put in to helping all their pupils to learn is properly recognised. We are committed to supplementing the information that is already in performance tables with information about how far schools, including special schools, help their pupils to progress between the various stages of their education. The performance tables, following piloting work, will include value-added measures from 2002 for secondary schools and from 2003 for primary schools. We want to do still more in that area.

There is a great deal more to do if we are to realise our aims. Much of our work since 1997 has focused on widening access and opportunity for children with SEN through improvements to the statutory framework. We are going forward in partnership with schools, local education authorities, health and social services departments and the voluntary sector to bring about real improvements.

John Mann: Statementing in my local education authority is a third of the national average. What advice, guidance or training are LEAs given in determining how to statement children?

Mr. Timms: A good deal of guidance has been given, and I have referred to a number of elements. With the regional SEN consortiums, we are making sure that good practice is spread throughout the regions and that successful LEAs can impart the benefit of their experience to those that have not been as successful. I hope that we will increasingly see good practice being uniformly operated across the country.

We have not reached our destination yet, but we are well on the way.

Mr. Hancock *rose—*

Mrs. Laing *rose—*

Mr. Timms: I will not give way again.

I welcome the opportunity of this debate to re-emphasise our commitment to make further progress, which, I know, reflects a high priority that is shared across the House.

8.16 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Let us start with the good news. The good news is that society's growing awareness of special educational needs has, over the past few years, made this a much more civilised country in which to live.

One of the commonest mistakes made by people in the second half of their lives—the over-50s, to which group, sadly, I belong—is to believe that since their childhood, everything has been getting gradually worse. I do not believe that, and if there is one thing about our society that has undoubtedly improved during my lifetime, it is the way in which people who have some form of special need—whether that be intellectual, emotional, or physical—are treated.

Let me be fair and say that the Government have cause to be congratulated for contributing to this change in society's attitudes. First, they introduced their 1997 Green Paper "Excellence for All Children: Meeting Special Educational Needs" and then in 2001 came their amendments to the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. Both measures were very welcome. However, before the Government get too complacent, I wish to press them on one point. Given that the target date for implementation of the measures set out in the Green Paper was 2002, I hope that the Minister winding up for the Government will take the opportunity to provide the House with an update on where they are with their objectives.

To return to my point, in our parents' days it was common practice, sadly, to shut away people with physical or mental disabilities in an institution, sometimes for the rest of their lives. Gradually, during our lifetimes, that has changed. Now, quite rightly, we accept that everyone has the right to opportunities to make the best of their talents and abilities, however great or small those may be.

The waste of talent—the waste of human lives—that used to occur is greatly reduced. Let me give an example from my constituency. Only a few years ago, a young lad with very severe congenital physical problems wanted to go to a local mainstream comprehensive school in west Berkshire. The school simply was not adapted to meet his needs, but the head teacher had the courage to fight for the funds to make the necessary structural changes and, to its credit, the local authority paid up.

The boy went to that mainstream school and was very successful. He obtained good exam results, joined in school expeditions and was popular with his schoolmates. He ended up as head boy and is now a successful university student. He, the local authority, and the head teacher who fought to enable him to be educated alongside others without his level of physical disability deserve great credit.

However, the real success of that story is what happened not to that young man, but to all the other young men and women in that school. They learned far more lessons than he did. They learned what it was like to have a disability, what help he needed, and how much they could gain from him and his companionship. They also learned that, to do that, it was sometimes necessary to give a bit in return. They had to take turns helping to push his wheelchair; they had to help him upstairs; they had to carry things that were too bulky or heavy for him to carry.

That example serves to illustrate some wider themes. First, society benefits from an inclusive education system that is right in principle. Wherever possible, the individual requirements of children with special educational needs should be met within the mainstream educational system. We all benefit from the talents unlocked as a result. Secondly, schools and teachers across the country—the front line—deserve to be congratulated on their hard work and dedication in meeting the diverse needs of the children in their care. Thirdly, they undertake that work in the context of a frequent shortage of money, and the constant development and expansion of our understanding of special educational needs.

That is not the only problem; there is also a lack of joined-up thinking across the education system as a whole. For example, what happens when SEN pupils move through the education system? Sometimes, we discover that facilities are in place to meet their requirements at primary level, but not at secondary level. The standard of provision varies widely across the country, and sometimes such pupils move across the country. As a recent Audit Commission consultative paper pointed out:

> "LEAs are working towards inclusion at different paces and using a range of approaches—often without a clear and coherent strategy . . . the support and educational opportunities children with special needs get vary depending on where they live and what school they go to."

None the less, mainstream schools are not right for everyone. Sadly, however much LEAs try to include young people with special educational needs in such schools, for the foreseeable future at least, there will always be some for whom mainstream schools simply cannot provide properly. Special schools also face major problems.

According to provisional departmental figures for 2002, there are 14,900 teachers in maintained special schools, compared with 15,100 in 2000, and 15,500 in 1997. The teacher vacancy rate for maintained special schools is 2.4 per cent, which is double the rate—1.2 per cent.—for maintained secondary, primary and nursery schools. Unlike elsewhere in the maintained sector, the trend in vacancy rates in maintained special schools is upwards, not downwards.

Underlying all those difficulties is the question of funding. The medical advances of the previous century were such that many people with natural disadvantages can live happy and successful lives as never before—a development that must be welcome. Moreover, such lives often last much longer than in past centuries. It is therefore hugely important that schoolchildren in mainstream schools study alongside others with different natural disadvantages, so that they can learn how to help them and how to get the most out of such schoolmates. However, that costs money. Schools must be given the necessary resources to cope with special educational needs, especially where the pupils' needs are so great that they cannot reasonably be met in a mainstream school.

I shall illustrate these points by considering some examples. We have—sadly, I should say we did have—several excellent special schools in my constituency, but I want to contrast just three, the first of which is the well-known Mary Hare grammar school for the deaf. Anyone who visits it is struck by the outstanding results that are achieved there by some of Britain's most profoundly deaf youngsters. I have never forgotten my first visit. As I was wandering down a corridor, I suddenly heard, as if from some distant place, the beautiful sound of a solo clarinet. Ignorant as I then was of the fantastic musical abilities of many deaf children, I was amazed to discover that a school for deaf children could not only contain many talented individual musicians, but put together an entire orchestra of musicians, just like any mainstream school.

Of course, the teachers need special training and the pupils need special help, and the cost of running the school is such that the local authorities sometimes baulk at the expense. Luckily, its reputation is so high that it can still flourish, but who could blame the local authorities—constantly strapped for cash as they are, thanks to real-terms cutbacks by central Government—for hesitating to spend much more on one Mary Hare pupil than they must spend on a mainstream, comprehensive-educated pupil? That is a real dilemma for the local authorities, and it is up to the Government to help them redress it.

The second example is Priors Court school, in Chieveley, to which it is even more difficult to persuade local authorities [illegible] send autistic children, despite the good work done by the National Autistic Society. Its facilities are outstanding. For example, it has an amazing swimming pool, with lights and sounds that provide a wonderfully stimulating environment. A very high teacher-pupil ratio gives each child the individual attention that they need to enable them to play a real part in society as adults. Thanks to some generous private individuals—one in particular—some children, at least, are getting the real start in life that they probably could not get anywhere else.

Sadly, that school can be contrasted with what was Enborne Lodge school. Although situated in Newbury, it was originally an old Greater London council school. When Mrs. Thatcher—as she then was—closed down the GLC in a fit of pique, the school was transferred to Lambeth borough. It would be difficult to think of a less suitable London borough. Of course, within a few years, Lambeth's own financial problems led to the closure of the school. What a waste.

While in existence, Enborne Lodge took under its wing some of London's most difficult pupils. Some had committed terrible crimes, such as burning down schools and committing violent acts against family members and others. Such children often came from violent backgrounds. Their parents beat each other up, and sadly they often beat and abused their children as well. None the less, at Enborne Lodge those children were given a completely new start in life. The children had emotional and behavioural difficulties, and for the first time in their lives, they were valued for what they could do instead of being despised for what they could not do.

Enborne Lodge often discovered hidden talents. Some of the pupils became first-class sportsmen and sportswomen. Some took their exams and went on to university and to important jobs in the community. The head teacher believed that all of them would probably have spent most of their lives in jail if they had not been to Enborne Lodge. The cost of the school, which in the end became too much for Lambeth to bear, was far less than the cost to society had those pupils not been given a second opportunity in life and, instead, been left to rot in prison.

The costs of providing properly for those with special educational needs have to be weighed carefully against the often even greater costs of not providing for them properly. At a recent hearing of the Public Accounts Committee, of which I am a member, which was called to discuss the closure of the dome, David James, the former executive chairman of the New Millennium Experience Company, made an interesting comment. He said that all too often the Government have such an obsession with getting the

[Mr. David Rendel]

cheapest possible service available at any one time that we often end up by spending a great deal more in the long run. The Liberal Democrats have frequently said that, and I was delighted to have it confirmed by such an authoritative source. Moreover, nowhere is it truer than in special educational needs. Short-term thinking, driven by the need to reduce costs, simply results in other costs. There are costs to society, because of the talents and abilities that are wasted as a result, and there are financial costs, because other budgets are often left to pick up the pieces.

Education must be about unlocking the talents and abilities of individuals. That is what SEN provision is about, too. In contrast, league tables and testing assume that all children start their school life equal. The danger is that those with special educational needs are left by the wayside. We cannot afford to let that happen, and we must not let that happen. We must not fail those who need us most.

8.30 pm

Mr. Shaun Woodward (St. Helens, South): The Minister has come under something of an attack. I was surprised by that because over the years the subject of special educational needs has been a matter of consensus rather than combat. SEN policies have been criticised before. I shall remind the Minister of a speech in which it was said:

> "Let me tell the Minister that we need more help in the country now. We need more residential educational facilities, and more respite for parents; we also need to provide more day provision for autistic adults. The Government must begin by reviewing the needs of the forgotten children."—[*Official Report*, 17 May 1995; Vol. 260, c.310.]

That is the sort of speech that the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) might have made, but in fact those were the words of the then Member for Finchley.

Special educational needs are important. They involve a vulnerable group of people, and the House needs to be cautious when it chooses to use such people as the subject of an Opposition day debate. It is easy to make criticisms that turn vulnerable people into political footballs without providing adequate ideas about how we should deal with the problem.

Indeed, we have been dealing with the problem for a long time. The solutions evolve as we learn more about the problems of children with SEN and children with autism. The shadow Leader of the House, when he was an Education Minister in 1992, said:

> "We hope to establish a consensus and to achieve the greatest possible agreement in order to identify the best ways to serve, help and support the children who deserve every support and help."—[*Official Report*, 3 July 1992; Vol. 210, c. 1134.]

Again, I caution the hon. Member for Epping Forest about the dangers of turning the debate into a combat rather than a matter of consensus.

The problem of a shortfall of specialist teachers is not new either. Back in 1994, it was said:

> "There is a shortfall of available specialist teachers. The number completing courses in teaching pupils with severe learning difficulties fell from 200"—

just 200—

> "in 1989 to 80 in 1993. The number of teachers of hearing-impaired children qualifying has fallen from 150 to 110. The British Association of Teachers of the Deaf reports an average age of more than 40 for new trainees and a serious fall-off in younger teachers. Special schools and support services are having difficulty in filling appointments with qualified people."—[*Official Report*, 9 May 1994; Vol. 243, c. 38.]

We need to be careful of ignoring the fact that the problems are not new. They are continuing and will remain with us for as long as the problem remains with us.

Mrs. Laing: Strange as it may seem, I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. This is not a matter for party political banter—as I said. He is right to say that the problems have always been with us and are still with us now. We must not look back at statistics, but forwards at what can be done. If a consensus that allows us all to work together can be achieved, let us achieve it.

Mr. Woodward: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for saying that. However, she needs to achieve greater consensus within her party, which faces the eternal problem of how to fund policies. She talks about the importance of greater resources and more provision, but if a party is committed to reducing Government spending to 35 per cent. of GDP, it raises the fundamental question of where it is going to make the cuts. Knowing her as I do, I am sure that the hon. Lady would want to ring-fence this area. Clearly, we would wish to give her the opportunity to say so this evening.

I shall remind the hon. Lady again of the words of the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) a couple of years ago:

> "The ambition to develop special schools as centres of expertise to collaborate with and support mainstream schools is a correct aspiration".

He was absolutely right. The head teachers of special schools in my county, however, say that they have heard such ideas before. They are absolutely right—they have heard them before. They are all too well aware of the funding implications. The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire continued:

> "The issue is how that is to be afforded."—[*Official Report*, 5 December 1997; Vol. 302, c. 628.]

The hon. Lady therefore needs to consult her colleagues on this issue. She also needs to bear in mind, when she puts forward this combative motion, the words of the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), among others of her hon. Friends, who recently said:

> "What goes on in the classroom and the school is only a small part of the education that the child needs. Especially in the case of a child who suffers from . . . autism".—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 9 January 2002; Vol. 377, c. 238WH.]

We must therefore see the issue in its real context.

The real criticism relates to how the problem was dealt with before 1991. The hon. Lady is right to draw attention to the problem of statistics. The fact is that before 1991 we did not even count the numbers. There is real criticism to be made of those lost years, for the sake of those forgotten children—today's adults—who suffered so much. The statistics are important, and she is right to remind Ministers of the importance of continuing to collate them.

The hon. Lady referred earlier to all those tragedies, but we must also be careful to avoid talking only about tragedies. As a result of the changes in our thinking, on which the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) and others have commented, we—including the hon. Lady's party, when in office—have achieved notable success. We must therefore be careful to avoid pointing only to what is going wrong, not to what is going right. The number of pupils with statements has increased each year since 1991, but the reason for that, of course, is that we are diagnosing those children. There are not suddenly more of them than there were before, but now we know where they are and who they are.

How are we to respond to the problem? Again, it is to the credit of the Conservative Government that the Education Act 1996 sought to give effect to the principle that pupils with special educational needs should normally be educated in mainstream schools. We must not lose sight of the importance of that decision, and the real progress that was achieved when that Government made it. As a principle of provision, the present Government have continued that policy since the election in 1997. That is right, and there have been some fantastic successes. In 1991, 165,875 children were identified as pupils with statements. That figure was up by nearly 100,000 in 1997, and today it is 269,000.

Crucially, those children have gone into mainstream education wherever possible. Let us celebrate that success. In 1991, 42 per cent. were in maintained mainstream schools; today that figure is 61 per cent. That is a good thing. In 1991, 54 per cent. were in special schools and pupil referral units; by 2000 that figure was down to 36 per cent. That is a cause for real celebration. That inclusion was achieved by the hon. Lady's party when in government, and was continued by the Labour party in government. Consensus across the House has been important in achieving that. I note the importance of caution with regard to turning the issue of children with special educational needs into an area of political combat. We have done well to keep it away from that, and we now need to be cautious about moving it into the arena as a political football.

In opposition the Labour party produced the document "Every Child is Special", which rightly drew attention to the fact that

"too high a proportion of the resources devoted to special educational needs was being spent on bureaucratic procedures",

and that too much time was spent on

"confrontational relationships between parents and local authorities."

The Government were right to tackle some of that. They were also right to increase the funding in special schools, despite the fall in the overall balance by 20 per cent. We should acknowledge that that funding has gone in. We should also acknowledge the Government's success in making it possible for children in mainstream schools to have access to such funding. That is not a criticism of the previous Government, but an observation of where our priorities as a society were.

In 1996–97 the extra budget made available to help to make the mainstream accessible to disabled pupils was £10 million. In 2001 it was £50 million, and over the next three years there is a commitment to spend £220 million under the schools access initiative. That is a good record, but we can do more.

The motion draws on the document "Autism in schools: crisis or challenge?" produced by the National Autistic Society. I am proud to be involved with that organisation, and I have enjoyed helping it with fund raising. We owe the society a great debt for the work that it has done. However, let us be fair about the figures. Even the society's current report says that it is surprised by the numbers of children with autism. It points out that only 90 per cent. of all teachers are trained in the specific problems of children with autism, but it realises that catch-up inevitably has to follow diagnosis. Training of teachers will follow recognition of the problem.

Norman Lamb: The Disabilities Trust makes the point about the crucial need for early diagnosis and assessment. Lost years can have a fatal effect on a child's development. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that more training needs to go into early diagnosis and assessment?

Mr. Woodward: I agree with that, and towards the end of my remarks I shall have a suggestion for my hon. Friend the Minister that will involve a dialogue with the Treasury.

Part of the Conservative party's criticism of the Government's approach to education is that it is too centralised. However, the hon. Member for Epping Forest should look more closely at the report from the National Autistic Society that is cited in the Opposition's motion. The society wants local education authorities to receive a strong lead from the centre so that they can deal with the problem. It wants central Government to tell LEAs to direct their resources to tackling autism and to concentrate them on providing teachers with more specialist training in dealing with the problems of children with autism. That is not a question of one size fits all; those at the sharp end of dealing with autism say that a lead from the centre will bring about fundamental changes.

We have heard much talk about what has been achieved in hon. Members' constituencies, and it gives me great pleasure to refer to my constituency in St. Helens. Luckily, we have just succeeded with a bid for a new school in St. Helens for children with special educational needs. Through the work of my LEA and its successful leader, Susan Richardson, we received the top award of £5 million. The LEA is providing the extra £1.5 million, and in two years the school will open in one of the most deprived parts of my constituency. It will take 170 children, with specialist teachers and specialist training. That must be a step forward, and I am grateful to the Government for providing the money.

However, no matter what we do, the solution for some children with autism will not be found in mainstream education. As the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) said, early intervention is crucial. If we meet the children when they are two or two and a half and intervene intensively on a one-to-one basis, there is a chance that, with special help, they can be integrated into mainstream education when they are five or six. I am sure that all Members would want that.

I recently came across the case of a young boy called Toby. He was three when he was diagnosed with autism in 1996. He lives in Camden with his mother, who went to the local authority and said that she needed special help for her boy. Camden had a school for children with special educational needs, but no special provision for children with autism. The boy's mother, who is an enterprising and energetic woman and works in the theatre, got the resources together to create a project called the Treehouse school. Five or six years later, that school has 30 children of primary school age.

I have been carefully complimentary about the Government's policies, so I shall direct my next remarks to my hon. Friend the Minister. The Treehouse school

[Mr. Woodward]

wants to expand its facilities so that it can take 80 children. There is no other such facility in Camden, and all but two of its 30 pupils are paid for by LEAs.

The school is running an appeal to raise nearly £11 million for its expansion, but £2.5 million of that is for VAT, which will find its way to the Chancellor. I am sure that he will find excellent ways to redistribute that money round the country, but I ask the Minister whether it is sensible to expect the school to raise those extra funds before it can build facilities for children whose places will be paid for by an LEA. After all, we are trying to tackle the problems of children with autism and we are encouraging the charitable sector to come up with creative solutions. The school in Camden is an excellent solution, and it fulfils a need that was not previously being met. Treehouse is an excellent model. It is doing pioneering American work that is changing the treatment of autism among young people and children of primary and secondary school age. If we mean what we say, and if we are a reforming Government in every area, we may need to consider reforming VAT to help special schools to do their work.

In their motion the Conservatives call for the Government

"to set out clearly its plans for this sector".

The hon. Member for Epping Forest spoke about vision, and I have to say that not only have the Government displayed vision since their time in opposition, when they published a paper on the subject, but there has been action, in my constituency and throughout the country.

Today I asked charities, such as the one cited in the motion, what they thought of Government policy. First, they are delighted with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. Secondly, they feel that the legislation is better than ever before in enshrining the rights of every child with special educational needs. Thirdly, they commend the national autism good practice working group and the national initiative for autism screening and assessment. The people at the coal face think that the Government are doing well.

Mrs. Laing: The theory that the hon. Gentleman puts forward is right, but does he not agree that there are thousands of parents who have to fight to get what is due to their children? A statement of need is issued and parents are told that the child has certain rights, but the local authority, the health authority and social services are unable to honour those rights because the necessary infrastructure does not exist.

Mr. Woodward: The hon. Lady is absolutely right, and she is making a wonderful case for championing the most vulnerable children. I only wonder, in light of what she said, why special educational needs was not a central part of the speech made by the leader of her party earlier today, in which he said that he would champion children. I have just read the press release of that speech, and I cannot find a word about children with special educational needs or autism.

I know that last week, which was national autism week, the Conservative party carried out a survey, and surveys are important in raising awareness. In the same week the party published its first important document on education—10,000 words of it, after eight months of intensive work. It is all about how we might begin to modernise education, but in 10,000 words there was not one word about autism and only half a line about special educational needs. There was not a policy or a proposal.

Mrs. Laing: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Woodward: No, I am about to finish my speech.

This is an important subject, but if there is to be anything more than combat, and if the leader of the Conservative party means to champion children, he must take the most vulnerable, those who need to be championed, and include them in his speech. Of course the hon. Lady's speech in the House this evening was important, but is she saying that it was more important than that of her party's leader? Last week was national autism week, so why did the Conservative leader not refer to autism if it is important enough to dominate the party's parliamentary time? It is important to match the rhetoric with action.

In the report on education that the Conservative party produced last week, there was nothing about autism but a great deal about Gladstone. When I was at school I learned about Gladstone in the context of the 19th century being a period of reaction and reform. Gladstone was indeed a radical reformer; the problem with the motion is that it is all reaction and no reform.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. May I point out to right hon. and hon. Members that there is not a great deal of time left in this debate, so brevity would be helpful?

8.50 pm

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): I am delighted to have the chance to contribute to this debate on a very important subject. I should like to start by saying that it should be absolutely evident that there is no political disagreement about the importance of special educational needs, but that is not the same as saying that there is no disagreement throughout the education system about how those needs are best met. Perhaps more than on any other issue, there is constant and vigorous debate between professionals and parents about the relative merits of special schools and supported education in mainstream schools.

I shall reply briefly to the points made by the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Woodward). He cannot imagine that the document published last week or the speech made today represent the Conservative party's final words on education, and we have initiated this debate to raise a number of issues, including autism.

The watchwords for this debate, as for other education issues, should be diversity and choice in so far as they can be achieved, especially in rural areas, and flexibility in the system, bearing in mind the variety and complexity of the educational needs of the children we are talking about and the fact that those needs are rarely static. To those watchwords we should add the need for the fullest possible information for, and the involvement of, parents and the best achievable co-ordination of the different responsible agencies locally.

What has been interesting about this evening—it would be equally interesting if we had more time—is the fact that we all bring our own experiences to this debate. We have heard about some moving examples from hon. Members' constituencies. I know, because I have heard him say so on many occasions, that the former Secretary of State for Education and Employment, now the Secretary of State for the Home Department, having himself attended a special school, is very much in favour of inclusiveness and educating children with special needs in mainstream schools. Although the Government of whom I was a member certainly stressed the importance of moving towards, where possible, as much inclusion as we could, my own experience of more than 30 years in education, one way and another, has influenced me to differ from the right hon. Gentleman's view.

My memory goes back to my experience of a post-war primary school in rural Norfolk, where the concept of special needs education, except for the blind and deaf, was quite unknown. As a result, in my 30-pupil primary school, children with pronounced special needs were not educated, but seated and, when possible, kept occupied next to the teacher and alongside us. That same teacher, in a two-teacher school, was also the head teacher. She was responsible for organising the work of about 15 children of all abilities between the ages of seven and 11. As a result, the special needs children got no chance at all.

When some residential special schools were opened in Norfolk in the early 1950s, the life chances of the children alongside us and their counterparts in all the other schools were transformed beyond all imagining, especially given some of their family circumstances.

In the intervening many decades since then, the pendulum of educational fashion has swung back and forth. We are currently in a phase that is worrying many heads of special schools. We heard what the Minister for School Standards had to say this evening, and I hope that we shall hear further reassurance from his colleague, the Minister for Lifelong Learning, when she makes her closing remarks. However, given the number of closures that have taken place and the examples of the LEAs' attitudes that we have heard about, there is no doubt that many head teachers of special schools feel that those schools, and the loving care and devotion that they and their staff provide, are under threat.

No one could seriously argue against the rightness of inclusion for all pupils, especially those who throughout their lives, because of their disabilities, may in any case feel excluded from mainstream life. It is a question of how best to balance the needs of any particular child at a given point in his or her life, and how best to equip that child to realise his or her full potential. That, surely, is the point of inclusiveness.

What is needed—we are not there yet, and we were not there in my time either—is the utmost flexibility between the special school system and supported education in mainstream schools. It is a pity if the dedicated work done in special schools is somehow devalued in the eyes of those who work in them because of the swing of the pendulum. We need both routes for these children, but with many crossing points between them at every stage.

Because of the need for crossing points, an essential feature of the education and continuing development of children with special needs is the closest possible co-ordination and co-operation at local level. We can all give excellent examples of that. Because of the time constraint I will not give lengthy examples from my constituency; I merely say that it is possible for a special school to work closely with a local training centre, which can in turn work closely with a further education college.

I did not agree with what was said by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), who is not here now, about what went on in FE colleges. In my experience at any rate, the work of FE colleges has been one of the great unsung successes of our age. The excitement and satisfaction gained by young people from their status as students is an object lesson in real inclusiveness, which I hope will not be adversely affected by the new regime of training and skills councils.

The main difficulty is coping with the anxieties of parents. They need to know their rights with regard to statements, and they need the greatest possible reassurance at all times. In no area is collaboration between all relevant agencies more vital. Like every other Member, I find that the most distressing letters in my postbag have come from parents who know that something is wrong with their children but are having to put up with delays and, sometimes, failure to communicate on the part of the various agencies. They feel that they are being pushed around through various kinds of bureaucracy, while having to cope with the appalling uncertainty involved in suspecting that their children may be different from others.

Many such parents are reassured by the knowledge that their children will be catered for by the specialised skills of a special school. Despite the best will in the world, a child inappropriately placed in mainstream education, even with support, may be a source of continuing worry and uncertainty for parents. Parents worry about whether the next class teacher will be as understanding as the present one, whether the child is being mocked or bullied and is not telling anyone, whether the support assistant will stay in her job, and whether the hours of support will be reduced.

That is not to denigrate the excellent work done in mainstream education for children with special needs. Clearly the appropriateness of a child's placement is the most important issue; but the parents' interests and peace of mind should not be overlooked, and nor should their responsibilities to the other members of the family. I think that a special school placement can help a whole family to survive, providing support that comes not least from other parents of children at the school.

It has been a privilege to speak in the debate. Let me end by saying that there is no one right route. There is a variety of routes, which can be opened through facilitation of the links between the two main pathways. We did not achieve that, and the present Government are not achieving it yet, but that is the direction in which we must go.

8.59 pm

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): I do not usually take part in Opposition day debates, because they tend to be choreographed rituals. First, the Opposition spokesman has to describe all the problems of the world as though they started on 2 May 1997 and everything went downhill from then. Then the Government Front-Bench spokesman has to respond by saying that we are actually making steady progress towards some nirvana, and so it goes on.

[Dr. Stephen Ladyman]

The beginning of the contribution made by the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) did nothing to lift my depression. Although she said that she did not want to turn the debate into a party political football, she did everything she could to make it so during the first 10 minutes of her speech when she spoke in party political language. However, her contribution improved thereafter and she raised some serious questions that I hope we can air presently.

The right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) also raised serious concerns and made some important points. However, the Opposition seem to have overlooked at least some of the Government's achievements. They should recognise our achievements. As my hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Phil Hope) said, the Government have increased spending on education for children with special needs by 20 per cent. in real terms. That is not nothing—it should at least be acknowledged.

The Opposition seem completely to have forgotten what has been achieved by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. It has put parents' preferences first in the legal framework for decisions about a child. Those provisions might not yet be working effectively and that is a legitimate subject for debate, but parents now have the legal right to insist on a mainstream place for their child if they want it. That is in addition to their previous and continuing legal right to insist on a special school place.

Greater inclusion in mainstream education means that local education authorities must constantly review special school provision in their area. I can understand why the Conservative survey found that 25 per cent. of special schools felt threatened. How many of those schools were in Conservative authorities? Conveniently, that information was not included in the Conservative motion.

We all have a responsibility to monitor the provision available in different education authority areas and to make decisions accordingly. It is sad that special schools feel threatened. Many of them—including those in my constituency—are doing a fabulous job, and it would be a tragedy if we lost them. It is up to us, as Members of Parliament, to make that case to our local education authorities; we must make sure that they realise the importance of the work of those schools.

Mr. Gale: The hon. Gentleman speaks with some pride of the 2001 Act; but I and some others had some quarrel with it. The Royal School for Deaf Children in Margate, in my constituency, also takes children from his constituency. Is he proud of the fact that, under the Act, the Royal School, which is not a state school, and other members of the national association for special schools, suffer discrimination? Should not they, too, be given the state help that they deserve?

Dr. Ladyman: The hon. Gentleman raises points that are not covered by the Act. The Act gives parents the legal right to insist on a mainstream school place and puts a duty on schools to provide access for disabled people and people with special needs. It discriminates against special schools only in the sense that they no longer have a captive market of children to attend them. In any case, a good local authority will make sure that it works with special schools to preserve their provision.

The Government are doing exactly that. A school in my constituency, but run by Wandsworth education authority, has just received £3 million for rebuilding work to provide for the needs of its pupils. My right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench are doing good work and we should acknowledge it.

I have exchanged the ritual abuse with Members on the Opposition Benches. I have fawned appropriately on my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench, so I hope that now I can turn to the constructive part of my contribution and talk about the issues raised by the motions. I want especially to talk about autism because, as Members know, I am chairman of the all-party autism group.

There has been discussion today of consensus on autism. The all-party group has 150 members from both Houses and all parties, and I am willing to bet that there is consensus among them on the need for provision for autistic people. There is probably some consensus on the progress that this Government have made, and probably consensus too on where there is still more work to do. It is important that we strive for consensus. I am sure that my hon. Friends on the Front Bench recognise where they are failing and where they need to do more. We need to give them credit for what they have done already.

So, in a spirit of constructive criticism, and knowing how interested the Government are in standard assessment tests, I have decided to mark my autism scorecard against their performance. I am pretty sure that there will be consensus among members of the all-party group on the provision that I describe, although there may be differences of opinion on how well the Government are doing.

The first thing that I would require of the Government is to improve planning for autistic people and special educational needs. The basis of planning is of course good data—knowing how many people for whom services are to be provided. The report published last week by the National Autistic Society said that one in 86 people has been identified by teachers as somewhere on the autistic spectrum. I point out for accuracy—this has not been mentioned in the debate so far—that the society also acknowledged that only one in 152 people has been formally diagnosed and that its own estimate remains at one in 110, and that the Medical Research Council's estimate of the number of autistic people under the age of eight is one in 166.

What can we deduce from those data? We should first acknowledge that we should not get too hung up on data. The level of variation shows how uncertain we are of our figures. One of the things that I first did when I became interested in autism was to ask in a parliamentary question how many people have autism. The Government answered that they did not know. When I challenged a Minister on that later that day and said that it was terrible, I was told that things were worse than I had feared, as the Government did not know that they did not know until I had asked the question. The Government should be given credit for acknowledging the fact that they did not know, and for trying to work out how many people have autism spectrum disorders. Having said that, we still do not have accurate figures.

The report of the all-party group, "The Rising Challenge", identified that 87 per cent. of local education authorities believe that the number of such people is increasing—whether that is through better diagnosis or whether it is a real increase is debatable. So, we should acknowledge that we need to plan for greater provision. I give the Government five out of 10 for recognising that they need better data, but only one out of 10 on top of that for progress so far. That totals six out of 10 for data collection and planning.

Secondly, we need to recognise the variability of needs. Autism spectrum disorders range from people who are high-functioning, who can probably do well with the right help in a mainstream school, to those who have very serious disorders, who could not possibly survive in a mainstream school. There are many special schools and many specialist support units in mainstream schools, so we have the range of provision, but not sufficient quantity of it.

I shall cite an example from Kent, although I do not do so because Kent is any worse than anywhere else. There are 32 specialist unit places for autistic children in mainstream secondary schools in Kent—two units of 16 places—and we have 12,000 autistic people in the county. I am not by any means saying that they all have the same needs and that it would be appropriate to send them all to such units, but those figures show the imbalance between provision and need. So, on the range of schools and support provided, and efforts to boost numbers, we can give the Government seven out of 10.

As my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Woodward) mentioned, we need to assess children at an early age, as that helps us to gather data and provide individuals with intensive support. The Government have recognised the need to identify autistic people at an early age, for which we can give them 10 out of 10, as they are the first Government to do so. The Department of Health has supported a national initiative on autism screening and assessment, and a working party is trying to establish best practice in identifying autism. We can therefore give the Government five out of 10 for supporting that initiative, and they will gain the remaining five marks if and when they roll it out across the country.

We need an autism-aware teacher in every school. I have told the House before of a case often cited by the National Autistic Society. A little girl was disruptive in class during literacy hour, when she had to sit in a circle with her schoolmates. An autism-aware teacher realised that she was disruptive because she was not sitting in the same place every time. A coloured carpet tile was provided, and the little girl knows that that is where she sits during literacy hour. The problem was solved with a nice, cheap solution because there was an autism-aware teacher in that school. The Government have provided £82 million for improved teacher training, which is an excellent step forward, but is not enough; we give them five out of 10.

Earlier, I spoke about the primacy of parental concerns in legislation. We ought to acknowledge that and give the Government 10 out of 10 for recognising it.

Intensive therapy was mentioned by the Liberal Democrat spokesman. It is important that we recognise the need to provide such therapy, but there is a lot of dispute about whether that should be done through education or health provision. Many parents have to fight, as the hon. Member for Epping Forest said, to get intensive therapy. In my early days as an MP, I championed the cause of a family who wanted the Lovaas technique for their child; we could not convince the local education authority, and the family had to provide it at their own expense. The child has prospered and will soon be back in a mainstream school at the cost, however, of the parents becoming bankrupt and the break-up of their marriage. Not providing that need when required involves an emotional cost, so the Government score three out of 10 for that.

Mr. Gale: I shall try to raise something on which we probably agree. Much has been said tonight about schools. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that when parents get their children into a special needs school or a mainstream school, it is tremendously sad that provision is for term time only? During the holidays, provision is cut; the children go back about four paces and have to start at that point the next term.

Dr. Ladyman: The hon. Gentleman is right; he and I agree on that important aspect of provision. However, we must acknowledge that extending provision would add to costs. I am also championing the case of a child who does not have an autistic spectrum disorder but needs special school provision; the provision identified as meeting his needs covers 52 weeks a year and will cost £170,000 a year. The local education authority told me that that would pay for four special teachers, so a significant judgment and a difficult decision have to be made. I therefore award the Government three out of 10 for the provision of intensive therapy.

Finally, the Minister for School Standards did not mention the national service framework for children, which is being championed largely by the Department of Health, but has close ties with the Department for Education and Skills. If it provides a one-stop shop from the point where a child is identified as having special needs to the fulfilment of those needs in education and health, and given that the Government have talked about using autism as an exemplar, we can give them nine out of 10 because the initiative will bring about the most dramatic improvement to the lives of autistic children in a generation. We will give them 10 out of 10 when the final framework is in place and we can make sure it is as good as promised.

That is a total score of 55 out of 80, or 68 per cent. We can give the Government a B and the comment "Room for improvement", as my school reports always used to say. I was always quite pleased to take a mark of 68 per cent. home to my dad. At least I knew that I was not in trouble at home. In the spirit of an Opposition day debate, I can say that that is certainly better than the C-minus of the Conservatives prior to 1997. The Government get a B, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister for Lifelong Learning will acknowledge that although progress has been made, a heck of a lot of progress remains to be made.

9.15 pm

Mr. Charles Hendry (Wealden): I shall focus on a particular aspect of the autism spectrum—the problems and education of children who are hyperactive. I raise the matter because of a number of distressing constituency cases which have come to my attention over the past year involving children with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and its awful consequences for their families and schools.

[Mr. Charles Hendry]

In two cases that come to mind, the children are young boys approaching their early teens. It is no surprise that they are young boys, as four out of five children who suffer from hyperactivity are male. The children in those two cases are violent and aggressive towards their parents and teachers, they threaten their siblings in the most frightening ways, they damage their own homes, and their schools cannot handle them. That has been a matter of awful concern to me. Hyperactive children fall between the stools within the local authority. Neither the education department nor the social services department is fully equipped to deal with such cases.

I have looked around to try and find the most appropriate help. It was a joy to find a small organisation based near Chichester called the Hyperactive Children's Support Group, a small charity run by a remarkable lady named Sally Bunday, who set it up because of her own problems more than 30 years ago with her own son, who suffered in the same way. The group's main conclusion is that a link can be drawn between hyperactivity and diet—deficiencies of certain products or excesses of other products.

That probably comes as no surprise to parents. We all know from our own experience or from that of other families about cases of a child being given a red or a blue Smartie or some other food containing colouring, and then exploding moments later. We can see a direct link in our families or our friends' families between those substances and the activities of such children. We need to focus on the awful knock-on effects when that happens while the child is at school.

There are even children's vitamins which are sold to help the child to be active during the day, but which themselves contain colouring. Parents may think that they are sending their child off to school boosted with the energy that he or she requires for the day, but in fact they are sending into the classroom a little time bomb that can go off at any time.

My hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) spoke about the lack of statistics. Just last week I asked the Minister of State, Department of Health, the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), how many children were diagnosed with ADHD. I was told that the information requested is not collected centrally, but the reply went on:

> "The prevalence of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder of all types is estimated at around 5 per cent. of school-aged children, approximately 345,000 six to 16-year-olds in England."—[*Official Report*, 16 May 2002; Vol. 385, c. 872w.]

That means that there are, on average, 500 hyperactive children in each of our constituencies—a frighteningly high level. The problem must be addressed urgently.

There are different approaches, of course. Some suggest prescribing Ritalin, but there is an increasing tendency to look at more natural approaches, such as cutting out colourings and artificial additives. The UK still allows more colourings and additives than any other country in Europe. Perhaps the time has come for labelling to show clearly that the product contains elements which could adversely affect some children and make them subject to hyperactivity. Further work is needed in that direction. We must look at combating mineral deficiency and using products such as evening primrose oil.

It has become clear from the debate that every case is different, so the solution to every case will be different. We must be creative in our approach. We need to work with schools to identify the problem and deal with it. There was a fascinating experiment at a small school in Cornwall, the Tywardeath primary school, where the headmaster, Gordon Walker, asked parents to stop their children eating 21 particular additives. All the parents were happy to take part. As a result, more than half of the 140 students behaved better and were able to concentrate more on their school work. The experiment produced nothing definitive, but evidence of how the problem can be addressed.

The Hyperactive Children's Support Group has also carried out its own survey in which people have followed the Feingold diet, which is based on work pioneered by Dr. Feingold in the United States. The survey found that three quarters of children showed a good response to the diet and that about three quarters of the boys surveyed and more than half the girls had zinc levels that were below normal—a direct contributory factor to hyperactivity.

Only last week, *The Independent* reported on a study carried out by Dr. Madelaine Portwood, a senior educational psychologist at Durham county council, who asked schools in her area to give supplements of fish and plant extracts so that the effect could be monitored. The report states:

> "Analysis at the halfway stage of the study shows remarkable advantages among children taking the supplements . . . One child's reading skills improved by the equivalent of four years after only 12 weeks of taking the supplements."

The report goes on to quote Andrew Westerman, one school's headmaster, as saying:

> "It's like lights being switched on."

That is the sort of evidence that we must take into account. Dr. Portwood said:

> "Why are there so many more children with developmental problems? The most significant change in the last 20 years has been the diet of children, and that is why we are exploring the use of food supplements."

Those are a number of ways in which schools can help in investigating special educational needs. I hope that we can find a number of schools around the country that are prepared to consider conducting pilot projects that will allow us further to explore these issues, and that the Government will make funding available. They have a healthy eating programme for which they give additional funds to county councils. Perhaps they could use that programme to fund some pilot projects to enable us to find out where the science is correct. There is a strong divergence of views among scientists and we must make an assessment. Even if we asked for children to undergo a nutritional assessment so we could decide and identify deficiencies and find out whether there was a correlation in relation to children with behavioural problems, we would make a significant advance. Every parent knows that a link exists and we must address it more seriously as part of the work of the House.

I should like briefly to mention one other matter that relates directly to autism. Last week, I visited a group in my constituency called Step-by-Step. The group has been set up by parents and grandparents of children who have autism. They want to establish a specialist school in Crowborough. The model on which they have chosen to base the school is the Treehouse school, to which the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Woodward) referred—one of three schools that are currently adopting an approach called applied behaviour analysis. When Nick Hornby, himself the father of an autistic son, addressed that issue in a recent article in *The Observer*, he asked:

> "How are we going to educate all these autistic kids, when there are currently 76,000 of them fighting for 3,000 specialist school places, and when we know from experts that it is only specialist education that can make any difference?"

Of course, wonderful work is done in mainstream education. As my hon. Friend the Member for Epping Forest said, we must all pay tribute to the patience and perseverance of people who work in these very difficult cases, but different cases need different solutions. She was also correct to say that inclusion is not right in all cases. I also agreed with the Minister, who said that parents have a unique understanding of their children's circumstances. He told us that two thirds of cases were working satisfactorily, which means that one third are not. We were told by the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor) that 75 per cent. of families with autistic children are happy with the education that they are getting, but that means that 25 per cent. are not happy. In other words, between 20,000 and 25,000 families are not getting the support that they believe they need.

I hope that the Government will find a way of assisting schools such as the Step-by-Step school that is planned for my constituency. The project is imaginative and creative, and tries to use a system that the families believe will work best for their children. I hope that the Minister will give us some encouraging words.

9.24 pm

Phil Hope (Corby): I welcome the chance to contribute, however briefly, to this debate.

The hon. Member for Wealden (Mr. Hendry) made some interesting points about the possible causes of some special educational needs and offered one or two observations about activities that might deal with them. I have to say, however, that this Opposition day debate has been characterised by an absence of Conservative party policy on what we should be doing to meet the needs of children with special educational needs.

I want to give a local example of a strategy—not just a one-off contribution that is a particularly good way of responding, but a complete strategy that is in accordance with the Government's policy and demonstrates how to deliver special education in a whole area. I am talking about the county of Northamptonshire, where the Labour county council has a reputation for having a very high-quality special educational needs policy. Indeed, a recent Ofsted report described the local education authority's strategy on special educational needs as excellent and as reflecting the national agenda, with a key commitment to the principle of inclusion. Interestingly, Opposition Members talked about watchwords of choice and diversity, but failed to use the word "inclusion" as a key principle in approaching the question of developing education for children with special educational needs.

The local education authority is in the top quartile of performance indicators for carrying out assessments within 18 weeks, at some 90 per cent. The parent partnership scheme that it funds is well developed and provides valuable support to parents through the education system. The Ofsted report said that the fact that parents were so well assisted by that system contributed to a reduction in the number of appeals having to reach tribunal stage.

I have practical experience of the situation in Northamptonshire. Studfall junior school in my constituency has achieved the full integration of children with special educational needs. To pick up a point made by the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale), that includes children with hearing impairments. I witnessed fantastic educational opportunities during a Christmas event, when the whole school—a group of deaf children with hearing children—sang "Silent Night" using sign language. That was astonishing, because the hearing children were doing the signing. Both deaf and hearing children benefit from that kind of inclusiveness in our education system. To include is to provide opportunities for all our children, not just those with special educational needs.

Although Northamptonshire has been recommended by Ofsted as having an excellent system, it wants to go further and is now considering the Government's agenda to decide how better to go forward. It has drawn up a series of principles that will underpin a major review of its provision. Those principles comprise a model that we might wish to apply elsewhere. They hold that the needs of pupils must be paramount; that there must be early identification and intervention for all pupils with special educational needs; and vitally and interestingly, that every pupil with a statement, wherever they are placed, must be put on the register of a local mainstream school. So even a pupil with a statement who attends a special school will be registered with a mainstream school—in effect, they are dual registered. That is a practical step towards linking together the needs of children in the mainstream and special school systems to ensure that those needs are met.

In Northamptonshire, the council is going to create a continuum of special education provision. To support an inclusive educational system, it will create a network of specialist centres with an agreed specification of expertise. Those centres will be directly linked to mainstream local schools so that the geographical distance is minimised to allow for ease of movement of pupils and teachers between them and mainstream schools. New partnerships of training, management, professional advice and expertise will be established, so that instead of isolated silos that children cannot move between, there will be an integrated network of specialist centres, mainstream schools and designated special provision—that is, a mainstream school with a designated special unit on site—that provides a real, multi-agency network of support within the school system. That will mean that young people can move freely and are not pigeonholed, boxed up and left uninspired in a place that cannot take them forward.

Of course, other children in mainstream schools will also have opportunities—the traffic is not one way. The provision in specialist centres is available to mainstream school children if they need it, and special needs children can use the mainstream school. Outside that, there will be a proper system of quality monitoring and control to ensure that the facilities meet the needs of all children.

I mentioned those principles because they will inform a radical review of provision in Northamptonshire. It will not be easy. Parents and providers will have fears and

[Phil Hope]

anxieties about what it means in practice. The principles that underpin the review and the reorganisation will create confidence that diversity will exist and be rooted in inclusiveness. That is the crucial new direction in which the Government are leading us.

I want to mention two examples of excellent practice that underpin the changes. It is vital that parents should be at the centre of the debate. My hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards and others have emphasised that. In 1994, we created Parents in Partnership in Northamptonshire. This afternoon, I spoke to the founder member of the organisation, which is now called SNIP—Special Needs in Partnership. It is a funded organisation that is run by volunteers and covers all children up to the age of 19. When a parent contacts it and says, "I'm not sure whether there's something wrong with my child; something is not quite right," a response is received in 24 hours. In days, someone from the organisation visits the family to talk through their problems, needs and worries.

The family may already have a child with special educational needs, or may be trying to get a child statemented. The parent may simply be worried. The service means that parents can have an advocate or mentor beside them—someone who understands the system and can draw on other resources, such as the voluntary organisations and specialist groups that were mentioned earlier—to be with the family. It is a fantastic service which is core funded by the county council. I am talking not about funny money but about real, sustainable money. There are paid and volunteer staff. This is a model of good practice that integrates the community, the voluntary sector and the local authority in providing parents with the support that they need.

Support for very young children is vital. No hon. Member has mentioned the portage service. Children with special educational needs that are identified early are visited by a portage home visitor, and a family with very small babies benefits from a tightly prescribed method for helping their child. The parents are shown what to do and, over a fortnight, they undertake activities every day with the child and keep a record. The volunteer from the portage service visits them again, assesses what has happened and describes the next series of activities. Consequently, the parents do not wonder what to do or feel isolated and the child does not get worse through lack of support.

The child is thus actively and practically supported by the parent, as the first educator, through the expertise and support of the service. The local education authority funds the service, but 50 volunteers provide it across the county. It is the largest service of its kind in the country, and many people could learn from it.

Time is not on our side, but I hope that I have shown that we have a good track record in Northamptonshire of providing services. We have new principles on which to base a reorganisation of those excellent services so as to be in tune with the Government's core aims of partnership with parents and inclusiveness for all children in our communities.

9.33 pm

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): My remarks will, of necessity, be brief. I pay tribute to some of the mainstream schools in my constituency that have pursued inclusion successfully. There is a hearing impairment unit at Wallisdean junior school attached to the mainstream school. Hearing impaired children there can thus receive additional support to help them integrate more fully into the mainstream school. Many physical changes are being made to Park Gate school to enable children with wheelchairs to have access to the mainstream curriculum.

We should pay tribute to the staff, pupils and heads of mainstream schools for their efforts to integrate children with special educational needs into their schools. They have done a terrific job, and everybody in the schools has benefited enormously from their actions.

As well as the recurrent theme of encouraging inclusion in schools in my constituency, another theme has run through meetings and conversations with head teachers. That is the issue of whether children with special educational needs should always be included in mainstream schools. I shall cite a couple of examples, because we need to stop and think about how far this agenda should go, and about what action we should take in consequence.

One head teacher has cited the situation in which an included child can absorb more resources than are funded by the local authority. As a consequence of that child's needs not being met by the additional funding, the classroom assistant or the teacher has to devote disproportionate time to that child's education, to the detriment of the other children in the class. There is concern that the education of other children suffers when there are insufficient resources available, and that the education of the child with special educational needs is not being fully supported in the way that we believe it should be. As a consequence, that child will not get the full chances in life that we all think he is entitled to.

The other example that I have come across in my constituency is one in which the support given to a child, and that child's ability to access the mainstream curriculum, is so limited that, although he is being educated in a classroom alongside his peers, the isolation is such that it would be unfair to say that he was being included. It would be more accurate to say that he was being co-located with his peers. The interests of that child are not being properly considered if he is simply being educated alongside a class, rather than as part of it.

The long-term consequences of pushing a short-term inclusion agenda will cause difficulties for children in that situation, because they need more care and educational support—probably in the form of the more supportive surroundings of a special school—than they are getting by being part of a mainstream school. We need to ensure, in providing the special education that children need, that we think carefully about their needs, in terms of the LEA, the parents and those who provide support and guidance to parents.

I am conscious that we are reaching the time when we shall start to get letters from constituents about statements and the needs that are specified in them, and about the support and help that children need. We should look to LEAs and voluntary groups to work more closely with parents to ensure that the statement of need produced as part of this process is really supportive of the long-term needs of the child, and not driven simply by the need either to cut costs or to pursue an inclusion agenda.

Last year, in my first year as a Member of Parliament, I came across many issues involving the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools. The fact that there are fewer special schools means that, when such a school is recommended to parents, transport costs can become an issue for the county council, which has to decide how to fund them and determine what impact that will have on other children's education.

Other methods of special education, which LEAs do not fund, exist outside the school structure. In my constituency, the Rainbow Centre provides conductive education for children with cerebral palsy from across the south-east of England. The centre is not funded by the Government, and I ask the Minister to look carefully at that issue. At present, the centre's valuable work is funded entirely by the tremendous efforts of volunteers, many of whom have put much effort into providing this form of education. I ask the Government to consider funding educational methods that are used outside the mainstream education system funded by the LEAs. I also hope that the inclusion agenda will not be pushed to such an extent that it works against the interests of the very children whom we hope to protect and support in the years ahead.

9.39 pm

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): This has been an interesting debate, well conducted on both sides. As always, it has been enriched by the personal knowledge of colleagues who take a particular interest in this matter in their constituencies. It is appropriate to pay tribute to the parents of the children we have been speaking about, to the many organisations and charities that work with them, and to those who work very hard in local education authorities, including my own in Bedfordshire, through their own schools and through Shaftesbury schools in my constituency such as Hinwick Hall. I also pay tribute to the children themselves, who achieve so much. It was right to pay tribute to some of the achievements of those children in the debate. I shall come back to that in a moment.

The hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) reminded us, quite properly, of where we had come from over the years. The issue of special needs is seen quite differently from how it was seen a generation ago. From my experience as Minister for Disabled People, I have a sense of a continually improving ratchet in relation to disability. Things steadily improve—we are not always where we want to be, but it is always better than how it was. Long may that continue.

The hon. Gentleman also spoke movingly about one of the schools in his constituency—now closed, sadly—which treated the most difficult of pupils. One can well understand the difficulties in that sort of school and how much good it did the pupils whom it was trying to support.

We had a rare sighting of the hon. Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Woodward). He spent the first few minutes of his speech talking about Conservatives—something is repressed there, I suspect. He spoke knowledgeably about them, and then spoke properly about autism and his constituency. He spoke well, and his remaining remarks were in tune with the rest of the debate.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard), in a commanding, authoritative and brief speech, reminded us why she was such an exceptionally good Secretary of State for Education. She discussed the importance of flexibility in relation to special needs and how the system had to accommodate individuals, despite a general sense of inclusion that we all share. She made the point about entry into the system in a variety of different ways and at different times and the need to be properly flexible in providing that system. She also mentioned further education, which I will come to in a moment.

The hon. Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman), as chairman of the all-party group on autism, referred to autism week. He gave the Government a score of 68 per cent. and said how pleased his dad would have been if he had gone home with that mark. I do not necessarily concur with the mark of 68 per cent., but I agree that taking home 68 per cent. to one's dad was pretty good. I say that tonight because it is my dad's birthday, and I hope that he gives me 68 per cent. for this speech. *[Interruption.]* We do not often get this sort of chance, so I am not going to miss it. It is a special birthday for my dad.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Mr. Hendry) made a significant speech about the impact of additives and diet on the diagnosis of those with behavioural problems. He produced a number of interesting points of evidence. There is much further work to be done in relation to that. Our diagnosis of special needs is improving, and the relationship between diet and special needs is of interest to a number of Members, as my hon. Friend reminded the House.

The hon. Member for Corby (Phil Hope) spoke about the portage service. I pay tribute to that; I had one in my previous constituency, and know how important it was for early diagnosis and early support. He also spoke movingly about children signing. As a Minister who signed at the special Christmas service for the Royal School for the Deaf in St. Margarets, I understand how overwhelmingly significant that is and the way it makes one feel in relation to those who have hearing disabilities. When children sign while they are singing, it is really very special. The hon. Gentleman was right to draw attention to that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) paid tribute to local schools in his constituency, and mentioned conductive education at the Rainbow Centre. In doing so, he made a proper and valid contribution to the debate.

I want to pick up on what my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk said about further education. We have spent most of our time today talking about special needs in schools, but for two reasons it is terribly important to discuss how they are dealt with in further and higher education. First, we should not forget that knowing that they can leave school and enter further and higher education provides an extraordinary role model for those with disabilities. Secondly, we must pay genuine tribute to those who have worked so hard in further and higher education to enable special needs provision to come on in leaps and bounds in the past decade or so.

Further education colleges are proud of their provision. They already cope with a wide variety of students, as the Minister knows full well. The Association of Colleges for Further and Higher Education has produced a toolkit that includes a range of measures to help colleges with the practicalities of providing beneficial places for those with special learning needs. This afternoon, I spoke to Sue Spencer and others at Walsall college, which does particularly well with the deaf and the deaf-blind. I mention this example to give hon. Members a sense of

[Alistair Burt]

the extent of further education provision for those with disabilities. Walsall college has some 80 students. Four are deaf-blind, and their ages range from 16 to 87. The 87-year-old man, who is deaf-blind, is on a computer course and has already finished courses in mathematics and English. A full range of courses are studied by those with special learning needs. Some go on to university, some to work, and others to different courses.

The keys to success include highly qualified teachers who continually top up their skills, good support systems—including educational interpreters who can offer assistance—along with other elements that the Minister might consider at some stage. As she knows, there is an acute national shortage of signers. The implication of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 is that the need for signers, particularly in education, has increased markedly. There is a chronic need to examine that issue, and to consider the way in which British sign language is handled for examination purposes.

What is happening in higher education is remarkable, and universities are doing ever more. About 7 per cent. of students at Leeds university, which I contacted this afternoon, have some form of special need or disability—a figure that is rather higher than the national average. In 1991, about 1 per cent. of all students had some form of disability, but the national average is now some 5 per cent., a figure which reflects society at large. That shows how far we have come in a decade. Leeds university has many students with dyslexia; indeed, the numbers have increased by 25 per cent. in a year. It also has students with cerebral palsy, and with speech and movement difficulties, who are following full higher education courses. It also has quadriplegics, tetraplegics, and sufferers of muscular dystrophy and trauma injuries.

The greatest difficulties relate to mental health. Given the nature of the illness, it is rather harder for those with mental health problems to participate in higher education, given the concentration required. Moreover, when one examines the destinations of such students, it is noticeable that they are also the most difficult to place. In considering what measures might be adopted, the Minister should note that insufficient research has been undertaken into the destinations of students with learning difficulties. It is difficult to place them with smaller employers, who often imagine that the reality is rather harder to deal with than it actually is. That leads to some frustration, but all in all good things are being done.

Although there is considerable agreement among hon. Members on this issue, several of the points raised by my hon. Friends and in our motion illustrate that certain difficulties exist. The differences between us, and between the motions before us, are sufficient to warrant our dividing the House this evening.

We want greater joined-up support for the various services that look after people with autism. Many hon. Members spoke about those problems. Whereas there is general support for the principle of inclusion, there is also great support for special schools. My hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) mentioned the special schools in his area that are being closed. Parents there are not being provided with a choice. The Government cannot truly be content to sit on the sidelines and not comment on that. My hon. Friend the Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale) also spoke about the problems of ending special provision in Margate.

We need greater research. There is concern about the overlap of support between social services and education. Social services have immense funding problems. The vast majority of directors of social services plead that they are in difficulties because they have to provide more and more for the elderly. As a result, money has been removed from those who need it in other services, which has affected those with special needs in particular. Despite the score card mentioned by the hon. Member for South Thanet, our score card would reveal rather more for the Government to do. Although the Minister may address our concerns, I suspect that we may still want to divide the House.

9.51 pm

The Minister for Lifelong Learning (Margaret Hodge): I am grateful to Conservative Members for giving us the opportunity to have this debate. I agree with the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) that we do not often focus our discussions in the Chamber on those pupils whose needs may be greatest because they have special needs.

Many powerful speeches were made, reflecting a genuine commitment to the large number of complex issues and challenges that we face in trying to give the best possible start in life to children with special educational needs. I pay tribute, as did the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), to all those involved. One of the most fulfilling periods in my life was when I worked with people in the disability and special educational needs world as we worked on legislation.

The hon. Gentleman's contribution was in stark contrast to the opening remarks by the hon. Member for Epping Forest. She may have been surprised at our reaction. When she describes children with special educational needs and disabilities as sad, disadvantaged, little tragic cases—

Mrs. Laing: Will the Minister give way?

Margaret Hodge: No.

When the hon. Lady says those things and talks about the liability that such children are imposing on LEAs because of inclusion, she displays a patronising attitude and devalues the worth of the individual children whose interest she is claiming to promote.

Mrs. Laing: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Margaret Hodge: No, I will not. The hon. Lady talked for far too long tonight.

Mrs. Laing *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister is not giving way.

Margaret Hodge: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Interruption.]* I am not behaving disgracefully.

Mrs. Laing: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I hope that hon. Lady is not raising a point of order because the Minister is not giving way. That is not really a point of order, is it?

Mrs. Laing: My point of order, Mr. Speaker, is that the hon. Lady is impugning me for something that I have not said. It cannot possibly be in order for her to do so.

Mr. Speaker: That is a matter for debate. One day the hon. Lady will have an opportunity to rebut the case that the Minister is making.

Margaret Hodge: She will also have the opportunity to look at the *Hansard* record.

The hon. Member for Epping Forest and many other hon. Members mentioned autism. My hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) gave us a score of 68 per cent. I think that five years into a Labour Government, that is good progress. I also accept, however, that there is much left to do. I agree about the need to have better information. In July 2001, we carried out a pilot study, involving 200 schools, to assess the feasibility of collecting data on the broad range of special educational needs. We are considering whether we should introduce a requirement for all schools and LEAs to provide that information from 2004. It is likely to include data on autism. My hon. Friend mentioned other important matters, and we will return to those.

The hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire said that further education is important. FE probably has the best record in responding to inclusive education for young people and older people with special educational needs and disabilities. I take on board the issues that he raised about British sign language. One reason why students are doing so much better in an inclusive environment in higher education is that we introduced the non-means tested disabled students allowance. We heard a thoughtful contribution from the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel). My hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Woodward) raised the issue of VAT, which I raise constantly with my colleagues in the Treasury, and I shall do so again following tonight's debate.

The hon. Member for Wealden (Mr. Hendry) raised some interesting issues about diet in relation to hyperactive children. Sharing that sort of information in the House can do nothing but add to our knowledge. My hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Phil Hope) and the hon. Member for Newbury both talked about the importance of inclusion—supporting not just children with special educational needs but contributing to the experience of all children in the mainstream environment. I was particularly interested to hear about what is happening in Northamptonshire, where specialist centres are being linked to mainstream schools.

The right hon. Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) talked about diversity and choice and trying to provide flexibility between special schools and mainstream schools. I agree with her on that. I would fail in my public duty, however, were I not to remind the House of the Conservative party's record in office in relation to special schools. In the last four years of the Tory Government, 83 special schools were closed. That is 50 per cent. more than were closed in the first four years of this Government. We are working with the special schools to ensure a positive future for them. Far from leaving them to the insecurity of the market, as the Tories did, we want to give them the security that comes from sensible planning and strong partnership.

That is why my noble Friend Baroness Ashton has set up a working group to consider the future role of special schools in the wider context of our strategy on inclusion. That group will focus on practical mechanisms that would help special schools to work more effectively. Subjects that it will consider will include: how best to secure regional provision to meet the requirements of those with low-incidence special educational needs; systems, which could include funding, that would enable special schools to deliver outreach support more effectively; how best to use the inspection team to celebrate the achievements of special schools; and provision for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. I hope that the hon. Member for Epping Forest will accept that that sort of work, leading to a report in the autumn, will ensure that we have proper inter-linking between special schools and the mainstream.

We have considerable achievements under our belt, although we have a long way to go. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 is on the statute book, and we have introduced the new SEN code of practice, which has been in force since January. All LEAs now have parent partnership services. We have placed a duty on LEAs to provide informal arrangements to prevent and resolve disagreements before they reach the tribunal stage. We have supported massive increases in funding in education in general and to respond specifically to the requirements of children with special educational needs. The standards fund is now five times larger than when we came into office, and we have introduced the £220 million access initiative into schools. Early years intervention, with special co-ordinators in each setting, is also an attempt to make progress.

I recognise, as have other hon. Members tonight, that we must continue to do more. There will continue to be major challenges in raising the quality and improving the outcomes for children with special educational needs. It is still a fact that a child with a special educational needs statement is seven times more likely to be excluded than a child without a statement. We need to tackle that. It is also still a fact that we need to get better at identifying a child's needs earlier and responding more quickly to them. That is why our guidance on working with children under the age of two will be so important. We hope to issue that guidance shortly. We need to get better at working across the disciplines—between health, social services and education. The special educational needs partnerships are a start in that work.

We need to build a stronger, professional work force to cater for the needs that we identify. Again, progress is being made, with more speech and language therapists, for example, but we want to ensure—

David Maclean (Penrith and The Border) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the original words stand part of the Question:—

The House divided: Ayes 129, Noes 357.

Division No. 249] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John

Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brazier, Julian
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gibb, Nick
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew

Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dr. Julian Lewis and
Mr. Laurence Robertson.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian

Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger

Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
(Copeland)
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis–Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H

Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*

Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Dan Norris and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

Question accordingly negatived.

Question, That the proposed words be there added, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 31 (Questions on amendments):—*

The House divided: Ayes 310, Noes 167.

Division No. 250] **[10.13 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
[illegible]ateng, Rt Hon Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burgon, Colin
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor. David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*

Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen

Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Marlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken

Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Rooney, Terry
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark

Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dan Norris and
Mr. Graham Stringer.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cabom, Rt Hon Richard
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*

Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hague, Rt Hon William
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady

Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Dr. Julian Lewis and
Mr. Laurence Robertson.

Question accordingly agreed to.

MR. SPEAKER *forthwith declared the main Question, as amended, to be agreed to.*

Resolved,

That this House notes the Government's commitment to helping all pupils release their potential; supports the development of an education service that provides equality of opportunity and raises achievement of all children, including those with special educational needs; welcomes the Government's recognition of the important role of special schools and the forthcoming work to review and develop that role; further welcomes the recent report by the National Autistic Society and recognises the importance of early intervention to help children with autism; applauds the Government's strong record on supporting pupils with special educational needs, notably through providing a clear vision for their education and welfare in its 1998 Green Paper "Excellence for all children" and implementing an ambitious programme of action resulting in this House's approval of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001, despite strong opposition from the other side of the House; commends the introduction of the new SEN Code of Practice and the principles of inclusion and partnership that lie behind it; further notes the development of national standards for specialist teachers and a range of training programmes and materials to support them; acknowledges the substantial increases in funding through both SSA and Standards Fund to support these and other initiatives; further notes that the Government will continue to ensure that the rights of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities are protected; and looks forward to the forthcoming Code of Practice to reinforce the rights of pupils with disabilities.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

That the draft Scotland Act 1998 (Transfer of Functions to the Scottish Ministers etc.) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 2nd May, be approved.

That the draft Scotland Act 1998 (Modifications of Schedule 5) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 2nd May, be approved.

FLAGS

That the draft Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) 2002, which were laid before this House on 9th May, be approved.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Ordered,

That the TSE (England) Regulations 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 843), dated 27th March, a copy of which was laid before this House on 27th March, be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

PETITION

Trowbridge Courthouse

10.26 pm

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): I am privileged to present a petition against the closure of Trowbridge courthouse. The petition bears the signatures of 2,000 people from west Wiltshire.

The petition states:

The humble petition of the constituency of West Wiltshire sheweth

That justice must be equally accessible to all and that it is best dispensed in a local context; that to close Trowbridge Courthouse would impose unacceptable burdens on court users, particularly those from deprived and rural areas; and that the decision by Wiltshire Magistrates' Court Committee to close Trowbridge Courthouse is unacceptable.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your honourable House shall take all necessary steps to ensure that Trowbridge Courthouse remains open.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Mobile Telephone Masts

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

10.27 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I am grateful for the opportunity to introduce an Adjournment debate on the subject of mobile phone masts, which I know is of concern to many Members. I recall that we have had several Adjournment debates on the subject, secured by my hon. Friends the Members for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) and for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) among others, and that the hon. Member for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley) introduced a ten-minute Bill on the matter.

There is growing concern on the issue. The Trade and Industry Committee report of March 2001 is probably the best overall summary of the politics, the economics and the technology involved, but the issue is not going away. I do not want simply to reiterate all the old arguments. Many of the scientific data are well summarised in the Stewart report, which remains the standard work on the subject. Much of the policy debate revolves around the Government's planning guidelines. I shall try to take the issues a little further.

I am prompted—I guess that in such Adjournment debates, most of us are—by local concerns. There are currently three big controversies in my constituency over mobile phone masts. None has been generated by politicians; they are very much grass-roots protests. I shall describe them briefly to give a flavour of what many of us are encountering in our constituencies.

One controversy concerns residential development at the edge of my constituency in Hampton. On a field immediately adjacent to a group of houses, Orange and BT Cellnet are trying to erect a mobile phone mast. The land happens to lie in the borough of Hounslow, which is adjacent to my borough, and the residents, with my support, have protested because of the planning problems associated with the application—the visual intrusion as well as anxieties about health.

Hounslow council turned down the application. Within days the mobile phone companies lodged appeals, and there is a fatalistic worry among the residents that the deep pockets of the telecom companies will prevail, despite the fact that there is ample room for manoeuvre: there is a large field, and the residents are perfectly happy for the masts to be sited on its far side. None the less, the pressures from the companies are inexorable.

In another case, Orange is trying to put up a mobile phone mast on a busy road where residents are already concerned about environmental impacts. Again, the matter is going before the council; it already has a recommendation for rejection, I believe, and we expect the case to go to appeal.

Most serious of all, and timely in view of today's debate, is the mobile phone mast erected immediately adjacent to St. Edmund's school in Whitton; I handed in a petition against that with 1,000 signatures this morning. The maximum intensity of the beam was directed at the school playing field, and staff, parents and nearby residents are incensed. Moreover, they have now discovered that Orange, the company promoting the mast, assumed that planning permission would be automatically granted, so did not even begin to apply for planning permission before it started to erect the mast.

Mobile phone companies have a 10-point code of conduct, but in my experience it is rarely applied or communicated to the contractors who carry out the work on their behalf. By contrast, most of the residents whom I encounter view the problem in a broad context, so I do not want to present it in a Nimby spirit; they fully accept that decisions have to be made on the basis of sound science and that there is a need for a national network. I want to focus on the way in which the planning system accommodates highly sensitive applications that arouse strong feelings, because it is not clear that it can do that at the moment.

I do not want to reinvent the wheel, but I shall start with the science. The Stewart report has been discussed endlessly, and it represents the current conventional wisdom. It is fair to say that its conclusions are subtle, complex and rather confusing for many ordinary people. I have picked out some key conclusions; taken together, they tell an ambiguous story.

The companies always quote the basic conclusion of the expert group in the report:

> "We conclude that the balance of evidence indicates that there is no general risk to the health of people living near to base stations on the basis that exposures are expected to be small fractions of guidelines. However, there can be indirect effects on their well being in some cases".

Later, the report states:

> "There is now scientific evidence however which suggests that there may be biological . . . effects occurring at exposures below these guidelines . . . We conclude that it is not possible at present to say that exposure to RF radiation, even at levels below national guidelines, is totally without potential adverse health effects and that the gaps in knowledge are sufficient to justify a precautionary approach".

The subtlety of that conclusion is surprising; it would have been easy for Professor Stewart and his committee to say, "Let's be brutally rational; there isn't a risk, so let's just proceed. People are misguided and are worried about myths, not a serious problem." However, Professor Stewart did not say that; he hedged his bets. I read in the evidence that he presented subsequently to the relevant Select Committee that he was scarred by the experience of the BSE affair. He was aware of the risks that science might reveal in future, so in his results he presented the need for a precautionary approach. Residents are picking up on that and are concerned about health effects, although there is no hard science to justify their reservations at present.

I should like to pose two questions to the Minister. If she answers them, that will help me to deal with my constituents' worries. How are the Government responding to and monitoring the scientific data as they come in? I have read some of the literature on the vast website on masts. Some interesting experiments are taking place. Work done in Switzerland has alarmed the Swiss and led them to introduce extremely restrictive conditions for mobile phone masts. Work has been done in Germany on the impact on livestock. I do not know whether those studies are good or bad, or whether they have been subject to tough peer review, but clearly the science is advancing. I would be interested to know how the Government intend to evaluate such results as they emerge, and at what point the conclusions of the Stewart report might have to be modified.

A further related question is whether the Government are monitoring and analysing the effects of the changes in technology. One of the interesting smaller points in the Select Committee report was the reference to the fact that in Finland, Nokia is developing a new type of technology for wireless telephony which dispenses with masts entirely. It is miniature technology, and it is up and running.

This month I noticed in *Scientific American*, which my scientific son insists that I read, a reference to something called UWB technology—a wholly new approach to short-range transmission, which could change altogether the way in which the wireless system operates. It would be useful to have some mechanism for understanding the extent to which that technology changes the assumptions on which current policy is based.

I shall now proceed to the issue of planning guidance, for which the Minister is directly responsible, and the extent to which it has helped or hindered residents who are concerned about the problem. I appreciate that there is some difficulty with the way in which planning guidance has emerged. A group of scientists under Professor Stewart said that the planning conditions needed to be changed, but as we know, planners are not qualified to judge science. That dilemma presents a fundamental difficulty.

When the Stewart report was published, the Government undertook

> "to introduce a requirement for full planning permission for all new masts".

The Minister will probably acknowledge that there has been a partial movement in that direction. The 15 ft masts are now subject to longer periods of consultation, but the prior approval procedures still apply. They are not subject to full planning clearance procedure. There is a narrow requirement, which is welcome, that schools should be consulted, but there is not an obligation to meet the requests of schools if they choose to make them. That is the problem of my residents in Whitton. The school has been consulted and has expressed its unhappiness, but there is no way in which the mobile phone company can be forced to meet its concerns.

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): Given the precautionary recommendations about schools, would it not be sensible for the Government to rule out applications that impact on school sites?

Dr. Cable: Yes, I agree. That was one of the conclusions towards which I was working, and I believe that it is the practice in countries such as the United States, which in many respects are much more permissive in their approach to technology, and much more cavalier about the environment, than we are. None the less, the US has a tough regime on schools, which I am sure is right.

The planning guidance is producing, perhaps unintentionally, much confusion among planning officials, councillors and local residents. They are frustrated because they understand that a precautionary principle applies and that there are health concerns, as yet unsubstantiated, but they cannot express those effectively through the planning process.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): Does my hon. Friend accept that most local authorities wish to observe the precautionary principle? Because they do not think that Government rules allow them to do that in a way that satisfies residents, they often adopt strange devices such as moratoriums on council land. In the constituency that I represent, it is impossible to put a mast on the end of a pier because of current council policy. All that is a result of the fact that councils wish to implement a precautionary approach, but do not feel that planning law allows them to do that properly.

Dr. Cable: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The process works out in all sorts of ways. Residents who are concerned about health often argue their case in planning committees on the grounds of visual amenity, as that is what the planning system allows them to do. That is not a sensible way of judging the issue, and the process needs to be changed. I am not expressing only a personal view or the views of my colleagues, but those of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, an all-party group that has expressed itself trenchantly. It said:

> "Unless it is clear that the planning system has a robust way of dealing with fears expressed by people, the results of the changes will be yet more frustration."

I should like to crystallise the position by asking the Minister a couple of questions. Can she help to clarify whether health anxieties are legitimate grounds for consideration in planning matters? There is a great deal of uncertainty about that. Many councils and council officials believe, on the basis of Government circulars, that they are not allowed to take health considerations into account and that if they do so, they will be taken to appeal by a mobile phone company and lose the case because they are operating outside the rules.

The position is ambiguous. When the planning guidance was circulated, we saw a paragraph stating that health considerations were a material planning consideration, so it is clear that different factors are operating. I know that the Minister's inspectors have looked into some important cases, including those of Newport in 1998, Tandridge in 2000, and Thurrock, Stanmore and others, in which councils have turned down masts because of public anxiety about health and have won the appeal. I want to be as clear as possible about the exact status of a planning application that is rejected by a council because of residents' anxieties about health effects.

The other final consideration that I want to raise relates to the intervention of my hon. Friend the Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) about schools, which are a special case. There is a particular anxiety about schools, and in his report Sir William Stewart made it clear why that is the case. Children's physical development makes them more vulnerable to the biological effects of waves—if, indeed, those waves are damaging.

In particular, Sir William Stewart urged the introduction of a more stringent set of rules than the Government have evolved for schools. I think that he specifically argued that schools' agreement should be obtained to the arrangements being made, and that that was especially important when beams were aimed directly at a school. Whether or not that is the case, will the Minister explain the position of local communities that feel strongly about the vulnerability of schools, but cannot argue effectively in the planning process that an application be turned down, even when there is strong resistance?

[Dr. Cable]

In conclusion and in drawing together the threads, it might be useful to summarise the consensus that exists, as this is not a party matter. The Local Government Association, which represents councils across the political spectrum, considered planning for masts recently and made this comment on the application of the precautionary principle:

> "the government does not seem to have implemented the recommendation wholeheartedly and therefore the aim of the recommendation has been compromised."

That is a rather harsh judgment—indeed, it may be harsher than it should be—but the association expresses the frustrations of councils throughout the land.

I should like to suggest a way forward, as I hope that we have not heard the last word from the Government on planning guidance. They could indicate, in revised planning guidance, letters to councils or statements in Parliament, that they wanted to find a mechanism enabling residents and local councils who are very concerned about a sensitive planning application to turn it down without running into the difficulties that they currently appear to experience in connection with planning inquiries. Such a mechanism would not relate to narrow planning considerations, but would ensure that broader grounds of public anxiety are accepted as a legitimate reason for turning down an application. That would possibly also allow councils to grant planning permission that is time limited because of anxieties that the science will change.

The compensation for a concession to make it easier to reject some planning applications connected with mobile phone telephony could be to require local authorities to have a plan that makes it easier to roll out the mast programme throughout the country. In other words, they would buy into the roll-out across the borough, but allow specific applications to be tackled more robustly than is possible under current planning procedures. That is a balanced approach that would allow an element of give and take and tackle many of our constituents' anxieties.

10.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Ms Sally Keeble): I congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on securing the debate on an important subject, which hon. Members and members of the public raise frequently. It is helpful to have a chance to clarify some issues. I shall deal with the hon. Gentleman's specific points, which covered health considerations in the planning process, research, the role of planning and roll-out of a plan. There is little time, and if I cannot deal with all the points now, I shall do so in correspondence, if that is helpful.

Clarity is needed, and we have devised a careful presentation that is based on the well-known anxieties that have been raised. I appreciate the opportunity simply to rehearse the arguments. The Government have three key responsibilities for mobile phone masts. Our main responsibility is the protection of public health. Secondly, we must facilitate the roll-out of new and existing networks. Thirdly, we must protect the environment. The third responsibility relates especially to planning.

The Government want to ensure that the public are able to enjoy the benefits that flow from a greater choice of service providers and a broader range of services. According to industry figures, more than two thirds of the total population of the UK use a mobile phone—around 45 million people. The growth in the mobile communications sector in the past 15 years has been remarkable and is set to continue. That creates pressure because of the demand for mobile phone services.

Mobile phones will not work without the supporting infrastructure—that is, the masts. Their siting causes the genuine problems on which I want to focus my comments. The issues tend to be the same, whether taken on a case-by-case or a roll-out basis. Whenever it is suggested that local authorities have a planning strategy for an issue that is not popular locally, the roll-out always becomes excessively difficult. If hon. Members consider waste incinerators, they will understand what I mean.

Hon. Members know about the Stewart report on mobile phones and health. On mobile phone base stations, the Stewart group concluded that the balance of evidence suggests no general risk to the health of people living near base stations because exposure is expected to be small fractions of the guidelines. However, there can be indirect adverse effects on well-being in some cases. I believe that the report specifically identified anxieties that can be caused when people are aware of masts in their areas. That explains the indirect effect on health. Gaps in scientific knowledge led Stewart to recommend a precautionary approach, which comprises a series of specific measures. Several people believe that the precautionary approach means a ban, but it clearly does not; the report did not recommend a ban on constructing mobile phone masts or the establishment of exclusion zones between masts and existing developments.

The Government accepted the recommended precautionary approach and are introducing a range of precautionary actions. Contrary to what people believe, almost every recommendation by the Stewart report, the responsibility for which covers different Departments, is being introduced. There is a slight variation on one planning recommendation, but only in procedure. The net effect on planning is almost the same. So, the idea that we are not complying with the precautionary approach is simply not borne out.

The things that we have done include: ensuring that all base stations meet the international exposure guidelines; setting up a national database with details of base stations; implementing a new £7 million joint Government/industry research programme; publishing leaflets; and auditing mobile phone base stations and masts to assess emissions, focusing on schools. The results from the first 100 audits carried out last year showed emissions ranging from several hundred to many thousands of times lower than the public exposure guideline limits.

The Stewart report suggested that lack of public consultation is a major grievance to the people who suffer loss of amenity when base stations are erected. It also suggested that many people feel excluded and disempowered by the current planning arrangements, and that the resulting frustration can have a negative effect on people's health and well-being. That is one of the indirect effects that I was talking about earlier.

For those reasons, the group recommended that changes to the planning arrangements were necessary, and changes were, indeed, made. I shall not go through the details of them all now, because I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is probably already aware of them. I will set them out in writing if he would like me to, but I want to move on to some of the other issues that he has raised.

One issue concerned the legislative arrangements that set out the procedure by which a planning application will be considered. Planning policy guidance note 8—known as PPG8—sets out the Government's policies on telecoms development. One of the important themes running through the guidance is the adoption of a partnership approach between the operator, the local planning authority and the local community. Careful consideration of the siting and design of a development should ensure that the right equipment is put in the right place in the right way.

In this context, the Government welcome the 10 commitments that the operators have made to adhere to clear standards and procedures which will deliver significantly improved consultation with local communities. In particular, the operators have pledged to provide their annual roll-out plans to local planning authorities each autumn. The Government strongly encourage operators and local planning authorities to carry out annual discussions based on those plans and on other information.

Mr. Oaten: The Minister referred to the voluntary code and the 10 commitments. Will she give a commitment to review that code, perhaps in a year's time, to see whether it is operating effectively?

Ms Keeble: I am coming to that issue.

Discussions at this stage will provide an opportunity for operators and authorities to identify potential sites that will be acceptable to all parties. This will provide an early opportunity to discuss technical and environmental constraints, and to explore possible alternative approaches—in particular, the opportunities for mast and site sharing. That suggestion is frequently made by people who are concerned about this issue. If an operator is able at this stage to identify potentially sensitive sites, it may be able to adapt its strategy for an area.

PPG8 suggests that pre-application discussions should be carried out by the operators with local planning authorities and other organisations with an interest in the proposed development, such as residential groups, parish councils or amenity groups. Such discussions can identify possible conflicts of interest at an early stage. In particular, our revised guidance makes it clear that there is a duty on both the operator and the local authority to consult the relevant body of a school or college near to which a proposed mast is to be sited. Pre-application discussions between the operators and the local planning authorities will be particularly helpful in identifying which schools or colleges should be consulted prior to an application being submitted.

Evidence of the extent to which these consultations actually take place is mixed, as the hon. Member for Twickenham mentioned. I want to reassure him that the Minister for Housing and Planning and I recently met industry representatives to discuss their progress in meeting their commitments. The industry has made a great deal of progress in establishing the procedures needed to take this work forward. We have emphasised strongly the need for pre-application discussions and consultations with the local community, and the importance of listening to, and taking seriously, local concerns.

Dr. Pugh: If such a consensual plan can emerge and be agreed according to a roll-out programme between local authorities and mass providers, would local authorities thereby put themselves in a stronger position to refuse applications that fell outside that plan?

Ms Keeble: I will deal with that point in the time remaining, because it relates in particular to planning concerns and because I want to explain about the consideration of health issues. The Government attach importance to the implementation of the commitments but, in purely practical terms, it is important that local communities are consulted as well.

On health and public concerns, I will have to stick to the wording in front of me; if I stray, I will get into considerable problems with planning appeals and so on. PPG8 also provides advice to local planning authorities about taking into account health and public concerns about mobile phone masts. Our guidance is clear that health considerations and public concern can, in principle, be material considerations in determining applications for planning permission and prior approval. I hope that that gives the clear guidance that is needed. However, whether such matters are material in a particular case is ultimately a matter for the courts. It is for the decision maker, usually the local planning authority, to determine what weight to attach to such considerations in any particular case.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): Will the Minister give way?

Ms Keeble: No, because there is only one minute left.

That is how decisions have to be made, and those rules have to be applied to each case.

In conclusion, it is the Government's firm view that the planning system is not the appropriate mechanism for determining health safeguards. If there are health risks, they should be dealt with directly and not obliquely, through the planning process. As I have said, the Government are adopting a range of measures on a precautionary basis, as advised by the Stewart report. It remains central Government's responsibility to decide what measures are needed to protect public health. The Government will continue to keep mobile phone technologies under review in the light of further research. I have already mentioned the scale of the research that we have commissioned.

I believe that good planning for telecommunications will be achieved by the development of a partnership approach in all areas. That means parties placing a proper emphasis on discussions about future roll-out plans, particularly the localities involved, and on pre-application discussions to ensure that masts are sensitively and appropriately sited.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 22 May 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[Mr. Speaker *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

Mersey Tunnels Bill (*By Order*)

Order for Second Reading Read.

To be read a Second time on Wednesday 12 June.

Oral Answers to Questions

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State was asked—

Special Advisers

1. **Norman Baker** (Lewes): What plans he has to improve the code relating to special advisers. [55925]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): A code of conduct for special advisers was published in July 2001.

Norman Baker: I thank the Minister for that illuminating answer. Does she accept the need to amend the code to improve the accountability of special advisers, as it is almost impossible to find out what they are doing? In particular, does she agree that there is an opportunity to allow Select Committees to interview special advisers so that we could find out officially what we know unofficially—that Lord Birt knows nothing about transport and is full of ludicrous ideas?

Mrs. Roche: First, on behalf of the Government, may I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his recent marriage? However, wonderful as this place is, perhaps the Chamber is not the most exciting place for a honeymoon.

We are the first Government to publish a code of conduct for special advisers, which we did immediately after the general election. By contrast, our Conservative predecessors refused to do anything of the kind. It is for Ministers to decide who should represent them before Select Committees.

Government Offices for the Regions

2. **Vernon Coaker** (Gedling): What priorities guide the operation of Government regional offices. [55927]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): The Government offices for the regions bring together the work of many different Departments, and we have increased their number from three to nine. Their priorities are to deliver the programmes of sponsor Departments, such as the national strategy for neighbourhood renewal and the crime reduction programme.

Vernon Coaker: Will my hon. Friend make sure that in the delivery of the Government offices' priorities, particularly priorities such as tackling poverty and regeneration, small pockets of deprivation outside city areas get the attention that they deserve? Too often, in my Gedling constituency, although we now have sure start and some regeneration money, money pours into the city but pockets of deprivation outside the city area have missed out. Will my hon. Friend look into that to make sure that we get the support and help that we need to regenerate those communities as well?

Mrs. Roche: I accept the points that my hon. Friend makes. It is right to concentrate on the most deprived areas, but of course regeneration needs to go much wider, which is why, as he suggested, we have programmes such as sure start, which have proved such a success. However, I shall certainly take his comments to heart and make sure that in our regeneration programmes we do not forget those other areas.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will the Minister bear in mind the fact—which, as a London Member, she will know—that if the Deputy Prime Minister has his way and regional assemblies are imposed on the kingdom, Londoners will primarily pay for that, because we produce more wealth than any other part of the kingdom? Will she at least eliminate one tier of interference—the Government offices for the regions?

Mrs. Roche: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman has mentioned the Government offices for the regions in that way, because in fact they were created by the Conservative Government that he supported. If that is yet another policy U-turn, it is good that the Chamber should hear about it first. As for regional governance, I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman is far behind the times; it was clear from the White Paper published by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister that that would be a matter of choice for regions, and they could decide by way of referendums. We are in favour of people having a say. Would the hon. Gentleman deny them that?

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Will my hon. Friend expand on the role of Government offices for the regions following the election of regional assemblies? Will the assemblies, for instance, draw the bulk of their administrative staff from the existing regional office staff, as happened to some extent in Wales and Scotland?

Mrs. Roche: Some of the staff of the Government offices will go to the new bodies, but we will still need the Government offices because, as we indicated clearly in the White Paper, some central functions will not go, including certain locally delivered services such as education.

Welsh Assembly

4. **Ian Lucas** (Wrexham): If he intends to contribute to the recently announced inquiry into the powers of the National Assembly for Wales. [55931]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (Mr. John Prescott): I understand that, with the exception of Lord Richard, no appointments have yet been made to the independent commission on Assembly powers. As I understand it, the terms of reference of the inquiry have not yet been agreed, so it would be premature for me to speculate on the Government's input to the work of the commission.

Ian Lucas: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. The devolution settlement in Wales is still very young, but any changes to it should be made only with the consent of the people of Wales. Does he agree that Members of Parliament should be fully involved in the inquiry that has been set up, and will he write to the First Minister to say so?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The agreement and settlement for the Welsh Assembly and Welsh devolution was decided by the Welsh people. However, the partnership agreement signed in October 2000 between the Labour and Liberal elements of the Administration established the commitment that before the end of the Assembly's first year, an independent commission on its powers and electoral arrangements would ensure that we could operate in the best interests of the people of Wales. The commission has not been appointed and terms of reference have not been given. We must wait and see what emerges from the discussions.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I welcome the publication of the right hon. Gentleman's White Paper on the English regions a couple of weeks ago. I think that paragraph 5.2 says that the document recognises that in England, devolution will be a process not an event. Will he use his considerable influence in such matters to ensure that whatever happens in England in terms of regional devolution, Wales, as a nation that is part of the United Kingdom, will stay one step ahead in the process of devolution?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I think that we have made the position absolutely clear. The people of Wales settled for their Welsh Assembly and the people of Scotland settled for their Scottish Parliament. We now intend to give the English regions the opportunity to decide about English regional government. It will be their choice—and properly so—and the people will soon have that opportunity to speak.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Does the Minister not think it somewhat ironic that certain people are pushing for more powers for the Welsh Assembly, when it refuses to use the powers that it already has, such as those relating to quangos? Is it not also ironic that those people have the cheek to ask for more powers for the Assembly when virtually no one in Wales is at all sympathetic to the idea?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: My hon. Friend makes a good point; there is certainly an awful lot of irony in this debate—in all parts of the United Kingdom.

Civil Defence and Emergency Planning

5. **Colin Burgon** (Elmet): What plans he has to improve the co-ordination of civil defence and emergency planning. [55932]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): The civil contingencies secretariat at the Cabinet Office was established last June. It provides the central focus for the Government's commitment to deal effectively with disruptive challenges, crises and emergencies. Effective multi-agency arrangements for dealing with emergencies, whatever their cause, are in place. We need to update the statutory framework and we are preparing the ground for that.

Colin Burgon: I thank the Minister for that reply. Is he confident that local authorities in areas of high population density such as Leeds can cope with the various emergency scenarios that they may face?

Mr. Leslie: One thing that I have learned in the course of my work on emergency planning is that the preparedness and work of local authority emergency planning officers are excellent. I should like to pay tribute to them. There is excellent co-ordination between the health services, the police and the fire authorities. I am confident that in major centres of population such as Leeds, the emergency services stand ready to cope with whatever challenges they may have to face.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): The Minister will recall from our extensive debates on the Civil Defence (Grant) Bill that many local authorities throughout the land remain deeply disappointed at the level of support and guidance from central Government following the events of 11 September. Will he clarify whether the Cabinet Office has now issued definitive guidance to all local authorities about what they should do to prepare for any repetition of 11 September or anything like it? Do the Government endorse the conclusions announced in the past few days by senior members of the US Administration that further terrorist attacks may indeed be very likely? If so, will he review any guidance that he has already issued?

Mr. Leslie: In respect of any terrorist threat, we remain on the alert and the situation is as it was after 11 September. As for discussion with local authorities, a ream of advice is available for emergency planning offices. The website at www.ukresilience.info should be sufficient to provide up-to-date information from the central news co-ordination centre about a number of different matters. I assure the hon. Gentleman that advice to postal services and a series of other agencies, including health and fire authorities, is available in the public domain, as well as on the basis of the emergency planning college and the training that is done through the civil contingencies secretariat.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): What powers would a directly elected assembly have in relation to emergency planning and civil defence?

Mr. Leslie: The Deputy Prime Minister recently published the White Paper on regional governance, which included information on how we intend to give responsibilities to regional authorities in respect of civil contingency matters—and to strengthen the regions that do not opt for regional elected assemblies—in terms of the capacity to co-ordinate on a regional basis any mutual aid arrangements between local authorities, and other more strategic issues. I am certainly working hard to ensure that we have a strong regional dimension in emergency planning.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Does the Minister agree that the system of making security status known in Government buildings is obscure and not widely publicised? The term "Black Bikini", for example, does not mean much to people in security terms. Has he observed that in the United States, the Department with responsibility for homeland defence has recently produced and widely publicised a new system using five different statuses ranging from red to green? Does he think that we have something to learn from that?

Mr. Leslie: The British are always very good at such things, and I am confident that the advice given to all public officials and civil servants in Government buildings about the level of security that applies is widely understood and readily available. I am not aware of the hon. Gentleman's "Black Bikini" example, but, having discussed with American homeland security officials some of the wider experiences in the United States, I shall certainly look much more closely at the matter.

Civil Service

6. **Tony Wright** (Cannock Chase): When he plans to bring forward a civil service Bill. [55933]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (Mr. John Prescott): In response to recommendations from both the Committee on Standards in Public Life and the Select Committee on Public Administration, which is chaired by my hon. Friend himself, the Government have committed themselves to civil service legislation, the timing of which will be announced in the normal way.

Tony Wright: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. I suppose I am getting a little weary of asking this question, and I am sure that my right hon. Friend is getting weary of answering it, but we have to sort it out somehow. The outgoing Cabinet Secretary says that we need a Bill now, the incoming Cabinet Secretary says that he is not sure, the First Civil Service Commissioner says that we need a Bill urgently, and the Public Administration Committee says that it is going to produce a Bill of its own. Can my right hon. Friend now say with some precision when he expects a consultation document to appear, and when he expects a draft Bill to follow it?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: We have made it absolutely clear that the Government's position is that we will produce a civil service Bill, which will become a civil service Act. We are in agreement with the conclusions of the Public Administration Committee on these matters. The recent comment by my hon. Friend, who is the Chairman of the Committee, that he felt that there was some doubt about that was quite wrong. We are strongly of this opinion, and we will produce that Bill. We welcome any consultation and any views that may be presented to us, and a consultation document will be produced shortly.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): The sooner the better. Does the Deputy Prime Minister recognise that not only is this measure widely sought after—and there is some consensus around it—but it is a proper response to the welcome stream of apologies and expressions of regret that have been heard from, for example, Alastair Campbell, who said that the techniques of opposition had been used in government for too long, and from the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), who referred to over-politicised press officers? Surely, drawing the boundary lines more clearly is what the Act would be for.

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I agree with the right hon. Gentleman about drawing the boundary lines. We have made that clear, and I think that we are the first Government to make it clear that there should be a civil service Act. We will carry out that promise.

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that the danger of introducing a civil service Bill at this time is that it will get bogged down in the current controversies? Will he ensure that the long-term future of the civil service, and the issues of "departmentalitis" and the division between policy and implementation, are addressed before a Bill is introduced?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I can assure my hon. Friend that that is exactly what we intend to do. We will consult before the Bill is introduced. That is our intention; let us make no mistake, the Government are committed to bringing in a new civil service Act—with all in agreement on the matter, we hope.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that all civil servants throughout the United Kingdom should have an opportunity to develop their expertise and competency? Will he seek to include in the civil service Bill provision for such training for professional civil servants as will enable them to gain expertise that will facilitate easy transfer between the Assemblies and Parliament, and thereby afford them greater opportunity for career development?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and the consultation document will cover many aspects of training, management and transferability between different sections.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): I welcome the Deputy Prime Minister's reaffirmation that it is the Government's intention to publish a draft civil service Bill in the near future. Is it still current thinking that it may contain a proposal for a cap on the number of special advisers?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The Bill will address itself to that point—but my hon. Friend must await the consultation document.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): As there is genuine cross-party consensus that we should have a civil service Bill, and furthermore that one of the principles that should be enshrined in it is protection of the independence of the civil service from any allegations of undue political influence, does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that such a Bill would be a good vehicle for introducing a genuinely independent non-partisan watchdog to check that donations to the governing party have not bought any favours? Does he further agree that such a vehicle is greatly to be preferred to the toothless poodle announced by his party yesterday?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The name of Asil Nadir comes clearly to mind. Let me tell the hon. Gentleman that we are committed to making sure that there is transparency in all political donations. We committed ourselves to that in opposition, although the previous Conservative Administration would not support such a proposal. We continue to be committed to that aim, because we believe that all contributions should be open to proper examination, and we took another step towards it yesterday when we said how our party will deal with the matter. Can the hon. Gentleman give an assurance that his party will do the same?

World Summit

7. **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): Pursuant to his oral answer of 24 April to the hon. Member for Harrow West (Mr. Thomas), *Official Report*, columns 320–21, on sustainable development, if he will make a statement on progress in preparation for the world summit. [55934]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (Mr. John Prescott): The fourth preparatory ministerial committee for the summit will take place in Indonesia from next weekend. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will lead the United Kingdom delegation.

Mr. Dalyell: Do Ministers preparing for the summit recognise that civil nuclear power is essential for sustainable development?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: My hon. Friend is right to point out that nuclear power is an important part of the provision of power in this country, and it will continue to be so. As the recent report by the performance and innovation unit pointed out, by 2010 about 20 per cent. of our power will be provided by nuclear generation. We are now conducting serious consultations about the future of power, and particularly about the role of nuclear power, which will be covered by a White Paper to be announced at the turn of the year.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): I am sure that the Deputy Prime Minister will have seen the BBC news item last night about the perilous situation in Malawi, where the worst famine since that in Ethiopia some 20 years ago is expected. As part of his preparations for the conference in southern Africa, will he ensure that all western Governments are fully engaged in efforts to avert that crisis?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We are involved in many matters around the world, and the world summit on sustainable development is about trying to get the same commitment to helping poorer nations and those who suffer great degradation and poverty as we gave to combating terrorism after 11 September.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I genuinely commiserate with the Deputy Prime Minister following the news that he may be suffering from diabetes. I know from my own family experience that that has no impact whatsoever on the ability to conduct an active career, and I am sure that he will able to do that. Given that the Cabinet Office has made it clear that health factors played no part in his decision not to go to Bali, will he explain why he will no longer be joining his officials there? Is it because he is a little embarrassed about the reports of the level of luxury that will be enjoyed by those who do attend?

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: The hon. Gentleman is developing a reputation for asking personal questions that have no relevance whatever to the point before us. He relies heavily on a British press that is much discredited for its handling of such stories—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh."] Hon. Members may say "Oh", but a recent European Union report points out that only 20 per cent. of the British public trust the British press, yet the figure for the rest of Europe is more than double that. That shows how press prattle tends to dominate many matters of substance, both in this place and outside it.

As it was the Conservative Government who took the first delegation to the world summit in Rio in 1992, the hon. Gentleman should be aware of the well known fact that those negotiations are conducted by the Secretary of State for the Environment. My responsibility for such matters therefore ended at the last general election, when I moved from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, and they are now dealt with by the current Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I never intended to be part of the delegation to which the hon. Gentleman refers, or to attend Bali Hi—or Bali Low—at any point.

Urban Poverty

8. **Mr. Adrian Bailey** (West Bromwich, West): What recent meetings he has had with organisations involved in combating urban poverty. [55935]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mrs. Barbara Roche): My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has recently met local organisations involved in combating urban poverty in Bradford, Doncaster and Hull. He also chairs the new deal for communities MPs' forum, which was attended by representatives of the Bristol and Salford new deal for community partnerships when it met last month.

Mr. Bailey: Does the Minister agree that combating urban poverty involves not just improving income, but improving opportunity and the environment, and reducing crime? In my local authority of Sandwell, the new deal in the community has found employment for 150 people and secured training places for a further 600. By working with the police, it has also reduced burglaries by 50 per cent. Will the Minister apply the example of the Sandwell partnership to new deal projects in other areas of the country, and consider extending the Sandwell project to other parts of my constituency?

Mrs. Roche: I certainly agree that in tackling poverty it is important to adopt minimum standards, or floor targets, which I describe as the social equivalent of the minimum wage. My hon. Friend is also right to say that, through the new deal for communities, some excellent work is being carried out in Sandwell by the local college and the police. I congratulate him on that work, and we will of course want to learn from such good practice.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Does my hon. Friend agree that in dealing with urban poverty, it is crucial both to create jobs and to get people to existing jobs? Has she seen the recent report that highlights the importance of the bus service in getting people to their jobs, and to college opportunities? Will she persuade the Government to pay far greater attention to providing more buses and creating a better bus service?

Mrs. Roche: My right hon. Friend is right. We know that there is a correlation between transport, jobs and unemployment, and that is precisely why the social exclusion unit is producing a report on that very subject.

Ministerial Code of Conduct

9. **Richard Ottaway** (Croydon, South): What plans he has to review the ministerial code of conduct. [55937]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): A revised ministerial code of conduct was published last year, and it remains under review.

Richard Ottaway: It is apparently okay for a Minister to mislead the House about the sacking of a civil servant, yet when the same Minister tells the truth about the referendum on the euro, he gets into trouble. Is there not something wrong, therefore, with the ministerial code of conduct?

Mr. Leslie: This is becoming a very tired subject. The hon. Gentleman should reread the statements that were made to the House; it is time that we moved on.

10. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): When he next plans to review the ministerial code with reference to parliamentary statements and other Government announcements. [55938]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Christopher Leslie): I refer the hon. Gentleman to the reply that I gave some moments ago.

Michael Fabricant: The Minister may think that it is time to move on, but I am not sure that the country does, so when will he answer the question? When will the ministerial code deal with those who lie to the House?

Mr. Leslie: Jonathan Aitken, Neil Hamilton, Jeffrey Archer—I am trying to remember the names. Perhaps my mind is a little jaded by the history of Conservative Administrations. The hon. Gentleman should recognise that the ministerial code of conduct is a strong document that ensures high standards of conduct from Ministers. I am proud of it. The hon. Gentleman should read it, and the amendments that are being made to it.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [55955] **Mr. Bill Rammell** (Harlow): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 22 May.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Mr. Rammell: Does the Prime Minister share my concern at the acute shortage of affordable homes and homes for rent in London and the south-east? Will he therefore ensure that the desperate need for extra housing investment is addressed in the forthcoming spending review? Does he agree that through such extra investment and by building on the fact that we have already reversed the disastrous cuts in housing investment that took place under the Conservative Government, we will demonstrate more clearly than ever the utterly hollow sham represented by the words "caring Conservatism"?

The Prime Minister: I am pleased to say that over the next couple of years, as a result of the additional investment, investment in housing will amount to some £4 billion, compared with about £1.6 billion when we came to office. As important as anything else has been the starter homes initiative for key workers in London, which will help about 4,500 of them. However, I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that there is a great deal more to do. That is clearly an important matter in relation to the comprehensive spending review. Of course, all that investment was opposed by the Conservative Opposition.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): In 1998 the Prime Minister removed the power of head teachers to exclude pupils involved in drugs. Does he now regret that policy?

The Prime Minister: Of course head teachers have the power to exclude pupils who are causing a problem in their schools. We have tried to bear down on unnecessary exclusions, but the right of head teachers to exclude pupils is necessary.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister speaks of excluding children, but in 1998 he gave appeals panels the power to overrule head teachers' decisions to exclude those involved in drug taking or dealing. Worse than that, the Prime Minister made it clear in that legislation that head teachers had to listen and respond to the directions of the Secretary of State. The present Secretary of State has said that excluding pupils for drugs offences was

"extreme and not related to the real world".

Will the Prime Minister tell us whether the number of school pupils taking drugs has gone up or down since then?

The Prime Minister: We know very well that the numbers of pupils who take drugs is a serious issue in our schools, but it is nonsense to suggest that we are saying that head teachers should not have the power to exclude pupils who are taking drugs. What is more, the work that we have been doing in schools on drug education and on ensuring that those who are dealing in drugs are properly punished bears comparison with anything that the previous Government did. In fact, over the past few years, we have invested more money in drugs education in our school, whereas the previous Government cut the amount of money available.

Mr. Duncan Smith: As ever—promises, but never the answer. Drug taking in schools has risen by nearly a third since the present Government have been in power, all because they undermined head teachers. Linked to that, assaults on teachers have risen fivefold since the Government came to power. Is it not a fact that schools are more drug-infested and more violence-ridden as a direct result of the way in which the Government have undermined the discipline of teachers and head teachers?

The Prime Minister: That is a pathetic attempt to exploit an issue which everybody knows is a serious issue in schools. It is nonsense to suggest that we have been lenient with people assaulting teachers in schools. We have made it clear that they should be subject to the severest penalties. As for drug taking in schools, if the Government were responsible, how does the right hon. Gentleman account for the fact that when the Conservatives were in power, crime doubled and drug taking at every level increased? We have taken measures to ensure that head teachers have the power to exclude, but we are also trying to deal with the causes of drug taking in our schools. Once again, the Conservative party sees a problem and, instead of trying to deal with it, simply wants to exploit it.

Mr. Mohammad Sarwar (Glasgow, Govan): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the rising tensions between India and Pakistan over the disputed area of Kashmir, which are in danger of developing into a full-scale war, or even a nuclear confrontation. What steps will he and the British Government take to defuse that extremely dangerous and potentially lethal situation?

The Prime Minister: The situation is indeed grave and serious and the dangers inherent in it cannot be stressed enough. India and Pakistan are currently confronting each other, and I urge the leadership of both countries to pause and reflect before taking action that could plunge not just their countries but the wider region into conflict, with implications for the whole world. We are in constant touch with both countries and other allies, and we will do everything that we possibly can to try to calm the tension and remove the source of conflict.

My own view is that it is essential in the end that Pakistan should stop support for any form of terrorism in Kashmir or anywhere else in the region and, at the same time, that India should be prepared to offer a proper system of dialogue to resolve all issues between the two countries, including disputes over Kashmir. That is the only way we will resolve the issue in the long term. In the short term, I urge both countries to reflect carefully on the moves on which they may embark.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Without doubt, the entire House will agree with the Prime Minister's sentiments on that issue.

On a different issue, does he agree with his former policy director, the hon. Member for South Shields (Mr. Miliband), who this week signed a parliamentary motion that puts forward his view that the five economic tests for sterling's entry into the single currency have already been met?

The Prime Minister: I agree—of course—with the Government's policy.

Mr. Kennedy: Then here is the ideal opportunity for the Prime Minister to clarify what the Government's policy actually is. Given the conflicting signals over the past week coming from the Treasury and No. 10, has the Prime Minister ruled out introducing legislation in the Queen's Speech this autumn to enable a single currency referendum?

The Prime Minister: The position is entirely clear, as it always has been. We believe that if the economic tests are met and passed—that assessment has to be made before June 2003—we will put the issue to people in a referendum. That is clear, and it is different from the policy of the Conservative party, which is against the single currency for good, for ever and at any point in time, and the policy of the Liberal Democrats, which is to enter the single currency even if the economic tests are not met and it is not in the economic interests—

Mr. Kennedy *indicated dissent.*

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman denies that, he presumably agrees with me. He should adopt the Government's policy, too.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): I am sure that the whole House will wish to join me in sending our condolences to Ken and Libby Osborne, whose son Joshua was tragically killed by their child minder, Linda Bayfield. Will the Prime Minister instigate an urgent review of the laws that protect our children from abusive child minders and nannies and, in particular, give parents the right of access to serious complaints that have been made against child minders? In the case of Ken and Libby Osborne, that would have saved their son Joshua, who would still be with us.

The Prime Minister: I extend my sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Osborne on the tragic death of their child. The Department for Education and Skills is looking at how the regulation of child care and child minders can be strengthened. However, no decisions have yet been taken. This case obviously illustrates the need for such a review.

Q2. [55956] **Adam Price** (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I know that the Prime Minister is aware of the crisis in the coal industry, including the threat to Betws colliery in my constituency. Will he tell us when the Government intend to make an announcement about an extension to the existing coal subsidy regime, which is currently set to expire on 23 July?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Gentleman says, we are considering that now. I should point out that I think Betws colliery has already received nearly £3 million under the operating aid scheme, and I think a further £1 million, or slightly more, is likely to be approved by the European Union shortly.

The operating aid scheme has brought benefits to the coal industry—some £140 million has been paid out under it—but we must review it, and we are reviewing it. I cannot say exactly when the decision will be made, but it will obviously be made before the deadline that we set.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): Does the Prime Minister agree with the American Government's assertion that Cuba is a terrorist state?

The Prime Minister: I think that America is entitled to its position on Cuba, which it takes for obvious reasons. We, however, take our position.

Q3. [55957] **Nick Harvey** (North Devon): What assessment have the Government made of recent reports of confirmed outbreaks of foot and mouth disease in South Korea and, indeed, in southern Japan? One case was less than 20 miles from a principal World cup stadium.

Given that rural Britain is still reeling from the impact of foot and mouth disease last year, what steps will the Government take to ensure that the thousands of Britons travelling to the World cup, as supporters and as journalists covering not just England matches but all matches taking place in those two countries, do not inadvertently bring the virus back to the United Kingdom through British airports?

The Prime Minister: Obviously we will consider what measures are necessary, but it is important to recognise that strict measures are already in place as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak that occurred here. While we must of course take any reasonable precaution, we must also ensure that we are not over-restrictive or unnecessarily bureaucratic.

Q4. [55958] **Ian Lucas** (Wrexham): After Potters Bar, safety on the railways is at the forefront of all our minds. British Rail was forced to sell off its track maintenance operations in 1993. Does the Prime Minister agree that the use of sub-contracted maintenance workers since then makes it more difficult for us to create a railway that is truly safe?

The Prime Minister: I think that the Lord Cullen recommendations give the answer. Lord Cullen recommended certain changes which are being implemented now. I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has also asked for work to be done by the Health and Safety Commission.

I do not think that the use of contractors and sub-contractors always means that a lower standard of safety is adhered to, but it does mean we should ensure that the proper checks are made to establish that safety standards are being adhered to. That is, of course, the very reason for Lord Cullen's recommendations.

Q5. [55959] **Sir Michael Spicer** (West Worcestershire): Why, according to the Institute for Management Development, has Britain fallen from ninth to 19th in the world competitiveness league since Labour took office?

The Prime Minister: Actually, the country moves around that competitive league virtually from year to year.

Unfortunately for the hon. Gentleman, the same report makes it clear that Britain will have a better growth record than any other major economy anywhere in the world. I thank him for giving me an opportunity to raise the issue of the economy. Britain now has the lowest inflation and the lowest interest rates for 40 years. Britain now has the lowest unemployment for nearly 30 years. Britain has cut long-term unemployment massively, and I pleased to say that Britain's economy is set to grow more than any comparable economy this year.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question.

Q6. [55960] **Mr. Chris Bryant** (Rhondda): The Prime Minister will know that heroin is one of the biggest problems facing former mining constituencies such as his and mine. Is he surprised, given his earlier remarks about primary school education, that Rhondda Cynon Taff county borough council, which is run by Plaid Cymru, still refuses to fund primary school education on drugs, such as the project in my constituency called DARE—Drug Abuse Resistance Education? Is he worried about the fact that my constituents must wait for 12 months for projects related to crime, drugs and alcohol? Does he believe that the way to deal with the problems is not to talk about reclassifying drugs, but to start thinking about making the extra investment in health, education and anti-crime measures that the Tories pointedly failed to make?

The Prime Minister: It is important that we take action in relation to this problem. First, we must make sure that there is proper investment in drugs treatment and in drugs education. That is what we are doing. We must also make sure that those who engage in peddling drugs are dealt with severely. That is why the changes in the criminal justice system and the Proceeds of Crime Bill, which is being opposed by the Conservatives, are just as important as drug treatment and prevention.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Will the Prime Minister tell us which Cabinet Minister is in charge of organising elections and referendums?

The Prime Minister: The issue of elections and referendums has obviously been dealt with through the Home Office in the past. However, all decisions are Cabinet decisions. If the right hon. Gentleman wants to know anything particular, he can ask us.

Mr. Duncan Smith: On 8 June 2001, in a Downing street press notice—issued, no doubt, by the Prime Minister—he made it clear that responsibility for referendums and elections was transferred to the newly created Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. Last year, therefore, the Prime Minister put the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in charge of referendums. When the Transport Secretary said that legislation on the euro referendum would be announced on the day of the next Queen's Speech, was he telling the truth?

The Prime Minister: First, the Home Office did indeed introduce the legislation on elections and referendums. Secondly, of course local elections are governed by the DTLR. As for what the Secretary of State has said, the position in relation to the euro referendum is exactly as I set it out a moment ago.

Mr. Duncan Smith: That is clear, then. It is marvellous that when the Transport Secretary goes on failing to tell the truth, the Prime Minister runs to his defence. When it appears that there is a glimmer of truth in what the Transport Secretary says, the Prime Minister dumps on him. Perhaps the Prime Minister could now answer the question. The Transport Secretary, the man in charge of referendums who will organise the legislation, said that on the day of the next Queen's Speech there would be legislation on the euro referendum. Was he telling the truth—yes or no?

The Prime Minister: The position in relation to the referendum is clear. If the economic tests are passed, we put the matter to the people in a referendum. What is more, those tests have to be met, or passed, or assessed before June 2003. [HON. MEMBERS: "More."] Let me say this to the right hon. Gentleman: it is clear, as we said in the manifesto, that the tests have to be assessed before June 2003. If the tests are met, the issue goes to people in a referendum. The right hon. Gentleman can make whatever debating points he wants, but that is the policy. It is clear—indeed, it is a darn sight clearer than his policy.

Hon. Members: More!

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Q7. [55961] **Harry Co[illegible]en** (Leyton and Wanstead): The Highways Agency made public commitments to environmental improvements before its operations in the capital were transferred to Transport for London. Those commitments have not been honoured. Four years ago, after the M11 link road was built through my constituency, I was promised, in writing, £1 million for environmental improvements to Leyton and Wanstead. That promise has not been fulfilled. Will the Prime Minister look into the matter so that trust can be restored in the word of Government agencies?

The Prime Minister: This is another case of a transferred obligation, as I gather that Transport for London is now responsible for compensation schemes. It has received about £20 million for doing so, but I will certainly look into my hon. Friend's point.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): The Prime Minister made some remarks in the past week with which I agreed. I refer to his science policy announcement on Monday, when he said that he would take further action to protect the science base and support scientists. Will the right hon. Gentleman back that up by making sure that we can in practice prevent animal rights activists from stopping legal research, and encourage trials of genetically modified crops to find out what their impact is? Does he recognise that problems of facilities and academic pay in the universities will create tensions for big research laboratories, which may well go to the United States. There is a big agenda here. Will the Prime Minister follow his good words with action?

The Prime Minister: The work that we have done already in trying to protect companies, such as Huntingdon Life Sciences, has been important, and we need to make it quite clear that those people who want to protest should do so legitimately and lawfully. What they should not do is disrupt legitimate business and prevent research, because people may be totally opposed to GM crops, but at least we should know the facts, based on research.

I will be making it clear tomorrow as well that, of course, we want to continue the support for science. We have already increased its funding very significantly, both in the public sector and in partnership with the Wellcome Trust, but I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is important that we carry on that work. The science base is hugely important not just to the future of this country, but, in particular, to the economy and the education of our children.

Q8. [55962] **Peter Bradley** (The Wrekin): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the complaints of people who are intimidated—or who, more often than not, feel intimidated—by the collections of young people on street corners are echoed by the young people themselves, who would much rather have somewhere else to go and something else to do? Will he take the opportunity of the comprehensive spending review to invest heavily in the youth service, which has been a Cinderella service, and in facilities for young people throughout the country?

The Prime Minister: We are doing two things: first, we are investing more money in youth services, and secondly, we are also investing in the new Connexions service which offers young people the prospect of proper career advice and development, which is vitally important for them. But my hon. Friend is right: at the same time as we bear down heavily on street crime and make sure that people who are repeat offenders are not constantly bailed, and so forth, we have to invest in programmes, such as sure start, and education, making sure that the youth services are properly funded so that young people have something to do and somewhere to go, rather than hanging about on street corners, creating mischief.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): On 26 February, the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions said:

> "Martin Sixsmith offered his resignation, which was accepted, on 15 February."—[*Official Report*, 26 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 574.]

Was he telling the truth?

The Prime Minister: That has been dealt with by my right hon. Friend and me. What this indicates, yet again, is the utter inability of the Conservatives to deal with any policy issue. It is fascinating—is it not?—that just once at this Prime Minister's Question Time have I been asked a serious policy question from the Conservative party—and that was from someone who does not agree with his party's leadership.

Q9. [55963] **Mr. Piara S. Khabra** (Ealing, Southall): In light of the reports of a college placing creationism and evolution on the same terms, does the Prime Minister agree that the national curriculum should be clarified to prevent the two being presented as scientific equivalents? Does he also agree that it is better to draw a clear line now, rather than later, to deal with the consequences of those teachers who abuse their position?

The Prime Minister: We must be careful of exaggerating the issue of creationism in schools. I say to my hon. Friend that the national curriculum already provides certain safeguards. Of course those safeguards are kept under review, but I am hesitant myself about saying that those particular issues should be dealt with if it is the case, as I believe, that the school in question is a good school, providing a good service for its pupils.

Q10. [55964] **Mr. Paul Tyler** (North Cornwall): Does the Prime Minister agree with the former membership secretary in his own constituency that the Labour party has ceased to be a democratic movement and has become a centralised mail order business?

The Prime Minister: I do not believe that he would have said that at all. I would simply point out to the hon. Gentleman that, if he looks at some of the local election results, he will see that we saw off the Liberal Democrats in many areas of the country.

Q11. [55965] **Andrew Mackinlay** (Thurrock): May I raise the question of Gibraltar? [HON. MEMBERS: "Yes."] Does the Prime Minister recall the prayer that says, "God grant me the courage to change the things which I can, the patience to accept those things that I cannot, and the wisdom to know the difference"? Should not that be applied in relation to the Government's policy on Gibraltar? The fact is that we cannot change Spain's position, so is it not time that we concluded those abortive and foolhardy talks and robustly defended the right of the people of Gibraltar to enjoy access throughout Europe and to promote their economy unhindered by Spain?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

The Prime Minister: Opposition Members cheer, but they should know that the Brussels process in which we are engaged began in 1984 and has been carried forward in good faith by the Government. It has been carried forward for a very simple reason: there is a dispute over Gibraltar and it has many ramifications within the European Union, for this country as well as for Spain. It is important that we try to resolve it, but we have made it clear throughout that the final say has to rest with the people of Gibraltar. We have conducted the talks in good faith and we will continue to do so.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): As the Prime Minister very sensibly expects strong support for his policy against terrorism, and as there is no commitment in the Good Friday agreement to granting an amnesty to terrorists on the run, can the right hon. Gentleman give the House an absolute assurance that he has no such intention?

The Prime Minister: What I can say is that we will look at the issue very carefully—as we said; there is a real issue as regards people on the run who have been either charged or convicted of offences, and circumstances where those who have been convicted and served their time are now out on the prisoner release scheme. We are well aware of the sensitivities regarding that issue in Northern Ireland and we hope that we can find a way forward that meets those sensitivities but that deals with a genuine problem—an anomaly in the system.

Q13. [55967] **Paul Farrelly** (Newcastle-under-Lyme): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Newcastle-under-Lyme Labour borough council on its work with the Labour Government and the Labour county council in attracting thousands of new jobs to former coal mining areas in my constituency? Furthermore, does he agree that the effective partnerships that we are forging show Labour making a real difference up and down the country in clearing up the wreckage left in former mining communities by the Conservatives?

The Prime Minister: It is true that massive investment is going into the former coal mining areas. That has of course created many, many jobs; indeed, there are 1.5 million extra jobs in the economy as a whole. All that investment was opposed by the so-called new party of the vulnerable.

Q14. [55968] **Pete Wishart** (North Tayside): As a fellow musician, the Prime Minister, I am sure, appreciates the contribution of the creative industries of the United Kingdom. He will therefore be aware that massive losses have been incurred by some of the major record companies in the UK. What are he and his Government going to do about the real issues of music piracy and copyright infringement that pose a great threat to the UK music industry?

The Prime Minister: I do not describe myself as a musician, but in respect of record companies, we have tightened the law in this country—it has also been tightened internationally. Many of the laws against piracy have to be dealt with internationally—as we are trying to do—and although I understand the frustration experienced by the record companies, as the hon. Gentleman knows, the result of the technology that is now available makes that very difficult.

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): In answer to an earlier question, my right hon. Friend re-emphasised the Government's commitment to increasing investment in science and engineering. In that context, does he share my disappointment that in a recent survey of 16-year-old school leavers neither scientist nor engineer figured in the top ten career choices of girls? What are the Government doing to improve the attractiveness of careers in science and engineering for girls and for boys?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that many young people do not see science as a good career. One of the best things that we can do is to show by what is happening in science today—in particular the extraordinary spin-offs between scientific endeavour and the commercial world—what huge opportunities there are for our young people. I hope that the investment and the priority given to science by the Government will play a part in that. If young people knew, for example, that in the Cambridge area alone there were some 60,000 high-tech, well-paid jobs as a result of co-operation between science and the academic world, we should have a lot more people going into science.

Q15. [55969] **Peter Bottomley** (Worthing, West): If the Prime Minister believes that questions in the House about whether a Minister has told the truth are not important matters for the House, may I ask that he take advice from his mentors and come back next week with a different answer?

Moving on from that, my specific question is on Northern Ireland. Has the Prime Minister noticed that the proportion of people—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman asked one question, and that is enough.

The Prime Minister: Of course it is important that Ministers tell the truth. I was simply saying that the issue had been dealt with comprehensively by the Secretary of State. I was saying also that it was typical of the Conservative party that it wants to personalise every issue rather than deal with policy issues, which are the real stuff of politics.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

David Burnside (South Antrim): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. On 10 April I tabled a question to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members leave the Chamber quietly?

David Burnside: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I asked the Secretary of State whether he would make a statement on the status of the Provisional IRA ceasefire in relation to the theft of intelligence information from special branch at Castlereagh police station. I received what I believe is called a holding answer which was "as soon as possible".

Yesterday, at Hillsborough Castle, the residence of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the right hon. Gentleman briefed the Alliance party, a party that has no representation and no Members in the House. He briefed it that he believed that the IRA ceasefire continued to be in existence. I do not wish on this point of order to comment on the content of the right hon. Gentleman's statement, which obviously proves that he lives on another planet from the rest of us in Northern Ireland. However, is the briefing of the Alliance party at Hillsborough yesterday and refusing to answer my question not in contempt of the House?

Mr. Speaker: I shall examine the hon. Gentleman's point of order, and will get back to him.

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I raise an issue of grave concern to many of us. Nearly every day we see many people queuing to enter the Strangers Gallery. As that is happening, we discover that there is a website which has been organised by the president of Plaid Cymru, who is not a Member of this place. He states on his website that if a certain sum—£180 a year—is paid to his club, he will arrange access for members of the public—*[Interruption.]* I ask the authorities of the House urgently to look into the matter—*[Interruption.]*.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let me reply to the hon. Gentleman. I have examined the document to which he refers. I see no breach of the rules of the House. However, individual Members are responsible for the issue of their allocation of Gallery tickets, bearing in mind that the facilities of the House should not be used in connection with fund raising for a political party or for any other causes.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I draw your attention to written question No. 5, which was tabled yesterday for answer today, in the name of the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle)? It having been tabled yesterday, I think that it is a planted question. It refers to an application for a wind farm in my constituency. Is it not a gross discourtesy to the House to table a question that relates specifically to an application in another Member's constituency, without giving some indication to that Member of the intention to table the question?

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, does it not concern you, as it concerns me, that the BBC are now phoning me for my reaction to the answer to the question, when the answer has not yet been placed in the Library?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is correct. Any Member tabling a question that has regard to another Member's constituency should have the courtesy to let that Member know. As for the BBC phoning the hon. Gentleman, he should do what I do and just ignore phone calls from the BBC.

Political Parties (Funding)

3.35 pm

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to make provision about the funding of political parties.

I hope that I shall be able to generate a little cross-party consensus on this proposal, in contrast, perhaps, to the last half-hour. This subject is very high on the political agenda and the media's agenda at the moment, and a lot of different ideas are flying around.

Towards the end of the American civil war, when the union armies were taking over the south, military governors were appointed in southern towns. In one town, whoever they appointed was bought off by the local crooks—I guess we would call them the mafia nowadays. Lincoln kept sending down better and better people, but they all got bought off. The sums got higher, but they still ended up getting bought off. In the end, Lincoln sent down his childhood friend and trusted law partner, and he thought that that would sort it out. He heard nothing for about six weeks, until he received a cable saying, "Mr. President, please relieve me, they've almost reached my price."

I do not know my price—all I get offered nowadays is lunch, and it is certainly a lot higher than that—but there is a moral in this. Politics needs money, but somehow the money at least gives the appearance of corrupting the politics. That is what is getting the current Government into trouble and what has got us into trouble in the past. It is a problem of all political parties, although it tends to affect the party in government more than the party in opposition, as it is easier for the party in government to raise the money and the party in opposition does not have much to offer in return.

Big donations are the problem. People do not have trouble with smaller donations—even £5,000 or £10,000 donations—but with donations of £100,000 and £200,000. Inevitably, those donations come from wealthy people, who usually have business interests. While they may not have an immediate point to make with the Government of the day, they often have an agenda. In exchange, they probably get some sort of access, which may be accidental, because party treasurers find it much easier to raise large sums of money from a very small number of people than small sums of money from a very large number of people. They therefore tend to offer lunch or dinner with senior Ministers or even with the Prime Minister. The process is pretty unsavoury to those who participate in it, and it leads to the feeling among donors that they have access, as they have met a Cabinet Minister or the Prime Minister. When a matter arises in which they have an interest, with the best intentions in the world—and saying that it is in the national interest—they tend to pursue that access.

That creates an appearance to the public of parties being corruptible by donors. The big donations, and not even the medium-sized ones, are the problem. We must address that. We would all acknowledge that politicians have a pretty low standing at the moment, and this is one of the things that make it worse. The alternatives that have been proposed tend to focus on public funding and using taxpayer's money through the Treasury, either on a matching funding basis or in replacement of private donations and party fundraising. That has met with a lot of resistance from taxpayers and a huge amount of resistance from the press—I do not know whether the whole of the media are resistant to it, but the newspapers certainly seem to be enormously resistant.

We therefore need to find a compromise, middle way, third way or whatever term is fashionable—perhaps we can call it different things on opposing sides. First, we need to acknowledge that parties need to raise money. It costs money to run a political party and an election campaign, and it is in the interests of the democratic process that parties put their points of view over to the electors and that they do so using modern communications and in a way that gets their message across.

Approximately—these are very rough figures—it costs the Conservative party and the Labour party £10 million a year to run their central party organisations and about another £20 million for the general election campaign. That is an average of £15 million a year over a four-year electoral cycle. The Liberals do not spend as much money as the rest of us, but, on the basis of the figures that I have seen, their average is about £4 million a year. We must acknowledge that parties need to raise money of that order. That is why it so much easier for the party treasurers who are charged with this task to try to raise it with a small number of very large donations. If they get a few people to give half a million pounds, that goes a long way towards reaching their annual target.

I propose that there is a way through this that achieves voluntarism on the one hand and gets rid of very large donations on the other. I would create a pot of matching funding by inviting taxpayers, on their tax return forms, to tick a box. If they did not tick that box, £2 would be added to their tax bill—£2 a year, which is the equivalent of 4p a week—and paid into a matching funding pot run by the Electoral Commission. If they did not want to pay, they would tick the box and they would not pay. Of course, if everyone ticked the box and did not pay, the scheme would not work, but that would at least put the solution in the hands of the electorate.

To qualify for such matching funding, a political party would have to do two things. First, it would have to say that it would not accept any donation of more than, let us say, £5,000, although the figure might be £10,000 or £2,000. The figure should be such that no one could believe that undue influence could be bought for that sum. Therefore, political parties would have to forgo large donations on an entirely voluntary basis.

Secondly, a political party would have to raise donations of less than £5,000 from a wider group of supporters, and it would then be entitled to money out of the matching fund for up to 100 per cent. of what it had succeeded in raising privately. That would encourage parties to get lots of small donations from the many supporters that we have out there but who do not pay us much attention. That would obviate the necessity for political parties to raise perhaps half their budgets from very large donations.

My Bill is different from other proposals that have been made for taxpayer finance because the donations would not be compulsory. It would be entirely up to individuals to decide whether to donate, and they would be under no compulsion to do so. It would not be the Chancellor of the Exchequer's decision, but the electorate's decision to decide whether to pay and how much there would be in the pot.

There are about 27 million taxpayers in the country. If 30 per cent. of them did not tick the box and gave their £2, that would raise approximately half of what the three major parties spend in the course of the electoral cycle. Matching funding would fund about half a party's current total expenditure and the balance would come from small donations. Most of those donations would be for much less than £5,000—as they are at the moment—but there would have to be more of them. Perhaps people would be more likely to donate if they felt that giving large donations would obviate the necessity for parties to seek very large donations.

There is cross-party consensus for my Bill. I am grateful to the people in my party, those on the Government side and those in the Liberal Democrats who have sponsored the Bill. I hope that my proposal will be taken into account as the debate continues, because I believe that it would achieve several purposes. There would be no more big donations, which are the problem that all parties face when they raise money. They create the problem that we have with our image with the public. It would reduce the pressure on party leaders to make themselves available for fund-raising events and perhaps, even worse, to make themselves and their Cabinet colleagues subsequently available to the people who have given money to the party. That would vastly improve our image collectively as politicians, and we all share an interest in that. Furthermore, there would be no compulsion either on the political party or on individual taxpayers to become involved. It would be an entirely voluntary scheme on both sides. I hope that the House will accept the Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. John Maples, Mr. David Curry, Mr. Peter Lilley, Mr. Archie Norman, Mr. Andrew Tyrie, Sir George Young, Donald Anderson, Andrew Mackinlay, Mr. Mike O'Brien, Ms Gisela Stuart and Mr. David Chidgey.

POLITICAL PARTIES (FUNDING)

Mr. John Maples accordingly presented a Bill to make provision about the funding of political parties: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 21 June, and to be printed [Bill 144].

Orders of the Day

National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill (Programme) (No. 2)

Ordered,

That the following provisions shall apply to the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 20th November 2001:

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments to the Bill shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion four hours after their commencement.

2. Those proceedings shall be taken in the order shown in the first column of the following Table, and each part of the proceedings shall, if not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at the time specified in the second column of the Table.

Table

Lords Amendments	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
Nos. 2, 4, 1, 3, 5, 17 to 30	One hour after the commencement of proceedings on Consideration of Lords Amendments
Nos. 6 to 16	Four hours after the commencement of those proceedings

Subsequent stages

3. The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—*[Mr. McNulty.]*

National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Bill

Lords amendments considered.

Mr. Speaker: I must draw the House's attention to the fact that privilege is involved in Lords amendment No. 6, which is to be considered today. If the House agrees to this Lords amendment, I shall ensure that the appropriate entry is made in the Journal.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 2, after clause 2, to insert the following new clause—*Duty of Primary Care Trusts, NHS Trusts and Strategic Health Authorities regarding education, training and research.*

3.45 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Mr. Speaker: With this we may discuss Lords amendment No. 4.

Mr. Hutton: I should express right at the beginning of my remarks the fact that I fully understand the sentiments and concerns that underpin amendments Nos. 2 and 4, which were made to the Bill in another place. In particular, I am sure that we would all wish to ensure that the enormously important contribution that academic

[Mr. Hutton]

medicine makes to the national health service is properly safeguarded and that its international reputation for excellence is properly secured.

Fundamentally, the arguments in favour of the amendments are based on two assumptions, the first of which is that the existing legal framework to ensure that education, training and research is properly underpinned in the NHS is either inadequate or ineffective. I do not believe that to be the case. The necessary statutory powers already exist and help to ensure that a proper focus on education, teaching and research is maintained right across the service.

The second assumption is that the NHS does not take the question of education, training and research seriously enough—that it is too low a priority and that creating a new legal duty in this area will improve matters.

On the first of those two arguments, I remind the House that section 51 of the National Health Service Act 1977 places a clear duty on the Secretary of State to exercise his functions so as

> "to secure that there are made available such facilities as he considers are reasonably required by any university which has a medical or dental school, in connection with clinical teaching and with research connected with clinical medicine, or as the case may be, clinical dentistry".

That duty is already delegated to health authorities, and once the changes under "Shifting the Balance of Power within the NHS" take effect—and once the changes under the Bill take effect later this year—it will be delegated directly to primary care trusts across the country. The duty is no less of a duty because it is delegated by the Secretary of State to PCTs. The Secretary of State and, through him, PCTs, will have a duty under the section to ensure the provision of facilities that are necessary for clinical teaching and research.

Under paragraphs 14 and 15 of part 3 of schedule 5A to the 1977 Act, which broadly sets out the powers and duties of PCTs, PCTs are empowered to conduct, commission or assist the conduct of research and to make officers and facilities available in connection with training by a university or any other body providing training in connection with the health service.

Under paragraph 11 of schedule 2 to the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, an NHS trust may undertake and commission research and make available staff and provide facilities for research by other persons. Under paragraph 12 of schedule 2 to the 1990 Act, an NHS trust may also provide training for persons employed or likely to be employed by the trust or otherwise in the provision of services under the 1977 Act, and to make facilities and staff available in connection with training by a university or any other body providing training in connection with the health service.

Under section 5(2)(d) of the National Health Service Act 1977, the Secretary of State has the power to conduct, or assist others to conduct, by grants or otherwise, research into matters relating to the causation, prevention, diagnosis and treatment of illness, and into any such other matters connected with any service provided under the 1977 Act, as he considers appropriate.

In addition to those specific powers, if it appears to the Secretary of State that it is necessary under section 17 of the 1977 Act, as amended by the Bill, he has a power to give directions about their exercise of any functions to strategic health authorities, PCTs and NHS trusts. The exercise of all those powers in relation to health bodies in Wales has been devolved to the National Assembly for Wales.

Anyone with a fair mind would regard that description of legal powers and duties as a comprehensive one, which I believe provides a solid legal basis for education, training and research right across the NHS.

The Lords amendment was made with the best of intentions—I am absolutely sure of that—but it would be superfluous to include its provisions in the Bill. As a general principle, we should not legislate unless there is a clear and obvious need to do so. An adequate legal framework is already in place and can, if necessary, be supplemented by directions from the Secretary of State to strategic health authorities, PCTs and NHS trusts about the exercise of relevant functions. There is, in short, no substantive need for the amendment, and that is why we should not accept it. There is another set of difficulties with the amendment. It is too vague to be meaningful. It does not even define education, training or research, or limit the scope of those three concepts to the health sector; nor does it offer any way of measuring whether the bodies concerned are meeting their legal obligations.

The second argument in support of the amendments relates to the concern about whether there is sufficient focus on education, training and research in the NHS. I believe that there is. That is certainly true of resources. On research, the Department of Health has increased its research and development budget from £432 million in 1996–97 to £507 million in this financial year. In relation to education and training, the budget for multi-professional education and training—the new MPET budget—has increased from £1.7 billion in 1996–97 to £2.9 billion this year. Those are significant increases in resources. No one looking at those figures could say that the Government have not focused sufficiently on education and training issues.

The amendments are not necessary to protect the funding for education, training or research. NHS funding for supporting research and development and for education and training is already managed centrally, as I am sure the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) recalls from his time in the Department of Health. NHS education and training funding is allocated to local NHS work force development confederations, which bring together local NHS organisations, including primary care organisations. Those in turn have the responsibility to purchase NHS-funded education and training from higher education institutions in accordance with local work force requirements, of course taking account of national priorities. NHS trusts can also use their own funds to support education and training where appropriate.

PCTs in particular, therefore, will not be under pressure to spend that money for other purposes. We have no plans to put the funding for research into PCTs' allocations for patient care. The money for research is ring-fenced. Indeed, even the small amount of money that health authorities spend directly on commissioning public health research and development will in future be protected within a ring-fenced central research and development budget.

The argument is not simply about money, however. It is right that we continue to look carefully at how we can improve present arrangements. That is why we will look for an increasingly closer collaboration between universities and research-active NHS bodies to guarantee the quality of research that meets the needs of patients and of staff delivering services at the front line.

We are already putting in place a new network of PCTs that will help to promote high standards of research governance and management across health and social care. The creation of that network by April next year is one of the targets in implementing the research governance framework for health and social care, which my Department published in March 2001. Those PCTs will have research management capacity that they will share with other PCTs around them, encouraging, I hope, a collaborative approach to research. By next April, we will also have in place around 30 new teaching PCTs, mainly in underprivileged and under-staffed areas to provide teaching, research and clinical opportunities for primary and community care professionals to support and improve the delivery of services to local populations. Teaching PCTs will work alongside local universities to provide a learning environment for their own organisation, as well as a local resource for the wider health community.

PCTs will also have the ability and opportunity to enhance the quality of patient care by engaging patients and carers in support of teaching and research; by fostering the special opportunities available in primary care for research and for teaching students across the range of health professions; and by taking full account of teaching and research in their commissioning of local and more distant hospital and specialist services. We expect PCTs to grasp those opportunities to ensure both the long-term success of the NHS plan and the continuing contribution of the NHS to health-related research and education.

To ensure that PCTs are fully equipped to take on their new functions, the national primary care trust development programme has been established. The programme recognises that, in addition to developing the general competencies of PCTs, more detailed work is required over a longer period on specific issues. I am pleased to be able to announce that one of those subjects will be the research, education and training issues affecting PCTs. The national primary care trust development programme will pull together a number of front-line PCTs, and other key individuals and organisations, to help to take that work forward. That will help to support PCTs in discharging their important responsibilities in that sector.

The Government are fully committed to investment in the NHS work force. The NHS plan has made that commitment clear, and our record in office confirms the priority that we rightly attach to education, training and research. Since 1997, the number of nurses has increased by 31,520; in the year between September 2000 and September 2001, the number of qualified nurses employed in the NHS increased by 14,430, or more than 4 per cent. Since 1997, the number of qualified scientific, therapeutic and technical staff has increased by almost 14,000; in the past year alone, the number of such staff has increased by 4,290 or 4 per cent. Since 1997, the number of doctors has increased by 9,550; there are now 99,170 doctors, excluding GP retainers, in the NHS in England. In the past year, the number of NHS doctors has increased by 2,850, or 3 per cent. I am glad to say that there are now 4,320 more consultants than there were in 1997.

The House will probably be grateful if I do not continue to read through that long list of statistics, but overall they are extremely positive. They confirm that we have prioritised that necessary investment, and that it is being made. We are committed to the development of that work through an expanded programme of education, training and research. The NHS plan and the most recent Budget underline those strong commitments. The Government are also committed to a modern NHS that values and makes use of research-based evidence in developing patient services.

Given the legal provisions that are currently available to sustain the proper focus on education, training and research, and the special arrangements that apply to the use of those resources in the NHS, I hope that the House agrees that amendment No. 2 is not necessary. Although I am sure that it is motivated by the best intentions, the circumstances in which we should and should not legislate are clear.

Amendment No. 4 would impose a similar statutory duty on local health boards, NHS trusts in Wales and specialist commissioning bodies in Wales. The position in Wales in respect of legal powers must now take into account the devolution settlement and the Government of Wales Act 1998. The existing powers and duties of the Secretary of State, laboriously described by me this afternoon, as they apply to the NHS in Wales have been devolved to the Welsh Assembly.

In addition, clause 6 confers on the Assembly a new general power both to establish local health boards and to determine their functions and duties. Consultation on the new structures will soon start in Wales. The problem with the amendment is that to a large extent it pre-empts that consultation exercise by establishing on the face of the Bill one of the duties of these new bodies; it is therefore inconsistent with the thrust of clause 6.

Were we to accept the amendment, we would in effect fetter the democratically elected devolved Administration in the exercise of their powers over those policy matters. The form, functions and responsibilities of local health boards are rightly matters for the Welsh Assembly to determine through regulations. Those regulations will be subject to scrutiny through the secondary legislation procedure, which will allow full open debate by Assembly Members. That is the right way to determine the functions of the new bodies in Wales, and that is what clause 6 already provides for. Amendment No. 4 would take us in the opposite direction, and for that reason, we should not agree to it.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): I listened carefully to the Minister and I appreciate his acknowledging that the amendments were tabled in all good faith. However, he went on to say that they were superfluous; I do not concur with that aspect of his analysis. As the Minister will know, concerns have been expressed in many areas by a large number of individuals both inside and outside the NHS about the terms of medical education, training and research. The amendments apply to England and Wales; they have the widest possible terms and embrace all aspects of education, training and research relevant to the NHS.

4 pm

I am sure that we all agree about the importance of education, training and research, but we cannot ignore problems in respect of their delivery, which is at the heart of our disagreement with the Minister. We want to focus on the size of the problem and whether existing NHS structures allow education, training and research to thrive and prosper. No one would disagree that our final goal is to ensure that they do so, but our disagreement or, rather, our change of emphasis, concerns the way in which we maximise opportunities and ensure that delivery goes beyond mere rhetoric and lives up to expectations. The issue at stake is not simply the existence of powers in NHS legislation, but whether they are being used to their full extent to maximise benefits and opportunities, which is why the proposed new clauses use the word "duty" in their titles. Will the Minister explain again why he believes that that word is superfluous, instead of regarding it as a back-up in the armoury of delivery to ensure that we achieve the end that we all seek?

While we all agree about the importance of education and its vital role in the NHS, it is plain to many people, particularly those involved in training and research, that those disciplines are vulnerable and threatened in the NHS. There is abundant anecdotal evidence that teaching and research resources are currently squeezed in NHS trusts. Lecture theatres are used for other purposes; there is a staffing crisis in universities; and doctors are so overwhelmed by day-to-day demands on their time, which affect their health care functions, that there is little or no time for research. It is all too tempting to sit back, secure in the comfort of the extra resources to which the Minister referred this afternoon and the possible extra resources that will emanate from last month's Budget. Citing statistics, however, will not make the problem go away; after all, part of the problem has been the squeeze on finances.

The problem, however, is not as simple as that. It is far from clear that any extra resources will find their way into teaching and research, as the Minister hopes. The crux of the matter is whether all the bodies in the NHS with a role in teaching, research and education will deliver the enhanced service we all hope for. I have doubts, for example, about primary care trusts and their lack of expertise and experience. The Minister may say with some justification that as PCTs bed down and gain experience, that problem may be minimised. The fact is that, as we made abundantly clear in Committee, the time scale for the introduction of PCTs was rushed; there will be problems with the new bodies' lack of experience and their ability to cope with their heavy responsibilities.

I have no doubt—and I hope that no doubts arise—that PCTs will build up experience and that the fears and concerns expressed in the initial stages of their creation will be removed. None the less, experience is a problem in the early stages, as it will be in any new organisation. The trusts have been asked in these early days to concentrate on identifying and providing acute care and other health services. However, if all their time and effort is concentrated on the delivery of health care—everyone would agree that that is their main function—problems may arise if they have to cut corners in the early stages because of those demands.

Education, training and research are a classic issue that PCTs will always feel they can pick up on later while seeking now to minimise the other problems concerning health care provision. Another problem is that the trusts' natural orientation is towards primary care. For those reasons, I do not believe that there can be certainty that PCTs will commission so as to promote and safeguard education, training and research to the extent that we would have hoped and expected them to do, especially in their early days.

The safeguarding of those elements of the health service, on whose importance we all agree, is still not addressed by strategic health authorities. The Government have stressed the role of SHAs in terms of the performance management of PCTs that fail to achieve what the authorities believe they should achieve on education and research. I am deeply sceptical, however, about whether the introduction of such loose structures and untried processes at this stage of the reforms will solve the problem.

Nevertheless, there is one sure way we can safeguard the three critical areas in question and put beyond any doubt the responsibility of NHS bodies for those vital elements, which are crucial if our health service is to continue to make improvements and enhancements and to deliver quality treatment. That solution is for the Minister to think again and accept the amendments introduced by another place—a place that is renowned for being not the partisan and highly political body that this House often is, but a more reflective body, which in debates about the Bill has drawn on the expertise of people who have spent a considerable proportion of their professional lives in the health service and in health and research in general. It would be unwise not to heed their wise words and reflective views and to seek to reverse a measure that was introduced into the Bill not to cause trouble but to strengthen, encourage and enhance training, research and education.

In the light of the reasonable way in which I have tried to convince the Minister of the argument, I hope that he will understand in an equally reasonable way that as we are considering such a crucial matter it would be wise to strengthen and reinforce the message by agreeing to the amendments, instead of deciding that they are superfluous and relying on the provisions as they stood before the Bill was amended.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I speak in support of the Lords amendments and against the motions to disagree on the basis of, first, a series of problems that exist at the level of academic medicine and teaching and research; secondly, an additional problem caused by Government policy, which puts more pressure on primary care trusts not to deal with the problem; and thirdly, a question mark over whether there is any problem with introducing the amendments. The Government may suspect that they will not be effective, but I do not believe that they would do any harm.

There are significant problems in education, training and research. There are also significant numbers of vacancies in academic medicine, and that situation is not getting any better; if anything, it is getting worse. Without the people to do the training—and, indeed, the people to train the trainers—we shall not have a work force in the future. A briefing provided by the British Medical Association tells us that the number of medical academics as a proportion of the work force has fallen from 11 to 8 per cent.

That fall is partly the result of an increase in the numbers of staff, but I would argue that there is an a priori reason for the proportion to stay the same, because as we recruit new staff they will initially be at a junior level, and we are still not seeing enough resources going to provide either the trainers or the trainers for the trainers. The significant problems in the recruitment of medical academics are often due to the pressures on them, and the lack of resources they feel they have in terms of time, equipment, hardware and space to do the teaching that is required.

A further component of the need to ensure that resources are allocated to this area is the desperate need for consultant expansion. If resources were spent on education and research because of the amendment that has been made in the House of Lords, the side effects would be that a significant amount of that money would be extra funding, and that extra priority would be given to consultant expansion. I have said to the Government—and to the Minister who is speaking for them today—on many occasions since 1997 that they must safeguard consultant expansion and ensure that resources go into enabling senior-level consultant staff to do high-quality work, research and training, rather than allowing the expansion of sub-consultant and non-consultant career grade posts, which, for all their merit, are almost by definition not involved in the training of the next generation of specialists; they are almost entirely service-related posts.

Until the Government can do something about the explosion of such posts, I will have little faith in their ability to ensure that there will be sufficient numbers of people to do important work such as the research that is led—although not exclusively carried out—by consultants, and the training that ought do be done almost entirely by fully trained specialists. Were the Government to introduce, through separate legislation, the means of controlling this explosion in sub-consultant grades and non-consultant career grades, we would be much more inclined to support the position that they are taking here and—I suppose that this is what counts for the Government in terms of the size of their majority—in another place. The Minister will accept that I have raised this issue several times; I have never had a satisfactory answer. Perhaps, with this Government, I never will.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a lot of what he is saying has to do with semantics, because what were once senior registrar grades are now, effectively, consultant grades, as we have recruited consultants who are younger and less experienced?

Dr. Harris: I fear that I do not understand the hon. Gentleman's question, and I would hesitate to guess at what he means. The easiest thing for me to do might be to restate our position, which is that we need—and the Government have said that they wish to see—a consultant-provided service for the treatment of patients and for the education and training of the next generation of the work force, and a consultant-provided, or at least consultant-led, research service. This applies to the other health care professions as well; I am using this as an example, but I am keen not to be seen to be concentrating on this one aspect.

If I have misunderstood the hon. Gentleman I apologise, but what we have seen instead is an explosion of jobs being created that are not to do with education and training. They are purely service jobs, including staff grades and associate specialists or, worse, non-mainstream trust grade doctors who are there to do the service work that trusts feel under pressure to do. Their numbers have expanded enormously. The Minister has heard me say before that many of the people filling those posts have not been treated well by the health service, often on the basis of their background or race, and that there are significant issues to address in this area.

We need to expand consultant opportunities and increase the number of people being trained for that specialist status. In the absence of a Government policy to guarantee that, this amendment, which would put a duty on the commissioners of services who provide the funding for those posts, would provide a mechanism for applying pressure for consultant expansion, although it would not be enough in itself. I hope that by setting out my position I have addressed the hon. Gentleman's point.

4.15 pm

The Minister said that the Government recognise the importance of research and try to base their policy on it. I question that, as I have before, because of some of the health policies that the Government are pursuing, such as giving priority to the two-week wait policy for cancer patients, which for all its merit is certainly not based on evidence of clinical outcomes. If the Government are saying that they support research so that it can inform their policies, they must "want"—to coin a phrase once used by another hon. Member—more research evidence, because I am not satisfied that that is happening.

My main concern is the pressure on primary care trusts and budget-holders arising from the distortion of priorities caused by the welter of Government targets, which are based, at best, on sensible service provision and, at worst, on aims that have little significance for, or impact on, rational patient outcomes. We know that education and training will always suffer when the commissioners of care are faced with compulsory targets.

If the Government withheld from setting some targets or at least adopted a more rational approach to target setting, I would be more likely to support their position that there is no need for the Bill explicitly to defend and protect less glamorous areas of the NHS. They may be less glamorous, but what is significant in this discussion is that they are not outcome-measured like many of the other initiatives that the Government have forced on primary care trusts. We have the tyranny of appraisal and the measurement of outcomes, and anything that does not have a hard outcome is deprioritised. That is why placing this duty on primary care trusts, although it is not the optimum solution, is a useful approach.

I turn finally to ring-fencing. The Minister knows my view that ideally we would have proper devolution of funding. Local commissioners would not be hidebound by ring-fenced pots or targets but would be in a position to allocate funding as they saw fit, according to local priorities, with a recognition of services that are not affordable through explicit rationing.

The Minister seeks to defend his position by saying that funding for research and education is ring-fenced, but at the same time he claims that the Government are

[Dr. Harris]

devolving responsibility for decision making to primary care trusts, and that is not wholly consistent. The Government must decide once and for all whether they are in favour of full devolution of spending decisions or whether they are in favour of a ring-fenced approach. We could then examine that policy in more detail.

The time of people in education and training is not ring-fenced. They find that increasingly even their unpaid overtime is being eaten into by service requirements, some of which are reasonable and some of which are merely target chasing. It is to protect their ability to do their job and to avoid causing them to leave the NHS in disgust, which would create an even greater manpower problem, that we should agree with the Lords in their amendment and allow the duty to remain in the Bill.

Mr. Hutton: I shall try to deal with the points raised by the hon. Members for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) and for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris). Both made thoughtful and well argued cases for the amendment, but none of their arguments confronted the issues as I see them. They did not deal with the inescapable logic that we should consider the legal basis of how these matters are currently regulated in the NHS. They also failed to deal with my remarks about our commitments and our allocation of resources. Listening to those contributions, one would think that education, training and research budgets were being cut because of service pressures elsewhere. That might well be an accurate description of past times, but it does not describe where we are today. Education, training and research projects are all growing substantially—a fact that provides the right context for the discussion that we should be having about these issues.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon raised some important points, and I agree with much of what he said about non-consultant service grade doctors and so on. There is little doubt that some of the growth in those grades constituted a reaction by trusts to the problems—as they perceive them—arising from the working time directive. To find solutions, we need to address that issue and to engage with the service urgently. It is not in the long-term interests of patients, doctors or the NHS itself to trap a large number of doctors in service grades in which they will be unable to use their full potential and skills. Frankly, such posts would not seem attractive or easy to fill in any case, even if it were right to set them up.

There is one aspect of the hon. Gentleman's argument that I find slightly difficult to understand. How would placing such a duty on primary care trusts deal with the problem? I accept that, in essence, we are talking about service issues that relate to resources. We need to look at medical, education and training issues in the round, and that is what we are doing. For example, we are considering senior house officer training, and there is a very strong case for reconsidering other grades, particularly non-consultant grade 2. Education, research and training are not—as the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for West Chelmsford have suggested—at the bottom of a list that prioritises issuing targets, and so on. Such issues are a priority, because fundamentally the national health service is a knowledge-based service. It is based on, and driven by, science and evidence.

The key to growing capacity—the biggest challenge that the NHS faces—is to invest in the NHS work force. We must train the new doctors, nurses, therapists and other grades of staff that the NHS needs for the future. We would be daft to compromise its ability to meet the NHS plan's challenging targets by taking a penny-pinching approach to education, training and research. We are simply not going to do that.

Dr. Harris: The Minister knows I accept the argument that he has just made, and I recognise that funding is available to begin the expansion of various aspects of the health service that we all want to see. I welcome his comments on non-consultant career grades, and perhaps we can pursue that issue later. However, I should stress that I am arguing not that the amendment would resolve the problem, but that—in terms of the need for consultant expansion, rather than service grade expansion—it would offer a protection, until we can see the fruits of the Government's thinking. Such thinking is reassuring, but we need to see the fruits of it.

Mr. Hutton: If I genuinely thought that that were so, I would take a different view, but I simply do not believe that the amendment would achieve the hon. Gentleman's aim, and it certainly would not achieve mine.

There is also a wider context, to which the hon. Gentleman referred, that we should keep in mind. On the broadly philosophical question of the balance between earmarked funding and general allocations to NHS organisations, I hope that he recognises the fact that we are earmarking unified general allocations to NHS trusts less and less. However, education and training is a separate issue. The hon. Gentleman, his Liberal Democrat colleagues and the hon. Member for West Chelmsford have identified the importance of such investment. We can secure prioritisation in an effective way without fundamentally compromising the thrust, the spirit or the letter of our policy on devolution.

The work force development confederations that receive the new training and education resources on behalf of the NHS are constituent organisations, consisting of local acute trusts, primary care trusts and so on. They are the organisations best placed to take such decisions. In distributing training and education resources to the confederations, identifying such resources carefully, and ensuring that they are spent on the purpose for which they were intended—a point that the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon raised in support of the amendment—we are in no way conflicting with our overall position on the devolution of power to the NHS front line.

This is probably one of those debates in which, despite having all the arguments on my side, I will not persuade the hon. Member for West Chelmsford and the Liberal Democrats to take a different stance. They supported the amendments in the other place and I fully understand why they did so. In asking the House to disagree with the Lords amendments, I am in no way trying to downplay the importance of education, training and research. We differ about how the goal can best be achieved.

I am absolutely sure that the Secretary of State, the Department of Health and the NHS recognise the importance of education, training and research. We have shown that commitment in the way that we have dedicated significant additional resources to challenging some of the problems that we face and dealing with the capacity constraints that we inherited in the training of nurses, doctors and other therapists.

We are getting on with that job. The best way that we can do that is to continue in the direction that we have set, and not legislate unnecessarily. We would be doing that, and ineffectively as well, if we accepted the amendments. The Government will continue to attach the highest priority to education, training and research across the national health service.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 321, Noes 193.

Division No. 251] **[4.26 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan

Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Graham Stringer and
Mr. Phil Woolas.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Charles Hendry and
Mr. David Wilshire.

Question accordingly agreed to.
Lords amendment disagreed to.
Lords amendment No. 4 disagreed to.

Clause 1

ENGLISH HEALTH AUTHORITIES: CHANGE OF [illegible]

Lords amendment: No. 1.

Mr. Hutton: I beg to move, That this House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With this we may discuss Lords amendment No. 3.

Mr. Hutton: Members will recall that on Report I tried to deal with the concerns of those on both sides of the

House by tabling an amendment seeking to provide for consultation before name changes, boundary changes and mergers of strategic health authorities could take place.

I am very grateful to Baroness Thomas of Walliswood for helpfully recommending in Committee in another place on 14 March that the Government could usefully reconsider the wording proposed for the new section 8(5) of the National Health Service Act 1977 Act contained in clause 1 of the Bill. My noble Friend Lord Hunt of Kings Heath promised at the time to look at the wording again, and I am pleased to say that on reflection we were able to bring a revised and shortened version of subsection (5) before their Lordships.

The wording as now drafted follows the precedent set for NHS trusts in section 5(2) of the National Health Service and Community Care Act 1990, as substituted by the Health Authorities Act 1995. The term "prescribed" is defined in section 128 of the 1977 Act as meaning prescribed in regulations made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State.

Let me make it clear that the previous version was not wrong. It would have achieved exactly the same in policy terms as this amendment. However, as we considered the issue further during the passage of the Bill, it became clear that what we wanted to do could be drafted more simply. We accordingly took the opportunity of making what I hope will be regarded on both sides as an improvement to the Bill. However, it does not change the substance.

Amendment No. 3 tidies up a minor drafting error in a definition in clause 5 to make it clear that for the purposes of this section

"a section 28C dental practitioner"

means a dentist who performs personal dental services in the area of the primary care trust. The amendment simply ensures that the wording in clause 5 is exactly the same for medical and dental practitioners. I am afraid that the words

"in the area of the Primary Care Trust"

had been mistakenly omitted from the earlier draft of the Bill.

Mr. Oliver Heald (North-East Hertfordshire): Let me start by saying as I did on a previous occasion that it is welcome that the Minister has accepted that there should be consultation on the orders about the establishment, variation, the name or the abolition of a strategic health authority. In supporting our amendment on Report, some Labour Members, including the hon. Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham) said that it was necessary to have proper consultation.

We had a concern, however, about the wording, if the Minister should make such regulations as provided for in the previous amendment that the Minister put forward on Report. Earl Howe, speaking for the Opposition in the other place, made that point. It is good that the Government have responded to the points that we made in Committee and on Report and have come up with what is, without doubt, a neater form of wording. I entirely agree with the Minister that amendment No. 3 is purely technical. We welcome these amendments.

Lords amendment agreed to.

Lords amendment No. 3 agreed to.

Clause 14

COMMISSION FOR HEALTH IMPROVEMENT: CONSTITUTION

Lords amendment: No. 5.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I beg to move, That the House agrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this we may take Lords amendment No. 30.

Ms Blears: Amendments Nos. 5 and 30 enable the Secretary of State for Health to delegate the appointment of the chair and members of the Commission for Health Improvement and the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health to the NHS Appointments Commission. Indeed, we go further than this, demonstrating that we are committed to the independence of these bodies and distancing the appointments process from the Secretary of State.

The amendments enable the Secretary of State to delegate to the NHS Appointments Commission such of his functions as may be appropriate in relation to the tenure of office, terms of appointment, dismissal, and so on, of the chair and members. The details of how such arrangements with the Appointments Commission might work in practice are subject to negotiation with Sir William Wells and his team.

As I have said, similar arrangements have been made for the appointment of the chair and members of the Commission for Health Improvement—

It being one hour after the commencement of proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to Order [this day], put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

Lords amendment agreed to.

MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded to put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Lords amendments Nos. 17 to 30 agreed to.

New Clause

Lords amendment: No. 6, before clause 16, to insert the following new clause—*Establishment of Patients' Councils.*

4.45 pm

Ms Blears: I beg to move, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment.

Madam Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to take Lords amendments Nos. 7 to 16 and the Government motions to disagree thereto, and Government amendments (a) to (d), (o) to (q), (e) to (l), (r), (m) and (n) in lieu.

Ms Blears: I should like to express my sincere apologies to all hon. Members for the late tabling of some of these amendments, as that lateness may have caused hon. Members some concern. I have certainly done my best, by issuing covering memorandums and by writing directly to Opposition Members, to try to set out not just

[Ms Blears]

the terms of the amendments, but their effect so as to try to minimise any awkwardness that may have been caused. The amendments have been tabled in a genuine attempt to try to engage the widest possible range of stakeholders in producing a proposal that I can put before the House this afternoon. I should like to express my genuine apologies for any difficulty that the amendments' late tabling may have caused.

At last we are coming to the end of a rather tortuous journey to strengthen patient and public involvement in health. From the NHS plan, published in July 2000, to the Health and Social Care Act 2001, and now in the Bill, we have reached a position on patient and public involvement that is as good as it gets. I genuinely believe that we will have a robust, independent and vigorous system of public and patient involvement. I and my ministerial colleagues, as well as previous Ministers—and our officials, too—have been in discussion with many stakeholders during the last year and a half to ensure that we develop the best possible set of arrangements.

The points made during parliamentary scrutiny and arising from the involvement of stakeholders have been extremely constructive. Although we have not agreed with all of [illegible] views expressed, it is fair to say that they have all played their part in helping to fine-tune the system. Patients councils were one of the turning points in our preparations.

The amendments to provide for patients councils that the other place voted to include in the Bill are not welcomed by the Government, as patients councils are, in our view, flawed organisations for reasons we have rehearsed in the House and in the other place. One of the primary reasons why they are not welcome is that they would involve the introduction of 150 new bodies, adding an entirely new layer to the system of public and patient involvement.

The other fundamental reason why we oppose introducing patients councils is that they would involve a system in which a body purports to speak on behalf of the public. That is fundamentally opposed to the whole system that we have tried to establish, which enables the public to speak for themselves. That is a key difference in the kind of facilities that we want to put in place.

Dr. Evan Harris: I am still recovering from the last few sentences, but I want to ask the Minister whether she has worked out how many enhanced PCT patients forums her proposals will produce? Will not there be twice as many as there would be patients councils based on overview and scrutiny committee areas? Although the proposed forums will be in addition to PCT patients forums, does she accept the argument that increasing PCT patients forums is at least as bureaucratic and will result in smaller organisations than introducing a more limited number of larger, local authority patients councils, based on overview and scrutiny committees, or something of that sort?

Ms Blears: I understand the point that the hon. Gentleman seeks to make, but I do not accept it. We propose to enhance existing organisations, whereas patients councils would introduce a whole new layer of separate organisations in the system. I am keen to ensure that we do not recreate a hierarchy of organisations that operate with increasing exclusivity and in which people see themselves as delegates of other people. The whole thrust of the patient and public involvement mechanisms is to enable people to express their own views and for them to have support in doing so, rather than having a delegate system whereby other people purport to speak for them. Hon. Members may have difficulty with that distinction—it may be complex—but it is crucial to the new approach in the new national health service that we have a system that is not about an exclusive delegate democracy but about liberating local people so that they can speak for themselves.

Mr. Heald: Which body will run "casualty watch"?

Ms Blears: As I explain the full implications of the amendments, the hon. Gentleman will see that we propose—in amendment (r), I think—to introduce a new power, or rather a function—which could be a power or a duty—for the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health to consider reports from patients forums and to assess emerging trends that may give rise to issues of national concern that should be taken up by patients forums generally. That would not be limited exclusively to "casualty watch". The forums might want to consider other issues that span the spectrum of their concerns; for example, they might want to undertake a review of a national service framework.

Our proposals are stronger than those envisaged by the hon. Gentleman; they are not simply limited to "casualty watch". It might be perfectly legitimate for patients forums to look into accident and emergency waiting times. They could report to the commission to ensure that we had a national overview. They might be even more creative and look into other issues.

Linda Perham (Ilford, North): As regards the point made by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), will my hon. Friend explain why the proposals in respect of the duties of patients councils and the patients forums of the primary care trusts would not create a hierarchy of PCTs?

Ms Blears: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question. She will be aware that I and my ministerial colleagues have expressed concern about the creation of a hierarchy of patients forums. I am keen to ensure that one forum is not seen as better than another. I want to try to ensure that the forums are able to attract local people of high calibre. I want patients forums for acute trusts and mental health trusts to be just as attractive as those for the PCTs. We want to ensure that the system is rooted in patients forums—that people see them as the driver in the system. There are genuine reasons for PCT patients forums to have a wider role, because PCTs do not merely provide primary care but also commission secondary services. Instead of seeing the system as a hierarchy—where one patients forum is better than another—I should prefer the PCT patients forums to be seen as having a broader remit. They should be seen not as reporting upwards in a hierarchy of organisations, but as having extended responsibilities.

Dr. Harris: I realise that the hon. Lady wants to make progress, and I shall be welcoming her proposals for other aspects of the measure, but this matter is important. One of the points that she made about patients councils is that she does not want people to feel that they are representing other people—or acting as delegates—and she wants people to feel free to speak out. I have not really understood that point. However, in order to create the super-patients forum—the PCT patients forum to which she referred—the amendments provide that at least one member of that forum should come from one of the other patients forums in the area. Does not that recreate what she considers a problem in the proposals for patients councils, although we would consider it a strength?

Ms Blears: When I go through the amendments, I shall explain the extended membership of the PCT patients forums. That is not about people representing others—it is a way of making connections and ensuring that people can share their ideas, knowledge and experience. It may help the hon. Gentleman if I explain that I said that the system should not involve people speaking on behalf of other people because there will be complex issues on which the public will hold a range of views. I do not want one organisation to weigh up that range of views and to come down firmly on one side and to promote only that point of view. Where there is a diverse range of views on a complex health service issue in a community, we need to have mechanisms that allow all of those views to be expressed, to be ventilated and to be weighed by those who are making decisions. Firm decisions should not be set in stone at an early stage before all the relevant views have been expressed. I appreciate that these matters are complex but I do not think that it is beyond our understanding to develop new ways of working.

We have said that much of the purpose of patients councils fits with our view of a strong and comprehensive public and patient involvement system. I think that the way forward is clear, and that is to try to ensure that the system that we have proposed builds on the strengths of patients councils but does not weaken the overall structure of embedding those powers in patients forums.

I shall explain the effects of amendments (a) to (d), (o) to (q), (e) to (l) and (r). The overall effect of what we are doing is to give to PCT patients forums the functions that we previously envisaged for the local offices of the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health. I genuinely think that that makes for a stronger local connection.

The commission will appoint staff to support and work with every PCT forum in England. The staff of the forum will support the members of the PCT forum on a day-to-day basis. That will ensure that there is a robust process in place for the work priorities of the staff to be fully informed by the priorities of local people. There will be real accountability to those communities.

It will be the job of the forum to promote the involvement of the local community in local decision-making processes. In particular, it will be its job to go out and find out the views of those disadvantaged and marginalised groups that traditionally have not had a say in shaping the development of health services.

It will also be the job of the forum to promote the views of people in its area to local decision makers, and in particular to a local overview and scrutiny committee. I believe that this arrangement will root and ground the commission's staff in local neighbourhoods.

In addition—this is where we have picked up some of the key strengths of the patients councils concept—the staff of the PCT forums will be able both to provide and to commission independent advocacy support. During various stages of the Bill's consideration many Members have talked about incorporating the duty to represent the views of local people, and the provision of independent complaint and advocacy support would make sense. We genuinely picked up on that idea.

It will also be the responsibility of PCT patients forums to act as a sort of one-stop shop for local people, by providing advice and information to them about how they can get involved locally, what consultations are taking place and how they can make a complaint. The forums will also be responsible locally for keeping an eye on the arrangements that other NHS bodies have in place to fulfil their duty to involve the public and to make arrangements to consult them about changes to services.

We have amended the composition of PCT patients forums. They will now include members of local community groups that represent the views of the public on issues that affect their health. For example, if a local environmental group was concerned with a particular issue that could affect the health of local people, it would be welcome to be involved. It is important to note that we are trying to expand the remit not only of the NHS in terms of the service that clinicians and the NHS has traditionally provided, but to try to make key links with the wider determinants of health—the environment, jobs, education and safe streets. All those things significantly influence health.

Dr. Harris: I stress that I welcome the fact that the Minister wants to include on one of these consultative bodies—which she wants to be PCT patients forums—people from other groups. However, she has just referred to them as representatives from other groups. I do not see a problem with that save that I wish they were to be democratically accountable. That is the only difference between us. However, she has talked earlier about rejecting the patients councils idea because she wants people to speak for themselves and not to feel that they are delegates of organisations. Has the hon. Lady sold the pass—I welcome it if she has—by recognising that it is reasonable for that representation to take place?

Ms Blears: No, I have not sold the pass on this one. What I have said is that there are organisations and groups out there who will want to feed people's views into the patients forum who will then put those views forward to other people. That is a perfectly legitimate position to be in.

By placing all these responsibilities with the PCT patients forum, we have shifted the power base of the new system for patient and public involvement to local communities. To do that, we will remove the middle layer of our original proposals: local offices of the national commission. We recognise, however, that there needs to be a way for forums to come together across an agreed area, which is a key concern raised by many Members. We have strengthened the provisions in the Bill to say that forums must work together in prescribed circumstances. Those circumstances will be set out in regulation, and I hope that that will meet the concerns of many Members about the integration.

5 pm

Helen Jones (Warrington, North): I welcome what my hon. Friend is saying about the representation of community groups. Will she assure me, however, that the regulations will ensure that, in places such as Warrington, deprived areas get representation on these bodies, as well as the better-off areas? Will she assure me that there will not be a repeat of what we have seen in the Warrington PCT, on which my constituency has hardly any representatives?

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. She has made a significant contribution over recent weeks, expressing her concern about what has happened in her local PCT. For that reason, we propose that members of patients forums should be appointed by the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health rather than by the Appointments Commission. We want to ensure not only that people respond to an advertisement but that we seek out people from communities who, traditionally, have not put themselves forward. That is easier said than done. In many cases, people will need encouragement, support, training, advice and back-up to come forward and feel that they can be part of the patients forum. That is a very different and much more proactive approach—not simply issuing an advertisement, waiting for people to apply and allowing a very self-selecting group to come forward to be part of our public involvement, but going out to deprived, marginalised, excluded communities that, traditionally, have not been part of running our services and making those decisions. My hon. Friend makes a key point about the way in which these mechanisms will operate differently in the future.

We are also amending the provisions that apply to both primary care trust and NHS trust patients forums. We are making it explicit in the Bill that patients forums will not only have a role in monitoring and reviewing the services that a trust provides but that they will also be able to identify gaps in service provision and make reports and recommendations about those to trusts. Trusts will have to publish forum recommendations in their annual patients prospectus, together with the action that they will take as a result, further ensuring that forums have real influence.

What was said to me, at many of the events that I attended with local people, was that all the structures in the world could be as perfect as we could make them, but unless there was real evidence that the decision makers in the health service took notice of what local people said and acted on it, they would quickly fall into disrepute, and rightly so. Therefore, making sure that a patients forum's recommendations are published in the prospectus and acted on by the trust will be a key mechanism in saying to local people, "It was worth while coming forward to get involved in your patients forum, because something has happened as a result of your activity. It was not simply a talking shop; action has been taken."

Many local people have also said to me that, although they do not expect 100 per cent. of things to be changed, they do expect significant changes to take place.

Mr. Burns: Was the Minister dismissing the valuable work done by community health councils by suggesting that they were just talking shops?

Ms Blears: The hon. Gentleman knows well that, in various discussions of these matters, on Second Reading and in Committee, I have put on record three, four, five or half a dozen times my tribute to many community health councils that have done an excellent job in representing people. The hon. Gentleman also knows—and many members of his party have agreed with me—that their performance has, in some cases, been patchy and inconsistent, and that people's ability to get involved has varied dramatically up and down the country. He knows fine well that the situation is more complex than he seeks to portray it, and that standards have varied dramatically.

We have also made explicit the breadth of the powers for forums to be able to refer matters. Concerns have been expressed, but the forums will be able to refer matters not just to overview and scrutiny committees, as previous amendments to the Bill provided for, but to the commission and, indeed, to any other person or body that the forums deem appropriate. They will be able to make their representations and concerns public.

We have transferred some of the functions envisaged for the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health that would have been carried out by its local offices to the PCT patients forums. We have also strengthened the functions that the commission will carry out at a national level. On top of its job of setting and monitoring quality standards for all patients forums and providers of independent complaints advocacy, it will also be able to make recommendations to them about how they can improve their performance. The commission will have a performance management role, and that is key to ensuring consistency right across the country and high quality in the activities of complaints services and patients forums. We are dealing with the key issue of inconsistency.

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): Does my hon. Friend agree that the proposals are genuinely about going out and involving people in decision making in the NHS? As a nurse, I very much welcome the fact that people will be involved. Does she also agree that some of the opposition to the proposals is merely about maintaining a cosy and comfortable atmosphere for the NHS watchdog? Implementing the proposals will not be easy—no one ever said that it would be—but it must be worth trying to involve people who were not previously involved in the NHS.

Ms Blears: I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution. She is right. Change and new ways of working are never easy. One of the most difficult things has been to try to get people to visualise what a new system might look like. When something exists, people can see, touch and feel it. It is hard to get people to understand something that is not yet in place. One of the problems is that people feel that the proposed system will be complex but, once the provisions are established, people will get used to working with them. They will see that that they are integrated at the right stages of the NHS. However, I do not pretend that the system will be revolutionised overnight; it is a matter of building on our proposals over the next few years.

The right for the commission to have a performance management role will ensure that the public, wherever they are, and the NHS can be assured of consistently high standards in the patients forums and from the providers of independent complaints and advocacy services.

We have listened to parliamentarians and to stakeholders and, in particular, to the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales and to community health councils, which were on our transition advisory board and helped us with transition to the new system. They have referred to the often-cited need for a "casualty watch" exercise. As I said earlier, rather than limiting the activities to "casualty watch" per se, the commission should have the right to undertake national reviews of patient experience data on issues that appear to it to be of national concern. That might include the waits in accident and emergency departments or a wider range of issues.

Dr. Murrison: The Minister says that the Government have listened to interested bodies about the future of community health councils. However, I have a list of about 20 organisations that are very much against the abolition of the CHCs. The bodies that have written to voice their concerns include the Manic Depression Fellowship, Mencap, the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations. I could go on. How much has she listened to outside organisations?

Ms Blears: The hon. Gentleman will be aware from previous debates that all sides of the argument have prayed in aid other organisations to support their case. However, I draw his attention to the view of the Long-term Medical Conditions Alliance, which has 115 patients organisations in its membership. On 8 April, it wrote to Members of the other place when the Bill was being considered there and said:

> "The argument over Patients' Councils seemed to our members to be a political one; the proposals as currently set forth appear to be perfectly adequate".

It consulted one of its groups that held an event in the local community and it reported that members were

> "alive with awareness about the possibilities offered by the new strategy, eager to participate, but prevented from doing so by what seem . . . to be esoteric arguments about detail".

It went on to say:

> "We do not see the need for more committees, which we see as likely to lead to the strangling of genuine citizen involvement and the promotion of bureaucracy at the expense of the voice of individual users of the NHS."

The hon. Gentleman is correct—there is a range of views on these issues—but the Long-term Medical Conditions Alliance expressed the view, on behalf of its members, that it wanted to be able to get on with the new issues at stake. We have listened, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will accept that.

Dr. Evan Harris: I accept the Minister's point that there are different views. However, she will be aware that in January this year the Long-term Medical Conditions Alliance welcomed the local network of the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health, which she has just announced an interest in abolishing. It also welcomed the separation of advocacy services from commissioning, for which there is an argument, but from which she is announcing a retreat. She should accept that certain organisations, even those that were among her initial supporters, will not welcome her proposals.

Ms Blears: The hon. Gentleman has been following the development of these issues closely and with great interest, and he will be aware that a wide range of organisations welcomed the functions of the commission in taking a proactive role to draw in views from communities that traditionally have not been represented and in promoting the involvement of local people. Certainly, the Long-term Medical Conditions Alliance, together with a wide range of organisations, welcomes the functions of the commission. Those functions remain very much at the forefront of our proposals but will be exercised by the PCT patients forum, and thus in a way that is more connected to local communities. We are not doing away with the functions of the commission, but embedding and grounding them much more in local structures. I hope that the hon. Gentleman is reassured by that.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): Does the Minister agree that the real test of the system will be what patients and people who work in the NHS think of it once it is in place, which we shall not know for a while? Will she tell us the views of the Chairman of the Select Committee on Health, whom no hon. Member would accuse of being a stooge of the Government, about the reforms?

Ms Blears: Certainly, I will. The Chairman of the Health Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), expressed concerns during our previous consideration of these matters. He said:

> "We are inches apart, but those inches are extremely important."—[*Official Report*, 15 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 207.]

Today, unfortunately, we are thousands of miles apart, because my hon. Friend is delayed in a long-arranged previous commitment in Russia. However, he was able to have a discussion with me before he went on his journey. I was keen to involve him in working up these new proposals, because he made some important points during previous debates.

In a letter to me, my hon. Friend said:

> "Unfortunately, as you are aware I have a long standing commitment . . . I felt it might be helpful to outline my views on the amendments you are bringing forward."

He continues:

> "You will recall that I raised specific concerns about the fragmentation of the separate Patients Forums and the inability to ensure an overview of the local health economy. I felt very strongly that a unifying structure of lay people at the level of local health economy should be written in the Bill."

He goes on to say:

> "I therefore genuinely welcome the fact that your new amendment"—

the one that I referred to—

> "places on the face of the Bill the requirement that all Patients Forums in an area should come together regularly to share ideas, views and experiences."

We are now providing that patients forums must, in prescribed circumstances, co-operate in jointly exercising their functions, which will give us that overview. He continues:

> "Obviously, I have not had the opportunity to consider fully the implications of your amendments, but I am satisfied that you have moved very significantly in the direction I and others felt necessary."

I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend for setting out those concerns, because I have been keen to try to maximise the degree of consensus that we can achieve.

5.15 pm

To summarise, every NHS trust and PCT will have a patient advocacy and liaison service, ensuring that concerns are dealt with before they become a serious problem, and a patients forum, ensuring that the local public have a vehicle to express their views about matters relating to health. The forum will also monitor and review services. Every PCT patients forum will have staff to commission or provide independent support to help individuals make a complaint.

Mr. Paul Truswell (Pudsey): Leeds has one community health council. Under the new structure, we will have seven patients forums, which will be responsible for undertaking the vast range of crucial functions that my hon. Friend sets out. Will they receive a commensurate increase in staff and support from the commission?

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend is right to raise the issue of resources, which has been mentioned in all my meetings with local people. I have acknowledged and put on the record that the new system will be more expensive and will need to receive greater resources. Public consultation does not come cheap. If we are serious about involving patients, the public and the community in shaping health services, then we have to do it properly. It cannot be a superficial sham.

There are bids for additional resources to enable us to have a rigorous, strong and independent system. I need to ensure that all the elements are properly resourced so that we do not involve patients and the public without providing the necessary back-up and support that they need to make the system work. We should be open and honest about that. Real involvement requires hard work by all organisations, including the NHS, and we need to ensure that the system works.

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): Broadly speaking, the Government amendments are welcome. Will the new system allow agreement to take place at a local level to allow a PCT patients forum to act as the lead on behalf of other PCT patients forums in a geographical area, such as Bedfordshire or Leeds, which my hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Mr. Truswell) mentioned? That would avoid the expensive duplication which would defeat the object of the new system.

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend has made several welcome and thoughtful contributions on such matters before, and I know that he is conscious of the detail. Many lead arrangements are in place for PCTs to commission services, so the idea of having lead organisations is already well established within the NHS. I would not want to do anything to provide a rigid blueprint framework to determine how people must operate. For patient involvement to work well, people have to agree on the system and feel as though they own it at a local level. I want the proposed regulations that will set out guidance for organisations to be flexible enough to accommodate the arrangement that my hon. Friend outlines.

My hon. Friend is probably aware that a number of pilot patient forums exist which are beginning to test out some of the new models. One such model in Tyneside has brought together the various elements in the system. They are sharing resources because they obviously get better value by bringing some activities together. However, that has to be based on local agreement. We do not want to impose a framework from the centre. What we are trying to achieve is in tune with shifting the balance of power. We will set the framework, but it is up to local people how they want to operate it. It is for them to decide how they get maximum input in driving up the standards of local health services. My hon. Friend makes an important point.

Every PCT forum will have staff who will commission or provide independent support to help individuals make a complaint. They will work to empower the local population to express their views about health issues, and will provide the one-stop shop service by giving advice and information about public involvement, the complaints process and how people can participate.

Dr. Murrison: Will the Minister give way?

Ms Blears: I will just make a little progress.

Nationally, the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health will set quality standards for the work of patients forums and the independent complaints and advocacy service. It will also performance manage them in relation to those standards. The commission will submit reports to the Secretary of State on how the whole public and patient involvement system is working and advise him about it. It will make reports as it sees fit to other national bodies such as Commission for Health Improvement, the National Care Standards Commission and the National Patient Safety Agency on issues that in its opinion give rise to concern about the safety or welfare of patients, and that have not been or are not being dealt with properly. It will review patient data in patients forums' annual reports and follow that up with reports as appropriate to the Secretary of State and others.

The overall effect of the changes that we are making today is to make the system simpler to understand, less bureaucratic and consequently more effective. As a result, it will be easier for patients and the public to navigate themselves around the system, and easier for them to get involved. We must not forget that what underpins all our patient and public involvement provisions is empowerment. All patients have the right to have their concerns addressed and to be properly supported in making complaints. All patients and all members of the public have the right to be supported in expressing their views about health issues, to be listened to and to have their views acted upon.

That will be undermined by adopting patients councils. Councils and what goes with them would have the effect of perpetuating what we most want to change about the existing system—the idea of an organisation that only represents the interests of patients and the public, without encouraging the wider population to get involved; an organisation that consequently has to take a decision about the relative importance of the many and varied views of members of the local population; in other words, an organisation that decides for people what is in their best interests.

I genuinely believe that local people can make those decisions, provided they are given support. The changes that we propose will, with the original provisions, create a system that is truly accessible to everyone, that is radical and far-reaching, and that will make a positive difference to the services the NHS provides and to patients' and the public's experience of the NHS.

Mr. Burns: The purpose of the debate is to enable the Government to persuade the House to disagree with the amendments made in another place that put patients councils on the face of the Bill, in defiance of the Government's wishes. A debate on this subject without the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe)—the father of the amendments, which were rejected by this House—being present seems rather like a production of "Hamlet" without the gravediggers. It is extraordinary that the poor man has been banished to Siberia because of the debate. I suspect that the Government Whips Office had known for some time about the hon. Gentleman's diary engagements when—conveniently, from the Government's point of view—the debate was scheduled for a day on which he was many thousands of miles away. The Minister shakes her head, but if she consults her Whips Office, she might find that there is far more truth in what I have just said than she believes.

The Minister alluded to the long history of this subject, and we have trodden a long road to get to where we are today. The proposals emanate from a desire, expressed in the Health and Social Care Act 2001, to abolish community health councils. When that legislation was passing through Parliament, the Conservatives said that that decision was wrong and not in the interests of patients, local communities or the NHS. CHCs were clearly defined, easily understood and well recognised by local communities. They were transparent, independent and able to consider and ask the awkward questions, as both Conservative and Labour Governments discovered.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): The Conservative party has been curiously reticent about revealing any details of its health policy. Can we now assume that the reinstatement of community health councils will be a centrepiece of its health policy if and when it ever gets round to telling us what it is?

Mr. Burns: The hon. Gentleman rightly said that, in health as in other areas, we are in the middle of a review, which any Opposition party is perfectly entitled to undertake. Indeed, the hon. Gentleman's party undertook them on at least four occasions between 1979 and 1997. In due course, I shall give him my view of the abolition of CHCs and the way forward, but he must be patient.

As I was saying, CHCs were a one-stop shop that performed a vital and valuable service for the local community in dealing with patients' problems and general health provision. They also made controversial decisions about the provision of health care, whether closing down a ward in a hospital or the hospital itself, as they had a power of veto and could formally object to the Secretary of State; Ministers could then look at decisions that CHCs considered were not in the public interest. Many people say that some CHCs did not work as well as others and that the provision of the service was patchy. If a system provides an invaluable service in principle, but has certain flaws, those flaws should be identified so that improvements can be made; we should strengthen the system, rather than destroying it altogether. The Minister was a distinguished chair of Salford CHC in the 1990s and I suspect that she was fully supportive of the role of CHCs and thought that they did a tremendous job in looking after the interests of the local community and individuals. I wonder how many of the Government proposals that we are considering today are motivated by a desire to remove a thorn in their side: they do not like criticism, especially if it comes from an independent source and gains credence among members of the public. The Government motion and amendments are a mistake. Personally, I would have preferred a strengthening and improvement of the CHC system to deal with perceived weaknesses, rather than the wholesale removal and replacement of the system.

The initial replacement was to my mind—and presumably to the Government's, as they have now backtracked dramatically—a ridiculous miasma of proposals, which included things like patient advocacy and liaison services and other bodies. The system would have been fragmented, and there was little confidence that it would be independent. To be fair to the Government, they have bowed to sustained criticism of their proposals and have taken a different direction.

Laura Moffatt: The hon. Gentleman and his party often talk about reform and how crucial it is to the NHS. Yet, in one of the most important parts of the NHS—the watchdog organisation—they propose little or no reform. How then can the hon. Gentleman pretend that his party's view reflects that of the general public?

5.30 pm

Mr. Burns: I know that the hon. Lady was trying desperately in her earlier intervention to impress her Whip; of course, this is the season of the run-up to reshuffles. Unfortunately, she has not been listening. I said that my preferred choice was to pick up the weaknesses in the CHC system and legislate to improve, enhance and strengthen it to make it more effective where perceived weaknesses existed, instead of abolishing it wholesale. As the hon. Lady will notice if she reads tomorrow's *Hansard*, that is the view that I expressed. I am afraid that her intervention bore little relation to what I was saying.

Let me return to the point that I was making before I ill-advisedly gave way. The Government have had to alter their position on the patients forums proposals in tabling their amendments. The battle on CHCs is over and they are not going to change their mind about them. Another place decided on the patients council option instead of seeking to restore the community health councils. As a realist, I accept that we must now move forward because of those actions. As the hon. Member for Wakefield made clear in speaking to his amendments in this place and in expressing his views in the Select Committee on Health and other arenas, the patients councils are for a number of reasons preferable to the Government's broad proposal.

Patients councils not only offer a range of features that were present in community health councils, but represent a move forward in terms of adjusting to some of the concerns that have been expressed. I believe for a number of reasons that they are more attractive than what the Government are offering, as they are an attempt to oversee the health service from the perspective of the patients and to consider a wider spectrum of activity than would a body based solely on specific trusts.

I accept that we will move away from some of those areas as a result of the Government's amendments, but I believe that patients councils will be able to monitor the

[Mr. Burns]

complete patient journey between trusts. They can also play an advocacy role over a sustained period. In relation to Alder Hey, patients benefited from the work of CHCs in that regard. Campaigning work such as "casualty watch" and other work that is still done by community health councils would be within the remit of patients councils, which could continue working in line with developments in the past 27 years by acting as a watchdog and advocate for patients.

It is also important to consider that patients councils would not be working in isolation within their trusts and that there would be greater interrelation between the trusts and on the progress of patient issues. The restoration of the one-stop shop and the removal of the maze brought into the system by the patients forums are also important, as the patients councils would be more easily understood by patients and members of the public in local communities. That is a preferable way forward.

Regardless of what the Minister says and of some of the amendments that have been tabled, the Government are proposing to introduce complex organisational bodies. In the early days, they will also be seen to be complex by patients and local communities. Whether that perception will disappear if they survive the legislation remains to be seen. With patients councils, as with CHCs, people would have a greater understanding of where they needed to go if they had individual health problems or problems with the provision of service in their area. The councils would, however, have to be properly financed.

The Government's statistics show that the funding of CHCs costs between £20 million and £30 million. I understand from the projections relating to the Government's proposals that the funding of the patients forum system will be considerably more—given their complexity and the sheer numbers involved—than the funding required for CHCs. I listened with interest when the Minister said earlier that she was determined that the forums would be properly resourced to ensure their success. That commitment is a slightly diluted version of one that would ensure proper funding to provide the resources necessary to operate effectively. I should be grateful if the Minister would return to the question of funding and give the House an assurance on that issue.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that, unlike other members of his party, he would be happy to see an expansion in the amount of money available for the NHS budget and for this particular service? If so, it is a welcome conversion.

Mr. Burns: I am grateful to the formidable hon. Lady. I will be cautious in crossing swords with her; I do not wish to make the mistake made by many of her own Ministers.

What I meant was that, in the context of CHCs versus patients forums, it is extraordinary that, in making a commitment fully to fund the forums, the Government are prepared to spend so much extra money when we already have a system in place that works.

Mrs. Dunwoody: More money?

Mr. Burns: If the hon. Lady will wait, I will tell her that I do not criticise extra money for the health service. What concerns me about the extra money that has been made available is that there are no systems in place to ensure that it will achieve what it is meant to achieve—the improved, enhanced provision of health care. It worries me that, if we do not have structures in the health service to ensure that we get value for money and enhanced patient care, that money will be frittered away and the patients of this country will become even more disillusioned and discontented.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Burns: No, I will not.

So that we do not continue to talk about money, which is slightly off the subject, I shall conclude by saying that the Government's proposals are ham-fisted, and that they will not work as the Minister suggests. The proposal for reformed and improved CHCs was the best way forward, but that is not to be. The proposals of the hon. Member for Wakefield for patients councils that were incorporated into the Bill in another place represent the better way forward. I question the motives behind the Government's proposals, because they are a way of trying to stifle any criticism and proper inquiry into problems in the health service in local communities. For that reason, I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to join me in opposing the Government's proposals to reverse the decisions made in another place.

Linda Perham: I speak as secretary of the all-party group on community health councils, as someone who has been a CHC member for four years, and as one of the 26 Members who voted on 15 January for the amendment on patients councils tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). As hon. Members know, this debate is taking place on a day when my hon. Friend has a long-standing commitment, of his choice, abroad.

Mr. Burns: Of his choice?

Linda Perham: Yes.

Mr. Burns: Has the hon. Lady spoken to the Whips Office?

Linda Perham: The hon. Gentleman may go in for conspiracy theories: indeed, everyone in this place is more willing to believe in a conspiracy than in the true version of events.

Mr. Burns: Has the hon. Lady discussed this matter with the hon. Member for Wakefield? If not, I recommend that she does so.

Linda Perham: I have had many discussions with my hon. Friend, and I am coming to those.

Mr. Burns: On this matter?

Linda Perham: I intend to continue with my speech.

My hon. Friend's contribution on these matters will be missed by many inside and outside the House. The Minister and others have acknowledged that my hon. Friend has done more than anyone else to draw attention to the shortcomings, if I may use that word, of the Government's original proposals for patient and public involvement in the health service. In consultation with the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales, my hon. Friend has made constructive suggestions for a way forward.

I spoke to my hon. Friend at length on Monday night before he left the country, as well as to the Minister. As Members have heard from the Minister, my hon. Friend has written to her welcoming the amendment to include in the Bill the requirement that all patients forums in an area should come together regularly to share ideas, views and experiences. Members will recall that, in his speech on 15 January, my hon. Friend asked for

"a unifying structure of lay people at the level of the local health economy, offering an overview of that economy".—[*Official Report*, 15 January 2002; Vol. 378, c. 208.]

Because that provision was lacking in the Bill, my hon. Friend tabled and voted for an amendment, which was also supported by myself and 24 colleagues.

I know that my hon. Friend has been grateful to the Minister for her co-operation in seeking to resolve the problems from the time when these matters were last before the House until a few days ago, but that he is not entirely happy about what is proposed today. Obviously, he would prefer the Government to support the introduction of his model for patients councils. It is almost two years since one line in chapter 10 of the NHS plan baldly stated that CHCs were to be abolished, and I have never had a satisfactory and rational explanation of why CHCs could not have been reformed and strengthened to play the central role in other reforms, most of which are warmly welcomed. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that Members are listening closely.

During the passage of the Health and Social Care Bill, an earlier version of my hon. Friend's amendment on patients councils was accepted by the Government but subsequently withdrawn. As the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) said, it has taken the other place, together with a well co-ordinated and competently argued campaign by ACHCEW and a range of other stakeholders, to bring us to the point where we may finally have a resolution.

I regret that so much time and effort has had to be expended when it has always been clear that a compromise would add value to the proposals as well as resolving the ongoing controversy. However, I recognise that the Minister has been very helpful and proactive in working on alternatives that seem capable of achieving much of what patients councils would deliver. I wish that the dialogue had started much sooner, perhaps even before her time as a Minister, but I have only praise for her tireless work in seeking a resolution of our differences, particularly in the past week or so with my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield and latterly myself.

There are some positives to take from this experience. It should be the good news story that we could have had earlier. The Minister and the Government are showing that they know that even though they did not get it wrong, they certainly did not get it all right. They have listened, and we have before us a compromise that I hope can lead to consensus. In this policy area, we ought to be able to reach agreement.

5.45 pm

I hope that CHCs and their national association will feel better after today. Theirs has been a long and stressful road that has taken a heavy toll. Although they and some patients and members of the public are not getting exactly what they wanted, they can claim a moral victory in the light of the Government's proposal, which includes a strong, independent, community-led and integrated watchdog for PCT patients forums. However, I hope that we can come up with a more user-friendly name, such as the "community health service".

I hope that the Minister will join me and the rest of the House in paying tribute to CHC voluntary members and staff, who have continued to serve their communities well during a time of much uncertainty and instability. I pay particular tribute to my own Redbridge CHC, of which I used to be a member. I hope that the Minister and other colleagues will also join me in congratulating the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales, its director, Peter Walsh, and its supporters, on conducting its campaign with such rigor and integrity. There can be no denying that the proposal before us is a great improvement on past attempts. That is due in no small part to ACHCEW's well informed and well argued briefings, and the excellent work—as has been widely acknowledged—carried out on behalf of NHS users by CHCs for almost a generation.

I heartily welcome the genuine attempts by all concerned to secure greater public involvement in health services. This Government are rightly investing huge sums in those services, thereby reflecting our constituents' continuing commitment to the national health service.

Dr. Evan Harris: All of us—perhaps excluding the Minister—are sick of repeatedly discussing this issue, but it is important to recognise that we have made progress, and I want to make a constructive contribution.

We have yet to reach consensus, but if we build on the excellent speech from the hon. Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham) we might find a starting point. The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) said that, although the two sides of the argument are inches apart, those inches are very important. If I might modernise his terminology—a risky procedure—perhaps they are now only centimetres apart, although the distance remains very important. Perhaps we can explore that issue.

I thank the Government for agreeing to change the programme motion. I do not understand how such matters are dealt with, but it was appropriate to extend the original offer, thereby enabling us to explore these issues properly. It is unfortunate that we cannot discuss a sheaf of amendments line by line in a Committee; perhaps we should do so outside this Chamber, so that we can resolve some of the confusion. I am confident that we can do that, because the Minister has always been willing to discuss this issue. If the amendments give rise to specific questions, we can discuss them.

In his usual style, the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) explained some of the reasons why the Government's entire strategy is flawed—a view with which we agree. It is not worth my repeating the points that I made on Second Reading, in Committee and on Report. My predecessor in this role, my hon. Friend the Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey), made the same points. Originally, he worked closely with the hon.

[Dr. Evan Harris]

Member for Wakefield to try to save community health councils and the other important elements that need to be saved.

I have never understood why the Government felt it necessary to abolish CHCs. Perhaps they did so on the basis of patchy performance, but such reasoning would threaten the roles of many Front Benchers.

Mr. Burns: Speak for yourself.

Dr. Harris: We should all watch out, and particularly members of the Cabinet. If patchy performance were a basis for abolition, we would have even more of a dictatorship, and even less Cabinet government.

I do not accept that it was ever reasonable to abolish community health councils, but the Government want to change the way in which things are done and we have to meet them part of the way. I accepted on Report, a little before the hon. Member for West Chelmsford, that we must move on to consider a way of reaching agreement.

As the Minister knows, the arithmetic is such that in the House of Lords, where the Government do not have a majority, there was a strong turnout of both main Opposition parties and Cross Benchers against the Government's proposals. Unless we can reach full agreement, I fear that that will continue. Despite the progress that we have made, I cannot say that my party will necessarily change its position. I do not believe that there is huge enthusiasm for the Government's proposals on the Labour Benches, although they are welcomed by some hon. Members, who are more than capable of speaking for themselves. There is still some way to go, but we have a useful platform.

Mr. Tom Harris: For the purposes of clarity, it would be wise to point out that, in Committee, the Lords voted for the abolition of community health councils, with a Government majority of 27. That was not made clear by the Conservative spokesman.

Dr. Harris: That is an intervention for the Conservative Front Bench. Some time ago, my party accepted that we should fight on for patients councils—the amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Wakefield has had our support throughout. We want to fight now for what patients councils provide; otherwise, we will just go round in circles. We cannot hold out time and again for the identical amendment in the House of Lords. I stress that unless we are satisfied on specific issues, there will continue to be opposition—it does not matter how strong; it will still be voting opposition—to the position that we have reached.

The hon. Member for Wakefield has been described as a grave-digger. Today, in his absence, he is more like the spectre at the feast. I accept, of course, the Government's assurances that the debate was not timed to coincide with the hon. Gentleman's absence. We had a helpful contribution from the hon. Member for Ilford, North, who I know has been working with the hon. Gentleman in negotiating with the Government. There is not much value in asking whether he went of his own accord; I am sure that he did.

The hon. Member for Wakefield did not write to me to express his views before he left, although I know that it was a last-minute decision. The letter that he did write has not been published, and the hon. Member for Ilford, North hinted that the hon. Member for Wakefield did not agree completely with the Government's proposals. I probably share that lack of agreement.

Linda Perham: I said that my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield was not entirely happy, as we would clearly have preferred the patients council model. However, the Minister has read out my hon. Friend's letter, and hon. Members can judge what he means from what the Minister said.

Dr. Harris: I accept that the Minister read from the letter. I do not suggest that she misread the hon. Gentleman's words, but I do not see why it should be a problem for the letter to be seen in its entirety and context. Although my party will make its own decision, it is useful to be informed by someone who has been involved in negotiation of the issues.

Let us consider some of the specific issues. Many of the functions proposed in the patients council model are delivered by the series of Government amendments. I put that on the record. When we are trying to persuade the Government to change their view, it is not helpful to hector them for doing so. We welcome the Government's proposals. That is how the two Houses work well, and how pressure from the Government's side works best. Even if it does exclude the Opposition parties, such negotiations bring progress to the public forum. There are, however, a number of objectives that have not yet been delivered by the amendments. I hope that in her response, the Minister will indicate that there may be some flexibility.

The Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales, to which I pay tribute, has been up as late as all of us, dealing with the late amendments from the Minister. It is a remarkable feat of her office to have delivered vaguely competent amendments in such a short time, given that negotiations were still taking place on Tuesday. In a briefing sent to hon. Members on 17 May, the Association of Community Health Councils set out why it liked the patients council option. There are various criteria on which the association based its case for patients councils.

One criterion was integration and simplification. It is not clear that that criterion has been met fully, but the abolition of the local networks of the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health helps to meet some of those concerns.

Another criterion was less bureaucracy than currently exists. I accept that there are arguments on both sides, but it is not clear that the proposed system is less bureaucratic because of the imbalances created by different types of patients forum of different sizes. The Association of Community Health Councils wanted a one-stop shop. The primary care trust patients forum provides almost all the aspects of the one-stop shop. Again, I put on record my gratitude for the progress made in the Government's amendments on that point.

A further factor was local credibility and accountability. To a certain extent, that relies on paid staff within the organisation. The theory of local networks and volunteer-run patients forums did not have that credibility, let alone the accountability. The fact that there will be staff for the PCTPFs—I agree with the hon. Member for Ilford, North that we need a better word, and as the Minister has had plenty of practice at coming up with new words I am sure that we will make progress in that respect—will provide more credibility.

The Association of Community Health Councils argued for a powerful, independent voice for local people. I am not convinced that the forum, as the Minister envisages it, delivers that, and I still fail to understand her distinction between the patients forum and the community health council or patients council model, in terms of allowing people to speak, rather than being spoken for. I have never understood what the hon. Lady meant by that.

What people want locally is for their view—their agreed view, if necessary—to be transmitted. The outcome is more likely to be a talking shop if people simply give their view, and no agreement is reached about the way forward by whatever body. I am sceptical about what the Minister said, particularly as she then said that there will be representatives—not people from, but representatives—of local health interest groups on the PCT patients forums. That is welcome, but it is inconsistent with her approach. I question whether it is a legitimate basis for her opposition to the patients council approach.

Another part of the case for patients councils is the need for an overview of health issues and services. That depends on whether the area governed by the primary care trust patients forum is large enough to provide an overview; otherwise it will merely provide a bottom view of a part of it. There is a major concern that when the Government think about PCTs, they are thinking about London, and not, as the hon. Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall) said, about shire counties and the size of PCTs there.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that under the current proposals, which lack overall integration, there would be no body to examine the impact of health issues on a local community?

Dr. Harris: There is the oversight and scrutiny committee of local authorities, which the Government introduced, but that does not represent the patient voice directly. That is why the patients council used as its base in terms of the local health economy, to quote the phrase coined by the hon. Member for Wakefield, the oversight and scrutiny committees of local authorities. That was a much better way of tackling the problem. In shire counties, there would be a county-sized overview and scrutiny committee, and a patients council or larger patients forum, which would benefit from the economies of scale, but would have the critical mass of expertise and be able to take a proper overview.

I shall be more specific. In Oxfordshire, there are a multitude of PCTs, so there will be four, five or six—who knows?—primary care trust patients forums with an interest in Oxfordshire, whereas at present there is one community health council that does a very good job, not just because of the people who serve on it, but because it is big enough to take an overview, with the one large acute trust in the county. It would be bizarre if there were five PCT patients forums with a wide remit and one acute trust patients forum that was subservient to them. That sounds like five chiefs and one Indian. It would be top-heavy and overly bureaucratic. It would be better to have a structure based at county level, which is where the overview and scrutiny committees work. That works well in London, for example, where PCTs are larger and often coterminous with local authorities.

The Minister should perhaps consider a scheme to allow the merging of PCT patients forums where that is supported locally. They could have a duty to consult on mergers, which would offer local people the structure that they want and would fit well with local authority scrutiny. The Minister knows that we supported the Government's proposals in the Local Government Act 2000, which provided for that function, but setting up multitudes of non-coterminous PCT patients forums is not joined-up government. If the Minister can make some concession on that important point, I might find more to commend in the amendments.

6 pm

There are currently about 180 CHCs and some 150 overview and scrutiny committees. The functions performed by CHCs include oversight and the reporting of concerns, and they have the resources, the secretariat and the research capability to perform the necessary investigations. Placing those functions with local authority overview and scrutiny committees would maintain the critical mass necessary for effective performance. Placing those functions with 300 or so PCT patients forums will multiply bureaucracy and increase costs. The Government claim that resources will be provided, but the House has an interest in ensuring that whatever resources are finally decided—we can argue about quantum—are spent as efficiently as possible. That could be achieved most efficiently through patients councils, or larger patients forums, operating at local authority level. The area covered should certainly be bigger than the chunks of shire counties that patients forums will cover in my area and others.

I have several detailed points to raise on the amendments, but I know that other hon. Members wish to speak. I hope that the Minister will accept interventions when she winds up the debate. I cannot at the moment support the Government's motion to disagree, but I recognise that we have made some progress. It would be wrong to fail to recognise that the provisions have improved in terms of function, but the structure is not yet right and some issues remain on resources. I hope that the Minister will express a willingness to negotiate both in the Chamber and outside on some of the specific points that I have made.

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest): I am amazed and delighted that some of my first impressions of the Government are beginning to be proved wrong. As we sat through the tedious hours in Committee, I felt that the Government were a juggernaut that was not for turning. Today, however, we have evidence that the Government have taken notice of many of the concerns expressed about the abolition of CHCs.

The first concern was the loss of the one-stop shop, but that does seem to have been addressed. Just this week, I have had complaints from a man who would have had to go to at least two separate PCTs; now, he should be able

[Dr. Richard Taylor]

to go to a one-stop shop. I am also very pleased that the Minister has said that the forums will not be only talking shops, but will have opportunities to make changes.

My second concern—the independence of patients forums—is more difficult to address. There was no doubt about the independence of CHCs, but I remain to be convinced about the independence of patients forums. The Prime Minister recently wrote that PCTS were

"run by patients, doctors and nurses."

They are certainly run by doctors and nurses, but I remain to be convinced that the patient input is effective. I have not been convinced by the independence or the effectiveness of some of the non-executive directors whom I have seen in action.

The non-executive directors are appointed by the NHS Appointments Commission. Several issues were raised at a recent public meeting of the Health Committee that called into question the independence of the commission. I do not wish to cast aspersions on individuals—the problem is the system that has been set up. For example, the chief executive of the commission was the chief executive of the previous similar body and the chairman has been well steeped in the functions of the NHS as a chairman of trusts. The first act of the commission was to appoint 28 strategic health authority chairs, 26 of whom already chaired, or were non-executive directors of, trusts or health authorities and had been appointed by the Secretary of State.

I am waiting to see what effect the appointment of patients forum members by the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health will have. I am pleased to hear that it will be able to seek members from potentially disadvantaged groups, but I was puzzled to hear recently that patients forums will elect a member to sit on PCTs and the NHS Appointments Commission will have the power to vet—and, presumably, veto—those elections. I hope that the Minister will deny that.

I was encouraged to see that the amendments would open the door to patients forum membership for people from health-related voluntary groups. That was one of the strengths of CHCs. My fear about patients councils is that they would add an extra tier, so I fully approve of strengthening an existing tier instead. On balance, I will support the Government, because they have widened and strengthened the scope and functions of PCT patients forums. However, as other hon. Members have pointed out, we need a better name for the forums. That would be a help, but their independence will be largely in the hands of their members—if they are given enough freedom.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): Like almost everyone who has spoken in this debate, I am at something of a loss to explain why CHCs have been abolished. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) and I have both had experience of the Oxfordshire CHC. For many years it was led by John Power, the leader of the Labour group on Oxford city council. It was a constructive and critical CHC, irrespective of which party was in office. I still do not understand why it was felt necessary to abolish CHCs.

Mr. Heald: Does my hon. Friend think that the abolition might have had anything to do with "casualty watch", which showed how poor the situation was in accident and emergency departments?

Tony Baldry: I genuinely do not know, but we have never been given a coherent explanation for the abolition. If I was looking for bits of the machinery of government that caused concern, CHCs—especially the Oxfordshire CHC—would not have been high on my list. As Ministers and everybody else would have hoped, Oxfordshire CHC was an effective voice for patients and the community as a whole. It was critical and constructive, and it engaged in the debate.

The most important thing about community health councils, however, was that people could find them. We in the Westminster hothouse may sometimes forget how long it takes for our constituents to adapt to change—and the NHS has experienced an enormous amount of change recently. I suspect that if we asked people in the high streets of our constituencies "What do you know about primary care trusts?" we would find that few had caught up with the change, or would know who was involved in the trusts. Our Oxfordshire health authority has been replaced by five primary care trusts; I suspect that few of my constituents could name the trust currently covering their area.

Stephen Hesford (Wirral, West): Does the hon. Gentleman realise that community health councils were introduced in 1974, while PCTs have existed, broadly, since April this year? He is not really comparing like with like. My experience is the reverse of his: I found that even after nearly 30 years people did not know where their community health council was, and most of those I bumped into did not even know what community health councils were.

Tony Baldry: Perhaps the Oxfordshire CHC was a star, but I suspect that many people in Oxfordshire knew about it. We experienced a number of dramas over the years. There were concerns about the future of hospitals such as the John Radcliffe and the Horton general hospital in my constituency. When public meetings were needed, people were content for the CHC to organise them, knowing that it was objective and independent and would not be party political or partisan. CHCs dealt in the politics of the possible, carrying out effectively the job with which Parliament had entrusted them.

As I have said, a lot of change is taking place in the NHS and it is sometimes difficult for our constituents to keep up with it. For each primary care trust there will be a patients forum. I must tell the Minister that I do not think that my constituents, or indeed many other people, are desperately gripped by the debate about whether there should be a patients forum or a patients council. I will support those on my Front Bench because I think that the other place has made some good points, but I believe that what people out there really want is stability.

My postbag today contained a newsletter from the primary care network, whose line was simply "Give NHS managers space, time and freedom to deliver". Inside was an article by the hon. Member for Dartford (Dr. Stoate), in which he said that PCTs must be allowed space in which to establish their own priorities.

People do want stability. If there is to be a patients forum for each primary care trust, people must at least know what the trusts are. As I said earlier, Oxfordshire now has five PCTs, one of which—Cherwell Vale—is based in Banbury. When it was set up, with the agreement of all, it included a chunk of Northamptonshire. The reason was simple: as Banbury is a market town, a day's cart ride has historically been involved. That is how it came to be a market town.

For centuries, those in many villages and small towns in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) have considered Banbury to be their natural market focus. Consequently, general practices in south Northamptonshire have traditionally sent patients to Horton general hospital in my constituency. Indeed, 30 per cent. of the hospital's work comes from Northamptonshire.

6.15 pm

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Will my hon. Friend accept a declaration of interest? I have lived in my constituency, in the far south-west of Northamptonshire, for more than 30 years. Throughout that period I have not only used Horton general as my local hospital, but used a general practice in Banbury. I have crossed the border for primary as well as secondary services.

Tony Baldry: My hon. Friend—who has lived in, worked in and represented his constituency for many years—makes an effective point.

The primary care trusts that the forums will represent "went live" on 1 April 2001, but only began active life on 1 April this year with the demise of the Oxfordshire health authority. They were shadowing the authority for a year. As I have said, Cherwell Vale primary care trust stretches into Northamptonshire. Members can imagine my amazement on seeing a letter from the chief executive of the Northamptonshire strategic health authority. Incidentally, if few people know which PCT represents them, I suspect that almost no one—and this goes for many Members of Parliament—understands what strategic health authorities do.

One thing strategic health authorities clearly want to do is reorganise PCTs. On 10 April, less than a fortnight after Cherwell Vale went live, David Sissling, chief executive of the Northamptonshire strategic health authority, wrote to the chief executive of the Thames Valley health authority saying:

> "We recently discussed a possible adjustment to the boundaries of Cherwell Vale PCT and Daventry and South Northamptonshire PCTs. This would enable an alignment with the boundaries of Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire and of course the new health authorities.
>
> I have discussed the proposal with a"—

listen to the next word—

> "limited number of colleagues including the Chief Executive of Daventry and South Northamptonshire PCT. On the basis of these discussions I can formally confirm our strong support for a reconfiguration."

No one in the PCT was consulted. No patients or general practitioners were consulted. Members of Parliament were not even given the courtesy, then or since, of being told about the possible configuration of PCTs, just 10 days after they had come into being.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Many of my constituents, particularly those living around Chipping Norton, use Horton general. It will concern them greatly that if the hospital does not have the support of PCTs and patients in south Northamptonshire, it may not be as viable as it is today. It currently gives my constituents a very good service, often much better than that provided by the very strapped John Radcliffe hospital in Oxford.

Tony Baldry *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Before the hon. Gentleman follows that line too far, let me say that the debate seems to be straying somewhat from the main point of the amendment.

Tony Baldry: We are focusing on patients forums, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Important questions are who will be on those forums, and what geographical areas they will represent. People in south Northamptonshire need to know which forum to go to, and they can know that only if they know which is their PCT. As I have said, they need some stability. For instance, people living in Chipping Norton, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron), need to know which PCT represents them.

One of the most important concerns of the forums, however, will be the viability and vitality of their local general hospitals. The only logical reason for the Northamptonshire strategic health authority to want to take patients away from the Cherwell Vale PCT is that it wants to refer them to hospitals in Northamptonshire—which will undermine the viability and vitality of Horton general.

At present, Oxfordshire has five primary care trusts; each one will, under the Government's proposals, have a patients forum. They came into being after considerable consultation between general practitioners, everyone involved in the national health service and all the stakeholders. Doubtless they had to have ministerial approval. It was agreed that there would be five of them. They have chief executives, boards and chairman—all the paraphernalia of a primary care trust. The Government are asking us to vote tonight for a patients forum for each of those PCTs.

Similarly, as soon [illegible] the primary care trusts took up their effective duti[illegible] 1 April, the chief executive of the Thames Valley strategic health authority tried to bludgeon the five to become three. Not surprisingly, the smallest of these, the North East Oxfordshire primary care trust, based in Bicester in my constituency, is somewhat concerned. The chairmen of at least two of the primary care trusts said:

> "We 'went live' 1st April 2001, i.e. 13 months ago, and are all now engaging fully and constructively with patient groups, local agencies and health professionals, including our GPs. We are certain that to close down our 5 trusts in order to create 3 new ones will very significantly disrupt and damage the ever improving quality of provision for our patients."

That was written by the chairmen of the North East Oxfordshire and the Cherwell Vale primary care trusts.

It is irrelevant to my constituents whether they have patients forums or patients councils. They want stability; people working in the NHS want stability; GPs want stability. The Government have set boundaries for primary care trusts—let us keep to them, at least until 2005, for heaven's sake. At least let there be natural

[Tony Baldry]

evolution. The Government should not set up primary care trusts on 1 April 2002 and seek to change the boundaries radically, without consulting anyone, by 10 April. What kind of precedent is that for patient or consumer involvement? Ministers talk about involving the wider community. If the national health service does not even have the courtesy to involve Members of Parliament, what hope is there of involving the wider community?

The Government will win the vote tonight because they will dragoon all their members into their Division Lobby, except for those who have been expelled to Siberia for the occasion. However, this debate is irrelevant if Ministers cannot accept and understand that, above all, the NHS needs some stability for the next two or three years so that everyone involved can understand what is happening. Simply rewriting the geographical boundaries will benefit no one. I hope that the Minister will intervene with the chief executives of the various strategic health authorities who seem to have nothing better to do than try to rewrite the boundaries of primary care trusts.

Dr. Murrison: In an earlier intervention on the Minister, I referred to a number of organisations that objected to the abolition of community health councils. I cited a number of charities, and the Minister responded with the name of an organisation which, unlike the ones to which I had referred, could hardly be said to be a household name.

I see from the list that someone has helpfully passed me that a number of establishment bodies have complained that to shut down CHCs would be a retrograde step. These include the British Medical Association and the General Medical Council. Interestingly, however, that view is also held by the Socialist Health Association, Health Action for Homeless People and the Co-operative party, while the Greater London Assembly has objected unanimously. There seems to be a pretty uniform view that the Government are about to make a retrograde move. It is a great shame that they have not listened.

The hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) said that he was heartened that the Government had been listening since the Bill's Committee stage. My impression throughout the Committee stage and subsequently is that the Government have been extremely recalcitrant with regard to all the helpful suggestions that have been offered to them. That is a great shame.

Brian McGinnis of Mencap said very tellingly that the CHC network has been a nuisance to the Government, but that that has been one of its strengths at times. He said that the new patchwork of half-baked ideas, designed for difference rather than effectiveness, lacks any real credibility.

Mr. Truswell: For some years, I was a member of a CHC. The crocodile tears that Conservative Members are splashing about are making me smile wryly. If the Conservative party is so wedded to the idea of CHCs' independence and critical role, why did a former Conservative Government remove from CHC observers to health bodies the right to participate in their proceedings? That right existed until a Conservative Government took it away. How does that square with all these crocodile tears?

Dr. Murrison: The hon. Gentleman's knowledge of history is greater than mine. The important thing is our commitment to the general concept of community health councils.

The CHCs offer a fairly seamless guide to people passing through the journey of the national health service. We must remember that people do not simply go to their GP and then suddenly go to hospital—it is a journey. One of our chief concerns is that the new proposals will cut across that. No longer will people have that seamless recourse to a knowledgeable and well respected body if they want to raise an issue of concern in the national health service.

There was a wider consultation on the future of community health councils in Wales, which subsequently opted to keep its CHCs. We could learn something from that.

I was interested to learn that Bath and District community health council, to which I pay tribute for all its hard work, cost £119,000 in the last financial year. Its chief officer thinks that patient advocacy and liaison services alone will cost about £750,000. There is a big difference. The *Health Service Journal* reckoned around the time of Second Reading that the new structures would come to about 10 times the current cost of community health councils. It is important to bear that in mind. Subsequent Government amendments could conceivably lead to greater costs.

Functions are far more important than institutions, however. I was interested to see the comments of my community health council on the recent revelation that the Royal United hospital in Bath will end the year with a deficit of £17 million, and that there is evidence of fiddled waiting lists. My CHC reacted in a timely and effective manner in contributing to that debate. I am left struggling to work out how the new bodies that the Government intend to replace CHCs would cope with the crisis facing the Royal United hospital in Bath.

I was pleased to read the agenda for the Bath and District community health council meeting of 14 May, held in Bath. It contains a raft of useful things that that body has done. It includes a review of the emergency unit and a "casualty watch" 2002, which took place earlier this week. It comments on detailed plans for the new emergency unit at the Royal United hospital and on transport into Bath for medical attention. That is a tribute to the many and varied things that my local community health council does, and its work is replicated across the country.

One of my concerns about the proposals is the impact that they are likely to have on staff. It seems to me that there is some confusion about who staff will work for and to whom they will be accountable. If I understood the Minister correctly, she suggested that the staff of PCT patients forums would be farmed out from the CPPIH, yet ACHCEW thinks that staff will answer to the PCTs. I would be grateful to the Minister if she could clarify that because, if ACHCEW and I are confused, I suspect that the general public will be as well. I am genuinely concerned that, if the staff who participate in the new bodies do not know to whom they are accountable and where they fit in the organisation, there is a real risk that they will become disheartened and dispirited.

6.30 pm

I am also concerned that the remit of PCT patients forums is being widened to include issues that broadly affect health. I would be the first to admit that, in general, many things impact on health and that issues such as housing, transport and so on have a very definite impact on people's lives and, indeed, health, but I would caution the Government that, by widening the remit in that way, they are perhaps diluting the forums' focus on the NHS. Of course the resources will have to be increased if the remit is widened, and the Minister has said nothing about that so far.

The Minister talked about representatives from various interest groups that could conceivably have a view on health-related issues. I am confused about that notion because she appeared to suggest that representatives would not be the way ahead in the new order of things. I disagree with her on that point, but I would be grateful to her if she could clarify it. If she is referring to representatives, who will choose them? Will they be appointed? If so, who could dismiss them?

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): One of the great advantages of being an Opposition Whip rather than a Government Whip is that one is not quite tied to the same vows of silence. I am conscious of the fact that I have not heard all the debate, but I do not wish to go over any ground, other than to say that I note the time is 6.32 pm and it would be fair to say that the Government willingly agreed to our request to change the guillotine arrangements so that there would be a guillotine part way through our proceedings. I should like to put on record our appreciation for that.

A subsequent request for further time came not from Her Majesty's official Opposition but from the Liberal Democrats. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where are they?"] They wanted an extra hour. The Government offered us two hours to discuss this business, and I am sure that you will notice, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we have indeed said all we wish to say. We have had our opportunity to disagree. We do not like what is going on, and I doubt whether we will be satisfied by the Minister's reply. However, I must make the point that the Liberal Democrats demanded an extra hour, but none of them can even bother to be here to hear the Minister's response.

Mr. Heald: Does my hon. Friend agree that the effect of changing the guillotine arrangements in that way was that we were unable to debate three groups of amendments that would have been discussed earlier, as a result of the Liberal Democrats' activities? *[Interruption.]* I see that one Liberal Democrat Member is now arriving in his place.

Mr. Wilshire: That very Member—the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris)—is the one who demanded the extra time because he had so much to say, and so many of his hon. Friends wanted to say it, but I have made my point, and I do not wish to stray into the issues that were debated when I was not present in the Chamber. However, I am most grateful to the Government for agreeing to our request, and I ask the House to note what else has happened.

Ms Blears: This has been an interesting and wide-ranging debate. It is fair to say that all hon. Members involved in it probably know far more about patient and public involvement than they could ever had anticipated when we first embarked on this journey almost two years ago, and I hope that we have all extended our knowledge and understanding during that period.

The hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) said at the outset of his contribution that the decision to abolish CHCs was wrong, and he set out why he thought that was the case. I would simply remind him that the decision to abolish CHCs was approved in the other place by a majority of 27 and that Lords amendment No. 6 deals with patients councils, and therefore we are discussing the fact that the Government disagree with that amendment. The issue of whether to retain CHCs is in fact behind us.

The hon. Gentleman expressed a kind of nostalgia about CHCs and said that they had a power of veto over hospital closures. I need hardly remind him that that power of veto, or power of referral, has now been transferred to democratically elected local government, and I would hope that that very important step forward would command the support of the whole House. Such crucial local decisions should be taken not by non-elected bodies but by ones that are locally accountable and democratic. I am sure that overview and scrutiny committees will carry out their tasks in a very discerning and appropriate way in future. That is real progress.

The hon. Gentleman also expressed concern about whether the new system will be able to address issues such as the terrible events that occurred at Alder Hey hospital. Hon. Members have also mentioned the dreadful trauma caused by the events at Bristol. I should like to remind the House that Professor Kennedy made the absolutely crucial point during the Bristol inquiry that patients and the public need to be on the inside of the system of patient and public involvement, not on the outside reacting to events when things have already gone wrong.

People should be inside the system and able to shape and influence the decisions that are taken. It is crucial to this debate to say that patients councils would perpetuate the system whereby people are on the outside, observing. Patients forums are fundamentally different; they are about patients and the public being on the inside of the system and able to exercise real power and influence.

The Conservative party is going through what the hon. Member for West Chelmsford described as a fundamental review of its policies on health and everything else. Obviously, there has been huge change in the NHS recently, which is the very reason why the system of public and patient involvement needs to change as well. If the hon. Gentleman is undertaking a review, he needs to be a little more creative and imaginative in looking to the future, not back at what has gone on for the past 27 years with CHCs. The shape of the system will be very different in future, and its values will be different as well. I urge him to keep up with the pace of change in our system.

The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of funding. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) welcomed his commitment to extra

[Ms Blears]

funding for the NHS. It is a great pity that the hon. Gentleman did not see fit to vote for it in the recent Budget debate. Nevertheless, I have acknowledged that more resources will be needed to ensure that the system works properly and that we do not get consultation and involvement on the cheap, so we will need to invest extra resources.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the important issue of value for money. At long last, performance management of patient and public involvement will be part of the new system, so we will be able to find out what we get for our money. In future, the people whom we have asked to pay a little extra for the NHS—I am delighted to say that the vast majority of the community are happy to do that—will be able to see exactly where the money is spent, what they get for it and how well the system of patient and public involvement is working across the country, instead of having perhaps a bit of a hit-and-miss system.

Dr. Evan Harris: On taxpayers' money being spent on a locally accountable health service, there is a strong argument for local democratic accountability in running the health service. Will the Minister make an announcement on the funding available to resource the model that she now proposes? Many of us think that it will cost a lot of money. If that money comes from the same announced resources, it will be spread more thinly, simply because of the multitude of organisations that she now seeks to beef up as PCT patients forums.

Ms Blears: I have in fact put it on the record in this debate and in Committee that the system will be more expensive. I am not in a position to make an announcement about specific allocation decisions, because they will be made as we decide where it is appropriate to put the massive extra investment that Labour is making in the national health service. The announcement of those allocations will be made at the appropriate time. However, we value a robust, independent and vigorous system of patient involvement, and clearly its implementation will cost more than the existing system. That is evidence of our commitment to investment.

Mr. Burns: Although I accept the Minister's statement that she cannot tell us about funding allocations for the bodies, has her Department made any assessment of their probable costs and, if so, can she share those figures with us?

Ms Blears: I have already acknowledged that the proposed system will cost more. At present, CHCs receive about £23 million; we allocated an extra £10 million to fund the patient advocacy and liaison services. The staffing of the patients forums will require additional resources, but I am not in a position to go into further detail. We could make hugely ambitious proposals for public and patient involvement, but we need to be sensible when making decisions, because investment is crying out to be made in other parts of the health service. Getting the balance right will be fundamental as we go through the next few months.

Dr. Evan Harris: I recognise that the Minister is committed to putting more resources into the new system than the old one, which included PALS. I also recognise the need to ensure that the money is well spent and that there is a crying need for it actually to be spent on services. However, if she cannot give us an undertaking about money, can she give us some indication of the possible staff numbers in PCT patients forums? We know about the staffing levels of CHCs—at least in our own areas—but if there were to be only 0.7 of a person per PCT forum that would significantly obstruct us in reaching agreement with her as regards the proposed structure.

Ms Blears: I have already said that there will be staffing both for the PCT patients forums and to facilitate the co-ordination of other patients forums. I am certainly not in a position to say whether that would be one person or one and a half, two, three or four people, but the staffing support will be adequate to enable the forums to carry out their functions. That is the key part of the equation. It would be wrong to give bodies responsibilities without the resources to discharge them. No sensible Government would ever do that.

Mr. Tom Harris: Does my hon. Friend share my surprise that the Conservatives are demanding accurate figures for the funding of the new bodies, yet will not commit themselves to the shape of the NHS—or even to support it?

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend goes to the heart of the matter. Our proposals are evidence of our commitment both to reform the system—this measure is a major reform—but also to the investment that makes reform work. The Opposition are unwilling to provide extra funds for the national health service as a whole. They have a reactionary approach to the whole subject. They are not looking forward—they have no creativity or imagination—and that is very disappointing indeed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham) made an excellent contribution and I was grateful for her support for the detailed amendments that we propose. I am pleased that she feels we have made significant progress in establishing a strong, independent and community-led system of public and patient involvement. She expressed a willingness to move towards those principles—as we are trying to do; we are talking about functions rather than rigid structures to which people should conform. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for her contribution, and for the time and effort that she has put in to try to reach a position that reflects the views not only of hon. Members but of the many stakeholders in the public and patient involvement system.

6.45 pm

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) said that my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) and I were centimetres rather than inches apart. I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's acknowledgement of the progress made by the amendments. He accepts that the decision to abolish CHCs has been taken both in this place and in the other place and that we should now move on to try to provide a robust system for future patient and public involvement.

I am sorry that before my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield left for Russia he did not write to the hon. Gentleman, but I have noted the hon. Gentleman's concerns and the fact that my hon. Friend welcomed our amendments.

Dr. Evan Harris: We shall make our own decision about the proposals—as will the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) when he reads the report of the proceedings—but as some of the amendments were not tabled before he left, he would not have fully known the Government's position. We do not know whether the entire letter was read out and we still do not know whether he thinks that more progress could be made. I am not trying to be awkward, but, in his absence, we cannot be persuaded that the concerns that we share with him have yet been met in their entirety.

Ms Blears: I do not have the Moscow telephone number of my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield—if I did, I would pass it to the hon. Gentleman. I assure him that my hon. Friend was aware of the principles and intentions behind all our amendments.

The hon. Gentleman read out a briefing from ACHCEW when he expressed his concerns. I urge him to take into account the fact that there are other views. ACHCEW has provided some constructive contributions, but one of the main reasons why we want to broaden the system of patient and public involvement is to incorporate the views of a range of patients organisations, carers groups and people in the community who are not part of the existing CHC framework. In many cases, they have been denied the opportunity to get involved because once the CHC world was consulted, the health service judged that it had fulfilled its duty. I ask the hon. Gentleman not to think that the views of ACHCEW express those of all patients and the public on important and crucial issues.

Recently, I attended an event organised by a support group for patients with bowel cancer. During the past three months, it had involved almost 1,000 people in various events; they had come together to share their experiences and to talk to clinicians about how standards could be driven up. That would not happen in a traditional, CHC framework. It is crucial that we involve people more creatively and imaginatively, so I urge the hon. Gentleman to look beyond the world of CHCs in coming to a view on the issues.

Clive Efford (Eltham): My hon. Friend referred to the involvement of local people in the formulation of health policy and decisions. Will that inform the process for choosing members of the local forums?

Ms Blears: As I explained earlier, the members of the forums will be appointed by the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health, part of whose remit will be to seek out people rather than simply waiting for them to make an application—as is sometimes the case, when we end up with a self-selected and fairly limited group. The commission will actually go out and find people who, in the past, had no say in the health service and will give them support, guidance and training to enable them to come forward. I very much hope that a much more representative group of people than ever before will be shaping decisions. Crucially, involvement will not be confined to the people in the organisation—they will be charged with finding out the views of the public. The members of the forum will not simply put their own view—they will have to ensure that they draw in the views of a wider section of the community.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon and other Members expressed some concern about the name "primary care trust patients forums" and asked whether we could come up with something snappier. I have had my fingers slightly burned in coming up with names for organisations. I hesitate to say that we should call PCT patients forums "local voices". Perhaps we shall not go back down that path. However, I hear what is being said to me and perhaps we can consider the matter.

The hon. Gentleman made an important point about the different configuration of different communities—urban communities, rural areas and places with small market towns, which will be different throughout the country. Therefore, there may be a need for PCT patients forums to come together so that we avoid duplication. I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to regulations that will be made under clause 18(2). Paragraph (f) provides for regulations to be made which govern

"the discharge of any function of a Patients' Forum by a committee of the Forum or by a joint committee appointed with another Forum".

There is legislative provision there to meet the flexibility that not only the hon. Gentleman but my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mr. Hall) wants. My hon. Friend made a similar point.

Dr. Harris: Clearly there are not yet regulations to read. Is the hon. Lady saying that there will be regulations that will allow, for example, the five PCT patients forums in Oxfordshire to group together to form one unit in the county as a PCT patients forum, which will have the staff and carry out all the functions, or will there still have to be five duplicated and different forums, that will come together for occasional issues?

Ms Blears: Far be it from me to take a centralist approach and to impose that on local communities. The regulations will be the subject of consultation. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will want to make his views and those of his community known in the consultation process.

Dr. Harris: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ms Blears: No. I think that I have responded adequately to the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) welcomed the changes that the Government are putting forward. I am delighted that his faith in the political process has been slightly restored since consideration of the Bill in Committee. I can reassure him that the forums will not merely be talking shops. They will be taking action. The hon. Gentleman expressed some concern about the election of a patients forum member as a non-executive member of the trust, and whether the NHS Appointments Commission would have a power of veto over that appointment.

The patients forum will put forward the person it wants to be on the NHS trust. That person will have to meet the criteria set by the appointments committee and will have the same status as all other members of the trust. It is vital

[Ms Blears]

that that person is not seen as a second-class member of the trust board, and that there is parity of esteem and influence within the board to ensure that their issues are taken on board.

There is a precedent in that at present the NHS Appointments Commission appoints a person—he or she is usually from the education sector—to trust boards, but it is the education sector that nominates that person to go forward. I hope that that reassures the hon. Gentleman. I am delighted to have his support for the Government amendments.

The hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) expressed the view that people knew where to find community health councils. Some of my hon. Friends expressed concern about the proportion of people who knew that. Some polling was done in the past. I do not pray it in aid and say that CHCs were bad because people did not know about them. However, extremely few local people knew what CHCs did, where they were and how they could get in touch with them. Less than 10 per cent. knew that. There is not the view that CHCs are well known and representative bodies.

The hon. Gentleman said that there had been a great deal of change in the NHS. That is exactly why the system of patient and public involvement needs to change, too, so that it can align with the changes that have taken place. He talked about dramas at the hospital in his area with which the CHC has been involved. There will be dramas about hospital configurations, but that is a tiny part of the entire system of the NHS. We are trying to get to a system that involves people who have diabetes, cancer and kidney disease, young people and children—the entire range of services.

In the past, everything has been about a drama and a crisis as a result of a configuration. That is one important aspect, but it does not reflect the entire range of concerns that people have about how the health service works for them. I genuinely believe that our new system will draw in many more views and issues than simply the sharp point about reconfiguration.

The hon. Gentleman raised an important issue about how decisions that change the way in which primary care trusts operate would be subject to public consultation. The general duty on the NHS, under section 11 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001, is that the trusts must consult—every part of the NHS must consult—where there will be an effect on the operational services. If it is a purely administrative matter that does not affect the way in which services are delivered, that can go ahead. Where the issue affects any of the services to be provided to the hon. Gentleman and his constituents, it needs to be the subject of proper and detailed consultation. That is a strong power in our provisions.

The hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) again raised the issue of the abolition of CHCs, which is unfortunately not the subject raised by the amendments. However, I welcomed his statement that functions are far more important than structures. That was real recognition. Perhaps he is keeping up a little faster than the hon. Member for West Chelmsford with a new approach. I am delighted about that.

The hon. Member for Westbury raised some concern about staffing. There will be staff employed by the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health who work with PCT patients forums, supporting all of the forums in an area, commissioning and providing independent complaints and advocacy services and, crucially, promoting public involvement in the whole of the health service and those wider issues that determine health in local communities. The staff will be a key part of the system, but they will be grounded and rooted in PCT patients forums close to their communities. I can confirm that the commission will be appointing members of the patients forums.

I believe that we have had an extremely wide-ranging debate on these issues. I like to think that after going over this ground perhaps half a dozen times, I may even have persuaded Opposition Members that the NHS is changing dramatically. Therefore, public and patient involvement needs to change too. We have recognised the fact that to get change we must have investment. We must ensure that our services improve and that we give local people the tools to get on with the job. We must give them guidance, back-up, education, training and support. We have active, articulate citizens who are able to take their rightful place in being involved in the NHS. We are proposing real and radical change. Perhaps these changes are a little too radical for Opposition Members, but we are committed to real change, real reform and massive investment, which we had the courage to vote for and take forward. I commend the amendments to the House.

Question put, That this House disagrees with the Lords in the said amendment:—

The House divided: Ayes 303, Noes 179.

Division No. 252] **[6.57 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Caborn, Rt Hon Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda
 (Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles
 (Norwich S)
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
 (B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit

Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David

Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Plaskitt, James

Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
 (Glasgow Anniesland)
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard

Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vaz, Keith
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watson, Tom
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
 (Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ian Pearson and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe.

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David

Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
 (NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
 (Rushcliffe)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric

Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Hammond, Philip
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Key, Robert
Knight, Rt Hon Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Oaten, Mark
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric

Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Webb, Steve
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Tom Brake and
Mr. Charles Hendry.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Lords amendment disagreed to.

Lords amendments Nos. 7 to 16 disagreed to.

Government amendments (a) to (d), (o) to (q), (e) to (l), (r), (m) and (n) agreed to in lieu of Lords amendments Nos. 6 to 16.

Committee appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendments Nos. 2 and 4: Mr. Simon Burns, Jim Fitzpatrick, Dr. Evan Harris, Mr. John Hutton and Ms Claire Ward; Mr. John Hutton to be the Chairman of the Committee; Three to be the quorum of the Committee.—*[Jim Fitzpatrick.]*

To withdraw immediately.

Reasons for disagreeing to Lords amendments Nos. 2 to 4 reported and agreed to; to be communicated to the Lords.

HOUSE OF COMMONS MEMBERS' FUND

Ordered,

That Mr. A. J. Beith, Mr. John Butterfill and Sylvia Heal be discharged as Managing Trustees of the House of Commons Members' Fund and Mr. Peter Lilley, Mr. Eric Martlew and Mr. John Burnett be appointed as Managing Trustees in pursuance of section 2 of the House of Commons Members' Fund Act 1939.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

PETITIONS

RAF Lyneham

7.13 pm

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): I have the honour to present a petition on behalf of 11,657 of my constituents. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. Will those hon. Members who are not staying please leave quickly and quietly? The hon. Gentleman will then have a better opportunity to exhibit his honour on this matter.

Mr. Gray: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have the honour to present a petition on behalf of 11,657 of my constituents who are very concerned about the possibility that the base at RAF Lyneham, the home of the Hercules aircraft, may have to close as a result of current Government studies. If that were to happen, not only would it cost my constituency £75 million in local income and 750 local jobs, but it would mean that all British Air Force, Army and Navy transport fleets would be based in one place. That would be at Brize Norton rather than Lyneham.

The petition states:

> The Petition of the Residents of Lyneham, Wootton Bassett, Calne, Chippenham, Malmesbury and of the other towns and villages of North Wiltshire.
>
> Declares that we are proud of the contribution which we make to the defence of the Realm by being home for 50 years to the Royal Air Force at Lyneham; that we support the activities of the Hercules fleet in every way; and that the closure of RAF Lyneham would have a devastating effect on the local economy and jobs.
>
> The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Secretary of Sate for Defence to take steps to ensure that the A400M transport plane is based at RAF Lyneham; and that even if it is not, Lyneham continues to serve as the base for the C130J Hercules.
>
> And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Traffic-calming Measures

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): It is my very sad duty to present a petition from 490 residents of North

Claines and members of the general public using the A38 through Fernhill Heath in Worcestershire. It is one of the great sadnesses of being a Member of Parliament that one discovers that it is often only after a fatal accident has occurred that the necessary traffic-calming measures are put in place. The petition describes one such circumstance.

The petition implies no criticism of the Highways Agency, which is about to de-trunk the road and is at last showing sufficient urgency in its approach to the problem. However, with the imminence of de-trunking, the petitioners believe that it is all the more important that the House of Commons, the Highways Agency and the successor body, Worcestershire county council, are reminded of the importance of the issue.

The petition states:

The Petition of North Claines Parish Council on behalf of the residents and general public using the A38T through Fernhill Heath, Worcestershire.

Declares that, due to traffic speed and volume and the lack of traffic calming measures, this has contributed to the tragic death of a four year old child on the A38T outside Hindlip Church of England First School.

The Petitioner therefore requests that the House of Commons supports the recommendations of the North Claines Parish Council that Worcestershire County Council "Safer Routes to School" measures for Hindlip Church of England First School be accepted along with the following additions:—

A further speed reduction to 20 mph outside Hindlip Church of England First School.

The 30 mph limit extended past Hindlip Hall Drive towards Sandyway Cottages.

A pelican crossing installed at an appropriate point as there is no "lollipop person" at Hindlip Church of England First School.

And the Petitioner remains, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Stroke Victims

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Kemp.]*

7.17 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): I thank the Speaker's Office for granting me this important debate. I am grateful for this opportunity to raise the issue of the support services available to the victims of strokes.

Let us first be clear what we are talking about. Each year more than 100,000 people in England and Wales have a first stroke. About 10,000 of them are under retirement age. There are 200 strokes each week in those under 55, and there are close to 60,000 deaths due to strokes each year.

Stroke is the third most common cause of death in England and Wales after heart disease and cancer. It accounts for more than 8 per cent. of all deaths in men and 13 per cent. of deaths in women in England. The cost of stroke to the nation in terms of health and social care is estimated to be more than £2.3 billion. That is 5.8 per cent. of total national health service and social service expenditure. The total cost of stroke care is expected to rise in real terms by around 30 per cent. by 2023.

Most important for the purposes of this debate, stroke is the largest single cause of severe disability in England and Wales, with 300,000 people being affected at any one time. About a third of people who have had a stroke die within a year, a third make a good recovery and a third are left with a serious disability.

Over the last 20 years, a number of small, randomised controlled trials for stroke units have been conducted. These trials show that stroke units reduce mortality and disability compared with management in acute general medical wards. No other treatment for stroke has demonstrated such large benefits. It is imperative that all victims of stroke, no matter where they live, be treated in a stroke unit. That is just not happening at the moment.

The Royal College of Physicians sentinel audit has shown that only 26 per cent. of patients are accessing such treatment. Even those hospitals that have a stroke unit often have insufficient beds to accommodate all their stroke patients. That means that some patients are treated in general wards just paces away from the specialist care that they need. In Coventry, we are fortunate to have a stroke unit at the Walsgrave university hospital. However, it is estimated that at least five people continue to die each day and seven require institutional care because they could not receive care in a specialised unit.

I welcome the Government's commitment to improving the care of those affected by stroke as laid out in the national service framework for older people. I particularly welcome their commitment to stroke victims receiving treatment from specialist stroke teams in designated stroke units. The framework, which has been endorsed by the Stroke Association, provides an excellent care standard for victims of stroke. Should any of those near and dear to me suffer stroke, I would rest easier knowing that their care was based on that outlined in the document.

The first milestone in the implementation of the framework has already passed—by last month, every general hospital should have had a plan in place to introduce a specialised stroke service. That is where my

[Mr. Jim Cunningham]

concerns about the Government's approach to stroke services begin, because progress towards that milestone is not yet known. I take this opportunity to ask my hon. Friend how the Department of Health is monitoring progress in this area and what mechanisms it intends to use to ensure that the milestone is reached. It is vital that hospitals that have yet to introduce a plan are supported and, dare I say it, compelled to introduce one.

We should welcome the publication of the national framework, but the Government must do more. I am concerned that no resources have been made available for hospitals to pump-prime stroke units or to increase the size of a unit to accommodate all patients. Obviously, the success of stroke units depends on adequate staffing of the multi-disciplinary team, ideally comprising specialist nurses, a specialist physician, a speech therapist, a dietitian, a clinical psychologist, a pharmacist and a social worker. It is essential that the Government ensure that there are sufficient numbers of therapy staff to support stroke victims in making the best possible recovery. Health care professionals need to be encouraged to specialise in those fields.

Strokes primarily affect older people, and with an ageing population we can expect their incidence to increase in coming years. I welcome the work that the Government and the Stroke Association are doing on stroke prevention. I particularly welcome the Stroke Association's work on stroke prevention in the Afro-Caribbean population. Afro-Caribbean people are twice as likely to have a stroke as those of European origin, and are more likely to have their first stroke at an early age. Although research is under way to try to explain that, the Stroke Association is not waiting for the results, but is conducting a major campaign to raise awareness within the community. It should be congratulated on that initiative.

It is important to recognise that investment today in adequate stroke units across the country will reap huge rewards in the future for individual patients and the public purse. There is a danger, however, that stroke is seen only as an older person's condition, especially as the stroke standard is contained within the national service framework for older people. A significant number of younger people and children suffer, and will continue to suffer, from strokes. It is vital that the needs of young people are acknowledged and that appropriate treatment and support is available to them as part of a comprehensive stroke service. The Stroke Association has raised concerns with me about the extent to which the stroke standard is being applied to the care of younger patients. How does the Minister's Department plan to ensure that young stroke victims receive specialist care?

I reiterate the importance of this subject. We are all aware of the demographic time bomb, and if we fail to take action now, we are storing up huge problems for the future. Although I hope that the prevention programmes in place today will reduce the numbers who fall victim to stroke, realistically we must expect more and more stroke patients over the coming years. Patients of the future are entitled to expect the best possible care—that is, through being treated in a stroke unit.

I have some questions for my hon. Friend. How is the Department of Health monitoring the progress of hospitals' plans to introduce stroke units? What is the Department doing to encourage health care professionals to specialise in the field of stroke care? What plans does she have to provide assistance for existing stroke units to expand? What is the Department doing to encourage health care professionals to specialise in stroke care? What plans does she have to provide assistance for existing stroke units? Finally, how does her Department plan to ensure that young stroke victims receive specialist care? Stroke victims across the country await the Minister's response.

7.24 pm

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): I start by offering warm congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) on securing this important debate. As he said, stroke affects thousands of people in this country every year and affects some families more than others. I welcome his support for the Stroke Association, which does a great job in my community and in communities throughout the United Kingdom, not least in providing sometimes very distressed family members with vital information when they need it most, sometimes when consultants are too busy or no specific consultant is available to advise on stroke. The association is there to help people and to guide them through a very troubling time.

Difficulties sometimes start in hospitals where patients are not placed in appropriate facilities—a stroke unit is not available and they have to go into general wards—and may continue long after the patient is discharged, sometimes into communities without appropriate facilities for people with stroke and perhaps an absence of physiotherapy services as well. In our community in the north-west, care is sporadic. I endorse the sentiments expressed by my hon. Friend and ask the Minister to reassure us about the implementation of the stroke plan, with particular reference to hospitals and stroke units.

Some hospitals are engaging in research activity on stroke. That is welcome. A local hospital, Aintree university hospital, has such a research facility. I recently visited it, and was delighted to hear that the stroke unit had received £1 million for research. I thought that that was rather a small amount of money for one year, and asked how it had been spent over the course of the year. I was told that it had been spent over a period of six years. One million pounds over six years does not a lot of research make. There is a desperate need to do far more research, because intervention and good management can lead to a good prognosis for many people who endure a stroke.

However, the argument is not just about money—it is far more complex than that. There is an acute shortage of appropriately qualified and motivated individuals who want to embark on work on this condition. Will the Minister touch on the initiatives that her Department is engaged in, first, to make more research funding available for people interested in stroke and in developing good outcomes for stroke victims and, secondly, to stimulate the clinical world's interest in stroke?

I want to say a few words about educating the public on what they can do to minimise susceptibility to stroke. Far too few people understand that salt is a significant factor in stroke, as is hypertension. Although we have started to educate the public on both those factors, far more work remains to be done. Unfortunately, it is often only when people have suffered a stroke that they discover that they could have taken several simple measures to reduce their risk. Will the Minister tell me what has been done to improve the information available?

7.28 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I commend my hon. Friends the Members for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) and for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) for securing and contributing to this important debate. The management of stroke is an important aspect of health care, and I welcome the debate, not least because it gives me an opportunity clearly to explain the Government's policy and how we are helping to make progress in this crucial area.

Stroke is an illness in which part of the brain is suddenly severely damaged or destroyed. The result is loss of function of the affected part of the brain. It usually causes weakness and paralysis of parts of the body, and in some cases, disturbance of vision and of speech. Stroke is the United Kingdom's third biggest killer and largest cause of serious disability.

During the 1990s, death rates from stroke fell by just over a third, having been falling continuously since the 1960s. However, although the figures have been coming down for several years, in 2000 the figure still stood at 19.9 deaths per 100,000. Although the majority of strokes affect older people, they can affect people at any age, and the consequences of a stroke for a young person are especially devastating.

My hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South asked what was happening about strokes and young people. The standards set out in the national service framework for older people apply equally to services for young people. They are not exclusively for older people. It is the responsibility of each coronary heart disease team and primary care trust to work together to ensure that they develop services that are appropriate to younger people. Involving patients in designing those services will help to make them more accessible and responsive. The health service often puts people into categories, such as older people or younger people, and the right services are not always available. That is particularly true of adolescents, who find that the services available are often not appropriate to their needs. Involving those patients will be a key consideration.

The Government are committed to reducing the number of disabilities and deaths that result from strokes. We are making changes and improvements in access to, and delivery of, effective care and treatment. That includes the key priorities of prevention and education about risk factors. It also relates to the care and rehabilitation services that people receive immediately following a stroke, which make a difference to the quality of life that stroke victims experience.

On funding, substantial new investment in health and social care services was announced in the Budget. The NHS will receive an annual average increase of 7.5 per cent. above inflation over the next five years. That represents an increase of about £34 billion and is the highest sustained growth in funding that the NHS has ever received. There will be a similar increase over the next three years of 6 per cent. in real terms for social services, which are just as important to people who suffer strokes as acute medical services.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crosby made the important point that the problem is not just one of investment; we also have to consider the capacity of the staff who work in the system. We are acutely aware that we need to boost the number of staff who are available to treat people in the NHS. The NHS plan makes it clear that we need a huge increase in consultants across the board if we want to have a consultant-led service. The target was initially set at 7,500 extra consultants by 2004. The recent Budget announcements have allowed us to roll that target forward and we now want to recruit at least 15,000 more doctors—consultants and GPs—over the 2000 baseline by 2005.

We are not just providing more doctors. Between September 2000 and September 2001, the number of qualified nurses employed in the NHS increased by 14,400, which is about 4.3 per cent. However, the Budget has allowed us to forecast a further increase of 35,000 more nurses by 2008. Again, we are trying to get qualified staff into the system as soon as possible.

Therapists are particularly important for people who have suffered strokes because they help with their rehabilitation. There will be 6,500 more therapists and other health professionals working in the NHS by 2004. There will also be an extra 4,450 training places. In the past, we failed to invest in training people in the system or we cut training places. The therapists will include physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech therapists, who are particularly important for stroke victims. Many of the stroke victims I met said that had they received speech therapy at an early stage in their treatment, their quality of life—in particular their communication with their families, friends and neighbours—would have been greatly enhanced.

I recently met an elderly lady who had recovered from a stroke. Before her stroke, she used to get a great deal of pleasure from completing crosswords, which formed a large part of her life. Following her stroke, she lost the ability to spell, which left a big hole in her leisure time. I managed to enrol her in classes for literacy and spelling, and she is well on the way to being able to complete crosswords again. The NHS would not necessarily have thought of providing her with educational support to ensure that her skills went back to the levels at which they were before she suffered her stroke. It is important that we are more imaginative about the services and links that we provide for rehabilitation.

We want to deliver a patient-centred service. That is a big challenge for us—nowhere more so than in services for people who have suffered strokes. We have a 10-year programme to provide extra investment and to reform the service. We need to increase capacity but we also need to look more creatively at the services that we provide. However, the extra funding will help us to deliver the national service framework for older people, on which clinical services for strokes will be centred.

We want to ensure that patients can return as far as possible to the lifestyle that they enjoyed before their stroke. Work on the national service framework will help us to achieve that. Many of the policies that we are developing, such as helping people to give up smoking, promoting healthy eating, encouraging people to increase their physical activity and reducing the number of overweight people, especially those who have problems with obesity, will help to reduce the incidence of stroke and to tackle heart disease.

[Ms Hazel Blears]

It is important to prevent and limit the burden that strokes impose on the people who suffer them and, crucially, their carers. A huge responsibility is put on the families and friends of those who have had a stroke. We recognise that in the White Paper "Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation", in which we identify heart disease and stroke as priorities for positive action to improve prevention. We set a target to reduce stroke mortality by at least a further third by 2010, using 1996 as a baseline. We are trying to build on recent reductions in mortality from strokes, and we have set a challenging target to reduce that even further.

Although we might reduce the number of people who have strokes, we must not forget that stroke victims still need a wide variety of services. Some people need acute care immediately following their stroke. Depending on the severity of the stroke, they will need a programme of rehabilitation to help them optimise their independence afterwards. Services for older people, especially stroke victims, were not always the most attractive parts of the health service and did not necessarily draw in clinicians. I am pleased to say that that is changing and we are developing good doctors, consultants, nurses and therapists who are committed to team working when helping stroke victims. I have seen evidence showing that when rehabilitation services work together, they have a huge impact on someone's quality of life in years to come. That intervention has to be at the earliest possible opportunity. If we leave problems for a long time, there is a corresponding reduction in the quality of life. Ensuring that different members of the team work together, and work quickly, is a priority.

Clearly, stroke is a medical emergency. The majority of patients are admitted to acute medical wards from accident and emergency departments. The aim of initial treatment is to stabilise the patient and reduce the risk of fatality; to reduce the prospect of major disability; and to prevent secondary strokes, which happen far too often and affect someone's quality of life enormously. The development of stroke services—the team working—has brought about an enormous change in the care of stroke patients. There is growing evidence that dedicated care improves outcome, reduces mortality and is cost-effective. Specialisation of nursing staff is a key factor in a successful stroke unit.

The latest development of stroke care was contained in the national service framework for older people, published in March last year. That sets specific standards and milestones, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South referred. It establishes the development of integrated stroke services and improvements in the delivery of stroke care as a priority. I am pleased to say that the NHS priorities and planning framework for 2002–03 reinforces the high priority given to delivery of the milestones set in the national service framework. The health service used to have a wide range of priorities—probably far too many, in fact. Having a smaller number of priorities should enable the NHS to deliver better on the targets that we set, and stroke care is one of those high-priority targets.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: Will my hon. Friend say more about numbers of social workers? How many specialist units have been established and where are they? My hon. Friend knows that provision throughout the country is patchy.

Ms Blears: I understand my hon. Friend's concern about the inconsistency in the way in which the units have been established. I understand that the results of monitoring will be available later this summer, so in the next couple of months we should get a clear picture of where services have been established, where they are planned but not yet up and running, and where we need to ensure that they are provided.

I know that the way in which monitoring will be carried out in future is a particular concern. In future, strategic health authorities will monitor the performance of acute trusts and primary care trusts in delivering the national planning priorities. Therefore, there will be a performance management route through the system, so that we can see where things are happening, and, where nothing is happening, take action through investment and creation of services on the ground. In future, the levers will be at strategic health authority level, rather than in the centre at the Department of Health. That is part of our drive to ensure that while the Department does not micro-manage the service, the service is managed according to the national standards and frameworks that we set. I assure both my hon. Friends that the matter is covered in the national priorities and planning framework and that it will be performance-managed to ensure proper performance in every community.

The aim of the stroke standard is to reduce the incidence of stroke in the population; to ensure that those who have had a stroke have prompt access to integrated stroke care; and to take action to prevent strokes, working in partnership with other agencies where that is appropriate. We are determined to ensure that people who have had a stroke have prompt access to diagnostic services; that they are treated appropriately by a specialist stroke service; and that subsequently they, with their carers, participate in a multidisciplinary programme of secondary prevention and rehabilitation.

Recently, I visited a beacon stroke service in the south-west which is attended by people who have had a stroke and their carers, so that they can learn together about the action that they can take to maximise the extent of rehabilitation and the mobility, speech and basic skills regained by the person who has had the stroke. I met an incredibly impressive husband-and-wife team who, as a result of their involvement with the stroke service in their area, resolved to set up a self-help group in their community. The stroke service was able to help them to set up this entirely new group, which could go on to help others in the community. I was impressed by that close collaboration between people who had had strokes, their carers and their wider family. That provides a good model for us.

The standards in the national service framework will be supported by wider action and development work on the elimination of age discrimination; the delivery of person-centred care through the single assessment process, which will apply to older people across health and social care, so that in future those involved in social care are involved in assessment as well as the NHS; the delivery of intermediate care services to promote faster recovery from illness and to prevent acute hospital admissions; and improving access to appropriate specialist care in the best hospital environments. Each of those standards has a contribution to make to the care of stroke patients.

Mr. Cunningham: Does my hon. Friend intend to speak about the Afro-Caribbean community—an issue that was drawn to my attention a couple of weeks ago? I am sure that she is aware that the Esaba Afro-Caribbean women's group in Coventry was involved in a pilot scheme during stroke week, which was last week.

Ms Blears: I am aware that certain groups in our community are particularly susceptible to certain conditions. A challenge facing all of us—not only those involved in stroke services but everyone involved in NHS provision—is to make sure that services are accessible, responsive and appropriate to the needs of a far more diverse and varied community than before.

The constituency group my hon. Friend mentions provides evidence of the way in which dramatic changes to services can be achieved when patients, their carers and their families are involved. The people with the best ideas for change are usually those who are at the sharp end—they know their illness better than any expert specialist, because they live with it every day. My Department is developing the expert patient programme, which covers a wide range of conditions including arthritis, diabetes and stroke. That programme will help to develop patients' skills in helping themselves and others. My hon. Friend's constituency group provides an excellent illustration of the way in which local people can influence the shape of health services in their community. I undertake to find out details of that project and to feed them into the development of policies within the Department.

The milestones for action were set from April this year. They are being monitored now and we should have the results very soon, which will enable us to see where specialised stroke services have been established. By April next year, all hospitals will have to have established clinical audit systems that ensure delivery of the Royal College of Physicians clinical guidelines for stroke care. By April 2004, PCTs will have to have linked with local specialist stroke services to ensure that general practices can identify, manage, treat and refer through agreed protocols. In that way, we will establish services at all levels—primary care, secondary care, and rehabilitation and community care—thus providing a seamless service for people with stroke.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: Recently, and to his great misfortune, a member of my staff succumbed to a second stroke, having had his first four years ago. Unfortunately, his prognosis is extremely grim. The problems he has experienced are familiar to me because this awful affliction has affected several members of my family.

From meeting this man's family and others, I have become concerned about the fact that when stroke strikes, people who have never been in that position before have no idea what type of services they can expect. This dear man is expected to leave hospital very shortly—the hospital can do no more for him, nor can physiotherapy—and his wife feels that she has been abandoned. She desperately wants to look after him at home, even though that will be extremely difficult, but she believes that social services are likely to tell her, "We're terribly sorry, but that's not an option. Your husband has to go into care because we're not prepared to fund the support that you need at home."

What can I say to that woman? Can I say, "If you want to nurse your husband—our dear friend—at home, you can do so and you will have the support of social services", or is there a class of individual who will invariably be consigned to a nursing home—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Lady cannot make a second speech during an intervention.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister is able to respond to the case that I have outlined.

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend gives a poignant illustration of the difficulties that people experience when seeking post-hospital care. The introduction through the national service framework of the single assessment process, which involves the NHS and social care, should ensure that people do not fall through the net. Closer integration and working between those two arms of the service will be key. In some circumstances, the assessment may indicate that residential care is the appropriate course of action. I have no knowledge of the personal circumstances of those involved in the case my hon. Friend describes, but in some cases residential care is appropriate. What is important is that the family, the carers and the person who has had the stroke are involved as far as possible in reaching what are extremely difficult and important decisions.

The involvement of specialist nurses is also important, as experience of other conditions such as cancer has shown. Macmillan nurses are able to assist people with home care, and the principles that govern their activities are equally applicable to a range of different conditions. Specialist help from people who have a wide range of knowledge and previous experience can help to guide and shape the services that should be established. Certainly, stroke services are not as well developed as cancer services, which have been in place for many years, so we need to look at developing them.

We have just embarked on a 10-year programme on the national service framework stroke standard. As it develops, I hope that fewer people will have a first or repeat stroke because there will be early identification and preventive action, and that there will be general advice and support on how to reduce risks; access to specialist stroke services, based on best evidence; better care and better outcomes to reduce death and disability from stroke; co-ordinated rehabilitation to improve people's chance of regaining independence; and support for carers.

As I said, it is important that standards in the national service framework for older people inform services provided for younger people in an age-appropriate setting.

[Ms Blears]

We are acutely aware that the organisation of stroke care across the country remains variable, and there is still much to do to ensure that services are consistent and that people can access them. In Coventry, there are 10 beds in a dedicated stroke unit at University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS trust, supported by a stroke co-ordinator, a consultant leader and a professor of age-related medicine, which represents good progress.

Approximately 1,000 patients a year are admitted to that hospital with stroke-related disease, but only 30 to 40 per cent. of them go through the dedicated unit, which has a very high occupancy rate. It is recognised that that low coverage of at-risk patients is not desirable, so more efficient use of beds is being examined. However, the stroke co-ordinator's role ensures that all patients admitted to hospital with stroke-related disease receive appropriate care, although there is more work to be done on getting people into the specialist unit. The primary care trust in the area is running an experimental national programme for stroke care called Smartcare, which aims to smooth out the early identification of stroke and the management of treatment across primary and secondary care. It tries to make those processes seamless so that people do not fall through the net. The two-year programme has already begun and we hope to learn national lessons from it.

I hope that my hon. Friends the Members for Coventry, South and for Crosby agree that the Government are committed to improving services for all NHS patients, including those who have had strokes. We have invested substantial extra funds in the NHS and intend to invest even more over the next five years. For people with stroke, initiatives such as the national service framework will do much to drive up standards of care. The improved standards will apply to stroke patients across the country, whatever their age.

I am delighted that my hon. Friends have raised this issue, which is of great concern to patients and their families. As I said, we have made progress, but we have a long way to go before we can be proud of services in every part of the country. However, shining a light on something which, in the past, may have been a Cinderella service is welcome; it can do nothing but good, draw clinicians and researchers together, and help to make the service a priority. When good teamwork and specialist clinicians are involved, there is evidence that the outcomes for people who have suffered a stroke are a lot better than many of us may expect in the early days. I am therefore delighted that my hon. Friends have participated in our debate, and I hope that they accept that we are making progress on aims that we all share.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes to Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 23 May 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON DEVELOPMENT AGENCY BILL *(BY ORDER)*

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 13 June.

Oral Answers to Questions

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Educational Maintenance Allowances

1. **Dr. Brian Iddon** (Bolton, South-East): What assessment she has made of the impact of educational maintenance allowances. [56343]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (John Healey): Independent evaluation of the educational maintenance allowances has been taking place since we introduced them in September 1999. The findings so far are encouraging and show significant increases in the rate of those staying on in full-time education among students from less well-off families. We plan to publish further evaluation reports soon.

Dr. Iddon: According to Roy Whittle, who is the principal of Bolton sixth form college, EMAs have had a significant impact on attendance rates at his college, and therefore on retention rates. Will my hon. Friend take note of a second point that Mr. Whittle has made to me—that he believes that student participation rates would improve significantly if EMAs were paid directly to the students, and not, as at present, to the parents or guardians?

John Healey: I thank my hon. Friend for that comment and question. He is right. His own area, Bolton, is one of the original 15 pilots. There, we are testing payments to parents, but elsewhere we are testing payments direct to students. It is part of the purpose of the pilots to work out not just how well EMAs work, but which model works best and also what impact it has in the longer term on the decisions of young people. We are examining carefully what is happening in Bolton, in particular at Bolton college, and in other EMA pilot areas and in control areas, where we do not yet have EMAs.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): Does the Minister agree that it is not just education maintenance allowances, but the right courses and the right settings, that will attract people to and keep them in full-time or part-time education after 16? What plans does the Minister have to implement the Labour party manifesto commitment to increase significantly the number of sixth form colleges? What effect will that have on existing further education provision, particularly in the light of the dismissive comments from his hon. Friend the Minister for Lifelong Learning about the success of further education in general colleges?

John Healey: I reject absolutely the suggestion that the ministerial team of the Department for Education and Skills is in any way dismissive of the importance of further education colleges. The hon. Gentleman is right that educational maintenance allowances are part of what we need to put in place to ensure that a range of options is available to young people. The EMAs have a particular purpose: to support the young people most likely to drop out of full-time education, and to encourage those from the most deprived areas to continue their education, partly in further education and sixth form colleges and partly in sixth forms at schools.

Vera Baird (Redcar): May I ask my hon. Friend to make haste with further assessment of the impact of EMAs? Will he take into account the problems caused when one authority has EMAs and the neighbouring one does not? My own Redcar and Cleveland authority does not have EMAs, but the neighbouring authority in Middlesbrough does. They are both very poor areas, and of course students from Redcar go to Middlesbrough, and vice versa. For a student who does not have the allowance, sitting next to someone who does have it can act as a deterrent to taking on courses and to continuing them. Can we hurry? If the benefits are good, can they be rolled out as soon as possible?

John Healey: We plan to publish shortly the second year's evaluation of the EMAs. I have much sympathy with my hon. and learned Friend's point about Redcar. Rotherham is also an area without EMAs, so I am conscious that we cannot continue indefinitely with EMA haves and have-nots sitting side by side in the same classroom. The emerging findings of the evaluation of the EMA programme form part of the discussions going on in Government as part of the spending review process.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): May I make a plea to the Minister for the pilot to be extended to Canvey Island in my constituency, where staying-on rates are particularly low compared with other areas in my constituency and in south Essex? That might help us to increase the participation rate and the retention of students in the local sixth form college.

John Healey: I am delighted to welcome that support from the Opposition Benches for our Labour policy and I shall pass it on to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor as a spending review representation. I am sure that it will reinforce our arguments with the Treasury.

Jeff Ennis (Barnsley, East and Mexborough): Given the undoubted success of EMAs in places such as Barnsley and Doncaster, is the Minister considering not only rolling out the programme throughout the rest of the country, but extending it to 19 to 24-year-olds? Might I even suggest that he consider extending the programme into higher education as well?

John Healey: My hon. Friend is racing ahead of our current position. As he rightly says, the evaluation of EMAs and our knowledge of their impact in south Yorkshire suggests that they have a genuine role to play at the critical point at which so many of our young people, especially in poorer areas, drop out of full-time education. That is the principal policy purpose of EMAs and we are currently concentrating on evaluating it and testing its potential much more widely across the country.

School Funding (Budget)

2. **Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire): What proportion of the money announced for schools in the Budget was not previously allocated. [56344]

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): As was made clear at the time of the Budget, £70 million of the resource for education was new money from the capital modernisation fund. Some of that money has already been allocated to fund more centres of vocational excellence in colleges of further education. The remaining £172 million for schools was made available from existing resources in the Department.

Mr. Gray: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer, but she will understand my cynical presumption of new Labour double counting, which has now almost become an art form on the Labour Benches. Does she agree that merely spending more money on schools is not necessarily the answer to everything that is wrong with our schools today in places such as North Wiltshire? Does she recall what she said as a junior Minister in an Adjournment debate that I secured on the subject of the SSA? I asked why £2,701 was spent every year on a secondary child in Wiltshire, while in her constituency that figure is £3,031. In the constituency of the Minister for School Standards, the figure is £3,678 a year and in Tower Hamlets it is a staggering £4,237 a year. Why should children in Wiltshire live in the second worst funded county in England and why should her constituents deserve £1,000 a year more per child than mine?

Estelle Morris: It is slightly inconsistent for somebody who began his question by saying that putting money into schools was not everything and would not do the job then to launch a tirade about why his constituency is the second worst funded LEA. However, as I am sure that I said in the Adjournment debate to which the hon. Gentleman referred, although it is right that children in different parts of the country are financed to support their need—I am sure that he agrees that children in some circumstances need extra resources to support additional needs—the existing SSA system, which was developed by his Government, is now out of date. There are many examples of unfairness, as he has illustrated. As the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has said, we will announce this year the formula that will be available and will be used for the next financial year. The hon. Gentleman can celebrate the fact that the announcement that is made for this financial year will be the last to be made under the current SSA system.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Schools in my constituency greatly value the substantial extra resources that they have received since this Government came to power, but my right hon. Friend will know about the need to recruit teachers so that we can spend all the money that has been allocated. To encourage more students to take up teaching, will she consider in her review of student finance waiving part of their maintenance loans if they commit themselves to work in state schools for five years or so?

Estelle Morris: I know that, as a former teacher, my hon. Friend takes a keen interest in education, so he will be delighted that in the legislation that is currently before the House of Lords, we have taken the power to write off a student loan over a 10-year period. If somebody stays in teaching for 10 years, the loan will be written off in tenths, so the policy both supports retention and is an acknowledgement of the importance of teaching today. We hope that, when the legislation takes effect, we will be able to introduce that policy from September this year. We will announce further details of how we will do so once the legislation has received Royal Assent.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): Will the right hon. Lady tell the House how much money has been taken away from schools by the Chancellor's increases in national insurance rates in the Budget?

Estelle Morris: Teachers in schools and those in local authorities will, like every employer, pay a share of the increased national insurance contributions. There are two points to make about that. Everyone in schools—pupils, teachers and everyone else—will benefit from the improvements in our national health service that that increase in national insurance contributions will bring about. As the hon. Gentleman knows, that has been widely welcomed. I am absolutely confident that every school in this country has an increased budget this year, as they have under every single year of this Government, and that they will be able to find the additional resources to cover the cost of NIC increases.

Mr. Green: I can understand why the right hon. Lady is too embarrassed to give a straight answer, because the figure is £150 million. Before she challenges that, I point out that it comes from a written answer from the Minister for School Standards. So what she has admitted in the past five minutes is that the Government gave education £70 million of new money in the Budget and took away £150 million. That £150 million will disappear year after year.

Does she recognise that parents, teachers and governors have by now seen through her Department's constant habit of twisting the facts? Does not she see that fiddling the Budget figures does not work, and that boasting one day that exclusions are down, then announcing this morning that they are up, but that she is happy about it, is simply not credible? Will she admit that her Department's obsession with managing headlines is now damaging its performance on policy, and that the real victims are children in schools, especially those in our most vulnerable inner city schools?

Estelle Morris: That is rich coming from a Member whose party reduced funding for schools by £120 per pupil over the last five years of Tory Government. The increase in national insurance contributions actually amounts to about £15 per pupil in primary schools and £20 per pupil in secondary schools. The figure that he quoted has to be set against the £1.3 billion settlement that has gone into schools from this year. He is not comparing like with like. The money that has gone through the Budget in the standard spending assessment for this year relates to national insurance contributions that will be repaid not this year, but next year. It is the Government's settlement for education spending for schools next year. I can assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that we will continue to invest. That record of investment and expenditure, bringing about reform and results, is one to be proud of.

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I proceed to the next question, may I say, gently, that the question was too long and the answer was too long? I must get through the Order Paper.

Classroom Assistants

3. **Tony Cunningham** (Workington): If she will make a statement on the role of classroom assistants in schools. [56345]

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. Stephen Timms): Teaching assistants play a very important role in individual support for pupils with special educational needs, in group support on literacy and numeracy needs and in specialist subject support—for example, in science and technology. We expect to consult later this year on proposals for enhancing the role that is played by teaching assistants in improving standards and reducing teacher work load.

Tony Cunningham: I thank the Minister for that answer. I recently visited one of my local primary schools, Victoria infant school, and met the headmistress, Pauline Robertson. The school has eight teachers and nine classroom assistants. Four years ago the standard assessment tests—SATs—results were Cs and Ds; they are now A and A* grades. Much of that is due to the work of classroom assistants. Will the Minister join me in paying tribute to the work of classroom assistants, and will he reconsider their pay and conditions and job descriptions?

Mr. Timms: I very much agree with my hon. Friend and I am glad to join him in his tribute. Since 1998, the number of teaching assistants in schools has risen by about 60 per cent., reflecting the scale of the investment that we are making in our schools and our commitment to raise standards. It is absolutely right that teaching assistants can play a very important part in raising pupil achievement and in reducing teacher work load, which is an important concern for us at the moment. We have been investing heavily in training assistants and we are seeing the benefits of that. My hon. Friend is right that those improvements will have implications for the status and pay of teaching assistants, but that is of course a matter for local education authorities, which are the employers of assistants, not one that is directly for me.

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): While we are on the subject of people in classrooms who are not fully qualified, will the Minister look into the case of my constituent, Mr. Christopher Read, who is sufficiently trusted by the nation to design electronic control systems for Trident nuclear submarines, but who cannot lawfully be given a secure employment contract to teach physics to 14-year-olds? Does the Minister agree that it should be possible for a school to provide secure employment that, while not obviating the requirement for the teacher to obtain fully qualified teacher status, would ensure that constituents such as Mr. Read are not put in the invidious position of having to apply for their own jobs?

Mr. Timms: I have a great deal of sympathy with the hon. Gentleman, who makes an important point. Many people in schools do not have qualified teacher status but play an important part in raising standards. They do an excellent job. We do not want to reduce the standards and quality thresholds that are necessary in our schools. Qualified teacher status is vital for teaching, but others play an important part in schools.

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): Will my hon. Friend accept an invitation to address Dudley teaching assistants? The meeting is organised by my constituent, Maggie Stowe. Teaching assistants have done a fantastic job in my constituency to improve standards, but there are uncertainties about their role. Will my hon. Friend address them directly about their pay and conditions?

Mr. Timms: I am grateful for that invitation, but I was in Dudley last week so it may be a little while before I can pay a return visit, although I would like to do that.

Last November, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State set out a new vision for the school work force. We are developing proposals based on that in consultation with all the teaching unions and the support staff and teaching assistants' unions. The proposals envisage a bigger role for assistants in class supervision, lunchtime administration, administering tests, providing individual support for pupils and covering for teacher absence. I am sure that my hon. Friend's constituents will be encouraged by that and I look forward to putting the proposals directly to them if the opportunity arises.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I join the hon. Members for Workington (Tony Cunningham) and for Stourbridge (Ms Shipley) in praising the valuable contribution of classroom assistants. Like me, the Minister represents a central London seat and he therefore knows that there is a great teacher recruitment crisis in London. Are classroom assistants intended to replace teachers in central London or does he hope that they will contribute to ensuring that vulnerable children in central London get a first-rate education?

Mr. Timms: No, we do not intend classroom assistants to replace teachers. It is vital to continue our successful efforts to recruit more teachers in London. We shall make some announcements about that shortly. Between 1979 and 1997, the number of teachers in England declined by 48,000. Since 1997, that figure has risen by more than 20,000. Indeed, it has increased by more than 9,000 in the past year. We are therefore making genuine progress.

Racial Tension

4. **Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): What proposals she has to reduce racial tension in schools. [56346]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Ivan Lewis): From September, as part of the national curriculum, pupils in secondary schools will, for the first time, be taught about the importance of mutual respect, tolerance and understanding between people of all ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds.

Paul Flynn: Racial tension is remarkable for its scarcity. Most schools, such as those in my constituency, are wonderful crucibles of racial harmony, where the children play, learn and pray together. It is a joy to see an assembly where children have their hands joined together in prayer—some in the Christian tradition, and others with their hands cupped in the Muslim tradition, but all saying the same prayer. Is not it desirable to create as far as possible balanced communities in schools of mixed religions and ethnicities to ensure that we avoid creating ghettos in 10 or 20 years?

Mr. Lewis: I agree with my hon. Friend that we should celebrate and highlight the excellent race relations that characterise so many of our schools where pupils from different backgrounds, religions and cultures are actively encouraged to work together, respect each other and learn about each other's cultures and religions. However, we should not dump on faith schools responsibility for tensions in communities. I believe that faith schools play an important part in promoting better understanding and tolerance between people of different religions and backgrounds. We should celebrate achievement and the excellent relations in most of our schools. We shall continue to build on that.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): That was a very balanced response from the Minister. Does he agree that, where there are cases in schools of persistent racial tension, perhaps involving bullying by certain pupils, persistent offenders might have to be removed from the school? If so, does he also agree that it would be unfortunate, to say the least, if the authority of a head teacher who was determined to stamp out racial tension or racial bullying in his school were to be overruled by an appeals panel reinstating someone whom the head teacher had thought fit to be removed? Will the Minister look again at this question?

Mr. Lewis: I am not sure that being described by the hon. Gentleman as "balanced" will do me much good. On the serious point that he has made, we cannot tolerate racism—particularly racist bullying—in our schools. It is important that we support head teachers in making the decisions that are right for their school, taking account of the circumstances. If a head teacher felt that racist bullying had taken place, it would be inappropriate for an appeals panel to overturn that decision.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Does the Minister agree that, where racial conflict exists in schools, it often arises from competition between neighbouring schools rather than from within an individual school? Will he help to ensure that all schools have better relations with, and a better understanding of, people in other schools in their community, so that such tensions between schools does not become the kind of racial tension that inflicts problems on our communities?

Mr. Lewis: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. In the context of the disturbances in some of our towns during the summer months last year, we have made it clear that a fundamental part of tackling the very real issues in those communities involves schools coming together in a far more organised and systematic way, to bring together young people from different schools and communities to participate in sporting activities, for example, and involving the youth service. It is right that we should move away from an era of competition between schools, and that we should support co-operation and partnership.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): Both sides of the House are united in wanting good race relations in our schools, and, as the Minister has accepted, the vast majority of schools already enjoy harmonious race relations. Is it really necessary, therefore, to require all schools, as of next week, to draft and publish a new race relations policy, and to require them to collect data and analyse pupil performance, admissions, discipline and exclusions by racial group? Is not the Minister concerned that, for good, harmonious, well-led schools, this will be yet another unnecessary bureaucratic burden, and yet another diversion from the central priority of raising education standards for all our children?

Mr. Lewis: No, I do not accept that view. It is important to understand that we have let down far too many children for far too long, for a whole variety of reasons including background and ethnic origin, in terms of under-achievement and low aspirations. One of the fundamental reasons for maintaining those data is to measure our progress and ensure that no child in this country is left behind.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Does my hon. Friend realise that many of us, on both sides of the House, welcome the initiatives that he has introduced, and which the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman has just criticised? Does my hon. Friend also understand, however, that many of us are concerned about some of the changes that have taken place in our communities since last summer, and since 11 September? Would he agree to meet a group of us from particular constituencies to talk about the serious concerns that we are picking up at constituency level about race relations between pupils?

Mr. Lewis: My hon. Friend makes an important point, and I would be delighted to meet him and other colleagues who have similar concerns. It is important to stress that Members of Parliament have an important leadership role, as do local councillors, in tackling these issues and getting to grips with them at an early stage—rather than avoiding or denying them—and being a force for good in their communities.

University Entrants

5. **Tony Wright** (Cannock Chase): What proposals she has to broaden the social class composition of university entrants. [56348]

The Minister for Lifelong Learning (Margaret Hodge): We are determined to encourage more young people from lower income backgrounds to enter higher education. We want to improve staying-on rates and to raise attainment levels in schools, but we have also committed more than £190 million to the excellence challenge programme, to raise the aspirations of young people in some of the most deprived areas of the country. The Higher Education Funding Council is also providing significant additional funding—about £180 million in 2002–03—for widening participation.

Tony Wright: I am grateful for that answer, but is not the difficulty that, although participation rates as a whole have increased, participation of the poorest economic groups has actually declined? That shows that we are getting something wrong—perhaps aspects of the student finance arrangements, as the Audit Commission has pointed out. Can the Minister assure us that, when the results of the student finance review are published, that issue in particular will be tackled? Can she also confirm that the review will not be determined simply by the needs of the Treasury?

Margaret Hodge: My hon. Friend raises a really important point that I have often alluded to in the House. Although we have increased the number of young people entering higher education, the gap between the number of entrants from higher and from lower income groups has not narrowed. If we are serious about social inclusion, we need to tackle that problem. My view has always been that there are three strands to this issue: achieving better attainment levels at school by encouraging people to stay on, getting young people to aim higher, and getting the student funding regime right. We are tackling all three strands to ensure that those from low-income families are not deterred from attending university because of debt, or the fear of debt.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): May I suggest to the hon. Lady that, regardless of the results of the review, the obvious answer is to reintroduce maintenance grants? That is the problem that is holding us back.

Margaret Hodge: That might be the hon. Gentleman's view, but mine is that the issue is much more complicated than that. Raising attainment levels and aspiration levels are difficult matters. I again draw the House's attention to a survey that showed that 44 per cent. of young people in the three lowest socio-economic groups never think of university as an option during their school years. That means that they are not encouraging themselves to aim higher, and nor are their friends, families, teachers or career advisers.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does my hon. Friend agree that we must get the problem with the grant settled soon? Does she also accept that, in impoverished areas such as mine, in which the pits have closed, it is very important that further education buildings are kept open? Is it not pathetic for the Tories to talk about those at the bottom of the scale, given that 10 out of the 11 members of the shadow Cabinet send their kids to public school, including the Leader of the Opposition, who, it is now revealed, sends his kid to Eton? That is not a good message, is it?

Margaret Hodge: I certainly feel that the experience of sending one's own children to school adds hugely to one's understanding of the issue, and I must say that I would never have denied my four children the privilege of a state education. I also recognise the importance, as my hon. Friend says, of ensuring proper further education opportunities for our young people throughout the country. We will settle the issue of student funding as soon as a proper, sustainable system is in place. The issue must be seen in the context of all the things that we want to do in education—including in further education.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does the Minister accept that many families have no history whatever of participation in further and higher education, and that as a result no member of such families is able to act as a role model and give advice? Does she agree that more universities could adopt schools in socially deprived areas? Through the links thereby developed, they would remove apprehension and encourage youngsters with potential to realise it in full by applying for a university place.

Margaret Hodge: The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely important and pertinent point. It is important that universities move away from their traditional practice, which was simply to wait for applications to come to them. They must go out and engage with the community, and particularly with young people who have not considered university as an option and whose parents probably did not go to university. I reassure the hon. Gentleman that through the excellence challenge programme, we are seeing a sea change in the way in which universities are responding. Every time I visit a university, I am shown the links that they are establishing with young children at school. It is never too soon—we can start at the age of 11, 12 or 13—to raise the aspirations of talented young children in our schools.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): My hon. Friend will be aware that the number of students studying the sciences, particularly chemistry and physics, is woefully low. Is it not plain that the abolition of maintenance grants was a disincentive to youngsters from poorer backgrounds entering higher education in the first place? If they do enter higher education, they tend to do courses that lead to higher paid jobs—it is fairly widely recognised that doing science will not lead to highly remunerated jobs. Is not the reintroduction of grants the answer?

Margaret Hodge: There is no evidence to suggest that young people from lower income backgrounds are choosing not to go to university because of the funding system. We are proactive in this matter because we want to reduce the participation gap. Furthermore, although there is a decline in the number of people going into engineering, science and related studies, the causes are far more complicated. Following the Roberts review, we are beginning to see what policies we can implement in our schools and beyond, and across gender, to encourage more young people to take up sciences in schools and go on to study them at university. It is not a question of the money they earn afterwards; they can earn plenty of money, and there are good career opportunities for them in the science-related subjects, too.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Encouraging high aspirations on the part of poor children is laudable; no one would deny that. But is it not particularly tragic that Her Majesty's Government's education policies have militated against those children achieving their aspirations? Is it not true that abolishing the assisted places scheme and making it harder for good grammar schools to maintain selective systems have damaged the chances of poor children? Would it not be absolutely fatal if universities were to skew their admission standards from an impartial assessment of scholarship?

Margaret Hodge: The hon. Gentleman ought to look at the facts which reveal that not many young people from working class backgrounds took advantage of the assisted places schemes. I would be happy to share that information with the hon. Gentleman if he so wishes. Since the Government have been in office, attainment levels have risen among 11-year-olds and 16-year-olds through to 18-year-olds and entry to university. The Government want to ensure that our brightest and best kids get opportunities at all universities. We are asking the universities to ensure that they have sophisticated means to hunt out the best, and many are doing this of their own accord. We want an intellectual elite, not a social elite.

Truancy

6. **Caroline Flint** (Don Valley): What measures she is proposing to tackle the problem of truancy. [56349]

8. **Colin Burgon** (Elmet): What further plans she has for helping teachers to improve discipline in schools. [56351]

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Estelle Morris): It is vital that we tackle both truancy and bad behaviour in schools. In the past five years, we have invested more than £600 million to support teachers in dealing with bad behaviour and tackling truancy. Earlier this month, we allocated a further £66 million of funding to targeted local education authorities to pilot our long-term strategy on improving behaviour and attendance.

Caroline Flint: I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the introduction of pupil referral units, which give many children who have been excluded or are frequent truants the chance of an education. However, my right hon. Friend will know that parents are part of the problem. In the Banbury case, one of the excuses used over two years about why a daughter was not in school was that a dog ate her trainers. I heard of an excuse used by a local parent after a week's half-term holiday. When the education welfare officer called round, she was confronted with the excuse that the school uniform had been nicked off the washing line. I did not realise that school uniform was such a desirable fashion item.

As we have found in Doncaster when truancy sweeps are held, many of the truants are found in the company of a parent, with no valid excuse. When visits are made to homes, parents have no valid excuse for why their child is not in school. However, the truancy teams have no powers to return a child to school if he or she is in the company of a parent. Can we strengthen the law in that regard?

Estelle Morris: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. If we are to tackle the problem of truancy, we have to demand that parents work with schools. We cannot ask everything of teachers, nor can we blame schools for all the ills of society. The schools that have been successful have worked carefully with parents, and my hon. Friend gave good examples. She may be interested to hear that in the past four weeks we have held truancy sweeps in more than 230 places, mainly in urban areas. We funded the police to work with education welfare officers and more than 600 children were returned directly to school. For the parents who were with the other children—a sizeable number—the message was clear: "This is not on. Get your child in school and give teachers and schools a chance."

Colin Burgon: In Tuesday's debate on discipline in schools, I was able to raise the issue of Team Teach, which is a programme that attempts to equip teachers with the necessary verbal and physical skills to confront difficult situations. Will my right hon. Friend evaluate that scheme and, if she thinks that it is of value, will she ensure that it is rolled out to all the secondary schools to which it would be applicable?

Estelle Morris: I am interested to hear about that scheme, because I do not know about it. I will certainly evaluate it. If it proved to be a good project, we would make it available to schools so that they could choose whether to implement it. The point that my hon. Friend makes about training teachers is important. For too long, teachers could train to be teachers without any guidance on how to enforce discipline in schools. Children cannot learn unless their classroom is well ordered. Therefore, my hon. Friend will be pleased to learn that we will ensure that every teacher who completes training has had a sound grounding in how to maintain discipline in schools. Indeed, the project that he mentions could be used in initial teacher training as well for continuous professional development.

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): The latest Ofsted report has clearly stated that poor behaviour by a minority of pupils is the major reason for teachers leaving the profession, and in recent written answers the Government admitted that they do not know how many teachers and pupils are attacked by other pupils. When will the Government discover the scale of the problem so that they can deal effectively with it?

Estelle Morris: The hon. Gentleman calls for us to collect information, and earlier in the week during the Opposition day debate, a Conservative Front Bencher said that we should collect data on children's violence against children. Normally, we hear from the Opposition about the need to reduce bureaucracy and paperwork. Indeed, only this Question Time, the Conservatives have said that they do not want to collect figures on achievement by ethnic minorities, because that is added bureaucracy. They should get their message straight.

We collect reasons for exclusion, so if the hon. Gentleman wishes to find out how many exclusions are because of violence towards teachers, he can do so. Without checking—so I am a little cautious about the figures—the number of such incidents has fallen slightly in the past year. However, I make nothing of that and I do not claim it as any improvement. It is important to collect data, as we do on exclusions, but we do not want to demand of schools that they collect data and return them to a host of organisations after every incident of child violence. We would sooner spend our resources, time and effort on supporting teachers in trying to eradicate that behaviour. That is the key to raising standards.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): Will the Secretary of State look at the excellent initiative launched by Devon and Cornwall police with all the local authorities to stop truancy in the two counties? In so doing, will she hold discussions with the local authority in Devon and perhaps look at some of the work carried out in some Devon schools? Vyv Game, the deputy principal of Exmouth community college—the largest school in Devon—said:

> "If we can recognise the reasons for someone's behaviour we can try to do something about it. Prevention is better than cure."

If the right hon. Lady agrees with that, will she tell us how depriving families of income helps in that understanding?

Estelle Morris: My starting point is that it is crucial to get children in school and to keep them there to enable them to learn. One thing I can guarantee is that if a child from a financially deprived home truants from school, that child will not learn and attain. All that happens is that the cycle of deprivation passes into the next generation and we never, never break it.

My starting point is that we should begin with support and cajoling; we should work with the parent and the child, try alternative forms of curriculum and as many innovative things as possible; but if, at the end of the day, the parent still does not accept their responsibility to send a child to school, we are faced with a decision. We must either turn our back, shrug and say, "There, let us condemn that child to a lifetime of poverty as well", or we take tough measures. Courts and others are right to take tough steps, but they are end of the road measures. In some recent cases, we have seen that they worked and that children are back in school and learning. At the end of the day, that is what we want.

Mr. David Watts (St. Helens, North): May I inform my right hon. Friend that many schools in St. Helens face major discipline problems due to yobs trespassing on school premises? At present, that is not a criminal action. Will my right hon. Friend look into whether we can change the law to give our children more protection in school?

Estelle Morris: I shall certainly look into that matter. I am not quite clear whether my hon. Friend is talking about trespass during school time or out of school time. When one visits a school, one of the saddest things—although it is necessary—is to see how much has to be spent on securing buildings because of the behaviour of people in the community. The irony is that sometimes the school is the best-equipped place to serve the community, yet it is destroyed by the actions of an irresponsible few. I take my hon. Friend's point and although I am not sure what my conclusions will be, I am happy to look into it.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): The Secretary of State has loyally given a following wind to the Prime Minister's latest headline grabbing gimmick—withdrawing benefits from parents of truants—and in the debate on Tuesday her hon. Friends talked about holding consultations to work out whether that would be practical, so why was I told, when I tabled a question to her Department on the subject, that any consultation would be undertaken by the Department for Work and Pensions?

Estelle Morris: Because child benefit is administered by the Department for Work and Pensions—the answer is quite simple. In the name of joined-up government—that is what we are—I am in close contact with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, and when the consultation takes place, no doubt part of it will reflect the contributions made by my Department to that debate. The important thing is that we debate and consult—I do not care two hoots about which Department that emanates from.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): Is it not the case that the presence of drugs in schools is a major impediment to overall discipline, and that young people in school who are under the influence of drugs, taking drugs or dealing in drugs are not in a condition to learn? They affect their own learning and that of others. Do not schools need to work with the police, local authorities and social and health services to deal with that matter? What are my right hon. Friend and her Department doing to help local education services and schools to tackle that particular problem?

Estelle Morris: My hon. Friend is right. We learn quickly that we cannot protect schools from what is going on in the wider community. Often, schools are havens—well ordered and disciplined places; sometimes they are the most disciplined place in a child's life. However, we cannot always protect children from the activities of the neighbourhood so, sadly, my hon. Friend is right: there are incidents of drug taking and inappropriate behaviour in schools. There is no easy solution. That is why the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis), who has responsibility for young people and learning, held a seminar this week where we could gather together those people who are beginning to develop good practice and take it forward. Without going into that matter, my hon. Friend made one important point: this has to be about all the services coming together: police, social services, the health authorities and mentors as well as the education service. If we can get the expertise from all those professionals, we may stand a chance. On top of that, we may make progress with parental support. I do not underestimate the nature of the difficulties, but progress has to be made as the problem is a barrier to real social cohesion and advancement.

Behavioural Special Needs

7. **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham): What plans she has to improve provision for children with behavioural special needs. [56350]

The Minister for Lifelong Learning (Margaret Hodge): Our new special educational needs code of practice provides sound advice on how best to meet the needs of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. We have also established a working group to look at the future role of special schools, including provision for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. The group will be reporting to Ministers in the autumn.

Tim Loughton: In autism awareness year, the incidence of reported autism among schoolchildren is at record levels and the National Autistic Society reported recently that one in 86 children have educational difficulties associated with autism or Asperger syndrome. Is the Minister aware of the Mental Health Foundation report that estimated the lifetime cost resulting from autism and associated learning disabilities at more than £2.9 million per person, of which 70 per cent. is made up of living costs and only 7 per cent. is spent on education? Is that not a false economy and should she not be doing more to redress that imbalance and to recruit specialist teachers to work in the classroom to identify the problems and intervene at an early stage to give children with autism a better chance of getting a better start as adults, thereby saving extra costs later in life?

Margaret Hodge: I agree that we need to invest and get better at identifying children with special educational needs and those relating to autism as soon as we can. We have started the work on that. We are about to produce guidance on children from nought to two, which will ensure that we can work across departments—not only with the education services, but with social and health services—to identify children's needs earlier. We then have to ensure that we have the proper services in place to respond to those needs so that those children can develop their potential. We are at the start of developing those services. We have a lot more to do, but we are on the right track.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): I am pleased to hear the Minister's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), but does she realise that although that is what she says in the House, what is happening out in the real world is different? Will she admit that many parents of children with special educational needs have long and tiring struggles to enforce the terms of their child's statement simply because of the vicious triangle between the three departments—health, education and social services—which do not work together at present? Will she undertake to work more closely with other Departments and encourage that approach right down the line to the local authorities and, in so doing, will she also find out how many children are autistic and have other behavioural problems? At present, the Government do not have that information. I am pleased to hear that they are beginning work on it. Will she give the House an undertaking that she will accelerate that work? If we do not know how many children will need special education in the years to come, how can we possibly plan for it?

Margaret Hodge: Our record in government is much better than that of the Conservatives when they were in office. One only needs to consider the fivefold increase in the standards fund, the £220 million access initiative, and the extra £760 that we are going to invest in every child during these two spending review periods to realise that we are putting our money where our mouth is. I agree with the hon. Lady that there is much more to do. We need to get better data and that is why we ran the pilot in July 2001 among 200 schools to get some idea of the broad range of special educational needs. We are considering implementing that throughout the country in 2004. I also agree with her that we need to get better at working across professions.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

The Solicitor-General was asked—

Crown Prosecution Service

33. **Dr. Phyllis Starkey** (Milton Keynes, South-West): What assessment she has made of the results of the trials under which the Crown Prosecution Service rather than the police decides on the charge against defendants. [56378]

The Solicitor-General (Ms Harriet Harman): In his review of the criminal justice system, Sir Robin Auld proposed that the CPS should take over responsibility for charging suspects, which is currently done by the police. To identify the practical issues that would need to be addressed if that change were made, we have set up pilot schemes in five areas, and the results of those pilot schemes will be looked at this summer.

Dr. Starkey: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for her answer, but may I tell her that a couple of my constituents, who have had experience of the CPS either refusing to press charges or downgrading charges against defendants, have been outraged by those decisions and the total lack of adequate explanations to them, as victims of crime, as to why the CPS took those decisions? May I ask her to ensure that, in considering the trial, communicating the decision to the victim is also considered and that, if the CPS takes the decision, it should communicate its reasons for doing so to the victim and not leave that to the police, who often disagree with the decision of the CPS?

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend raises a number of important points. First, she talks about charges that have been made by the police subsequently being dropped and the disappointment that that causes the victim. It is also unfair on the defendants to have charges hanging over them. One of the charging pilot schemes' objectives is to ensure that a charge should never be made in cases that are going nowhere because of insufficient evidence and that therefore it is recognised from the outset that it is not a runner. That certainly appears to be happening in those pilots.

As for the explanation to the victim if charges have to be dropped or changed, we want to ensure that far fewer charges are in fact dropped or changed, but in the old days a charge could be dropped and sometimes the victim would not be told and only read about it in the newspapers. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to suggest that that is quite wrong. That is why we have rolled out a national programme under which the CPS tells victims what is happening in a case and explains why it is happening.

Norman Baker (Lewes): Does the Solicitor-General accept that there is a further problem: sometimes the police second-guess the CPS and do not put evidence before it because they wrongly believe that the CPS will not prosecute, whereas it may well do so? Is that not a particular problem with sex offences, where the police perhaps conclude that, if there is no victim statement, they are unable to proceed with the case, whereas the CPS would be prepared to consider such cases on the basis of other evidence that might accrue?

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman is right. The problem is not just that cases are charged and then dropped, but that good cases are not taken to court because the police think that the CPS would not consider that there was enough evidence. The idea of the charging pilot schemes is that the CPS should work closely with the police at the outset, give advice about the nature of the evidence needed and assess the amount of available evidence, so that it can get the charge and the evidence right and the case can proceed swiftly to court.

Youth Justice Inspectorate

34. **Mr. Bill O'Brien** (Normanton): If she will make a statement on the progress made by the new inspectorate on youth justice issues; and if she will make a statement. [56379]

The Solicitor-General: The inspectorates of the Crown Prosecution Service, the police and the courts carried out a joint inspection into youth justice in February last year. Today, they have published the report of their follow-up inspection, and I have placed a copy of it in the Library. The target of halving the time from arrest to sentence has been achieved, but there are still some areas of the country where further progress needs to be made.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that reply. Youth crime is causing a great deal of concern among many of my constituents, including the elderly and vulnerable members of our community. Street crime and the theft of mobile phones are significant among the crimes committed by young people. I am interested in the work of the inspectorate and its proposals on how to crack down on youth crime. What are its proposals on the delivery of youth justice and the successful prosecution of criminals in the courts? What help is to be given to the victims of crime?

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend asks about the inspectorate, which gives me the opportunity to thank warmly the inspectorates of the courts, the police and, in particular, the CPS, which led the inspection, for the work that they have done. The combined inspectorate has gone through things with a fine-toothed comb, not looking just at the police, the courts or at the prosecution, but at how the entire system is working, and it is making proposals. It has been able to identify good practice, and encourage others to build on it, as well as to note those areas where more progress needs to be made. There has been progress on our pledge to halve the time that it takes to bring a youth to justice, which is a significant achievement on which the police, the courts and the CPS should be congratulated. We are making further efforts in relation to street crime, of which the House will no doubt be aware.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I am delighted that the Government have adopted what was effectively the content of my ten-minute Bill, albeit 10 years later, to reduce the time taken to bring young offenders to trial. Does the Solicitor-General share my concern that young offenders who are terrorising and vandalising towns such as Thirsk in the Vale of York are sometimes arrested two or three times in as many months but are simply not being prosecuted? What does she propose to do about that?

The Solicitor-General: Our objective is to ensure that more offenders are brought to justice. The hon. Lady makes the point about youth offenders and thanks the Government for taking up her Bill. I wonder why the previous Government did not take up her Bill—*[Interruption.]* They could easily have taken up the issue, but I shall move swiftly on.

When we took office, the average time between the arrest and conviction of a young person was 142 days, which was too long. We are proud of the progress that has been made on that, but we are not complacent, and more needs to be done.

Death in Custody

35. **Mr. Chris Bryant** (Rhondda): What criteria are applied when deciding whether to prosecute where a death in police custody has occurred. [56380]

The Solicitor-General: When deciding whether to prosecute, in all cases, including those in which there has been a death in a prison or a police station, the Crown Prosecution Service applies the code for Crown prosecutors. First, it considers whether there is enough evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction, and, secondly, whether the prosecution is in the public interest.

Mr. Bryant: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that answer. I am sure that she will be delighted, as I am, that the number of deaths in custody has fallen dramatically in the last few years; indeed, it has more than halved in the last four years, which is good news. Every time there is a death in custody, however, local communities' trust in the police is undermined. How can we make sure, in any consultation process that we undergo to change the system of setting criteria, that we increase public confidence in the system to deliver justice for everyone?

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend is right. People need to be absolutely confident that those who work in the criminal justice system, whether in the police or in prisons, are not above the law. The Attorney-General is well aware of the concerns that have been expressed about prosecutions after deaths in custody. He has instigated a review and consulted and involved in that process not only the prisons, the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the courts but the families of those who have died in custody. The state has a special responsibility for people in custody and we must make sure that the system for answering relatives' questions after someone has died in custody is open, fair and accountable.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Would the Solicitor-General comment on the remarks made by his honour Judge Gerald Butler in 1998, when reporting at the request of the then Director of Public Prosecutions on the quality of decision making by the CPS in relation to deaths in custody? He said:

> "There is a powerful public interest in the prosecution of police officers who have committed an offence of such gravity".

Despite having the same burden of proof in both inquests and criminal trials—beyond reasonable doubt—why have verdicts of unlawful killing recorded at inquests when a person has died in police custody not led to more prosecutions of police? Would she comment on whether there is a danger that, because the CPS is so closely linked to the police service, the self-interest of the police has led to the interests of justice being overridden?

The Solicitor-General: It is very important that the Crown Prosecution Service maintain its independence, that that be recognised, and that it make independent decisions. It is also important, however, that investigations have a measure of independence so that they can command public confidence. His honour Judge Butler, to whom the hon. Gentleman referred, has been involved in the review, which is focusing on prosecutions. He has looked at the paperwork in previous cases. The Attorney-General has gone wider and has not only looked at the different agencies involved but talked to the relatives concerned.

One of the problems is that relatives often feel left in the dark. They do not know the difference between inquest issues, they do not know what points have to be proved in a criminal court and they are, generally speaking, not told what is going on. As well as tackling delay in the system, we also look to the review to ensure that victims' relatives are kept involved in, and informed of, the process.

Business of the House

12.35 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Leader of the House tell us the business for next week?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): I am pleased to announce that we will have a busy week after the Whitsun recess. The business is as follows:

MONDAY 10 JUNE—Consideration in Committee and remaining stages of the National Insurance Contributions Bill.

TUESDAY 11 JUNE—Progress on remaining stages of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill.

WEDNESDAY 12 JUNE—Conclusion of remaining stages of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill.

THURSDAY 13 JUNE—Progress on remaining stages of the Enterprise Bill.

FRIDAY 14 JUNE—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the following week will be:

MONDAY 17 JUNE—Conclusion of remaining stages of the Enterprise Bill.

TUESDAY 18 JUNE—There will be a debate on European Affairs on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

WEDNESDAY 19 JUNE—I should like to advise the House that subject to receiving a message from the other place, the day will consist of a half-day Opposition debate until 7 o'clock, followed by a motion to concur with their Lordships on the establishment of a Joint Committee on the House of Lords.

THURSDAY 20 JUNE—There will be a debate on Energy: Towards 2050, on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 21 JUNE—Private Member's Bills.

The House will also wish to know that on Tuesday 18 June 2002, there will be a debate relating to authorisation of human and veterinary medicines in European Standing Committee C.

Details of the relevant documents will be given in the *Official Report.*

[Tuesday 18 June 2002:

European Standing Committee C—Relevant European Union documents: 13361/01; 14591/01: Authorisation of human and veterinary medicines; 6240/02; Authorisation of traditional herbal medicinal products. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Reports: HC 152-xii and HC 152-xxiii (2000–01)].

Mr. Forth: I thank the Leader of the House for giving us that statement. Given his legendary ability to read documents at high speed and digest every detail of their content, may I assume that he has thoroughly absorbed document HC 844, issued by the parliamentary ombudsman? Assuming that he has, I will not need to remind him of its contents. However, with your permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to give one quotation from the report—although I could give many. On page 16, paragraph 4.13, the ombudsman says:

> "Throughout this part of my investigation I had received no direct communication from the Cabinet Office . . . they appeared to be withholding papers, which they readily acknowledged existed, from my investigation. I was deeply concerned at this development. Such a refusal strikes at the very heart of my Office's function. Together with the lack of co-operation from the Home Office it made it impossible for me to corroborate the account contained in Sir Anthony's report with respect to the information sought by Mr. M. Given this attitude, which had effectively made my investigation unsustainable, I found myself in the position of being quite unable to confirm"—

and so on.

That goes to the heart of the Government's repeated claims that they are in favour of freedom of information, open government, transparency and clarity. Will the Leader of the House therefore arrange for an urgent debate to be held on the matter, because what the ombudsman says about the Government is very serious indeed? He is making serious allegations about the attitude of Ministers—and, I am sad to say, the officials under their control—to the whole process of investigation. I hope that the Leader of the House will accept that the matter merits urgent attention by the House, because it also goes to the heart of the relationship between the House and the Government. I hope that we shall receive his assurances on that subject.

May I remind the Leader of the House of what the Prime Minister said yesterday in reply to a brief exchange? Asked whether he agreed

> "with the former membership secretary in his own constituency that the Labour party has ceased to become a democratic movement and has become a centralised mail order business",

the Prime Minister replied, rather typically:

> "I do not believe that he"—

that is, the former membership secretary of the Sedgefield constituency—

> "would have said that at all."—[*Official Report*, 22 May 2002; Vol. 386, c. 291–92.]

Will the Leader of the House therefore tell us whether a journal called *Renewal* exists, or whether he is aware of it? If it does exist, can he confirm whether it said—this is allegedly a quote from *Renewal*—that the Labour party had been

> "replaced by mail order politics, where everything was run from the centre"?

I raise that question because yesterday the Prime Minister stated that he did not believe the person concerned would have said that, but those words are apparently a direct quotation from that individual. In order to protect his Prime Minister, surely the Leader of the House has to make a statement as early as possible to clarify whether the Prime Minister knows about that, whether the individual said those words or whether the Prime Minister, regrettably, was unable to clarify the truth of the matter to the House.

On another matter, Lord Levy is described in a newspaper today as

> "an invaluable one-man money-raising machine."

I would call Lord Levy Tony's No. 1 crony—but no matter how one characterises him, is the Leader of the House satisfied that it is credible that a committee of six people, which includes Lord Levy, can vet donations to the Labour party? That is directly connected with Ministers' oft-repeated boasts that the Labour party is clean and above board with regard to donations and financial contributions.

We need to know whether the poachers and gamekeepers are indistinguishable, and whether the Labour party is serious, as it claims, about vetting its

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donations. Surely the Leader of the House, with his reputation for integrity, wants to clear that up. Can we have a brief statement from the Government about the relationship between donations to the Labour party, the committee that has been set up, and Lord Levy's role in that committee?

Mr. Cook: Yesterday I made a speech in which I suggested that if we want to restore the respect of the public for Parliament, we should try to rise above our tribal instincts. However, the right hon. Gentleman makes it terribly difficult for me rise above my tribal instincts, and I think that today I will fail miserably.

I have had an opportunity to study the ombudsman's report; I took it off the web this morning. I know that the right hon. Gentleman has disdain for anything that smacks of the web or the internet, but I recommend it to him as an easy and convenient way of getting access to public documents. As he has quoted paragraph 4.13, I refer him to paragraph 4.20, where he will find that the ombudsman states that he found

"very little in the way of documentation"—

Mr. Forth: Exactly.

Mr. Cook: On the contrary, the ombudsman had access to all the documents in the Cabinet Office. I concede that there was a delay, for which the Cabinet Office apologised. However, he did gain access to the documents. He sets out in paragraph 4.19 and 4.18 that he saw all there was to see, and found that very little documentation had been delayed.

The ombudsman's conclusion was precisely the same as the conclusion reached by Sir Anthony Hammond. Indeed, he explicitly said that he reached the same conclusion. I see no point in wasting the time of the House in examining further a matter that has been exhaustively examined by Sir Anthony Hammond, and on which the ombudsman has reached the same conclusion. Had the conclusion been different, there might have been a point to the right hon. Gentleman's question, but as the conclusion is the same, there is no reason why the House should waste its effort and time on that.

As for the other matters raised by the right hon. Gentleman, I regret to say that I have not recently had an opportunity to hold discussions with the former membership secretary of the Prime Minister's constituency party. I am aware of *Renewal*. As the right hon. Gentleman is also aware of it, he may know that it recently carried a very interesting speech by myself, which it reprinted as an article.

Renewal is one of the many examples of vigorous, open, intellectual and democratic debate in the labour movement. I would have more respect for the right hon. Gentleman's concern about democracy in the Labour party if he did something about democracy in the Conservative party. For instance, perhaps he should respond to the demand of Conservative activists that they should elect officers within their party, as we elect officers in the Labour party.

I have told the House before that I believe that Lord Levy has played a valuable and useful role in British foreign policy. During my time as Foreign Secretary, I found him very valuable in making sure that we had access in the middle east, and that we were able to get our message across. I regret very much the fact that his being engaged in trying to find a way forward in an area of great tension, where there is the potential for a great explosion, is constantly run down by the media and by the Conservative party.

As for the vetting of donations, I think it entirely healthy and proper that we should set up a committee—and be open about the membership of that committee—to consider the implications of any donation that we take. I wish that the Conservative party would now—finally—tell us from whom it took donations when the Conservatives were in office. The Conservatives can do it—I presume that they have not burnt the files, so they are somewhere in central office. The only donations they ever owned up to were those that they were obliged to disclose after we laid a legal requirement on them.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Ask the ombudsman.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend makes an interesting suggestion. I may be getting tribal again, but perhaps I should encourage the ombudsman to make an inquiry at central office and see just how long the delay is before the Conservatives finally tell us from what companies and what countries they took money when they were the Government of Great Britain.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): May I express my thanks to the Leader of the House for giving us a second day on the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill—time that we requested and others agreed was necessary? In the light of recent developments, it is extremely important that we discuss those issues, especially those that were not covered in Committee.

While I am in a grateful mood, may I also thank the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) for giving added publicity to my question to the Prime Minister yesterday? I am very grateful.

I read with great interest and welcome the speech that the Leader of the House made to the Hansard Society last night, but does he agree that the House must find better ways to discuss urgent and topical issues more thoroughly? Let me give two examples. First, there is the funding of democracy and political parties, which has just been mentioned. The Prime Minister goes on television to talk about it, the chairman of the Labour party talks about it, two prominent Conservative MPs were talking about it yesterday—even the CBI is now talking about state funding of political parties. When will the Government give the House time to debate that issue properly?

Secondly, I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to the adjudication by the pensions appeal tribunal yesterday in the case of a gentleman who served this country well in the Gulf and now suffers from Gulf war syndrome. The right hon. Gentleman will know of my interest as a long-time member of the Royal British Legion, which is concerned about the matter. Does he realise that the report in today's *Daily Express*, which I assume is now required Government reading, given that it is clearly their favourite newspaper, not only refers to the pay-out announced for Mr. Shaun Rusling, but states that his claim was adjusted—I think that is the best way to put it—by the Ministry of Defence so that it would not refer specifically to Gulf war syndrome and so open the door for other applicants? May we have an urgent statement from the MOD, not only about that adjudication, but about the way in which the MOD appears to have fiddled it?

Mr. Cook: First, I thank the hon. Gentleman for what he said about the arrangements for the Report stage the week after the Whitsun recess. In the light of the representations that were made, it was right to ensure that there was adequate time for the remaining stages of that Bill. On a number of occasions since the general election the Government have listened to representations about remaining stages and provided the House with adequate time to explore important issues. We regard the Bill as a very important one, which deals with a serious issue.

I also appreciate the hon. Gentleman's comments about my speech yesterday. I fully agree with him about the importance of making sure that our proceedings are topical and deal with the public interest. I look forward to the forthcoming report from the Select Committee on Procedure, which I hope will enable us to shorten the period of notice for oral questions and thereby ensure greater topicality in those that come before the House.

I cannot promise a debate on party funding because, as the hon. Gentleman will have observed, we have a crowded schedule at this time of year. My impression is that there is a lively debate going on about party funding, and the hon. Gentleman will be aware that no step can be taken in respect of party funding without a decision of the House, and therefore a debate in the House.

I am aware of the pensions appeal tribunal's judgment with regard to Gulf war syndrome. As the hon. Gentleman knows, it is a very recent judgment, and it is right for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence to consider it carefully and respond to it in due course. However, the hon. Gentleman can take it as read that we take what has been said by the tribunal extremely seriously.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): My right hon. Friend will know that the Prime Minister is making an important speech today about science and research. He will know also that the spin-off from science and research in universities in the north-east will be crucial to the future prosperity of the north-east. Can we have a debate on this issue soon—although preferably not next week—so that we can explore the best ways of improving job creation by [illegible] universities?

Mr. Cook: I think that my right hon. Friend carried the House with him when he suggested that any debate that we may have should not take place next week. I very much welcome the Prime Minister's decision to give a major speech on science, research and technology. Sometimes, because of the press pressures on us and the agenda on the front pages, we overlook what are the fundamentally important and strategically significant issues in our nation, and I welcome the fact that the Prime Minister has chosen to highlight one of those strategic questions. My right hon. Friend may be aware that there is a forthcoming debate in Westminster Hall on the report by the Committee on Science and Technology, when I am sure many of these points can be aired.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I hope that the Procedure Committee will not disappoint the Leader of the House when it produces its report on parliamentary questions, but my question to him is somewhat different. Although I strongly regret the decision of the House 10 days ago to reject the Modernisation Committee's proposals for a Committee of Nomination for appointments to Select Committees, I believe that the House could well return to the matter at a later date, no doubt on the initiative of the Liaison Committee. However, the debate 10 days ago also concerned proposals for increased facilities and resources for Select Committees. Is the Leader of the House in a position yet to indicate when he may make a statement about those additional facilities and resources to enable Select Committees to do the vital job that they perform for the House of Commons?

Mr. Cook: I share the hon. Gentleman's regret. I must say that I was intrigued by the fact that 90 Conservative Members voted against the proposal, thereby reinforcing the existing powers of the Government Whips. No doubt they have their own reasons for having supported the Government Whips—and some day we may be able to fathom them. In the meantime, I repeat that although I regret the outcome, as Leader of the House I have to respect it. The House reached a conclusion. I am not going to concede that I was wrong—I still believe that I was right—but I do concede that the House has made a decision, and it would therefore take a very compelling argument for us to revisit the issue.

We should not lose sight of the fact that last week the House approved all the many other items from the Modernisation Committee report, and as the hon. Gentleman says, those included increased resources and staff for Select Committees. I am pleased to say to the House that, having got the approval of the House last week, we are making all progress on that, and I anticipate that those resources will be put in place over the next Session.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): The Leader of the House will be aware that at the moment President Bush is in Europe and, among other things, is seeking support for possible military action against Iraq. As President Bush has already consulted the Prime Minister on this matter, when will Parliament debate any possible action? When will the Government publish the dossier proving that Iraq has acquired weapons of mass destruction? Will we, as the Foreign Secretary said recently on the Frost programme, first seek a new mandate from the United Nations before we even consider President Bush's request?

Mr. Cook: As I have said to the House on a number of occasions, no decision on that matter has been taken, and a decision may never be taken. Plainly, should a decision be taken, the House would have to be consulted and there would have to be a full debate. With respect, I think that we have proved ourselves very willing to consult the House and debate these matters in the House, as witness the six full days of debate which we gave to the use of military force in Afghanistan. As for the other matter that my hon. Friend raises, it is clear that one of our strengths in the war against terrorism in Afghanistan was the

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international coalition of support. Plainly, any action in Iraq must also look for similar international support, and the UN is a good place to build such support.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): Will the Leader of the House give a progress report on his deliberations with the Lord Chancellor about amending the Data Protection Act 1998 so that Members of Parliament can once again represent their constituents' interests properly?

Mr. Cook: As the House will understand, I share Members' concern that when they are approached by constituents, they cannot take action on their behalf because it might breach the Data Protection Act. Plainly, that is not a suitable way in which to work; when our constituents approach us they expect us to do something—that is why they come to us. I am pleased to tell the hon. Gentleman that we are making progress on the proposal to introduce a statutory instrument to cater for the position of Members of Parliament and other elected people in public life; I hope that next month we will be able to clear the matter up.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is aware of the Government's intention to fund the nursing care of residents in care homes, so that they benefit financially. Is he also aware, however, that a significant number of care homes, including Highfield Holdings in my constituency, have raised their residential fees by the amount paid for nursing care? Highfield Holdings has raised fees by about £69 a week, which means that residents are paying exactly the same as they were before, and are not getting the financial benefit that the Government intended. That is unacceptable and morally reprehensible. Will my right hon. Friend arrange for that to be debated in the House so that Members can express their views on that disgraceful action?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises an issue of concern to many Members who have been approached by constituents, and I fully understand and share his concern. The problem is known to the Department of Health, which has written to a number of homes that are raising their prices. Ultimately, they are private commercial institutions, and pricing is under their control, but the measure was introduced as public policy to relieve pressure on residents in those homes and their families. I very much hope that the people who run those homes will recognise that residents and their relatives should benefit most from that public money.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Can we have an early debate on the state of the food processing industry, with particular reference to the Albert Fisher group, which went into receivership today, jeopardising 3,000 jobs across the country? As the Leader of the House knows, Fisher Foods is the largest private sector employer in my constituency, with 700 jobs in its Fraserburgh and Peterhead factories, and this is an extremely anxious time for the workers and their families. What role does the Leader of the House envisage for Departments in securing the customer base of those profitable operations and finding an alternative buyer so that we can retain those vital factories in the north-east of Scotland?

Mr. Cook: I fully understand the hon. Gentleman's concerns about the impact of that development on his constituents. As I understand it, the operations will be run as a going commercial concern by the receiver for another six weeks; I hope that that will provide an interval in which an alternative buyer and operator can be found. The plants in the hon. Gentleman's constituency have received substantial investment in the past decade, and I understand that they are profitable and have a number of high-value prestigious clients, such as Marks and Spencer and Safeway, which is a testimony to their products. In those circumstances, of course we want another buyer to come forward. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government and the Scottish Executive will do anything that they can to help, but ultimately this is a commercial matter.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): I welcome the announcement by my right hon. Friend that we will have a debate on energy on 20 June, and I thank him for his good offices in helping to bring that about. Does he agree that Members will have an opportunity to take part in an important debate on the nation's long-term requirements, and will have the chance to talk about things like the new generation clean-coal technology?

Mr. Cook: Given the number of times that my hon. Friend has raised that matter with me over the weeks, I would have been severely disappointed if he, at least, had not thanked me for arranging that debate. Its title implies that we will be looking at energy until 2050, which is a long perspective but a necessary one. Looking at the future of our energy needs and their impact on the environment, the issues to which my hon. Friend referred are plainly relevant and are important to our investment in an efficient, effective and reliable energy supply in Britain.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North-East Hampshire): Will the Leader of the House please find time for an early debate on the way Ministers handle their correspondence? I wrote to the Secretary of State for Health on 11 April. It may seem to some people—not to me—reasonable to wait six weeks for an answer to a letter, but that letter was dated 11 April 2001. I have written time and again to ask for an answer and nothing seems to have happened. What has become of the ministerial targets for dealing with correspondence?

Mr. Cook *rose—*

Hon. Members: Write to him.

Mr. Cook: I am advised to write to the right hon. Gentleman. I am not aware that there is any letter from April 2001 outstanding with me. I obviously cannot respond to the right hon. Gentleman on the detail of his case, but I will happily take it up with the Department of Health. Plainly, I would like hon. Members to receive replies on time, and by and large Government Departments provide replies timeously. There will be the occasional bad case and I will certainly pursue it.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Will my right hon. Friend find time today to bask in the congratulations of hon. Members in many, if not all, parts of the House on his pioneering work on pre-legislative scrutiny? That started online this morning on the Joint Committee on the draft Communications Bill. Is my right hon. Friend aware that many people throughout the UK have taken the chance to look at the website and make contributions? The website is at www.parliamentlive.tv and the e-mail address is edemocracy@lse.ac.uk. Many dozens of people have already contributed to the evidence-taking, and many hon. Members have made contributions to the debate this morning. As that has been such a success, will my right hon. Friend ensure that all future Bills go through pre-legislative scrutiny, so that not only Members of the House but every member of our electoral community can participate in our debates?

Mr. Cook: This seems a good opportunity for mutual appreciation and congratulations, so may I congratulate my hon. Friend on the indefatigable way in which he has pursued the case for online scrutiny of legislation? The system started today in respect of the draft Communications Bill, and I am glad to hear from my hon. Friend that it is proving popular and receiving much public interest. The point of pre-legislative scrutiny is to allow the public and lobby groups to join in, so that legislation is not simply a matter for debate within Westminster. As to the future, as I have said before, my ambition is to secure an outcome in which pre-legislative scrutiny will become the norm, not the exception. Because of the capacity constraints, including in relation to the parliamentary draftsmen, it will take us some years to get there, but I am convinced that that is the right way to go. If Parliament seriously wants to shape the future of Government Bills, it must see them early and in draft.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): Will the Leader of the House make time available for an early statement by the relevant Minister from the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on the figures for deaths at sea published recently by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency? The right hon. Gentleman should know that the number of deaths at sea in Scotland last year rose to 84, as opposed to 54 the previous year. He will also be aware that that is a matter of great concern in my constituency, as last year saw the closure of Pentland coastguard station in my constituency and the Oban coastguard station in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid). There may or may not be a link between those facts, but may we have a statement so that the issue is given a proper airing?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that, which I understand must be a matter of deep concern to his constituents and to other constituencies that have sea-going fleets and constituents. I believe that I am right in saying that the closure to which he refers took place following a public inquiry, and that a tug has been deployed full-time within the area. However, the figures that the hon. Gentleman quotes are disturbing and we will look closely at the recent report to see whether there is any contribution that we can make to ensure that we bring down those figures in future years.

Mr. Alan Hurst (Braintree): My right hon. Friend may have read the report in Monday's *Daily Mirror* concerning the condition of the railway line from London to Colchester. That line runs through the heart of my constituency, and thousands, if not tens of thousands of people use it to commute into London every day. In the light of the serious allegations that have been raised, and the concerns that there will obviously be in the public mind, will my right hon. Friend arrange for an early debate or statement on the condition of the nation's railway tracks?

Mr. Cook: I am aware of the report to which my hon. Friend refers, and I think that I am right in saying that the information was taken unofficially over a 10-mile stretch of rail. The DTLR and Railtrack are seeking to obtain more details on what the filming involved and what it shows, and they will study it with great care. In the meantime, I shall ensure that the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions writes to him giving the Department's views on the study and the extent to which it may be valid.

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): This morning, yet another story emerged about the technical problems at the air traffic control centre in Swanwick in my constituency. The story follows reports that the Civil Aviation Authority has rejected the increase in fees proposed by National Air Traffic Services. Will the Leader of the House ensure that when the House returns from recess next month, the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions comes to the Chamber to make a statement on the technical reliability and financial position of NATS?

Mr. Cook: First, with regard to this morning's claims about NATS operators misreading heights of planes and being unable to read their new displays, NATS completely rejects those allegations. It remains put out that the integrity and competence of its staff have been questioned in such a manner and it is confident that nothing has happened to put the safety of passengers at risk.

On the new displays, when a new system is installed, it is plainly right to monitor it closely to ensure that it can be improved. That is happening at the present time.

The financial integrity of NATS was fully considered by the regulator when deciding whether prices and charges should be increased; he concluded that the increase was not justified in full knowledge of the financial background.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): May I refer my right hon. Friend to the situation between India and Pakistan? I hope that he agrees that it threatens not only our nationals, as the Foreign Secretary's correct decision to downgrade staffing at our posts in Pakistan shows, but huge numbers of dual nationals. Does he agree that if any situation in the world is genuinely globally threatening it is that between India and Pakistan, which are both now nuclear powers? One of them at least has made no commitment on no first use of the weapons. The possibility of war on an horrendous scale between the two countries is a global tragedy, and the prospect of such conflict being a nuclear war can hardly be contemplated. What facilities exist in this moment of near crisis to allow Parliament to be kept in touch and to give us the opportunity to monitor the situation and have an input as it unwinds?

Mr. Cook: I am glad that my hon. Friend has raised this issue, which is of grave concern. It must be

[Mr. Cook]

of especially acute concern to hon. Members whose constituencies contain large communities that have community and family ties with the Indian subcontinent. The Government deeply regret that we have had to curtail some of our diplomatic operations and services in Pakistan. The reason for that is the growing terrorist threat in Pakistan; the decision was taken solely in the light of the safety and future of our nationals who are working for the British Government inside the country. That must quite properly be one of our first concerns. We have, however, maintained our consular provision, so we can still maintain, although possibly on a reduced basis, contact with British nationals and citizens in Pakistan.

On the wider issue that my hon. Friend raises, I am sure that the whole House will share his apprehension about the possibility of armed conflict between the two countries, which cannot be in the interests of either of them. In the event of any such conflict, there would be no winner: both would be losers. That is why all of us who are friends of both Pakistan and India and wish them well must do all we can to try to avoid such an outcome, and why the Foreign Secretary will visit the region next week to try to achieve the understanding that the world outside and the international community want on the avoidance of armed conflict.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): Can I take the Leader of the House back to the obstruction of the parliamentary ombudsman by the Cabinet Office to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) referred? Will he ensure that there is an early debate on the relationship between this Government and the ombudsman? I refer him to the ombudsman's fourth report of November last year, in which he said:

> "This is the first occasion on which a Government Department has refused to accept the conclusions of the Ombudsman on a question of disclosure of information."

Is it not time, some seven months later, for the Government to give a response to that report and not continue to ignore it?

Mr. Cook: I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that the Government fully accept the conclusions of the ombudsman in today's report, which are entirely consistent with what we have said in the past. It is indeed regrettable that over a period of three months the ombudsman's request for access to files was not granted, and the Cabinet Office secretariat has apologised for that delay. I see no policy issue here, and I certainly see no reason to turn the matter into a party political dispute.

Mr. John Lyons (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): Several churches in my constituency have written to me about Malawi. My right hon. Friend will have heard Malawi mentioned in the House yesterday, and the subject is raised again today in early-day motion 1375:

[That this House notes the current plight of Malawi which faces its worst food crisis in nearly 20 years; acknowledges that the country is facing an immediate shortfall of thousands of tonnes of food; recognises that warnings of this crisis appeared three months ago; and calls on the international community to act with speed and generosity to avert disaster.]

Malawi is facing a desperate situation—probably the worst for 20 years—as regards food shortages. Does my right hon. Friend agree that we need to give the House some time to discuss how we can help Malawi?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend is right to draw hon. Members' attention to the grave situation in Malawi, which is life-threatening to many of its residents. That is why in the course of this year we have provided additional support for humanitarian aid and for food assistance in Malawi. Indeed, only last month we announced another £1 million for that purpose. We are keen to work with the Government of Malawi to resolve this, and we hope that they will be able to work with us on acceptable terms of transparency to ensure that our assistance is getting through to the people whom we want to assist. I assure my hon. Friend that the Government are fully aware of the crisis in Malawi, understand the British public's compassion and concern about it, and will do all that we can to be of assistance.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): The greatest disappointment arising from last week's Divisions on the Select Committee motions was the House's failure to back a call to increase representation on Select Committees for the smaller minority parties such as the Ulster Unionist party. All right hon. and hon. Members have to respect decisions of the House, but can the Leader of the House assure me and my colleagues in the minority parties that this most important of issues will not simply be forgotten about?

Mr. Cook: I know most of those who voted, although I do not have the list entirely off by heart.

Mr. Forth: I bet you do.

Mr. Cook: Yes, and I have a long memory, too.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it was a pity that the vote on the size of Committees fell owing to a technicality, because it referred to the Committee of Nomination after that proposal had been defeated in an earlier Division. If it is the will of the House, I am not averse to considering ways in which the House can have an opportunity to reach a decision on the matter, although I see no point in revisiting the prior decision.

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I support the call for a debate in the House on the importance of science policy, not least because a document that has come into my hands, apparently produced by officials in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs at the behest of the biotech industry, would severely restrict the rights of scrutiny of genetically modified crop approvals. As the Leader of the House probably knows, it is currently possible to present in hearings scientific evidence about damage to soil ecology, the wider environmental impact, genetic contamination and the impact on the feed and food chain. Under the proposals circulating in DEFRA, all those grounds of scientific objection would be removed from the scrutiny process.

I am sure that hon. Members understand that the gap between sound science and soundbite science is filled by scrutiny and liability, and it would be disastrous if Government policy were seen to become a cash crop for private gain. Will the Leader of the House assure me that we can have a full debate in which the House can assert the principle that the shaping of Government science policy will be driven by the precautionary, not the contributory, principle?

Mr. Cook: We apply the precautionary principle to all environmental issues. I am not familiar with the document that my hon. Friend cites, and I would like an opportunity of studying it before I comment on it. I am sure that he will welcome the fact that we are undertaking a rigorous farm-scale evaluation of the trial of GM crops. The conclusions will appear in the next six to nine months, if I remember rightly. They will form part of an informed debate on the way forward for GM crops.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): We have just passed the first anniversary of the creation of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The Curry commission on the future of food and farming has reported; the European Union is formulating its proposals for a mid-term review of the common agricultural policy; throughout the countryside, there is increasing anxiety about bovine TB, and as we have heard, further concern about GM crops. Despite all that, there has been no debate on agriculture and food-related matters in Government time in the past 12 months. Will the Leader of the House review the matter and ascertain whether we can hold such a debate before the House rises for the summer recess?

Mr. Cook: The right hon. Gentleman makes a splendid case for DEFRA, which was created to bring together all the issues that affect not only agriculture but the wider economy in the countryside, other rural issues and the environment. I am pleased to say that DEFRA has worked hard and successfully on that in its first year.

I am aware of the request for a debate on agriculture and wider countryside affairs, and I appreciate hon. Members' interest in the subject. I cannot promise a debate before the Whit recess, but I shall tuck the matter away for future reference.

Mr. James Wray (Glasgow, Baillieston): Will my right hon. Friend consider the World Health Organisation's statement that it is worried about the childhood asthma epidemic in Britain? There is an obstacle in the form of the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 because although it covers children's medical needs, it does not allow for people who look after children in schools to minister to those needs.

Mr. Cook: I am well aware of the alarming increase in respiratory diseases, of which asthma is one. That is one of the reasons why the Government have placed greater emphasis on and given greater priority to public health issues. We must focus on prevention as well as the much greater resources that we have provided for more nurses, doctors and beds and the treatment of diseases. I was not aware of my hon. Friend's specific point, but I shall draw it to the attention of the Department of Health.

English National Stadium

1.17 pm

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I want to make a statement on the progress of the national stadium project. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) must wait and see. It fulfils my commitment to the House on 7 May to update hon. Members before the Whitsun recess.

I want to deal with four main points. First, I shall consider the extent and nature of Government responsibility for the Football Association project. Secondly, I shall deal with the allegations that arise from the James and Tropus reports into the early stages of the tendering process. Thirdly, I shall update hon. Members on progress since my last statement on 7 May—perhaps it was not technically a statement, because it was made in response to a private notice question from my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). Fourthly, I want to comment on the lessons learned and the changes made consequently.

Clearly, the project is primarily a matter for the FA. It wants a national stadium at Wembley and it is prepared to pay for it. However, it is a clear principle that big infrastructure projects require some Government engagement, whether financial or facilitating. Patrick Carter's report made that clear. Government support is plainly a factor in the market's assessment of such a project. The first Wembley proposal was over-ambitious and poorly managed. The tendering process was flawed and secure bank lending was not achieved. Costs escalated and the Government's role was ambiguous. It was these weaknesses that led to delays, to the request from the FA for extra public funds, and to the Government's decision to ask Patrick Carter to carry out a full review of the project's feasibility.

The Government can decide to support the Football Association or we can walk away. If we walk away, it will almost certainly stop the project in its tracks. We cannot, should not, and will not take over the direction of the project. That remains clearly with the FA. However, when public funds are committed to a project, the Government clearly have a responsibility to ensure that proper safeguards are in place to safeguard public investment, and to secure the improvements to the management and governance of the project necessary for success. That is what we are doing.

We are insisting on best-practice public sector standards—which are higher than those that apply in the commercial sector—to protect the taxpayer and the lottery player. That should also reassure the market that this is a worthy project to invest in. Once those measures are in place, it will be appropriate for us to meet some of the non-stadium infrastructure costs, and we have identified £20 million for that purpose. Of course, we also need to stay engaged with the project to protect the public interest in the £120 million lottery grant made by Sport England.

Hon. Members will have read much in recent days about the James and Tropus reports into the procurement of the stadium project. These reports investigated alleged irregularities in the tendering and procurement processes, and weaknesses in the corporate governance of the project. The allegations applied specifically to the period from 1999 to the summer of 2000, and they make

[Tessa Jowell]

disturbing reading. That is why, when I saw the James report in December last year, I set clear conditions that this project had to be cleansed before any further commitment could be made by the Government. *[Interruption.]* We note the hoots of laughter from the Conservatives, for whom such matters of public finance are clearly irrelevant.

It is important that the allegations are now considered in the context of the progress made since my statement to the House on 19 December. The four conditions set as a result of the availability of David James's report were: a full value-for-money assessment of the construction agreement to be undertaken by an independent assessor; that Wembley National Stadium Ltd. supply a copy of the James report to the National Audit Office; that significant changes be made to corporate governance; and that legally binding agreements for the financing of the stadium, from whatever source, be concluded.

I should make it clear to the House that I do not believe that there have been any new disclosures which add to the concerns previously identified. It is important to note that David James's report did not find any evidence of criminal impropriety; nor did it recommend re-tendering the contract for rebuilding Wembley. The most important question to be answered, therefore, was whether the flaws identified by the James report in relation to procurement and tendering had irrevocably damaged the project, on grounds of cost, propriety or deliverability. The expert judgments suggest that they have not.

In December, I asked both the FA and WNSL to publish the James-Berwin Leighton Paisner report. For legal reasons, however, WNSL felt unable to do so. A publishable version has now, finally, seen the light of day. Much of what I have set out is history, but it is history from which we must learn. Changes have been made, particularly since December. I now wish to look to the future, because in many ways as much progress has been made on this project in the past five months as in the previous five years. I believe that the three conditions—assessment of value for money, consideration of the relevant papers by the National Audit Office, and the strengthening of project management and corporate governance—have broadly been met.

I will not repeat to the House what I said on these matters two weeks ago, except to say that a copy of the Sweett report—the independent value-for-money assessment—is available in the House of Commons Library for those who wish to read it in detail. It confirms that it is unlikely that re-tendering of the construction contracts would result in significant savings.

I do wish, however, to bring the House up to date on the question of the project's financing. On 7 May, I informed the House that the lead bank had agreed in outline to proceed. The FA has since said that it expects to sign a "heads of agreement" term sheet and an exclusive mandate with WestLB—the lead bank—in the next seven days, which will agree the project's overall financial structure. They have said that they expect to complete all the financial contracts at some point in the next 10 weeks. The bank is satisfied that it has access to all the information that it requires, including the James and Tropus reports. I should make it clear that I regard these time scales—which are not under my or the Government's control, and which relate to the contract between the FA and the relevant banks—as indicative, rather than definitive.

The prospects are good and the progress is promising, but the outcome is not yet certain: this is not yet a done deal. Accordingly, I will not give final approval to the Government's contribution to the non-stadium infrastructure until a final report on the extent to which the four tests have been met has been produced by Patrick Carter, after proper banking arrangements have been concluded and assessed.

It is clear to me—as indeed it is to the FA—that the current negotiations represent the last chance for Wembley. Should a Wembley deal not prove possible, I would expect the FA to enter into discussions with Birmingham about its proposals, as I have maintained in December and since. The FA has repeated its assurances that if Wembley fails to proceed, it will look to other options, including Birmingham. That is what it said in December, and yesterday I confirmed the position with the FA's chief executive, who also issued a statement to that effect.

The Birmingham bid, which was and is credible, has been examined by Patrick Carter and by the FA in good faith. However, the Carter report supports the view that Wembley would deliver higher revenues, hence its status as the FA's declared preference. The Birmingham bid remains only embryonic; planning permission for what is a green belt site has not been given; the detailed design has not been completed; final costings for the stadium have yet to be made; the business plan has yet to be thoroughly tested, or backed by market research; and there remains a significant funding gap to be bridged. So moving the project to Birmingham is not a straightforward process with a guarantee of success. However, if Wembley fails, Birmingham deserves the chance to make its case.

In that context, I want to clear up one matter. Some people have mistakenly assumed that a secret agreement exists between the FA and Sport England to reopen the old Wembley stadium if the new project fails. That is nothing more than a misunderstanding of the staging agreement between Sport England and the FA. It is the security obtained by Sport England for the £120 million lottery grant. It could, in theory, allow Sport England to require the FA to stage events at Wembley for 20 years in the event of the project failing. In reality—let us focus on the reality—the stadium would be very expensive to reopen, and would be increasingly sub-standard as a venue. The Carter report indicates that it would cost around £40 million for a quick fix to open the doors: a solution that would require a second major refurbishment only five years later, costing tens of millions of pounds more.

The FA made it clear in its statement yesterday that reopening the stadium is only one of the options that might be available in the event of a failure to proceed with the new stadium; given the cost, it is an unlikely option for the FA to choose. However, it is for Sport England and the FA to decide how and—in the event of the project failing—when the grant is repaid.

I come now to the last point. Hindsight shows what a high-risk project this was. However, lottery money is not about risk avoidance. It should be much more about risk management. I believe that more work needs to be done with distributors on risk assessment in relation to large projects such as this. One solution that I intend to pursue is to involve the Office of Government Commerce in all high-risk lottery projects—the project has now been subjected to this process—to ensure full scrutiny of proposals before their approval. The OGC's report, in the light of the changes made and proposed, supports the stadium plans and recommends that the project should proceed to contractual close.

I intend to include this issue in the forthcoming consultation on the future of lottery distribution, which I have announced to the House and which I intend to bring before the House before the summer recess. It is important for the future of the lottery to get this issue right.

One year ago, the national stadium project was flawed, tainted and unsustainable. Since then, the efforts of the FA and other stakeholders, working with Patrick Carter and his team, have yielded results in governance, transparency and the potential to attract financial support to a much more credible project.

Because of that, the money sought from Government is still on the table. It forms part of the financial package and it will remain there while the present negotiations with the bank continue progress to a conclusion. There is some distance still to travel. If the four conditions that I have set out are met in full, the House can be assured that Government support will be given to a project that will have demonstrated that it deserves it; a project with the potential to benefit sport in England at all levels for generations.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I thank the Secretary of State for making the statement today, as she promised to do, and for an advance copy of it.

Here we are again: another day, another statement, another mess. We are told that the prospects are good and that progress is promising, but that the outcome is still not yet certain. We now have the deeply damaging contents of the Tropus report and the James report, in sp[illegible] which the Secretary of State says today that she believes that there have been no new disclosures that add to the concerns previously identified.

The House would like to know when the Secretary of State knew about the Tropus report. When did her Department have the report? Was it before 19 December 2001? Why were the FA and WNSL so slow to publish the James report? We have had sight of it only thanks to the vigilance of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, under the skilful chairmanship of the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman).

The Secretary of State plays down the contents of the two reports, taking comfort from the fact that the James report did not find any evidence of criminal impropriety and did not recommend retendering the contract for rebuilding Wembley. She focuses on whether flaws identified had irrevocably damaged the project on the grounds of cost, propriety or deliverability. It was yet another last chance for Wembley, and the possibility still existed that FA could enter into discussions with Birmingham on its proposal.

The statement gives rise to several questions. What matters remain for negotiation on Wembley? Are they matters of principle or of detail? How much longer is the Secretary of State prepared to give Wembley, and where does that leave Birmingham? What is Coventry's position?

Why did the Secretary of State tell the House earlier this month that

> "the detail of that progress is shrouded in commercial confidentiality"?

Was she partly referring to the staging agreement? Did she know about the staging agreement giving a commitment that all football internationals and FA cup finals to be held until 2019 would be at Wembley? When precisely did she know that? Was that information made available to the other bidders?

On the position of athletics at Wembley, the Secretary of State has said that

> "the Sport England report will be published shortly".—[*Official Report*, 7 May 2002; Vol. 385, c. 23–4.]

Where does the whole sorry saga leave Birmingham and Coventry? Would she support the reimbursement of the costs of the teams from those areas incurred in compiling their bids? What lessons are there for the lottery, and does she really think that this statement will reassure the market that the project is a worthy one to invest in? When can English sports fans expect to see a new national stadium opened? How many more drinks will Wembley enjoy in the last chance saloon?

Tessa Jowell: I do not wish to be disrespectful to the hon. Lady, but I am sure that she wishes that her senior colleague had been here, because her response to the statement that I made was pathetic.

I became aware of the James report in December last year. As the hon. Lady says, it was shrouded in commercial secrecy, because it was highly sensitive. It was made available, as I made clear to the House on 19 December, on grounds of legal privilege. That limited the number of people who saw the report and the use that could be made of it. However, it is because of that report and my insistence that it be passed to my Department and made available to the National Audit Office—and because the steps that I have reminded the House of today were followed—that the project is now in the state that it is in today, instead of the flawed, tainted, unbankable state that it was in a year ago. That is a matter of fact.

The question of whether the financial deal will now proceed to a commercial close is a matter for the FA and the banks concerned, but the indications are that the banks will be encouraged by the consistency of Government support for the project and the fact that a commercial project has been subjected to a degree of rigour and scrutiny equivalent to the standards expected in the public sector.

In my statement, I set out the position in relation to Birmingham: when the Football Association made it clear that Wembley was its preferred location, the Birmingham team agreed—rightly—that it would undertake no further work on the proposal for the time being. I have set out, as made clear by the Football Association, the further steps that would need to be taken if Wembley fails and Birmingham is then considered as an alternative.

The hon. Lady asks what I meant by "shortly" as regards publication of the athletics report. I suggest that when she gets back to her office she tell off her researcher, because the information has been in the Library, in response to a parliamentary question, for about two weeks. It is also available on the Sport England website.

[Tessa Jowell]

Finally, I have made very clear the lessons for the lottery and the steps I intend to initiate in order to ensure that the lottery does not become risk averse, and that where lottery money is invested in risky projects, that is done on the best known understanding of the likely effect of those risks.

The project is now moving forward. The hon. Lady's contribution shows that none of that progress has been achieved with the help of the Opposition.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): What is pretty clear is that if a new Wembley stadium is built, it will be coated with high-gloss whitewash.

My right hon. Friend will understand that, as far as I am concerned, what matters is the House's custodianship of the expenditure of public money. Will she therefore make it absolutely clear that in no circumstances whatever will a penny above the £20 million to which she has previously referred be given by the Government for this project?

My right hon. Friend talked of the need to protect the taxpayer and the lottery payer. She will be aware that the David James report—which, like the other documents, was published only because the Select Committee forced their publication—identifies serious breaches of the lottery funding agreement and subsequently a complete failure by Sport England to do anything about it. There has been a serious dereliction of duty by Sport England, which flung £120 million at the project and did not lift a finger to monitor how the money was used.

Will my right hon. Friend hold Sport England to account? My view is that there should be sackings at Sport England—especially Mrs. Brigid Simmonds, who seems to take pride in the neglect of Sport England. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that never again, in any public project, will such negligence be allowed? Furthermore, will she ensure that my constituents' money, whether paid through lottery tickets or taxes, will be safeguarded and not used to provide a free gift of a stadium to the FA?

Tessa Jowell: If I may take my right hon. Friend's third point first, I have made it clear on the Floor of the House and before his Select Committee that there are lessons to be learned in relation to the stewardship of lottery grant. That point was also recognised in evidence to the Committee from David Moffett, now the chief executive of Sport England. I shall study carefully the Select Committee's conclusions on the specific points where it considered that Sport England had not offered proper stewardship.

Throughout this process, however, it is important to separate the allegations of negligence from the fact of negligence. Certainly, the lottery agreement has been altered and there were not proper and sufficiently close relationships between WNSL and Sport England, as evidenced by the fact that when the stadium was closed Sport England was not aware of that fact. I am entirely persuaded, therefore, of the need for some changes, but it is important to focus on fact rather than allegation.

On my right hon. Friend's second point, the House will be clear about the sources from which public money for investment in Wembley stadium will come: there will be £20 million for non-stadium infrastructure and £21 million from the London development agency. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions recently announced the plans to upgrade Wembley Park tube station. I am clear that that is the proper limit of public investment in this project. Indeed, part of the financial deal on which Patrick Carter's advice has been taken is intended to ensure that the FA bears the risk for the project.

Finally, on my right hon. Friend's point about publication of the James report, the Tropus report to which he referred is a dossier of allegations. The James report has now been slightly amended and is in publishable form. At Christmas, I called for its publication. It has now seen the light of day and I welcome that.

Nick Harvey (North Devon): I thank the right hon. Lady for her statement today, but I regret that there is not a little more progress to report. I also commend her fortitude in riding out the embarrassment that the Government should feel about the entire Wembley saga. At this stage, she is right to see this bid through to an actual conclusion one way or the other. Will she confirm that the banking arrangement is 95 per cent. agreed and that it is a process of due diligence that is now under way? Is it not time that some due diligence was shown in this project?

As the Wembley bid is nearing a conclusion, one way or another, surely it would be perverse in the extreme to exaggerate the significance of a few weeks' delay now and to favour another bid that, for understandable reasons, is not even on the starting blocks in terms of planning, costing or funding.

Finally, should the new Wembley stadium project fail for one reason or another, I urge the right hon. Lady to keep a rather more open mind than seems apparent from her statement about the possibility of breathing some new life into the old Wembley stadium. If a new stadium is to be in Birmingham, east London or anywhere else, it will take many years to deliver and some extended life for the old Wembley might well be a useful transitional phase.

Tessa Jowell: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's practical and sensible approach to the financing of the project. I will not make any predictions about the probability, and so forth. This is a matter for negotiation between the FA and the lead bank. I have made it clear that the money that the Government have offered for non-stadium infrastructure is on the table and will remain there while the process of negotiating the deal to a close takes its course.

On the allegations, it is important to be clear that the allegations made by David James in his report became known to me and my Department in December, although there was certainly a belief before that that there had been some impropriety in the procurement of the contract—it had been known to Patrick Carter. Progress has been secured since that time. The focus on the allegations now should not cloud the progress that has been made in the intervening six months.

Finally—as I have said too many times to repeat, but I shall say it one more time—the decision on the location of the national football stadium is a matter for the FA.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): Will my right hon. Friend assure me that, in her future consideration of this issue, she will not be swayed by the anti-London hysteria that is being whipped up by Conservative Members against the Wembley option? Will she also assure me that she recognises the fundamental importance of a rebuilt, modernised Wembley stadium to many businesses in my constituency and to the wider north-west London economy? When does she expect that we can have some confidence in the FA's ability not to be completely and utterly incompetent at building national stadiums again?

Tessa Jowell: Well, first, the Opposition's attitude is opportunist, rather than particularly anti anything at all. Secondly, yes, of course the national football stadium will be a very important source of regeneration in a part of north-west London that badly needs such investment and regeneration, and I welcome that fact. As for the time scale, I have made the position clear.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): Several years on, there is still no real plan or clear way ahead. Is not this whole saga a classic example of the syndrome of paralysis by analysis? Now, the Secretary of State's latest wheeze appears to involve four key tests. If those four key tests are met, can we have a referendum?

Tessa Jowell: The hon. Gentleman has worked hard on that one, hasn't he? *[Interruption.]* I suspect he has been practising all day. There are two worlds in all this: the world of the FA, the Government trying to make things work, the lead bank negotiating on due diligence and the other stakeholders making the project happen; and there is the world of the Opposition, who are increasingly irrelevant.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I thank my right hon. Friend for the clarity of her statement and the seriousness with which she has approached this issue of national importance, in marked contrast to the official Opposition's absurd responses. I endorse her concerns with regard to regenerating a part of north-west London that needs it and, indeed, sustaining that economy in London for the future, but when she is being firm about there being no public money in addition to that already stated, will she consider the fact that there are serious concerns about how fans would travel to Birmingham if the plan were moved to the midlands, as it would be almost exclusively car based?

Tessa Jowell: I thank my hon. Friend. Obviously, the benefits if the national stadium proceeds at Wembley will be felt by her constituents as well. I have to say with the greatest respect that, at the moment, I am more focused on how fans will travel to a national stadium at Wembley than on any of the other options, which is why I welcome the announcement of investment by London Transport and the Mayor in upgrading Wembley Park tube station. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) for his advocacy and determination in securing that improvement for his constituents.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): To say that the attempt to provide a new national stadium at Wembley has been a sorry saga rather understates the case, but will the Secretary of State confirm that she said in her statement on 19 December that she had asked the FA to deal with four points? Those four points, which she listed in her statement today, have all been dealt with and the heads of agreement between the banks have been confirmed. Although the detail has to be sorted out, surely the only choice now is to conclude those negotiations successfully and build a new stadium at Wembley, which will come sooner than any alternative, generate more income and, in fact, be cheaper. It is now absolutely essential, after the farce of Picketts Lock, that the decisions be taken and the infrastructure put in place so that north London's economy can be regenerated.

Tessa Jowell: I welcome that unexpectedly sensible intervention from the Opposition Benches. I am not wholly satisfied that all the conditions have yet been met. I have made clear the work in progress in relation to the financing of the project, and I wait to be assured that all the corporate governance changes necessary, as identified by the James report and others who have examined the project, are in place and are secure. I will ask Patrick Carter, who has had an independent and advisory role in relation to this matter, to advise me that the four conditions have been met and that the Government can have confidence, when investing the £20 million to which I have referred, in allowing the project to proceed. That is the proper and prudent way to approach the matter, and that is what I intend to do.

Mr. Mike O'Brien (North Warwickshire): Wembley is—in my right hon. Friend's words—not yet a done deal. If the west midlands option can therefore be revived, will she confirm that the £20 million from the Government will still be on the table? What will happen to the £120 million from Sport England?

Tessa Jowell: I have, I hope, made the position absolutely clear in relation to the Birmingham bid—it is an option that the FA will consider if its preferred option of Wembley fails. I spell that out because I do not want anyone to be in any doubt about that. I made it clear in December, and it remains the case, that if the Wembley project fails I would ensure that the £20 million that would be made available for infrastructure there would be made available for the Birmingham project. I have also made it clear on several occasions that, in the event of failure in relation to Wembley, I would expect the lottery grant to be repaid. That would be a matter for further negotiation between Sport England and the Football Association, but that would be the clear expectation.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): May I congratulate the Secretary of State on not setting a deadline today? Is it a coincidence that she represents a London constituency, her predecessor represented a London constituency, two of the three people who have held the job of Minister for Sport represent London constituencies, and the present holder of the job represents a Sheffield constituency? Is that why Birmingham does not stand a chance? Why does she not say so?

Tessa Jowell: No.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): In case the point gets lost in this debate, the majority of football supporters would welcome siting the national stadium in Birmingham. Equally, the majority of football

[Mr. Dennis Turner]

clubs would welcome siting it in Birmingham. Many Labour Members are very concerned about the way in which the FA has handled this situation, for many reasons. In particular, we do not want to find, at the end of this period, that our Government cause the opprobrium and embarrassment to rest with us and not the FA.

What is the Secretary of State's or her Department's judgment of when we shall get to the end of this saga of the FA and Wembley? The negotiations continue. What is her estimate—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I wonder when the hon. Gentleman might get to the end of his question. There are quite a number of other hon. Members to fit in.

Mr. Turner: What is the Secretary of State's estimate of the final outcome of these negotiations?

Tessa Jowell: I am well aware of the level of popular support and support from hon. Members on both sides—my hon. Friend made this clear—for the Birmingham option. However, as I have done on a number of occasions, I remind him that the decision about the location of the national stadium is a matter for the Football Association. It is not a matter for me.

In my opening remarks, I set out the indicative time scale that the FA has notified for the next stages in relation to banking. That is the best indication that we have. I have also made it clear to the House today that the Government's offer remains on the table while the negotiations proceed. However, I do not know by precisely what date they will conclude.

I pay warm tribute to my hon. Friend for his unfailing advocacy of the west midlands and its bid. I wish him well in his continued pursuit of his cause.

David Burnside (South Antrim): As a Tottenham supporter from Northern Ireland, I have not been to Wembley often enough. However, I first went to Wembley in 1966 for the match to determine third and fourth places and then to the World cup final when I supported England.

This is not a parochial issue, but it has become all about Birmingham and Coventry. As I said, I am a Tottenham supporter from Northern Ireland and, back home, there are United and Liverpool fans as well as a few Rangers and Celtic supporters. We want the national stadium to be at Wembley. We want to go to London, to go up Wembley way and to see the twin towers. Does the Secretary of State agree that, in the national interest, she should stop passing the buck, show some leadership, support Wembley and rebuild it? That is where we went in the past and it is where we want to go in the future.

Tessa Jowell: I shall be delighted to pass on the hon. Gentleman's comments to the Football Association. I can be absolutely clear to the hon. Gentleman about the practical steps that the Government have taken with the FA—I have set them out to the House—to enable the project to make progress.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State confirmed that an option was agreed between the FA and Sport England in 1999 that the national stadium could remain at the current site in Wembley. However, she said that she thought that there had been a misunderstanding about the nature of that agreement. May I draw her attention to the fact that, on 4 July 2001, the chief executive of the FA wrote to the chief executive of Birmingham city council confirming that there were three—I repeat, three—options for the national stadium? The chief executive of the FA said that the options were:

> "1. The current design proposal for a 90,000 stadium at Wembley,
>
> 2. A new 80,000/85,000 design for Wembley,
>
> 3. A new 80,000/85,000 design in Birmingham."

He said that he was being "completely open".

As there clearly was a further option—let us put it no stronger than that—it remains a fact that Birmingham and, I believe, the country have been misled. As a result of that, is not the FA obliged to do two things? First, if it has misled Birmingham, it should compensate Birmingham and the rest of the west midlands for the expenditure that they have already incurred. Secondly, even at this late stage, it should play fair and give Birmingham a fair deal and respond to what my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner) correctly said was the choice of the fans—to bring the national stadium to Birmingham.

Tessa Jowell: I think that there was some misrepresentation of remarks made by the FA's company secretary to the Select Committee earlier this week. That led the chief executive of the FA to set out yesterday very clearly the nature of the FA's position on Birmingham and to confirm to me by telephone yesterday that nothing had changed in the FA's position on Birmingham between now and last Christmas, which is when the announcement that the FA would proceed with Wembley was made.

For my hon. Friend's information, let me quote the chief executive. He said:

> "Nothing has changed since then and, as far as The F.A. is concerned, Birmingham would remain an option for the national stadium should the new Wembley not proceed. As has always been the case, this would of course be subject to discussions by all the stakeholders on how best to abort the current project and any agreements relating to it."

He finished by saying:

> "I am very clear therefore that Birmingham have not been misled by either the Carter review team, government or The F. A."

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): Following on from what the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) said, is the Secretary of State aware of the enormous pride in our greatest sporting triumph of 1966, which took place at Wembley stadium? Is not the present shambles regrettable in view of those memories? Has it not brought international shame on this country and on the greatest game in the world? How does she see the role of the Government, not only in the shambles, but from here on in? Is the national stadium the Government's responsibility, or is it not?

Tessa Jowell: I will not rehearse the arguments that I have already made. What I will do is send the good wishes from every corner of the House to the England team. I hope that they repeat their magnificent achievement of 1966 in the next few weeks.

Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): This is obviously a game of three halves. When the Secretary of State sends her greetings to the England team, will she tell them that we are going to extend the principle of the timeless test to football matches? If players find themselves 1-0 down at full-time, the referee will not only extend the game until they score two or three goals, but suspend the offside trap and probably go around chopping off the legs of the opposition as well. That is how sponsors and supporters of the west midlands bid feel, as other hon. Members have said.

Some 69 per cent. of fans throughout the country want the stadium to be in the west midlands, as do 55 of the league clubs. Anyone with any sense wants the stadium there. The deadline of 30 April set by the FA and the Government will be passed by several months because it will be the end of July by the end of the 10-week period. When, and under what circumstances, will the Government ensure that the FA honours its undertaking to Birmingham so that its bid can be considered properly and given a fair chance in line with the views of the fans, the clubs and the game in general?

Tessa Jowell: I will provide my hon. Friend with a copy of the letter sent by the chief executive of the Football Association, to whom his comments should be addressed.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): The right hon. Lady does herself no favours by blaming the previous Secretary of State and the Football Association. However, in response to the question asked by her hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden), she said that what was said on Tuesday had been misrepresented. The transcripts of that will be available, but let me tell her that Mr. Nick Coward, the company secretary of the FA, made it clear that Birmingham was never in the running. Mr. David Moffatt, the chief executive of Sport England, speaking of the deal to return the £120 million and the fact that Birmingham was never in the running, said that Birmingham looks extremely remote because of that. There was no misrepresentation.

If the Football Association has changed its mind, I welcome that. I also welcome the fact that progress has been made on Wembley, and I hope that it goes ahead. However, if it does not, and in light of the Football Association's apparent change of mind, how will the £120 million be repaid?

Tessa Jowell: The position of the Football Association on the potential Birmingham bid was clarified yesterday by Adam Crozier, the chief executive of the Football Association. I ask the House to accept that.

On the repayment of the £120 million, I am not going to speculate either on the circumstances or on the negotiations that would lead to its repayment, save to say that it is subject to a contract between the Football Association and Sport England. I think that every party to the deal understands that if Wembley fails, the money will be repaid.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Is it not the case that, with £120 million of lottery money devoted to the scheme plus the £20 million additional public money pledged by my right hon. Friend, more money than it cost to build the Millennium stadium in Cardiff has been put into this project, just to cover one fifth of the overall cost? Is there not a third way available? The stadium is not needed—it is not even wanted by many England fans, who are happy to see their team travel around the country. Should we not close the roof on the deal altogether, cut our losses, and make Cardiff the permanent home of the FA cup final and the play-offs?

Tessa Jowell: No doubt my hon. Friend will suggest that to the Football Association. He never loses an opportunity—nor should he—to praise the excellent Millennium stadium in Cardiff.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Is my right hon. Friend as fed up as I am with the moaning voices who continue to try to derail Wembley by highlighting two-year-old management defects as though they were today's current news? Will she confirm that the Sweett report has concluded that the new stadium represents good value for money, and that the independent National Audit Office and the Office of Government Commerce have said that the project is now well managed and should proceed? Will she confirm that the new Wembley stadium will bring regeneration and an estimated 20,000 jobs to my part of north-west London? In the expectation that the FA concludes the deal in the next 10 weeks, does she look forward with me to the silencing of the moaning Mancunian, extinguished once again by the Wembley roar?

Tessa Jowell: Yes to the first point, yes to the second, and yes to the third, but I am not absolutely sure how many jobs will be created as a result of the stadium. As for the fourth point, I look forward to progress on the stadium. Everyone who has played a part in the scrutiny, including my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), deserves credit.

Mr. Terry Davis (Birmingham, Hodge Hill): When did my right hon. Friend and her Department become aware of what she has described as a theoretical commitment by the Football Association to continue to use Wembley even if the plan for a new stadium fell through?

Tessa Jowell: That was part of the staging agreement that formed part of the lottery agreement that settled the payment of the money from Sport England to WNSL. In January 2000, the Select Committee was informed by Sport England of the existence of the staging agreement.

Miss McIntosh: When did the Secretary of State know?

Tessa Jowell: I became aware of the staging agreement when I became Secretary of State and examined the terms under which the £120 million had been paid.

Ms Debra Shipley (Stourbridge): I draw the attention of the House to those parts of the Secretary of State's statement that deal with the FA's comments to the Select Committee. It was in response to my questions in the Select Committee, especially those addressed to Mr. Coward, that it was revealed that, in the worst-case

[Ms Debra Shipley]

scenario, the £120 million could be repaid only if the contractual agreement to FA events being held at Wembley were broken. Only if that agreement were broken could the project go to Birmingham, and the only way to get the £120 million is to honour that contractual agreement. There is therefore a conflict in the position that the FA is trying to promote. The FA is speaking with a forked tongue in suggesting simultaneously that Birmingham is in with a chance if everything else falls through, and that the money can be paid back. Both cannot happen because of the contractual agreements.

However, on a more positive note—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady must hurry. Her question is becoming a statement.

Ms Shipley: How will the Secretary of State, as design champion for architecture and the built environment, ensure that, wherever the stadium is built, we will have excellence?

Tessa Jowell: That is a very good question. The Foster design has attracted both support and admiration. Ultimately, the choice of architect and design is a matter for the Football Association, and it wants to stick with the Foster design for the reasons referred to by my hon. Friend.

I hope that I have made clear to the House the position regarding the staging agreement. I believe that the chief executive of the FA clarified the position in his letter yesterday. The staging agreement between Sport England and WNSL would clearly have to be renegotiated, but we must add to the fact of its existence the fact that after the agreement was settled, the stadium was closed in October 2000, and as Patrick Carter's report makes clear, it would cost an estimated £40 million to reopen it. In those circumstances it would be fit probably for about five years, after which a further substantial sum would have to be paid. Those are the sorts of complexities that would have to be addressed in the event of the Wembley project failing and the money being due for return.

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, Central): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, and I concur, probably for the first time in my life, with the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside). As a Scot, I believe that Wembley is important to the whole of the UK, not just England. I also have a personal interest because for many years I have bored my family and friends with a video of me scoring a goal at Wembley, and when I start to bore my grandchildren, I want it to mean something to them.

Does the Secretary of State agree that the project is now making progress not because of the FA but in spite of it? Does she also agree that the Tropus and James reports confirmed that the FA acted in a cavalier and arrogant manner, and one of the lessons that we should learn from the whole experience is that lottery funding agreements must impose much more robust standards on the recipients of funds, and, even more importantly, that those standards must be enforced?

Tessa Jowell: Yes, I entirely accept my hon. Friend's point about lottery agreements. The terms of the Government's continuing support—the four tests to which I have referred—were made clear to the FA as being non-negotiable. The FA accepted that, which means that we have been able to make the progress that has undoubtedly been achieved. I hope that shortly my hon. Friend will be able to go to Wembley for his encore.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that although there might be differences of opinion about Wembley and Birmingham, Coventry, which has been mentioned today, meets the criteria? It is a brownfield site, it has planning permission—unlike Birmingham—and it has been well costed, despite what the Secretary of State may think.

Tessa Jowell: As my hon. Friend knows, Patrick Carter, with the FA, considered the Coventry bid. The FA has decided to go to Wembley, and, as I have made clear, it is a matter for the FA. However, I know that that is a disappointment for my hon. Friend.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): The Secretary of State has conducted herself impeccably in the course of this difficult matter, and the fact that we are now closer to starting the construction of a new national stadium at Wembley is very much due to what she has done in the past 12 months.

Will my right hon. Friend bear it in mind that when people say that the Japanese, the South Koreans, the French, the Australians, the Spanish—

Kevin Brennan: The Welsh.

Mr. Banks: And indeed the Welsh—They have all managed to construct magnificent stadiums and to organise big international events, but it is mainly because their Governments were prepared to take over the projects and to run them. In this country we have the worst of all possible worlds for such projects: minimum Government financial contributions but maximum Government interference. On my right hon. Friend's part, of course, that has been highly constructive. It is about time that we looked at these projects and decided that the arm's length principle simply does not work. If we are going to run national projects, and the Government are going to start taking the blame for some of the things that go wrong, they should run them from the outset. I look forward to the point at which we can get on and stop nitpicking, so that my right hon. Friend can echo the famous words of Kenneth Wolstenholme in her next statement.

Tessa Jowell: I join my hon. Friend in saying that now, I hope, is the time to move forward. He is right that claims about the success of stadiums in other countries sometimes bear closer scrutiny. Stadiums funded by the commercial sector that fail become a burden on the taxpayer. I am determined that that will not be the case with this stadium.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We must move on. I have programmed business to protect, and no doubt there will be opportunities for this matter to be aired again.

Points of Order

2.21 pm

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Has the Speaker had any indication from the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions that he wishes to come to the House to make a statement to correct previous statements to the House on the timing of his decision to put Railtrack into administration? The Secretary of State has made numerous references in the House to the fact that he made that decision on 5 October. For example, on 5 November last year, he said of the decision:

> "It was taken on Friday 5 October. That is the 20th time I have told the House that and it is the truth of the situation."—[*Official Report*, 5 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 22.]

Yesterday and today, however, there have been reports that at a meeting with the Paddington Survivors Group on 12 September the Secretary of State referred to that decision. Pam Warren from the group said:

> "He said Railtrack wouldn't be much trouble for much longer. He was to replace it with a not-for-profit company."

Another member of the group said:

> "Mr. Byers said there would be an announcement around October 8 that would be very pleasing to us."

At the very least, that throws doubt on the timing of the Secretary of State's decision. Has he indicated to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, or the Speaker that he wishes to come to the House to make a further statement? If not, could I ask for guidance on how we can ensure that he comes to the House so that Members may question him about the matter and make sure that the House has been told the truth?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): The short answer to the hon. Lady is that Mr. Speaker has had no such indication of an impending statement. The Chair has no power to require a member of the Government to make a statement to the House. I am sure that the hon. Lady will find other ways of pursuing the matter, which she has now put on the record.

Norman Baker (Lewes): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Following yesterday's exchange during Prime Minister's Question Time about the allocation of responsibilities and the confusion about referendums, I want to draw to your attention to another confusion and ask for guidance on how to proceed.

When I asked how I should pursue a matter relating to a royal issue, the Table Office said that I should pose a question to the Lord Chancellor's Department. I duly did so on 15 April. On 19 April, the answer to my question on its duties in relation to royal issues came back—"None." I then asked the Prime Minister on 22 May which Department had lead responsibility for royal matters, and he answered:

> "In England and Wales, the Lord Chancellor's Department has lead responsibility for these matters."—[*Official Report*, 22 May 2002; Vol. 386, c. 320W.]

Given that it is difficult to pursue that, as no Department is taking responsibility, will you tell me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how best to take the matter forward and who is responsible? Is it perhaps the Transport Secretary?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the content of ministerial answers is not a matter for the Chair. In this particular instance, however, the Chair would feel diffident about advising the hon. Gentleman how to pursue matters through parliamentary questions, as he has some form in that respect.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I seek your guidance on a serious matter affecting my constituency? You may be aware that there was a report this morning of alleged safety breaches at the air traffic control centre in Swanwick. As one of the affected airports—Cardiff—is in my constituency, I have sought assurances. I am afraid that I have to report that there are serious inconsistencies in the information that I have received, with different views given by the Civil Aviation Authority and the Health and Safety Executive, both of which bodies are the responsibility of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. In light of the fact that I was unable to catch Mr. Speaker's eye in business questions and that the House is going into recess tomorrow, I believe that that is a matter of great public concern. How can we now best get the Minister with responsibility for aviation to look at it and report to the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman has stretched the definition of a point of order to get the matter on the record. I recognise that it is of obvious importance, but there are parliamentary means of pursuing such issues, even on an urgent basis, and I leave him to think about that, although he has now put his concern on the record.

Orders of the Day

State Pension Credit Bill *[Lords]*

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 1

IMPUTATION OF YEARS OF HOME RESPONSIBILITY

'(1) On making an initial claim to state pension credit, all claimants shall be asked to list the date of birth of any natural children and any other children for whom they had primary caring responsibilities in any year prior to the introduction of Home Responsibilities Protection.

(2) The definition of primary caring responsibilities shall be set out in regulations.

(3) For the purposes of calculation of entitlement to the guarantee credit and the savings credit, any individual may substitute for his actual rate of retirement pension an amount equal to the rate of retirement pension that he would have received if he had been entitled to a year of Home Responsibilities Protection for each year in which he was the primary carer for a child up to the age of 16 prior to the introduction of Home Responsibilities Protection.'.—*[Mr. Webb.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

2.25 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

In pensions, women have been second-class citizens for generations. Of today's elderly pensioners, women are the poorest, and make up the bulk of the group of people approaching pension age with poor pension entitlements. With increasing reliance on private sector pensions, there is a danger that in future women will be less likely to have private sector pensions or take out stakeholder pensions; once again, they will be the poor relations in pension provision.

New clause 1 tries to correct a feature of the Bill which is prejudicial to the interests of a particular group of women. We touched on that issue in Committee, which was constructive and non-partisan; I hope that we can carry that over to today's deliberations, and it is certainly the spirit in which the new clause has been moved. We are seeking to deal with the danger that the values of the 1940s, when bringing up children was seen as women's work, will be carried over into the 21st century in the Bill. We cannot rewrite the system of the 1940s, but we can try to make sure that those values are not enshrined in new legislation and advanced for decades to come.

There has been confusion about the categories of women affected. There has been discussion—I have raised the matter myself—about the position of women who pay the married women's stamp, but that is not my primary focus now. I wish to focus on women whose state pension entitlement has been substantially reduced because of years spent out of the labour market bringing up children. Leaving aside the millions of women who have already retired, I wish to talk about women who are coming up to state pension age with poor pension entitlements. Recently, I received a written answer that suggested that typically women reaching 60 have a basic state pension entitlement of £58 a week, excluding the state earnings-related pension scheme and so on, compared with the full basic pension of £75 a week. That is roughly 75 per cent. of the average figure.

Despite the growth in women's work and the introduction of home responsibilities protection in the late 1970s, women are still reaching pension age with poor basic state pension entitlements. We are not proposing to rewrite the history of the basic state pension entitlement, and are leaving alone the fact that women will typically retire with £58 a week. However, in new clause 1, we query the carry-through of that poor basic state pension entitlement into state pension credit entitlement. Society was right in the late 1970s to value the work of bringing up children, which was predominantly undertaken by women, in home responsibilities protection and similar measures that protected women's pension entitlements during the years when they were raising their family.

2.30 pm

The problem is that women now reaching 60 brought up their children, by and large, in the years before home responsibilities protection was introduced. To take a simple example, if a woman who is 60 this year—in other words, who was born in 1942—had her children in her 20s, which is common, or early 30s, most of the time that she spent bringing up those children was in the 1960s and early 1970s, before home responsibilities protection came in. That woman suffers the consequences in the form of a poor basic pension, and the state pension credit system doubles the penalty. It says to the woman who has managed to do some saving—which, let us face it, was doubly difficult because of all the years that she spent bringing up the children—"You don't get a reward for that saving until you have built up from the pension that you are getting to the full basic pension, and we reward private pensions or other saving only beyond that point." Of two women, one with a full basic pension and a little saving, and one with a partial basic pension and a little saving, one gets a reward for her saving and the other does not—the infamous double whammy. A poor basic pension is the penalty for having brought up children, and a reduced savings credit is the second penalty.

The question is how we can best respond to that. We have considered various ways in which that might be done. In Committee we proposed that home responsibilities protection on the post-1977 model might be imputed for years before 1977. The Minister responding said that one of the problems with that is that the benefits that trigger entitlement to home responsibilities protection—child benefit, invalid care and so on—did not exist at all or did not exist in the same form before 1977, so there was no simple read-over from the post-1977 to the pre-1977 system. One could not apply the new rules to the old period.

In the new clause we propose a different way of imputing a value to the caring that those women did, for the purposes of calculating their entitlement to the state pension credit, with particular reference to the savings credit. Nothing that we propose would affect their basic pension entitlement, but it would help them with their savings credit.

We are proposing that when a woman fills in her state pension credit form, she is asked about the children that she has ever cared for. The new clause refers to natural children and others for whom she had caring responsibilities. We have left to regulations a specific decision about the definition of caring responsibilities. We are aiming at women who spent time out of the labour market because they were looking after their own children. We would like to include adopted children, foster children and so on, but those cases are on the margins of the issue that we are raising. The key point is that women should not be penalised for caring.

When the issue has been raised in the House in the past, the Government have conflated the position—not wilfully, I am sure—of women who paid the married women's stamp and therefore saved some money and therefore had a poor pension, with women who simply brought up their own children. I shall give one instance of that.

On Second Reading, the hon. Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) intervened on the Secretary of State and pointed out that

> "the savings credit will cut in only once the full basic state pension has been reached, and that those with a lesser entitlement—often women—will lose the first bit of their savings in reaching that level."

That is the point that I have been making. The Secretary of State said in response:

> "We believe that it is right that people should first use their money to pay contributions to the basic state pension."

Now, the women in question did not have any money. They were at home bringing up the children, so they were not making pension contributions in their own right—not by choice, not because they had the money but were not putting it into a pension, but because they had no money coming in to put into a pension. The Secretary of State went on to say:

> "It would be curious if somebody who had chosen not to pay all such contributions then asked us to apply those they had paid to a pension credit, rather than in the first instance to the basic state pension."—[*Official Report*, 25 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 602.]

But those women had not chosen not to pay contributions. The women under discussion are not the women on the married women's stamp—or rather, they may also be, but that is not the reason why, for the periods of home responsibility, they were messing up their pension record. It is because they were caring—bringing up a child. We recognise that we cannot rewrite their basic pension entitlement, but in a brand new Bill at the start of the 21st century the system should not penalise women a second time round for the fact that in the 1960s and 1970s society did not put a financial value on bringing up children.

I shall be happy to hear the Minister's comments on the logistics of our specific recommendation. Clearly, there are issues to do with providing evidence about children who were born 20 or 30 years ago and whether or not the woman was their full-time carer. Inevitably, there will have to be some broad-brush response to those issues. Unless there are extraordinarily detailed regulations defining primary caring responsibility, there might be one or two women who would not be entitled to credits, but in general, if a mother could show that she was the natural mother of a child and if she stated on the form that she was responsible for that child—in the sense that the present child benefit system works, which is the trigger for home responsibilities protection—that should be enough. There might be the odd case where the husband challenged that, but the House would probably accept that the claim by a mother that she had cared for the children listed should be enough to trigger entitlement to the credits.

Speaking specifically about home responsibilities protection and about caring makes a distinction between women who did something that society now values, but did not value financially in the past—bringing up children—and women who had some financial benefit from paying the married women's stamp. That is not the issue that we are raising here. We are dealing not with women who saved some money by opting out, but with women who did not have money and whose work was not recognised then. It is time that the House valued such work.

For too long women have been the poor relations in state pension provision. There is a danger that we carry over that relative poverty into the Bill. New clause 1 provides the House with the opportunity to make sure that we do not redouble that injustice.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) introduced his new clause with precision and moderation. He rightly said that the Committee stage had been conducted in that spirit. We even found ourselves in agreement on a number of issues, to which I may have occasion to refer this afternoon. I support the hon. Gentleman's attempt to probe the Government's intentions. There is no need to rehearse his arguments at length.

On the technical side, it had occurred to me, and I am sure that Ministers will also say—anyone who has ever had ministerial responsibility is conscious of these things—that evidence is important. Even if Ministers wished to make a concession—we may hypothesise about that—I see the dilemma that they might face in deciding what the evidence should be. A proxy benefit that could be read back and then enhanced or treated as a credit for the present purpose would be much easier, but that is not the case.

The hon. Member for Northavon emphasised that his new clause essentially related to the position of women, but he did not cover himself as fully as he might have done. The drafting is unisex. Indeed, at one point the legal term "he" is used, to include both men and women, but realistically, the majority of people who have an incomplete entitlement to a full state pension and therefore, by extension, under the new arrangements in the Bill, an incomplete entitlement to the state pension credit, because they have to fill up their pension first, are likely to be women. That in no sense detracts from the validity of the hon. Gentleman's argument. We share that view.

I draw the attention of the House to the Select Committee report on the pension credit. Paragraph 29 points out that

> "17 per cent. of female pensioners (over one million women) will potentially have any private or occupational income unrewarded, compared to only 8 per cent. of male pensioners."

There is a much greater shortfall among women. In Committee we analysed figures suggested by the Select Committee relating to

> "around 50,000 pensioner 'benefit units' who have private income for which they will see no benefit."

The Select Committee report goes on:

> "Another 2-300,000 will be 'rewarded' for only some of their private savings."

Those figures give the lie to the Government's assumption, which they have frequently asserted, that it always pays to save, and that the arrangements set out in

[Mr. Tim Boswell]

the Bill are uniquely favourable to women. There is still something of a black hole for a number of women. The category was rightly identified by the hon. Member for Northavon. Attempts to deal with the matter will be neither free of cost nor without difficulty. Of course, women who had home responsibility before the new arrangements were introduced in the late 1970s are not the only category of people for whom there is a shortfall.

The Select Committee report indicated that there will always be some who have fallen short as some of their earnings were below the contribution level, while others may go abroad or break their service because of illness or whatever else. A number of people will miss out. The hon. Gentleman is not seeking to remedy all the ills of the pension system, but he is trying to tackle the problems and it is important that the Government make a substantive response.

The position of guardians was also discussed in Committee. I am especially sorry in that respect—but not only in that respect—that the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) cannot be present.

The Minister for Pensions (Mr. Ian McCartney): My hon. Friend wrote me a letter to apologise for his non-attendance, which is due to a commitment that he cannot get out of.

Mr. Boswell: I entirely accept that; my remarks were genuine and not meant to be sarcastic. The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde made some serious points in Committee and it would be nice if he could be present. As he is not here, no doubt he will read what we have said. Indeed, he may want to return to some of the issues that we are discussing. It is a tribute to the respect that I have for him and his contributions in Committee that I wanted to say that he made a perfectly fair point about people who were caring for children as foster carers and so on, but were not in receipt of child benefit and could not be in receipt of home responsibility protection. Even if such people were looking after children full time and were unable to work, they would be racking up a potential shortfall in their future pension credit because they could not contribute.

The Minister spoke entirely in accordance with the general flavour of the Committee proceedings by responding sympathetically to that issue and saying that he would think about it. The two categories that arise are older cases involving people who had children in their care before home responsibility protection cut in or those whose contribution had been severely impaired by it, and those who currently have children in their care but are not in receipt of child benefit and therefore cannot get home responsibility protection to add to their eventual pension. Of course, the Minister may wish also to refer to other categories.

I do not want to make any mistake on the position of the Select Committee, but I am aware that it was concerned about some wider issues relating to shortfall on the pension credit. It summed up the passage from which I have already quoted by stating:

> "We recommend that the Government should inquire into the immediate and long-term costs, benefits and affordability of extending the Pension Credit in this way and make public the results."

I think that that is a reasonable request. Equally, I would understand if the Government were to say that those issues were not cost-free and that we cannot simply do everything that we want to do and must set priorities. For example, those who are currently caring for children may be a higher priority than those in some of the other categories that have been mentioned.

2.45 pm

It would be useful if the Minister could tell us how much the various difficulties exposed by the new clause would cost to remedy and explain the policy read-across, possibly including other benefits, and the administrability of any concessions. He would help the House by taking some of those matters forward. We understand that there are difficulties and that it is not always possible to rewrite the past, but as the hon. Member for Northavon said, as we move into the new century, we would like to secure a basis for the assessment of entitlement to pensions that is as principled, constructive and modern as possible.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I express my wholehearted support for the new clause of the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) and I am pleased that it has been supported by my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) from the Opposition Front Bench.

Women who choose to look after their children at home do not currently have a genuine choice in terms of the income that they forgo and the benefits to which they are entitled. Some of the Scandinavian countries such as Finland and Norway have excellent schemes in that regard. It would be easy for the Government to draw a line in the sand and say that the new clause seeks to rectify problems that arose a long time ago, that we should move on and that if we do anything it should be to rectify problems affecting women who currently have children. It would be enormously to their credit, however, if they were seriously to consider the new clause. That would send a powerful signal to the country that the value that the House and the Government place on women—and, indeed, on any parent who chooses to stay at home and look after their children—is the same as that which they place on parents who choose to go out to work.

I commend the hon. Member for Northavon for tabling the new clause, I am delighted to see that it has the support of Her Majesty's official Opposition and I hope that the Minister's response will be favourable.

Mr. McCartney: I thank the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) for the way in which he spoke to his new clause and the hon. Members for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) and for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) for their contributions.

The hon. Member for Northavon said from the outset that he wanted our approach to be non-partisan, and the Committee proceedings were non-partisan in the sense that everyone put their view in a very fair and effective way. On occasions, the debate became very passionate, as there are significant differences, not least between the official Opposition and the hon. Member for Northavon, some of which may emerge in this debate. I shall be non-partisan to that extent, but it is important to be aware of all the issues. For example, the hon. Gentleman could have referred to his article in the *Sunday Mirror*, which we shall come to. That is what he was talking about;

his remarks contained little reference to the new clause and related more to his legitimate campaigning on other issues.

The overriding issue for hon. Members in speaking to the new clause was fairness to women. We are attempting in the Bill to do a number of things. Some of them involve trying to right past wrongs and to do so effectively. The truth of the matter is that when the basic state pension was established, wonderful as it was, it had a number of flaws. Every pension system is a compromise, and one of the flaws was that the system undermined in a range of ways the position of a variety of different women in different circumstances, as the hon. Member for Northavon said.

We are, therefore, dealing with a legacy as well as trying to establish the pension credit, the state second pension and the other changes that we are making to ensure that the mistakes of the past are not visited on women in future. There must be a balance and we must have regard to what is feasible and can practically be done in establishing arrangements for the future and designing a system that should be non-discriminatory in dealing with gender and access on retirement to income from the state.

The hon. Member for Daventry—I am paraphrasing, so I apologise if I get anything wrong—suggested that the Bill did not extensively help women, but that is not the case.

Mr. Boswell: We do not need to get into a silly semantic argument about it. I was merely implying, first, that some Ministers' claims that the measure helps all women went somewhat beyond what they were entitled to say and, secondly, that in a number of cases, which we sought to identify in explaining the new clause, women will not benefit at all.

Mr. McCartney: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his volte face—I was not expecting a total U-turn. I have never said that every single woman who reaches retirement age will benefit from pension credit. We said from the outset that 5.1 million pensioners will benefit. Of those, 53 per cent. of single women and 31 per cent. of couples will benefit from pension credit, so 84 per cent. of women will experience a positive impact on their retirement income. It is nonsense to suggest that this is not a significant step forward for women—of course it is. It is not only about righting the wrongs of the past, but about being able to put in place for the future a system that is non-discriminatory towards women.

I want to refer to the *Sunday Mirror* article that quoted the hon. Member for Northavon, which is entitled "The Unfairer Sex: Poverty trap for women pensioners". It is unfortunate that in a debate about the unfairer sex, as the article terms them, the only Members who have participated so far are grizzly middle-aged men. I think that we all agree, on a non-partisan basis, that we are sympathetic to the unfair way in which women have been treated in the past, but it is important to correct some of what was said in the *Sunday Mirror* article so that people are not misled either about a lack of entitlement to minimum income guarantee or the current level of the basic state pension.

The hon. Member for Northavon may say that he was misquoted or that the article was edited to give average figures. I shall be kind and say that it must be the latter, because the *Sunday Mirror* never misquotes anyone of substance. *[Interruption.]* I heard an hon. Member say, "That leaves the hon. Gentleman out." I was not intending to feed Labour Back Benchers; I shall not give them any red meat just yet. I want to clear this up. The last time the basic state pension was £58 was in 1984. The current basic state pension is £75.50 for single people and £120.70 for couples. More importantly, for the women to whom the hon. Member for Northavon referred the minimum income guarantee is £98.15. For couples it is £149.80. That is a significant improvement on the figures cited in last Sunday's article, and that should be acknowledged by all concerned.

I turn to the debate in Standing Committee on 18 April this year. I want to give two short quotes that set the tone for what I am going to say next. The quotes come from columns 121 and 122 of the *Official Report*. That is not so much a reference for *Hansard* as for the Gallery writer from *The Times*, who unfortunately seems not to understand Glaswegian. [Hon. Members: "Shame."] He wrote an article in which he did not spell anything right. He thought that I was asking for a pint of heavy, but I was talking about the pension credit. Just for the record, I shall say that it was the pension credit, not a pint of heavy—although at this moment I would prefer a pint of heavy.

I said in Committee, in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell):

> "We appreciate the work that foster carers do and sympathise with those who, having chosen to be full-time carers, receive poorer pensions as a result."

I went on to say:

> "I do not wish to over-egg the pudding and suggest with nods and winks that a solution is just around the corner; I am telling him openly and honestly that this is another issue that I looked at when I first became a Minister, and I decided that something must be done. We are reviewing the matter. I cannot say any more, but I hope that hon. Members will understand that I recognise the problem and that it must be resolved in an effective way".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 18 April 2002; c. 121–122.]

I repeat that now to re-emphasise that that is my position as Minister. It was not said to create discussion in Committee—it is a genuinely held position. I am not surprised that the hon. Member for Northavon has returned to the matter—[illegible] has been trying to champion this lost cause, as he would call it, for some time—but I hope that he recognises the truth of what I said to my hon. Friend in Committee.

New clause 1 would have the effect of deeming a notional amount of basic retirement pension, so that a group of pensioners—in this case, those caring for children before 1978—could make the most of the savings credit. It would increase the amount of basic state pension they have in the calculation of the savings credit, so that they have to use less of, or none of, their own savings to get their income up to the savings credit threshold of £77. It might help if I give an example. A single pensioner has a reduced basic state pension of, say, £50 because they have a deficient national insurance record. They have a second pension of £25 and no other income. Their total income of £75 would immediately be topped up to the guarantee credit of £100, but they would receive no reward for their saving because their income was below the savings threshold of £77. In other words, they would not receive any savings credit because their income was below the level of the full state pension. If they could take advantage of home responsibility protection, they might qualify for the savings credit.

[Mr. McCartney]

The new clause as drafted would have two peculiar outcomes. First, it would require people to list any natural children they have ever had, regardless of whether they have ever had any caring responsibilities for them. I am not sure that the Department for Work and Pensions needs that information, nor that people would want to share it with us—nor, in some cases, with their current partners. That matters, because at this stage of parliamentary scrutiny there is no further opportunity to correct drafting.

Mr. Webb: I do not quite understand what the Minister is saying. New clause 1 states that claimants would be

"asked to list the date of birth of any natural children and any other children for whom they had primary caring responsibilities".

The Minister said that they would have to list children irrespective of whether they had cared for them, but the new clause explicitly covers the matter.

Mr. McCartney: My interpretation of the new clause is based on the advice on its wording that I have received from parliamentary counsel and our officers. It would be a legal minefield to go back for such a long period in relation to natural children who were cared for initially, but later not cared for after those looking after them had given up their caring responsibilities. It is also a potential minefield in terms of relationships with current partners.

Secondly, the new clause would allow a person the option of replacing their actual rate of basic pension with a higher amount in the calculation of the guarantee credit. I am unclear whether this was intentional, but if a person did exercise that option, their income would decrease, not increase. That said, I think that what the new clause tries to achieve is an increase in basic state pension so that more people come nearer to the £77 threshold. It would do that in a notional way by imagining that this group of pensioners was entitled to the home responsibility protection in a time before it was invented. One cannot make law on that basis. One cannot dream up or invent a situation, then develop proposals on that basis which go back, not for two or three years or for one or two decades, but beyond even that.

3 pm

Home responsibility protection has been available since 1978. It covers two distinct groups of people. Those in the first group have been awarded child benefit for children under 16; those in the second have been regularly engaged for at least 35 hours a week in caring for someone who receives attendance allowance or the highest middle rates of disability living allowance for a minimum of 48 weeks a year. Entitlement to home responsibility protection depends on people undertaking the caring activities for complete tax years.

The protection offers a reduction in the number of qualifying years for a full basic pension. For example, a woman needs 39 qualifying years of contributions or credits for a full pension. Every year of the protection reduces that number, and there is a maximum number of years that can count towards home responsibility protection: 19 for women and 24 for men. The different periods reflect the current arrangements whereby men need five more qualifying years to earn a full basic state pension.

The new clause tries to provide home responsibility protection as if it existed before 1978 to those who would have been entitled to child benefit if it had existed before then. The new clause would achieve that by asking all new claimants for the pension credit to list the dates of birth of their children if they cared for them before the introduction of home responsibility protection. The hon. Member for Northavon wisely does not try to apply the new clause to carers of the sick and disabled. The provision is confined to parents; he does not propose its extension because he knows that that would be unworkable. Trying to prove a caring relationship that fulfilled the criteria for home responsibility protection would be impossible after so many years. He nods, so I am right about his intentions.

The new clause would be impossible to put into effect. We could be stretching back as far as the 1920s. That is at the heart of the problem, and why in practice and in principle, Governments cannot generally go back that far. We cannot replicate current provisions with ease or certainty. If we try to do that, we create a form of injustice for someone else. For those reasons, we must reject the new clause. However, I do not want hon. Members to be left with the impression that refusal to accept it means a significant gap in provision. It does not.

Those who are disadvantaged because they do not have access to home responsibility protection are likely to be few. Many of them and the larger group of carers who are already covered by the protection will be married women. Most will have the benefit of a full married woman's pension. Any pension in excess of that, private or state, will be rewarded. Many of the women will now be widows. On widowhood, the combination of their national insurance contributions and those of their late husbands will have brought the income of most of them up to the basic state pension.

Andrew Selous: Are not the Government correctly righting a wrong through considering the underpayment of women who worked in colliery canteens in the 1950s? I know from one of my constituents that that is happening. That is absolutely just, but does not that mean that the Government have already established the principle of righting past wrongs?

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman is not technically correct. The issue not only involves the former National Coal Board, but applies to employers in the public and private sectors who took contributions for women but treated them in a discriminatory way within the rules of their pension funds. A European ruling has been made, and the tribunal system is now considering its implementation so that it can make good that discrimination. It is an entirely different proposition from new clause 1.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but we are acknowledging that discrimination occurred by introducing the minimum income guarantee and modernising the pension credit through the Bill. We are already ensuring that women against whom the state system discriminated benefit significantly. We are therefore able to go back in an effective, honest and transparent way to establish incomes for those women. Without those arrangements, they would fall foul of their backgrounds and languish below the basic state pension line. The Bill will bring their incomes up to it, and in many cases, above it.

Those who are not in that position will continue to be entitled to the guaranteed credit. Our investment in MIG and other measures such as winter fuel payments mean that all MIG households are at least £20 a week or £1,000 a year better off than in 1997. That is a real terms increase in living standards of 23 per cent. Pensioners who have, until now, been the most disadvantaged can depend on a decent income in retirement.

We do not know about the whereabouts of the hon. Member for Northavon since 1984. The *Sunday Mirror* article finishes by stating:

> "The Liberal Democrat plan is to raise pensions by targeting the money at those who need it most."

I accept the hon. Gentleman's flattery; he is obviously trying to imitate what the Government are already doing in the Bill, which reflects our achievements with MIG. Since coming to power in 1997, we have gone out of our way to right the wrongs of the past and to ensure that those pensioners in poverty are taken out of it, not only now but in the future through the pension credit. I therefore ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw the new clause.

Mr. Webb: I am grateful to the hon. Members for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) and for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) for their support for the principle of the new clause and disappointed with the Government's response. It was argued that there are drafting problems, and although I do not understand them, I would happily withdraw the new clause if the Government accepted its substance. We can argue about the drafting and if there is a problem, I am happy not to pursue the new clause as long as the Government accept the principle.

The Minister rightly said that we have not tried to recreate the rules for people who care for the long-term sick and disabled. Trying to do that for 20 or 30 years ago would probably be unworkable. However, trying to establish whether someone had a child and would, under current rules, be entitled to something akin to child benefit is straightforward.

I am sure that the Minister was not implying that those who apply for pension credit would wilfully mislead. There would be no penalty in those few cases in which people did not want to reveal that they had had a child. It is not like missing something off a benefit form, for which people are penalised; it is an option. If it is embarrassing for a woman to reveal that she has had a child because, for example, the husband does not know about it, there is no obligation to do that. However, most mothers would like the opportunity that the new clause would provide.

The Minister said that we could be considering events in the 1920s. He also said that when husbands die, many women move on to the full basic pension through widows' pensions rules. However, most of the women whom we are considering have yet to retire or have recently retired. In most cases, their husbands have not reached 65 or died. Although I do not regard myself as gnarled or middle aged, the period that we are discussing—the 1960s and 1970s—is in living memory. It is not therefore implausible to ask people whether they were looking after children in the 1960s and 1970s. I believe that we could take their word for it. That is not an unreasonable basis on which to proceed.

In the benefits system, we impute all sorts of things that are not so. If people blow all their money to reduce their income to get more benefit, the benefits system treats them as though they still had the money. If people defer a pension and do not draw it when they are 65, the system means-tests them as if they had drawn it because they should not be rewarded for not drawing it. The benefits system uses the "as if" principle all the time. All we want is for people to be treated as if current values attached to bringing up children applied before 1977.

The Minister kindly drew attention to the press coverage for our campaign for justice in women's pensions. Every time I open my mail, more women throughout the country are joining the campaign because of their sense of injustice about issues such as the subject of our debate. Nothing that the Minister said this afternoon implies that the Government will respond to that. He said that not many people were affected, but the £58 figure is a Government figure. It is the average for newly retired women. We are not considering 90-year-old women who lived and worked in a previous generation, but those who are approaching pension age. If they only have private savings on top of the £58, they do not get rewarded up to £75. We can argue about the number of people who are affected, but we support the principle that they should not be penalised a second time.

We are not simply considering rules that will apply next year. When the system is up and running, it will apply to a 60-year-old woman for the rest of her life. In other words, we are talking about the rate that she will get not only next year but in 2020, and perhaps 2030. Would it not be extraordinary if, in 2030, we were still paying a lower rate to someone because of caring that they did in the 1960s? It seems extraordinary to perpetuate this discrimination against women.

I have one more response to the points that the Minister made. If we were to use the imputation system for the guaranteed credit, there would be an issue about reducing entitlement, because we would be imputing a higher basic pension. A better version of new clause 1 might remove references to the guaranteed credit altogether. I take that point, because we are primarily concerned about the savings credit.

For the avoidance of doubt on the drafting, and because new clause 1 is primarily concerned with the savings credit, as the Minister understood, while observing that I do not feel that the principle of this matter has been addressed by the Government, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 5

REPORT ON INCENTIVES ETC.

'( ) The Secretary of State shall as soon as practicable after the end of the financial year 2004–05 and annually thereafter lay before Parliament a report containing an assessment of the effect of the savings credit on the propensity of individuals of working age to save for their retirement; and may invite the Social Security Advisory Committee to comment thereon and make recommendations for any change to structures or benefits which seem to them to be appropriate.'.—*[Mr. Clappison.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 6, in clause 1, page 1, line 5, after "credit", insert—

'calculated in accordance with section 2'.

No. 7, in page 1, line 9, leave out from "2" to end of line 10.

No. 8, in page 1, line 11, leave out subsection (3).

No. 9, in page 1, line 18, leave out "and (3) are" and insert "is".

No. 10, in clause 2, page 2, line 10, leave out "a guarantee" and insert "state pension".

No. 11, in page 2, line 11, leave out "guarantee" and insert "state pension".

No. 12, in page 2, line 13, leave out "guarantee" and insert "state pension".

No. 4, in page 2, line 36, at end insert—

'(8A) For the purposes of this section, where the client has attained the age of 65 or is a member of a married or unmarried couple the other member of which has attained that age, there shall be disregarded in the calculation of the claimant's income a prescribed percentage of the amount, if any, by which his qualifying income (after deducting such part of his income, if any, as lies between the standard minimum guarantee and the appropriate minimum guarantee) exceeds a prescribed amount (the savings disregard threshold).

(8B) Regulations may make provision as to income which is, and income which is not, to be treated as qualifying income for the purposes of this section.'.

No. 5, in page 2, line 40, leave out Clause 3.

No. 1, in clause 3, page 2, line 42, leave out "age of 65" and insert "qualifying age".

No. 2, in page 3, line 26, at end insert—

'(6A) In the case of men aged under 65, such regulations shall provide that the calculation of qualifying income shall include an amount equal to the amount of retirement pension that the claimant is forecast by the Secretary of State to be entitled to at the age of 65. This forecast shall be revised on each anniversary of the initial claim until the claimant reaches the age of 65.'.

Mr. Clappison: New clause 5 would require the Secretary of State to prepare a report on the effect of the savings credit on savings behaviour, and to invite the Social Security Advisory Committee to comment on that report and to consider recommending change. We have been over this ground before, but I make no apologies for coming back to it, because the effect of the pension credit on the incentive to save, and the amounts actually saved, are matters of real concern, and have been identified as such by many experts and organisations that have looked at the Bill, including those who looked at it when it was being considered by the Select Committee. Their concerns about the effects of the Bill on incentives to save are reflected in their many submissions to the Committee.

We are holding this debate on new clause 5 against the background of the salutary fact that, as a nation, we are simply not saving enough. The savings ratio is now at its lowest for 40 years, and we hear tell in the media and elsewhere of estimates of a £27 billion savings gap. Against that background, it is important that people should save more, particularly those on modest incomes, and we need to consider the effect of the pension credit on this problem.

Will the credit make matters better or worse? The new clause would go some way towards enabling us to find out, because it would require the Secretary of State to prepare a report. We need to remember, when considering this question, that the pension credit follows in the wake of the minimum income guarantee. One of the obvious features of the MIG that was much commented on is that it leaves pensioners on modest incomes with savings in no better position than those without. For those who could see 100 per cent. of the value of their savings coming from the benefits that they received, there would therefore be no incentive to save.

3.15 pm

We acknowledge that the Bill seeks to change matters through the introduction of the savings credit. That much is obvious, but what effect will that, and the way in which it is being introduced, have on incentives? Will there be an incentive to save, when what is saved now will, in effect, be subject to a 40p in the pound tax on retirement? That is what this measure will mean for those involved.

The views of the expert authorities submitted to the Select Committee were decidedly mixed. Andrew Dilnot of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, when questioned by the Select Committee on incentives to save, said that the Government were on "a difficult wicket". Difficult wickets invite spin—I am sure that you know that as well as anyone, Mr. Deputy Speaker—and no doubt we shall be told in due course that the savings credit is an innovative and imaginative way of rewarding saving, as the Secretary of State suggested on Second Reading, when he said:

> "The important point is that the pension credit removes for the first time—this has been widely recognised—the disincentive in the present system whereby someone with moderate savings can find that they are no better off than somebody who has made no effort whatsoever."—[*Official Report*, 25 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 600.]

That raises the question of who introduced the minimum income guarantee and linked it to earnings in such a way that it would be likely to bring more and more people into its ambit, but there we are.

What will be the effect of these measures? Under the Bill, pensioners will, in one sense, derive benefit from having saved, and no doubt the Minister will take us back to that point. By the time people become pensioners, they will be better off through having saved, compared with those who have not, because they will have the benefit of 60p in the pound for every pound of their savings.

That, however, is not the question. The question that Ministers must address, and have so far failed to address, is: will it be worth while for workers to save earlier in their lives, when their savings will be subject to an effective 40 per cent. rate of tax later on? What will be the effect on their incentive to save, and on their savings behaviour, at that point in their lives?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the reasoned amendment that he tabled on Second Reading would have left the minimum income guarantee as it is, with a cliff edge, a 100 per cent. marginal withdrawal rate?

Mr. Clappison: We set out what we proposed to do. I do not accept the hon. Lady's analysis, but she cannot get away from the question of the incentive to save, which is rather a different matter.

Mr. McCartney: Middle stump!

Mr. Clappison: I think that I am dealing with the spin rather well.

Mr. McCartney: Out!

Mr. Clappison: The right hon. Gentleman says, "Out". I might say that his judgment is as good as some other recent umpiring decisions—but we shall not go into that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. He is absolutely wrong. Neither he nor the hon. Lady will face up to the question of what the effect of this measure will be on the incentive to save. That is the question that I put to them. When one is referred back to other subjects by Ministers, one knows that one is getting somewhere with one's bowling, so let us take this a bit further.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene. May I give him a bit of fast bowling from Age Concern on that wicket? A briefing dated today, on just this subject, says:

> "we believe that the pension credit will fail to provide sufficient incentive for younger people to save for their retirement."

Mr. Clappison: That is very much to the point and very accurate, as fast bowling often is.

Mr. McCartney: It's wide!

Mr. Clappison: I hear the Minister saying that the ball was a wide. Perhaps he will try this—

Mr. McCartney: No ball!

Mr. Clappison: Before the Minister says "No ball", I must point out that I have not even got as far as the crease. That says much about the quality of his umpiring. Perhaps he will do me the courtesy of allowing me to get that far before he proclaims a no ball.

Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will umpire the views of the Association of British Insurers, which has sought to measure the economic benefit of saving. It has found that under these proposals, someone saving £50 a month would have to save for 10 years before they would see any economic benefit from having saved. The association believes that for 10 years, there would be a negative implied rate of return from saving £50 a month. Less value will be received in increased retirement income than will be paid in through contributions. Perhaps we will get an honest stroke from Ministers in response to that.

What is Ministers' reaction to the views of the Institute for Public Policy Research—on which the Government look favourably in other circumstances—on this matter? Further to the opinion of Age Concern cited by my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink), the IPPR, of all things, says:

> "It would be very hard to argue that the Pension Credit has been designed to generate incentives for current workers to save."

What do Ministers say to the National Pensioners Convention, which states:

> "People of working age, deciding how much to save for their retirement will need to take into account the very real possibility—for some a strong probability—of any additional retirement income being taxed at 40 per cent."?

Ministers may argue—as some of their colleagues have argued in other forums—that people simply will not understand what may happen with the pension credit. They may argue that there will be no disincentive to save, because people will not look into the future and make those calculations, and even that if they do, they will not understand the pension credit. That is one view, but it was disposed of by, among others, Andrew Dilnot, of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, in his comments to the Select Committee. Ministers may not agree with him, but if so they would do well to heed the following warning from the National Pensioners Convention:

> "It is tempting to assume that only a small minority of financially well-informed people will be aware of these facts and that the disincentive effect on saving will therefore be small. It seems to us, however, that financial advisers and providers of pension schemes will have a duty to inform people about such a major factor affecting the outcome of their investment decisions. Even if that were not so, it would be difficult to justify a policy which rested on the assumption that most of those affected by it would be deliberately kept in ignorance of its implication for their future well-being."

We do not want people to be in ignorance of what these important decisions mean for their future well-being. Ministers need to come clean, and to answer now the question of whether the provision amounts to a disincentive to save. The new clause simply asks that Ministers provide information for a report in due course. If they maintain that there is no disincentive to save, perhaps they could be brave and allow the report to state as much.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): I am concerned by the nature of the defence that Ministers appear to be deploying. Is it not true that the perception that the whole savings environment is very complex, off-putting and difficult to engage with already acts as a major disincentive to younger people making proper provision for their retirement? We need a simple approach to promoting saving, not added complexity.

Mr. Clappison: With the best will in the world, it is not entirely self-evident that the provisions of the pension credit will simplify future pension provision.

Amendments Nos. 4 to 12 attempt to achieve the simplicity to which my hon. Friend refers. *[Interruption.]* Ministers may laugh, but that is no easy task. They are drafting amendments designed to make the Bill more straightforward, and to achieve the Bill's original effect, rather than to alter it. You will be pleased to hear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I shall not take the House through their precise nature, although the Minister may well choose to do so. If they do not find favour, I do not intend to press them to a vote, given that the simplicity of this issue is not entirely self-evident.

New clause 5 could not be more straightforward. Let us have an open debate about incentives to save, and access to all the relevant information. I hope that Ministers will respond positively, because I cannot imagine that there is anything they want to keep covered up. Let us be transparent, and bring everything out into the open.

Mr. Webb: I have a lot of sympathy with where the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) is coming

[Mr. Webb]

from on this issue. I have been advised not to remark on his reputation for googlies, so I shall not do so at this juncture.

The hon. Gentleman's point about the effect of the provision is critical. Beneath the rhetoric, the state pension credit is actually the minimum income guarantee, plus a boost for those who have saved. If we did not have the additional savings credit the Bill would not be necessary, because the MIG already exists. In essence, the Bill merely adds the new savings credit and tidies up the link between it and the MIG.

Under new clause 5, I would want any report to consider the effect on people's propensity to save not of the savings credit, but of the whole of Government policy on income in old age. The savings credit might arguably be regarded as the cavalry: it comes along when the Government have completely messed up the incentive to save, and restores it. The Government and the Minister for Pensions are fond of saying that they are the first Government to reward people for saving, but in fact they are the first to have completely trashed the incentive to save. In a sense, they are penitent sinners on this point, but only partially.

When the Government came to power in 1997, the gap between the basic pension and the MIG—or income support, as it was then known—was about £7 a week. For anyone who could save more than £7 a week, it therefore paid to save. Those who saved £8 a week got the first £7 at the 100 per cent. marginal rate, so they were better off by the extra £1. *[Interruption.]* Ministers may disagree, but those are the facts. The eighth, ninth or tenth extra pounds all constituted a complete benefit, beyond the scope of the means-tested benefit system. In other words, it paid to save anything more than seven quid.

When the MIG and the other provisions are introduced next year, the pension will be £77 and the MIG £100, so taking the MIG into account, it will not pay to save £23. When the Government took office, someone who saved £23 a week was £16 a week better off for having done so, but under the proposed rates, such a person will be no better off. The Government merely say, "Whoops"—

Maria Eagle: The hon. Gentleman seems to be arguing that alleviating pensioner poverty today is providing such a disincentive to save for the pensioners of tomorrow that it should not be done.

Mr. Webb: As the hon. Lady knows, there are two ways to target pensioner poverty. One is using complicated means-tested mechanisms such as that in the Bill and—dare I say it—in amendments Nos. 4 to 12. The other is using age as a proxy for poverty, because the basic state pension is a guaranteed way of getting money to poor pensioners. Given that the majority of poor pensioners—particularly the poorest in the land, who are entitled to means-tested benefits but do not get them—are older pensioners, pensioner poverty can be targeted by raising their pension, rather than by using complex means-tested benefits. The right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), the former Minister with responsibility for welfare reform, the hon. Member for Hertsmere and I all agree with that view.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): The hon. Gentleman says that there are two separate approaches to alleviating pensioner poverty: complex means testing, with which he disagrees, and targeting by means of age, which he advocates. He will accept that even if we focus on age, in certain circumstances pensioners aged between 65 and 70 will not benefit, even though their incomes are low. For such people a means-tested element would still be necessary, even under his proposal to target by age. The difference is that he is proposing means-testing for the poor only, which increases its stigma.

Mr. Webb: I was with the hon. Gentleman until his final sentence, which I am not sure that I understood.

Our view is that—to echo a new Labour phrase—means-testing should be for the few, not the many. That is the distinction. Under our proposal, "the few" would be those under the age of 75 who are residually poor. On average, the majority of those under that age tend to be better off, whereas the majority over that age tend to be poorer. One helps the poor in a universal way by helping the old. It is true that some better-off people would benefit, but it is predominantly poorer people who would benefit. If such people are sufficiently well-off to pay tax on the benefit, they would do so. The Government use the language of guarantees, but the MIG is guaranteed to no one unless they claim it. Some 500,000 pensioners—predominantly older pensioners—do not claim it, but they all claim the basic state pension.

3.30 pm

David Cairns: The hon. Gentleman will deliver eloquent diatribes against means-testing in debates on the amendments and on Third Reading. However, for the pensioners who are interested in this debate, will he clarify the fact that under his policy, means-testing will still exist, primarily for pensioners between 65 and 70 who are poor, which increases the stigma of means-testing?

Mr. Webb: For the avoidance of doubt, the answer to the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question is yes. The question is whether we means-test half or two thirds of the pensioner population, which is the Government's strategy, or whether we have a residual safety net—

David Cairns: For the poor.

Mr. Webb: Absolutely. We want the vast majority of people in old age to have a guaranteed income that lifts them clear of the need for top-ups. What the hon. Gentleman and I will want in our old age is a decent pension—whether from this place, the state or anywhere else—so that we do not have to claim a top-up every year. Our strategy would reduce the number of pensioners who need to claim top-ups at all to a relatively low level.

Mr. Boswell: As the hon. Gentleman will know from our earlier debates, I am very much on his side on such matters. Is not the logic of the position of the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde that the only way to make means-testing acceptable is to put so many people into it that somehow the effect is diluted? The hon. Member for Northavon is arguing for a safety net for the few that is not spread across the whole pensioner population.

Mr. Webb: That is right. In all such arrangements, we are dealing with a continuum and a trade-off. There is no perfect solution. The Government's mass means-testing solution leaves hundreds of thousands—on the Government's own figures—not getting a penny of what they are entitled to and living below the poverty line. The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde may frown, but the Government estimate that roughly 500,000 pensioners do not claim the minimum income guarantee to which they are entitled. Therefore they are below the poverty line. That is a simple statement of fact, based on the Government's own figures. Paying the money through the pension would mean that everyone in the age category was guaranteed to get it.

Mr. McCartney: The determinant for older people is not age but income; that is the case whether they are 60, 85 or 90. Significantly, the hon. Gentleman is saying that the Liberal Democrats' proposals for pensions—far from helping the very women for whom he says he is campaigning—will result in the vast majority of those now coming up to pension age getting no benefit whatever. Indeed, they would have to stay on the old-fashioned minimum income guarantee with no commitment that they would be made up to the basic state pension. That is not a small group of women, or of pensioners. It is almost equivalent to the current number of pensioners whom we have taken out of poverty in the first four years of the Labour Government—and kept out of poverty.

Under the hon. Gentleman's proposals, nearly 2 million people would be left on an old-fashioned minimum income guarantee, an old-fashioned means test. He argues that his proposals are about getting rid of poverty, but he would be making sure that poverty remained not just for this generation, but for every generation thereafter. He is talking economic nonsense.

Mr. Webb: The Minister is talking complete nonsense himself. The group coming up to pension age have many historic problems in their accumulated pension rights, including the married woman's stamp. We have a range of proposals in our campaign for justice in women's pensions that will address those points to ensure that as few of them as possible have to depend on a means-tested top-up when they reach old age.

To come back to the perfectly reasonable point made by the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde, there will be some residual role for means-testing. There are aspects of the pension credit that make the minimum income guarantee more humane, and I am entirely in favour of those. For example, sending people a claim form when they apply for a pension is eminently sensible. It is not a case of throwing the baby out with the bathwater; there are administrative aspects of the Bill that I heartily endorse. But the strategy of mass means-testing is not one of them.

Maria Eagle: The hon. Gentleman just said that his schemes would leave a residual role for means-testing. How many people would remain on the means test under his proposals?

Mr. Webb: That would depend on exactly how much we could increase the basic state pension by. I do not have an exact figure. The Minister will know that before the means-tested benefits system kicks in, the majority of poor pensioners are women and older pensioners. By loading the increases for older people on to pensioners, we will do the most to get people off the means test altogether.

The majority of the newly retired are couples, and couples tend on average—partly because one of them is a man—to have higher incomes, so the incidence of means-testing among that age group is much smaller. We are focusing the money where the means-testing is most intense and on the group that is, on average, substantially poorer, and we are guaranteeing take-up with no savings disincentive. That is a powerful combination.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): On the extension of mass means-testing, can I remind the hon. Gentleman that in new Labour's 1997 election manifesto, there was a pledge to reduce means-testing for pensioners? Perhaps the comments made by Labour Members should be viewed in the context of that pledge.

Mr. Webb: I do not recall the exact wording of the manifesto, but we all recall the Chancellor talking about an end to means-testing for our pensioners. The semantic hoops through which Labour Members jump to try to get out of that, result in their saying that what is proposed is not means-testing—but I suspect that to the recipients, it will feel very much like it.

Mr. Clappison: With the benefit of some extra spin, we now know that what the Chancellor really meant was an end to "old-fashioned" means-testing.

Mr. Webb: I am sure that that is right.

To return to the amendments, we are interested in the effect of the Government's strategy on the incentive to save, and a report such as that proposed in new clause 5 would have the potential to add something. I have suggested that the scope of the report should be broader than just the effects of the savings credit; it ought to look at the whole strategy. The savings credit is applied to a system in which the 100 per cent. tax rate has been vastly extended in scope and gives a bit back.

Even the Financial Services Authority produced a report—only last week—which said on page 24, paragraph 4.33:

> "the implied 40 per cent. deduction rate will inevitably be a disincentive to save for some now at work."

That is the FSA, not some extreme organisation opposed to Government policy. The FSA is, almost certainly, run by the Government.

Everybody seems to agree that the overall strategy is undermining the incentive to save. That is the beauty of targeting by age; we give people more money in their old age for being old and their savings are theirs to keep on top of that, because they are clear of the means test. The more people we can get clear of the means test, the less we will need complicated savings credits, because they will get to keep the money anyway.

The gist of what we are saying is that the Government are trying to claim credit for solving a problem that they have made themselves. That is why an assessment of the effect on the incentive to save, as proposed in new clause 5, would be welcome.

The hon. Member for Hertsmere said that amendments Nos. 4 to 12 were so complicated he would not take us through them in detail, but that they were not complicated

[Mr. Webb]

compared with the Government's complicated scheme. I wrestled with the amendments for several minutes and they are indicative of the problem of trying to write any such schemes down; they are inherently complex. A simple system with a good basic pension—particularly for older pensioners—and a savings incentive so that they get to keep their own money, is the simplest and neatest of the lot.

Amendments Nos. 1 and 2 seek to remove yet another respect in which the Bill discriminates against a group of women. The House may feel that I am warming to a theme this afternoon, but there are various ways in which the Bill penalises particular groups of women. There will be women up and down the land who hang on to every word that the Secretary of State says. They will have heard him say, "It will pay to save" and that "pensioners"—the term is unqualified—"will for the first time be rewarded for their savings."

What the Secretary of State has not said is that women aged 60 to 64 do not count; they do not qualify. He did not qualify any of his statements to that effect. I challenge Ministers to give me any instance of an occasion when the Secretary of State, having made those sweeping statements, has qualified them by saying explicitly that women aged 60 to 64 will be excluded. I would be happy to take an intervention to hear about a time when he has done that. The Secretary of State has failed to point that out. Obviously, those who read Bills and follow the small print will know it, but women aged 60 to 64 are missing out.

Those women may feel that they are pensioners who have saved. Why can they not be rewarded? The Government's answer concerns equalisation; they have to equalise somewhere because of equal opportunities requirements. However, they have equalised at 60 for the guaranteed credit element of the pension credit. Within the Bill, we have equalisation at 60. When the Government have been forced to equalise, whether on winter fuel payments or concessionary travel for older people, they have equalised at 60, not 65, even though that brings in men aged 60 to 64, who are not state retirement pensioners. Therefore, the precedents exist. There is even a precedent in the Bill for equalising at 60.

When we raised the issue in Committee and came up with a proposal for achieving our aims, the Minister said that it would not work because men of, say, 63 had not had the opportunity of living to 65 to receive a full pension and being assessed on that basis. It was, the Minister argued, discriminatory to assess men at 63 on the basis of the pension that they had accrued up to that point.

Amendment No. 2 therefore proposes an alternative strategy. Instead of assessing those people on the basis of the pension accrued to that point, they would be assessed on the pension that the Department forecast that they would receive at 65. Each year, as men approached 65, the calculation would be done afresh. Such calculations are done all the time by the Government, and we have all seen pension forecast statements. It would not be complicated to provide such forecasts for men aged 60 to 64.

Amendment No. 2 would be non-discriminatory, because the message for women over 60 would be, "You have had your full working life to build up a pension, and we will assess on the basis of that pension." The message to men would be, "We will assess you on the basis of the pension that we expect you to get at the end of your full working life." That deals with the point about discrimination, which was the Minister's principal objection, and it would bring into the scheme women aged 60 to 64, who are another group of second-class citizens under the Bill.

The issue of incentives to save is important. I welcome the spirit of new clause 5, if not the detailed string of amendments that go with it. In our view, a related aspect is that women aged 60 to 64 who have saved should not be excluded. If they were included, the Government would have to agree that the new clause would provide an additional incentive for women to save. Therefore, the Government should welcome our amendments.

Bob Spink: The encouragement of saving is a key area in which the Bill falls seriously short. The pension credit might even depress the savings ratio, which is already dangerously low. New clause 5 is an important addition because it would focus attention on the Bill's impact on the encouragement of young people to save for their retirement. The Bill should not discourage people from saving for their retirement, but it may have that impact.

The Bill should provide an incentive for younger people to change their behaviour. It should encourage them to save more for their retirement and to consider more carefully their post-retirement income and lifestyles. In short, it should encourage them to be prudent. New clause 5 would facilitate the measurement of the Bill's success in achieving that increase in prudence, although we believe that the Bill may discourage prudence. New clause 5 is, therefore, an essential part of the necessary control mechanism for the Bill, without which it would be less effective.

The Government should have no problem accepting new clause 5 as a simple, common-sense feedback mechanism that would illuminate the performance of the savings credit measure and enable the legislators to make any necessary changes in that light. The only reason for the Government to resist this common-sense addition to the Bill is if they lack confidence in the potential effectiveness of their savings credit measure and would be embarrassed to have light thrown on its performance.

David Cairns: I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman is making a narrow argument about new clause 5 merely adding the requirement to submit a report. However, he has made several comments about the need to encourage prudence. Can he outline exactly what his party's policy is on encouraging prudence and getting people to save for their old age?

Bob Spink: I should be delighted to do as the hon. Gentleman suggests, but I am sure that if I did so, you would immediately call me to order, Madam Deputy Speaker, because we are debating new clause 5. What do the Government have to be afraid of if more light is shed on the matter, which is all that new clause 5 seeks to do?

We should all be concerned about today's pensioners, because they have had a raw deal from the Government—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] They certainly have. The proportion of national income taken by pensioners today is lower than it was under John Major's Government in 1997, and that is disgraceful. We should also be concerned for the well-being of tomorrow's pensioners. Only around half of people below state retirement age are currently saving for their retirement. That is a chilling and frightening statistic that we should do something to correct. We should increase the number of people who save for their pensions, but the Bill will not do that. The new clause would illuminate that point and I therefore commend my Opposition colleagues for tabling it. I urge the House to accept it because it would enable us to monitor what is happening to savings and to change the operation of benefits to encourage greater prudence.

3.45 pm

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): I, too, wish to speak in support of new clause 5. It is important to lay out clearly exactly what the new clause says. It falls into two parts. The first would invite the Secretary of State to lay before Parliament annually

"an assessment of the effect of the savings credit on the propensity of individuals of working age to save for their retirement".

The second would allow the Secretary of State to invite the Social Security Advisory Committee—a neutral and fair-minded body—to comment on the report and

"make recommendations for any change to structures or benefits which seem to them to be appropriate."

I serve with my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) on the Work and Pensions Committee, and in the course of our inquiry into the pension credit we heard much evidence about what expert individuals and bodies believed would be its effect on future saving. The Norwich Union, for example, declared that the incentive to save is "insufficient". The Institute of Actuaries said that it would become

"impossible to provide savings advice to those on low to medium incomes".

The IPPR—a body associated not with the Conservative party, but with the Labour party—*[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) says, "Not yet." We shall see. The IPPR said that the credit was

"a highly opaque means of generating the right incentives: it is extremely difficult for individuals to know what to expect from it".

Andrew Dilnot of the Institute for Fiscal Studies said that in connection with the incentive to save, the Government were

"on a much more difficult wicket."

That has given rise to the various cricket metaphors that have been thrown around the Chamber.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): I applaud the hon. Gentleman for returning the attention of the House to the work of the Work and Pensions Committee, but is he not ably demonstrating that the Committee had no trouble at all in taking evidence from the Social Security Advisory Committee? From his work on the Work and Pensions Committee, is he not aware of the annual report of the Department to the House that already exists? Would not the new clause simply duplicate matters?

Mr. Goodman: In a sense the hon. Lady is making my case for me, although I am sure that she will not agree. I see no reason why the Committee would not be able to supplement its work with a report of the kind envisaged by my Front-Bench colleagues. I shall cap the evidence to the Committee that I have quoted with what Age Concern has said about the pension credit, which has already been mentioned this afternoon. It said, baldly and clearly, that it believes

"that the pension credit will fail to provide sufficient incentive to younger people to save for their retirement."

David Cairns: The hon. Gentleman cites many esteemed experts to support his case, but of course he omits the comments made by Lord Fowler in the other place. Lord Fowler, while welcoming the measure, said that his only regret was that his Government had not introduced it when they had the chance.

Mr. Goodman: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman mentioned the comments of Lord Fowler, because if there was an annual report of the type to which my hon. Friends have referred, we should be able to see whether all those who gave evidence to the Select Committee—and indeed Lord Fowler—were right or wrong. The hon. Gentleman, too, is helping my case.

Finally, I quote from the conclusion of the Select Committee itself. The Committee is made up of many more Labour than Conservative Members, but it is a fair-minded Committee. On incentives to save, the Committee stated:

"We have concluded that, whilst the Pension Credit will enable today's pensioners to see a reward for saving"—

I include that phrase because I want to be sure that I quote from the Committee's report in a way that is fair to the Government—

"there is no clear evidence that it will actually increase younger individuals' savings."

I return to my starting point. In essence, the new clause seeks only to test the claims that have been made by the Labour Members who intervened during my contribution: it would make an independent assessment of whether the Government are right or wrong to say that the pension credit will increase incentives to save.

All the expert advice of which I am aware is that the pension credit will decrease the incentive to save. The Government believe the opposite. If they believe that my hon. Friends on the Front Bench and I are wrong, they need only produce a report, as the new clause proposes, and let a fair-minded and independent body comment and arbitrate on it. I urge the House to accept the new clause.

Annabelle Ewing: I rise to support the basic premise of new clause 5. I do not understand why the Government are afraid of having to produce a report. They maintain that, inter alia, the Bill will act as an incentive to save. If that is their objective and if they are keen to ensure that the Bill is indeed an incentive to save, they should be willing to do everything that they can to achieve that objective. The preparation of a report—supplementary to other reports produced by the Department for Work and Pensions—would be a reasonable way of assisting the Government in securing their stated objective.

As we have already heard, various third-party bodies have expressed concern as to whether the measure will really act as an incentive to save. I do not want to go over the same ground by repeating those concerns. The key question is: how will the Bill act as an incentive to save when individuals do not have sufficient financial information early in their life to assess, or predict,

[Annabelle Ewing]

the likely value of their savings many decades down the line? That is an important issue that could be discussed in a report. It should certainly be given further consideration.

Maria Eagle: The hon. Lady has made a good point. One of the best ways to ensure that people save more for their retirement is to give them information about what their retirement income would look like in the light of their current provision. In that respect, the Government are promoting joint pension forecasts, so that individuals receive a document annually that shows what they would be likely to receive from their private and state pensions. Does the hon. Lady not agree that such information would be much more useful than a general report to Parliament?

Annabelle Ewing: The two are not mutually exclusive. It is helpful to learn that there will be some Government-assisted prediction of the likely pension.

Mr. Clappison: May I interject a bipartisan, consensual note? Does the hon. Lady agree that it would be useful if those pension forecasts included details of how much the Government will take from people's pensions through the pensions tax that the Chancellor introduced in 1997?

Annabelle Ewing: The hon. Gentleman has made his point and I do not want to go down that road today; to do so might be to detain the House much longer than anticipated.

Let me return to the Minister's point. The prediction would be very general because the financial information would not be accurate enough; for example, we would not know the value of the guaranteed income 20 years down the line. It would thus be difficult to make a meaningful prediction of the value of someone's savings. In any event, the two elements are not mutually exclusive and I do not understand what it is the Government are so afraid of.

The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) felt that the amendment was too restrictive and that we should consider the overall effect of the Government's policy on savings. I agree with him. I share many of his concerns about the situation faced by pensioners at present. I wonder whether the Bill will really make much difference as regards lifting pensioners out of poverty.

In Scotland, we face a disgraceful situation: one in four pensioners live in poverty. That is unacceptable and I am not convinced that the Bill would do much more than tinker at the edges. If it helped even one pensioner, I would certainly support it, but it represents a missed opportunity to deal with pensioner poverty.

I turn briefly to the amendments. I confess that I was a bit puzzled about amendments Nos. 6 to 12, especially Nos. 4 and 5. Could we have some further elucidation of them?

I support the position of the hon. Member for Northavon on amendments Nos. 1 and 2. As he said earlier, there is discrimination against women and the Government are doing nothing to end it. The amendments are a reasonable way of tackling that unacceptable discrimination. The point that there is a contradiction in the Bill was well made: although the Government accept that the problem can be dealt with vis-à-vis the income guarantee element, they seem to take a different view on the savings credit element. Perhaps that will be clarified. I look forward to the Minister's comments.

Andrew Selous: I, too, speak as a member of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions. Sadly, I note that only Conservative members of the Committee are in the Chamber for the debate.

The Committee's excellent Chairman, the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), frequently reminds us that, as Committee members, we are simple seekers after truth. That splendid phrase encapsulates the intention of new clause 5, which would cost the Government nothing; the expense for the Department for Work and Pensions would be negligible.

It is excellent that the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle), has confirmed that there will be annual statements for pensioners of future provision from both their private and public pensions. I very much welcome that; the information will be extremely useful for individual pensioners. However, when, as a nation, we are looking at a £27 billion savings gap, we need aggregate information, covering the whole country, to guide experts in the field and to advise the Government as to what should be done.

The hon. Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford) asked why the Select Committee could not examine the matter annually and provide the information. I must point out to the hon. Lady that the scope of the Committee's inquiries is extremely wide. Only yesterday, we considered the Child Support Agency. We also look into the whole field of work. It is not always possible or practical to expect a Select Committee annually to provide information, as she suggests, given the range of the Department's activities—the Department spends £110 billion a year.

I commend the new clause to the House. It will cost the Government nothing and it could shed some useful light on this extremely pressing matter.

4 pm

Mr. Brady: I shall be brief. I have listened with interest to the comments of my hon. Friends and hon. Members from other parties.

On amendments Nos. 1 and 2, about which the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) spoke, I was interested to hear that the Government's response has entirely concerned the discrimination that they believe would result in favour of women aged 60 to 64. Will the hon. Gentleman or the Minister comment on the viability of such an argument, given that the transitional arrangement is in itself clearly discriminatory? Ministers have accepted that that arrangement is appropriate. I cannot therefore see why they should not also accept some other measures that try to incorporate greater fairness.

On new clause 5, we must take into account the context in which we are trying to deal with the problem. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) described the massive damage that the Government have already done to the savings ratio. Hon. Members on both sides of the House are acutely aware of the difficulties that so many pension schemes are facing—whether those are the problems of Equitable Life or of the increasing number of people who will no longer be covered by final salary pension schemes. We are very much aware of the damage that has been done to pension funds by the Chancellor's £5 billion tax on those funds.

Against that backdrop and given that young people are not saving sufficiently, the new clause is a modest but important attempt to improve the situation. Young people are deterred from saving because they feel that the system is too complicated, is not worth it, does not apply to them and is not relevant and, tragically, by the knowledge that they will not benefit fully if they take responsible action and try to provide for themselves.

The Minister must reflect on one crucial question. We would not be here today dealing with this new clause and the amendments, or indeed with the Bill that will introduce the pension credit and the savings credit, had the Government got it right in the first place and had they not created a problem with the introduction of the minimum income guarantee. Had that guarantee been accompanied by such a requirement to produce an annual report on the savings behaviour of the nation, the Government would have understood the crisis sooner and the seriousness—

Maria Eagle: Did I hear the hon. Gentleman say that the minimum income guarantee is a problem? It is a poverty alleviation measure of which the Government are proud.

Mr. Brady: I think that the Minister can do better than that. We all accept that there are problems—even the Government clearly accept it—with people's willingness to save and to make proper pension provision for themselves. Frankly, the hon. Lady's point was rather facile given that hon. Members on both sides of the House accept that something needs to be done.

Mr. Goodman: Did the Minister for Pensions not refer earlier in the debate to some of the problems caused by what he called the "old-fashioned MIG", making it clear that he thought that the pension credit was needed to alleviate some of those problems, which is what my hon. Friend was referring to?

Mr. McCartney *rose—*

Mr. Brady: I think that the Minister wishes to intervene immediately.

Mr. McCartney: We are talking about old-fashioned income support. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman would like to offer an apology for encouraging young people to come out of their pension schemes and go for personal pensions, which led to millions of such pensions being mis-sold. The Labour Government have had to clear up that mess.

Mr. Brady: Ministers are now competing with each other to make silly and irrelevant points, which they are doing rather well. I am sure that I heard the Minister refer to the "old-fashioned MIG". In some of his more red flag-waving moments I think he thought of something else as being an old-fashioned MIG not so long ago. He was referring to the minimum income guarantee and not income support. Perhaps the record will now be hastily corrected, but that was indeed what he said. He referred to the minimum income guarantee as the "old-fashioned MIG". Perhaps it was a Freudian slip, but it was a clear acceptance that the Government have created problems.

If the Government had been prepared to incorporate a proper review procedure such as the one that we seek today, they might have arrived sooner at the conclusion that they now appear to have reached that something needs to be done to "fine-tune", the Minister may say, but certainly to ameliorate the situation.

If the Minister is going to be open minded and try to do the best job he can with the legislation before us, he should accept new clause 5 without any reservation.

Maria Eagle: The debate on this group has been very lively. I hope to be able to answer as many questions as I can get through without testing the patience of the House too much. The hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) has just been talking about the minimum income guarantee. We know that the Conservative party dislikes it and thinks that it is a problem. Indeed, the Leader of the Opposition said in March 1999, when we were discussing the MIG in the House:

> "That is a huge rise in spending . . . I can think of nothing to recommend it."—[*Official Report*, 15 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 740.]

The Conservatives have never liked the minimum income guarantee because they do not like alleviating the poverty that they caused pensioners.

Mr. Brady: If the Minister likes the MIG so much, why is she legislating to remove it?

Maria Eagle: That is a wide long hop, to return to the cricket analogies that we were using earlier. The minimum income guarantee is based on income support rules. The fastest way we could introduce the scheme to alleviate poverty was to use the existing rules. We are now changing those rules to make them much simpler and to make the scheme better, so I have no problem in dispatching that comment to the boundary. The hon. Gentleman will have to try harder, although I probably should not have reintroduced cricket. I get the feeling that I may regret it at some point this afternoon.

Annabelle Ewing: Retaining the nice humour that we seem to be enjoying in this interlude in hostilities, could the Minister give me a glossary of terms, as I am getting a little lost with all these cricket analogies?

Maria Eagle: I am sorry to hear that the hon. Lady is not as familiar as some hon. Members with cricketing terminology, because Scotland has rather a good cricket team. I would have expected her to have watched their games occasionally. I cannot promise to give her a glossary at this moment as I am sure that Madam Deputy Speaker would bring me to order straight away, but I can point her to the section in the Library that contains "Wisden". She will no doubt find a good glossary of cricketing terms there. However, I must get on if I am to have any chance of dealing with the meat of the debate on this group, which has been very interesting.

[Maria Eagle]

New clause 5 was moved by the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) at some length and supported by most if not all Conservative Members present and also by some hon. Members from other parties here present. The purpose of the new clause is to ensure that an annual parliamentary reporting mechanism is in place on the effect of the pension credit on an individual's incentive to save for retirement. I do not think that anyone would object to the House and the Government, or anyone who is considering these matters, having as much information as possible about the effect of policies on people's behaviour. Information is a good thing. The Government try to base their policies on evidence, and I am sure that most hon. Members would agree that that was a good thing.

The new clause would, however, require the Secretary of State to lay an annual report before Parliament setting out the effect of the pension credit on the individual's incentive to save, and would give the Secretary of State the authority to invite the Social Security Advisory Committee to comment on that report and make recommendations for changes to the structure of benefits that seemed to it to be important.

The new clause is not necessary because the Secretary of State already has the power to ask the Social Security Advisory Committee for advice on any social security matter. In fact, if Opposition Members look at paragraph 20 of schedule 2, they will see that it will amend section 170(5) of the Social Security Administration Act 1992, so that the Bill, when enacted, will become a relevant enactment, which will bring pension credit into the existing SSAC framework. The SSAC may give advice and assistance to the Secretary of State in connection with the discharge of his functions under those enactments, which will include the Bill. Of course, under section 170(3) of the 1992 Act, he may refer to the committee for consideration and advice such questions relating to the operation of any relevant enactment as he thinks fit. In that sense, the power already exists in the Bill for the Secretary of State to make references to the SSAC if he wishes to do so. So the new clause is not necessary; nor would it add anything to the existing powers.

Of course Ministers are accountable to the House for the introduction and monitoring of any new policy. That is how things should be done. I am sure that Opposition Members will continue to seek Adjournment debates and ask parliamentary questions to discover how the Bill is working if it is enacted. That is the right way to deal with things, and new clause 5 would add nothing.

It is technically very difficult to produce a report that specifically separates the effects of pension credit from other impacts and policies designed to promote incentives to save for retirement. It would be particularly difficult to produce a report that isolated whatever the incentive, or disincentive, effect of the Bill may be on the propensity to save, as the new clause puts it, so there could be rather more confusion.

I hope that I shall not be unfair to the hon. Member for Hertsmere if I say that he probably tabled the new clause to promote a debate about incentives to save. It would probably be fair to say, having listened to the debate, that he certainly managed to have such a debate. *[Interruption.]* He is chuntering away, and I hope that I can hear what he is saying. I am talking about new clause 5 and trying to deal with the points that he made.

Mr. Clappison: There is no mystery about new clause 5, because it refers to

> "the effect of the savings credit on the propensity of individuals of working age to save for their retirement".

That is precisely what the phrase "incentives to save" means.

Maria Eagle: The point that I am trying to make, although obviously not clearly enough for the hon. Gentleman, is that it is quite difficult to disentangle the incentive of one policy from all the other incentives or disincentives that are flying around. That is the problem with the new clause.

The hon. Gentleman was trying to promote a debate about incentives to save, and in that respect I want to answer some of the points that he made. He rightly said that many people of working age are not saving enough for their retirement. No one would disagree with that. Ministers have said at the Dispatch Box that people are not saving enough. He also referred to the alleged £27 billion savings gap, as did some of his colleagues. He made the point that, if the Bill were implemented in that way, it would act as a disincentive to save for people of working age, rather than rewarding savings, which is what we think it would do.

A tension inevitably exists between the need to ensure that there is a floor below which pensioner incomes do not fall and the need to ensure that today's workers have a clear incentive to save. The Bill provides a mechanism for doing both, by ensuring that we can tackle poverty among today's pensioners. May I say gently to Conservative Members that, after their 18 years in power, our priority when we came to power in 1997 had to be to do something, as part of a decent pensions policy, to alleviate the pensioner poverty with which they left us?

Things have not got worse. The claims made by the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) were complete nonsense, and I do not recognise any of the points that he made as being based on any kind of fact whatever. If he could point out his source for the claims that he made, I should be very interested to see it.

4.15 pm

Mr. Goodman: Will the Minister not acknowledge that even the pension credit's supporters recognise that the difficulty with the Government's approach is the extensive reliance on means-testing, that up to roughly a fifth of those entitled to the MIG do not take it up, and that there is no evidence at all to show that take-up will increase under the pension credit?

Maria Eagle: I shall come to some of the points that the hon. Gentleman makes later. Take-up is obviously important. We want to promote take-up to ensure that those who are entitled to benefits take them up. One of the ways in which pension credit represents an improvement in that regard is that the so-called means test—the information that people will have to provide us with—is much simpler and much more straightforward. The weekly means test that currently exists for income support and the MIG will disappear, and people will normally only have to make a claim once every five years. That will lead to a considerable improvement in take-up, which is what we aim to achieve.

The hon. Member for Hertsmere suggested that the Bill will involve a disincentive to save, but the pension credit is about fairness; it will reward thrift instead of penalising it. For the first time, those who have saved a modest amount for their retirement will be rewarded for doing so by receiving the savings credit. That has not been the case in the past. So the Bill will remove a disincentive to save for people who were likely to qualify for the MIG. Instead of losing benefit pound for pound, as happens under the old income support and the MIG systems, they will receive a 60p a week reward for every pound saved in the target income band. That is not a disincentive to save; it is a reward for saving.

No hon. Member has so far mentioned that the capital rule changes that we are making in pension credit are very beneficial. We shall treat capital five times more generously than it is treated under the old income support and MIG-type rules. We have designed pension credit to promote saving in respect of the capital rules. We will abolish the current rule that excludes pensioners with £12,000 or more in savings from any help at all.

Income from savings below £6,000 will be ignored. For savings above £6,000, a notional rate of income, set at half the current MIG rate, will be assumed. Those improvements ought to encourage people and those who have been excluded in the past because of their capital to benefit from the savings reward. All those things are an incentive to save, rather than a disincentive, because they will explicitly provide a reward for savings. That is one of the Bill's main aims, and I contend that that is exactly what the Bill will do.

Of course Opposition Members needed to support their assertions. In doing so, they read out comments made to the Select Committee during the evidence that it took, as well as other sources—briefings and so on—that have been circulated while we have been considering the Bill. However, they did not read out all the quotes from all the organisations—not that I am shocked about that—and there are some other quotes from respectable organisations in the pensions world that agree with the Government that the pension credit will provide an incentive save.

For example, the Association of British Insurers said:

> "The ABI welcomes the Government's proposals for a Pension Credit as an important step in addressing the issues which may currently discourage those on moderate incomes from saving for their retirement."

The National Association of Pension Funds said:

> "The NAPF welcomes the concept of the Pension Credit and believes that it will go some way to rewarding low income pensioners for their thrift during their working lifetime. It will also assist in creating the right environment for today's workers on low or modest incomes to be able to justify making a commitment to a long term pension saving vehicle."

Legal and General said:

> "Legal and General is confident that the pension credit has the potential to be a powerful encouragement to save for low or middle income groups."

I could read out many more. Obviously, Opposition Members read out the quotes that supported them and they will not be surprised that I have read out some of the quotes that support the Government's position, but Opposition Members ought at least to accept the fact that the professional view is not all one way. Many professionals in the industry believe, as do the Government, that pension credit will provide an incentive to save. I would not therefore accept the Conservative party's claim that our proposals are disincentives to save.

Mr. Goodman: The hon. Lady is being very fair. Rightly, she says that Conservative Members have a propensity to quote those organisations that believe that the pension credit does not provide an incentive to save. She has just read out quotes from bodies that say that it is an incentive to save. Why will she not therefore support the new clause, which would allow a neutral body to make the judgment?

Maria Eagle: If the hon. Gentleman were to be fair, he would accept that I have said that the powers already exist to enable the Government to do as the new clause suggests. Therefore—

Mr. Brady: Will the Minister give way?

Maria Eagle: If the hon. Gentleman gives me a chance to finish, I might consider giving way to him, as long as he does not throw a cricketing analogy at me.

The Government already have the power and authority to do as the new clause suggests. I have made it clear that we believe in evidence-based policy making and that the House has the power and the duty to hold the Government to account, as I am sure it will.

Mr. Brady: I promise no cricketing analogies. The Minister says that the new clause is not necessary because the Government already have the power that it would provide. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) is eminently reasonable, and if she were to give an undertaking that the Government would use those powers and commission a report on an annual basis, we might be persuaded to consider withdrawing the new clause.

Mr. Boswell: Tempting.

Maria Eagle: It might be tempting to give such short answers, as the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) suggests, but it is usually foolish for Ministers to give in to that temptation. We are committed to evidence-based policy and we have the power to find out and do all the research that we need to do to evaluate our policies, and we shall do so. There are some technical problems in respect of isolating propensity to save in relation to one policy, as opposed to everything else that is going on. The point that I am trying to get across is that I am not hostile to the idea of evaluating policy—we are in favour of that but the new clause is a flawed way of doing it.

David Cairns: Would my hon. Friend not agree that the reason why we are having so much debate and so many speeches by Conservatives Members on the issue of reporting is that, when it comes to substantial policies for making the lives of Britain's pensioners better, they have absolutely no alternatives?

Andrew Selous: At the moment.

Maria Eagle: The hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) is a very honest man. My hon. Friend has received his reply.

[Maria Eagle]

I do not want to try the patience of the House. I hope that I have dealt with the issues in relation to new clause 5 in detail and that Conservative Members, although they may not like what I have said, will accept that I have at least attempted to answer their points.

Interestingly, when the hon. Member for Hertsmere referred to amendments Nos. 4 to 12—he did not technically move them, of course—he mumbled something about them reducing complexity. He went on to say that they were so complex that he could not and would not deal with explaining to the House what they meant. I was hoping that he would do so, because, on giving them a close look after they had been tabled, I hoped that I would receive a little guidance in his opening remarks.

Mr. Clappison: I am tempted.

Maria Eagle: Oh, the hon. Gentleman is feeling tempted now. I shall not tempt him too much. Given that he did not set out clearly precisely what the amendments were about and what he was about—one wonders how they got written, given that nobody is quite sure what they are about—I must crave the indulgence of the House and deal with them in relation to my interpretation of them rather than the interpretation of the Members who tabled them.

Mr. Boswell: Perhaps I can assist the Minister, as my name is also attached to these amendments, although, for technical reasons, I did not move them. Indeed, it would take a long time to explain them. They are, as it were, derivatives of amendments moved in another place by the late and sincerely lamented Baroness Castle. They are intended to be entirely neutral in effect. The reason they are more complex than the amendments moved by her and Baroness Turner in the other place is that they have been upgraded to take account of at least two of the objections made by the Minister's colleague Baroness Hollis, and we felt that her third objection could have been dealt with in another way. They therefore have a degree of commonality of pedigree, even if the Minister is not prepared to accept them.

Mr. Brady: Middle stump.

Maria Eagle: We are back to cricket again. I agree that, given that explanation, the amendments have a degree of pedigree behind them. On reading them, it was apparent that there was a great deal of ingenuity behind them—I have even written "ingenuity" on my notes. Even though I thought that they were tabled by the Conservative party, I was about to concede that they were ingenious, which they are. If we accept the new clause and amendments at face value as an attempt to improve the Bill, I have some points to make about their faults.

Clearly, clause 3 is a complex piece of work, and it was recognised in Committee that it was not the clearest drafting that we have ever seen. When one tries to set out a mathematical calculation in words, one is already at a disadvantage—that is why we have mathematics—but that is what the parliamentary draftsman who produced clause 3 had to do. The calculation of the pension credit in the Bill has two parts. First, a single pensioner who has an income below £100 will receive 60p a week for every £1 of savings that they have over £77, building to a maximum of £3.80 a week for someone whose weekly income from pensions and savings is £100. Secondly, if a single pensioner's income is above £100, the weekly maximum savings credit of £13.80 starts to reduce by 40p for every £1 of original income. That is the basic calculation.

To achieve the same end, the new clause and amendments introduce an income disregard. The way they work is quite clever, because it seems that the calculation that they introduce works across the entire income range to produce the same figures as the calculation in the Bill. That is why I use the word "ingenious"; they are ingenious. I am not absolutely sure, however, that the calculation is any more transparent than the one in the Bill. In addition, there is a flaw. The current Bill distinguishes between the two components of the pension credit—the guarantee credit and the savings credit—whereas, effectively, the new clause and amendments do the calculation in a different way, which brings everybody's income below the guarantee level using disregards. That was put forward as more simple because, I presume, there is one element instead of two. I hope that I am getting it right.

Mr. Boswell: You are.

Maria Eagle: Good. The problem with that is that the guarantee credit is a poverty alleviation measure and a passport to other benefits, receipt of which is dependent on receipt of guarantee credit. Without guarantee credit, below which everybody's income is reduced before being topped up, there is a difficulty in how to identify those who might be eligible, by passporting to other elements of income support—for example, severe disability premium and carers premium. That is one set of problems with the proposals.

Another defect is that the new clause would exclude pensioners with a downrated guarantee credit, because they were in hospital for more than 13 weeks, from benefiting from the savings credit. As the House knows, or at least, as Members on the Committee know, savings credit should not be downrated. Were we to adopt the proposed formulation and calculation, we would be prevented from being able to differentiate those who had guarantee credit and savings credit, and which one should be downrated.

Mr. Boswell: I had, in a sense, already trailed the Minister's objection to one point about the passporting of benefits. If we had gone on at length about the approach that we would have taken, we would have said that only people with incomes not exceeding the appropriate minimum guarantee would be passported. Although I have not considered the point in detail, I think that it would equally have been possible to have maintained the savings credit about which she has also expressed concerns.

4.30 pm

Maria Eagle: That is interesting, but it still prompts the question: why bother doing the calculation in a different way if it means taking a different route to exactly the same place? What is the benefit of doing that? We need two elements of the pension credit, because they are essential to enable us both to support the income of pensioners by way of the guaranteed credit and to make transparent—this is a main policy aim of the Bill—the fact that there will be a reward for saving. The hon. Gentleman's approach would remove that clarity, because it would not be clear that a specific element of the pension credit would be a reward for savings. That would have an impact on incentives. I know that Opposition Members do not always accept our point of view, but we believe that their approach would be bad in that regard.

I hope that I have dealt with the amendments tabled by Conservative Members, so I shall move on to some of the points made by the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb). I intervened in his speech when he appeared to complain about our proposals for the alleviation of poverty. He suggested that, by increasing the amount of the minimum income guarantee—soon to be guaranteed credit—we would create a problem. However, I believe that we are helping to alleviate poverty. I would have thought that Liberal Democrats were in favour of that—they used to be.

Perhaps the hon. Gentleman is moving a bit closer to the main Opposition party in saying that he is not really in favour of alleviating poverty even though we inherited from the Conservative party, when it left office after 18 years, a far wider income disparity than existed when they came to office. We were very keen to do something about that.

Mr. Webb: I am never entirely sure whether the Minister is wilfully misrepresenting my position. I made it absolutely clear that we believe that there are two strategies for tackling pensioner poverty: the mass means-testing route or targeting by age. Each has strengths and weaknesses and each involves trade-offs. I made it perfectly clear that we did not oppose attacking poverty but that we thought that the Government's approach had damaged savings, and missed the people who do not claim under the complicated schemes. We think that there are better ways of alleviating poverty, and that is clearly what I said. We do not disagree about the fact that there should be a strategy for dealing with poverty.

Maria Eagle: The approach that the Liberal Democrats have chosen would not achieve that aim, whereas our policies will.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that I am not in the business of wilfully misrepresenting him. Perhaps he is in the business of not being quite as clear as he might be. I listened to him carefully and he basically said that targeting could be achieved without any form of means-testing—*[Interruption]*—without a form of mass means-testing is the phrase I think he used. He referred to using age as a proxy for poverty and signed up to the reasoned amendment on Second Reading that made that point. That is why I see a lessening gap between the policy of the official Opposition and the Liberal Democrats.

Both parties have referred to age additions as targeting without means-testing. The hon. Gentleman said that the biggest income gaps could be proxied by age, and therefore that age additions were a way of dealing with the problem without resorting to mass mean-testing, as he put it. However, the family resources survey shows that the biggest income gaps are between people in the same age groups, not between people in different age groups. So his point is simply not true.

The hon. Gentleman proposes to give extra money to people such as Baroness Thatcher. Whatever one thinks of her, she is a wealthy woman and has been rewarded for her work. He would give extra money to Baroness Thatcher because she is over 75 but not to a poor pensioner who is 60. If he really is suggesting that that is a way of targeting poverty, he has got it very wrong.

The hon. Member for Northavon suggests that we should pay the £2 billion that the pension credit will cost to the over-75s, but that would still leave three quarters of that group short of the current MIG level. When I asked him for his calculations for those who would be still on the MIG under his scheme, he was not able to provide them and he did not give his figures for what he might raise the pension to. However, if we were to raise the basic state pension to the current MIG level, which is probably higher than he would suggest, that would cost £9.7 billion net and it would not target the poorest pensioners. In fact, the poorest pensioners would have their benefit reduced pound for pound because of the income support rules and the 100 per cent. marginal rate of deduction. That would still leave 1.6 million pensioners entitled to the MIG. His policy would not even achieve his aims or deal with the problems with which the pension credit deals.

On amendments Nos. 1 and 2, points were made about those aged between 60 and 64. As we discovered in Committee, it is a difficult issue. The hon. Member for Northavon has also been fairly ingenious in coming up with a different way of achieving what the amendments he tabled in Committee tried to achieve. Amendments Nos. 1 and 2 seek to rectify the anomaly, as he sees it, of restricting the savings credit for men and women over 65 by making it available to both men and women from the same age as for the guaranteed credit, which is currently 60.

The amendments would set the minimum age for the savings credit at the qualifying age rather than the age of 65. The hon. Gentleman has used that device, and the qualifying age would apply to the guaranteed credit and to the savings credit. Under the Bill, the qualifying age is different for the guaranteed credit and the savings credit.

The problem with the hon. Gentleman's approach is that we still do not have equality in pension provision. I tried to make the point to him in Committee that his proposal would not work because we will not have equality in the basic state pension and pension provision by the state until 2020. The House will recall that the Pensions Act 1995 tackled the issue of gender inequality in pensions, but it recognised that the problems could not be dealt with overnight because pension saving does not operate in that way. Therefore, a provision was made that, between 2010 and 2020, the basic state pension age for women would rise over that time until it is equal to that for men. Until that happens, we will not be able to apply the Bill's provisions in a way that can avoid anomalies. That is the basic problem.

The amendments are slightly different from the ones that the hon. Gentleman tabled in Committee, but they still create the same problems. That is why I ask the House to reject them. They would still leave inequalities

[Maria Eagle]

between men and women at different ages even though they are in identical circumstances. Despite his ingenuity, the effects are the same. The Government cannot accept them because they would produce anomalous results such as the one that I referred to in Committee. Under his amendments, men between 60 and 64 might receive the pension credit but, once they hit 65, they would have it taken off them. We do not want our policy to create such anomalies.

I give the hon. Gentleman every credit for his ingenuity, but the basic problem is the current inequality in state pension provision. We cannot overcome the problem until we have the equality that will take time to achieve. Try as he might and try as we did, we cannot do any better than to have the savings credit come into effect at age 65. It is regrettable that some people will lose out because of that, but there is nothing that we can do to put matters right unless we bring forward the age of equality between the genders. And we cannot do that.

I realise that I have been speaking for some time. I do not want to try the patience of the House too much, and I hope that I have dealt with the points raised. I also hope that the hon. Member for Hertsmere is not falling asleep as a result of my droning on, and that having heard my argument, he will withdraw the motion.

Mr. Clappison: I would not be so ungallant as to accuse the hon. Lady of droning on. Indeed, I listened to her carefully considered arguments with great interest. However, I am not as convinced as I should like to be to withdraw the motion.

I am grateful for the support given to the new clause by my hon. Friends and from other quarters, reflecting the widespread concern about the crisis in saving and the lack of saving for the future. I remind the hon. Lady, as my hon. Friends did, that this modest amendment only requires the Government to prepare a report. The case for the new clause, which was already strong, now looks even stronger.

The hon. Lady was brave enough to argue that the new clause is unnecessary because the Secretary of State already has the power to require a report. However, when pressed on that, she gave no hint that the Secretary of State has contemplated such a step. That is unsatisfactory. The subject is important and we want the fullest possible information on it.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 99, Noes 220.

Division No. 253] **[4.41 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Bacon, Richard
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bercow, John
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mates, Michael
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Paice, James
Price, Adam
Randall, John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob
Steen, Anthony
Stunell, Andrew
Swire, Hugo
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Julian Brazier and
Mr. Laurence Robertson.

NOES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles
(Norwich S)
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*

Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff
Etherington, Bill
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hoey, Kate
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John

Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Moffatt, Laura
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norris, Dan
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Rammell, Bill
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Squire, Rachel
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Wareing, Robert N
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Wood, Mike

Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Tony McNulty and
Mr. Nick Ainger.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 9

DURATION OF ASSESSED INCOME PERIOD

Mr. Boswell: I beg to move amendment No. 13, in page 6, line 28, at end insert—

> '(1A) The Secretary of State may provide by regulation for the assessed income period to be continued for a period not exceeding five years notwithstanding that the payment of benefit during that period has been terminated under regulations made under section 1(5) or section 2(6) of this Act, and may make provision for the restoration of benefit on the same basis of assessment as has previously applied when the conditions giving rise to the termination of that benefit no longer apply.'.

Even those of us who do not habitually indulge in immoderate language or high political grandstanding are entitled to do so from time to time. I seem to remember on one occasion during consideration of the Bill that became the Learning and Skills Act 2000 becoming extremely excited with the Secretary of State and threatening at about midnight to divide the House. Although I make no such threat at this point, which might be a comfort to some hon. Members, who knows what will happen? As ever, it depends on the Minister's response. There is a serious and important point that needs to be dealt with. We discussed it at some length in Committee, but I do not feel that it has been satisfactorily answered yet, although I realise that it might be resolved at a later stage through appropriate regulations.

The whole business arises from the Government's shift to an assessed income period of a maximum of five years, compared with what might be regarded as a traditional measure of weekly income for means-tested benefits, or annual income for tax. My argument is not that that shift should not have happened. We all know that for practical reasons the purity of the doctrine of the weekly basis for the payment of means-tested benefits has become somewhat attenuated in recent years—for example, in the qualifications for jobseeker's allowance and the linking rules that apply to people who are returning to work—but the House would not forgive us were we to dilate on those issues today. However, we face an extraordinary and unprecedented position in which, at up to five years, the assessment period for a means-tested benefit—the savings credit—is to extend for considerably longer than the annual period of assessment for tax or the period used in respect of any other benefit.

We are not arguing in the amendment that that concept should be removed from the legislation—there are immensely important practical reasons why it should stand. However, unlike some pensioners' organisations, the Government do not appear to have fully grasped the dramatic administrative implications of trying to run a means-tested benefit for approximately 5.5 million pensioners—half the total number. It is clearly sensible to make the assessment period as long as reasonably practicable, but the implications of doing so must be addressed.

There are basic inequities that will be difficult to eliminate in applying assessment over a long period. When we asked Ministers about that in Committee,

[Mr. Boswell]

their reply was, in effect, that if something happens to a pensioner's income and it falls, they can apply for reassessment, or they will receive an annual reminder and then apply for reassessment. In short, the matter can be picked up, and they can be reassessed and their credits adjusted appropriately. That appears wholly reasonable. However, there will be other cases in which a pensioner's income will rise for some reason—for example, they might come into some money. That might make them no longer eligible for benefit if they are new claimants; conversely, if they have had an assessment, which lasts for five years, they will not be required to report their windfall or to have their means-tested benefit reduced. There could be inequity between people with the same level of income, or assumed income, according to whether or not they were assessed for five years. That also applies to circumstances in which there may have been a discontinuity in their benefit, and those are addressed in the amendment.

5 pm

In Committee, when we asked Ministers about such circumstances, they said that if it would be better for pensioners to reapply, they could reapply. However, we pointed out that if continuity for pension credit had been broken and a new assessment was required, pensioners would need to reapply but would receive a lower benefit than someone in exactly the same circumstances who had maintained their benefit for five years.

We need to discuss the circumstances in which that problem might arise. I should make it clear to the House that we are not talking here about what might be termed genuine changes in circumstances arising, largely, from voluntary decisions. If a pensioner chooses to marry or has a child, clearly there is a material change in their circumstances, but those factors have always been recognised in the benefits system. We are concerned here with what I might call contingent changes of circumstance whereby pensioners go through a hoop and then have to reapply on a new basis, as a consequence of which they may lose out, as against pensioners with exactly the same income circumstances who can maintain their vested rights to an assessment for five years.

The circumstances that may arise range, if I may put it this way, in order of diminishing acceptability, from the entirely reasonable to the more questionable. First, a pensioner may spend time abroad. It is envisaged in the explanatory notes to the Bill that, on the analogy of jobseeker's allowance, a pensioner who goes abroad for four weeks will be able to maintain their benefit, and after that it will cease. That period will be extended to eight weeks, as I understand it, in cases where a pensioner has to go abroad to support a child who is receiving medical treatment. No one wishes to cavil at that. If it is necessary to have a distinction, that seems to be an acceptable one.

We need to consider the situation of pensioners who normally go abroad for longer than four weeks. For example, they might want to go abroad to receive medical treatment. It could even be that they had been referred by the NHS to a hospital in another country, paid for by the British taxpayer. If they could not get the operation that they needed in the UK, they might be sent abroad for it, and they might need to be away for more than four weeks, although medicine now tends to achieve quicker turnaround times. In that circumstance, which arises from a deficiency in NHS provision, they might say, " I accept that I must have treatment abroad, and I am going at the public expense, although I don't object to that." However, they might come back to find that their pension credit entitlement had ceased. In that case, they would have to make a new application, and they might get less.

That would be the extreme case, and Ministers understand that not everything can be tailored to the needs of the hard case, but there is a point of much wider application, for example, to anybody who wanted to go away to the Costa Brava for a winter holiday. Unless I have completely misunderstood the Bill, after four weeks, the assessment that they had previously enjoyed would be lost, and on coming back they would have to reapply and be assessed on a new basis, which might be less favourable than the original.

I leave aside, because it will complicate the issue, concerns about the administrative arrangements for reactivating the benefit, although those will clearly be important. I leave aside also concerns about cases in which the pensioner had, in good faith, nipped off for a holiday, perhaps at short notice, and forgotten to inform the Pension Service. By doing so they would have committed a technical offence or perhaps even a substantive one.

Pensioners with an entitlement to benefit which is fixed for five years—it is not reassessed weekly—who take a holiday in another state of the European Union or beyond and are penalised may feel that they are harshly treated as against those who take their holiday in the UK and are not penalised. That may well attract the attention of European jurisprudence in due course. I mentioned that in Committee, and I do so again because there is a barrier to the free movement of persons if some disadvantage arises out of a contingent movement to another EU state. Anyway, in the real world, it is perfectly reasonable for a pensioner to say, "I want to take six weeks' holiday in the Costa Brava this year. I feel that I've earned it. Why am I being messed about on my benefit?"

As the Minister will remember, other cases may arise. I hope that when he replies he will not caricature such cases. One, which we did not talk through enough in Committee, is that of hospital downrating. That issue is separate from whether or not persons are sent abroad for treatment that is paid for by the NHS. It would be appropriate to ask whether, if a person was sent abroad by the NHS, and the period of treatment or hospitalisation exceeded 13 weeks, they would be subject to downrating on their basic pension as well. It would be useful to get that on the record.

There is also the question of the entitlement to savings credit. The Under-Secretary, who responded to the previous debate, confirmed that savings credit will not be lost even if hospital downrating takes place. It would be useful to get that back on the record. I am concerned about the re-entry into benefit when hospitalisation finishes, and I should like ministerial confirmation that the assessed income period that already applies will be maintained—that is, unless and until it is more favourable for the claimant to be assessed on a different period.

The final issues that I wish to raise are the perhaps less worthy ones that we debated and kicked around in Committee. They concern people who enter religious orders, some of whom are represented in the Chamber this afternoon. I do not imagine that people would do so for a short period, so my query is hypothetical, but it also concerns individuals detained at Her Majesty's pleasure. I have said that there is a problem with double provision. Clearly it is wrong to pay someone pension credit while they are inside and being maintained at Her Majesty's expense—and very expensive that is, as we all know. On the other hand, should they lose satisfactory pension credit arrangements?

The intention and effect of the amendment is to suspend the assessment period, then reactivate it later. There should be no question about paying benefit while someone is abroad and perhaps, if we want to complete the provision, in the subsidiary example in which someone is in prison or some other state of disqualification from benefit. Rather than just simply having a mechanism that enables the system to regenerate a claim and get someone back on benefit, it would be more sensible to have a system in which the benefit is deemed to be suspended, then reactivated when those circumstances no longer apply. We have tried to draft the amendment in that way.

I urge the Minister to accept that I tabled the amendment with good will. The issue is difficult. The problem may not be as extensive as I have stated but, if I were him, I would make provision for it—if not now, then perhaps in the regulations that will no doubt flow from the Bill—so that, if necessary, benefit can be reassessed and looked at afresh. In addition, in certain cases it may be administratively easier and fairer for the benefit to be suspended, then reinstated when certain conditions no longer apply. Our amendment is tailored to do that.

Mr. McCartney: I hope that we can dispose of this item reasonably quickly, as we debated it for a considerable time in Committee. The next group of amendments, dare I say, contain more meat and are of a higher quality. At the risk of upsetting the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), his amendment has no merit, but I shall come to that in a moment.

The hon. Gentleman first raised these issues in Committee, when he said that convicted prisoners should continue to get the benefit of pension credit. We therefore nicknamed his amendment the Ronnie Biggs amendment. Such was the embarrassment of the Conservative party that it quickly dropped that argument and had to find another reason for tabling such an amendment. It has now found one, and has introduced the Costa del Sol amendment, which I shall deal with quickly.

In Committee, the hon. Gentleman gave me an A for the clarity of my explanation of why the amendment was not only unnecessary, but worked against pensioners, but I only got a C for its acceptability. Having listened to his contribution today, I have to give him a triple X for acceptability, as I am even less persuaded by it than I was by his argument in Committee.

The main effect of the amendment would be to allow a person who went abroad for more than four weeks and had his claim for pension credit closed to pick up where he left off. Any remaining assessed income period from his previous claim would be restored upon reclaiming, so changes in his circumstances would be ignored. The amendment would have the same result when someone lost entitlement to pension credit on going to prison or, in certain circumstances, as a consequence of hospital downrating.

The hon. Gentleman perceives an unfairness in our proposals because he believes that pensioners who can travel abroad may be inhibited from doing so. To use one of his examples, a person may receive a windfall, perhaps after the death of an elderly relative, which makes them much richer. They may continue to live in the United Kingdom and benefit from both pension credit and the windfall gain for up to five years. He contrasted that with someone who goes to another country and, upon their return, finds that they are no longer entitled to pension credit.

Opposition Members have tunnel vision, and need to look at the bigger picture. We are not ignoring lottery wins and other windfalls during the assessed income period because we think people in such a position need pension credit. We are doing so because we want to reduce intrusiveness for all recipients of pension credit. We can live with ignoring individuals' good fortune for the sake of simplifying the system for the overwhelming majority of pensioners, but we should not extend that generous treatment to people who reclaim pension credit because their previous claim rightly ended, whether as a result of going abroad or for some other reason. We must ask questions anyway, if only to be sure that the claimant is who they say they are, rather than an imposter taking advantage of someone's absence.

5.15 pm

I know what the answer would be if one asked a typical pensioner in the street whether he would like to retain the weekly means test, in order to avoid some perceived hardship to a handful of pensioners who had had a windfall and who could afford to travel abroad for months or even years at a time. The answer from the vast majority of pensioners would be a resounding no.

In any case, it is more likely that a person who has been abroad for some time will have a lower income stream, having used up savings, rather than a higher income from, say, winning the lottery. That is where the hon. Gentleman's case falls down. When people go on holiday, they are using their capital, so it is more than likely that they will come back with less income. Having paid for their holiday and taken their spending money with them, they are eating up their capital all the time that they are away. They have, presumably, not gone to Spain or any other country to work, but to enjoy themselves. It is therefore in the pensioner's interest that a reassessment is carried out.

As I said in Committee, it may be in the claimant's interest for a full assessment to be carried out on his return from a protracted absence, as people are more likely to win than to lose out. People who have been abroad for some time are more likely to have a lower income stream because they have used up part of their savings than they are to have won the lottery in Spain. I do not know what the odds are for winning—

Mr. Boswell: Fourteen million to one.

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman has obviously played the lottery in Spain; I have never been able to, although I understand that one can now play it in the United Kingdom. That is being advertised.

[Mr. McCartney]

In Committee, the hon. Member for Daventry, referring to me, said:

> "He says—he may be right; I do not contest that—that many people who return from protracted absences abroad may have spent themselves out, and might be better off with a new assessment."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 23 April 2002; c. 185.]

At that point, I thought that the hon. Gentleman would have sat down and forgotten about the matter, but he is back again.

The hon. Gentleman did not dispute my assertion that people who have been abroad for some time are more likely to gain from a full assessment than to lose out. The only people who stand to gain from the amendment are those who have some unforeseen increase in their finances, such as a lottery win or some other windfall, since their pension credit award and who go abroad for more than four weeks. It is not clear why this group so concerns Conservative Members.

As I explained in Committee, we intend to limit strictly the number of changes in circumstance that will require reassessment of income, but we believe that protracted absence abroad is one such instance. We also think it right that where a pension credit claim closes, it closes. It is entirely consistent to undertake a full assessment on a new, fresh claim.

It must be right that while simplifying the system for the benefit of pensioners, wherever possible we simplify administration too. I do not see how one can reconcile this important factor with holding closed claims in some kind of suspended animation, to be re-awakened at some unspecified future time, which may or may not occur.

The same arguments apply with regard to loss of entitlement to pension credit as a consequence of hospital downrating. I remind the House that it was the present Government who increased from six weeks to 13 weeks the period for which a person may be in hospital before having his benefit downrated. People in receipt of the pension credit will be able to retain entitlement to up to eight weeks on temporary absence abroad, as the hon. Gentleman said, for children's treatment.

People who travel abroad to receive national health service treatment will be considered still to be in Great Britain for the duration of that medical care. Ministers recently agreed that people who receive pension credit, income support and jobseeker's allowance who travel abroad for NHS-funded medical treatment will not be subject to the time restrictions on temporary absence from Great Britain. I hope that that helps the hon. Gentleman and will enable him to withdraw his amendment.

Mr. Boswell: I am grateful to the Minister for that reassurance at the end, which represents some progress. I was disappointed by some of his earlier remarks. When he started attributing to me the title of the amendment—the "Ronnie Biggs amendment"—which he himself had used to ridicule it, I knew that we were in for trouble and some lack of understanding.

In arguing for the amendment, I was making the point that there is an inherent inequity between a person who travels abroad and receives a windfall and is then reassessed for pension credit or disqualified, and somebody who remains in the UK, receives the same or even a larger windfall and is untroubled. The Minister explained why that is the case, but the inequity remains.

I am even more troubled by the possibility that a person may feel inhibited, or there may be accusations that a person feels inhibited, from travelling round the European Union by the structure of the benefits system and the disqualification from certain benefits. That does not fully honour the spirit of mutuality of benefits that is beginning to be introduced in Europe.

However, these are complex issues and the Minister has tossed me a very small bone in relation to downrating, which is helpful. I do not want to be churlish and I shall not seek to press the amendment to a Division. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 15

INCOME AND CAPITAL

Paul Holmes (Chesterfield): I beg to move amendment No. 3, in page 9, line 7, after "earnings", insert—

> ', except that that part of a claimant's hourly earnings that is equal to the rate of the National Minimum Wage shall be disregarded'.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 14, in page 9, line 18, at end insert—

> 'but shall in no circumstances include income derived from or calculated as income implied by any compensation fund (whether or not written in trust) administered for the benefit of any claimant for state pension credit in connection with a settlement of a claim on behalf of that person arising from industrial injuries or medical negligence.'.

No. 15, in page 9, line 22, at end insert—

> 'but shall exclude any income derived from PEPs, TESSAs or ISAs.'.

No. 16, in page 9, line 24, at end insert—

> 'but subject to the restriction that the income implied by any capital holding shall not exceed the current Bank of England minimum lending rate plus two percentage points, to be averaged over a twelve month period prescribed in the regulations.'.

Paul Holmes: I want to discuss the apparent contradiction in Government policy in relation to encouraging people to continue in some degree of employment after reaching the legal age of retirement—a contradiction that has already been discussed in the Select and Standing Committees.

The Cabinet Office report "Winning the Generation Game" stated that older workers should be encouraged to stay in work and that more flexibility should be available in terms of retirement. The Government have often said that they are keen to maintain and even improve the ratio of workers to pensioners, but their pension credit proposals have been widely criticised as effectively discouraging people from doing part-time work after retirement.

It is widely accepted that encouraging older people to continue in at least part-time work if they wish to do so is a desirable aim. With an increasing proportion of elderly people in the population at large, it makes economic sense for the nation to retain for longer the work contribution, skills and expertise that are based on the years of expertise that older people have. It also makes financial and personal sense for many individuals to continue working for at least part of the week after reaching legal retirement age. Many older people would value the potential benefit of extra financial income on top of an inadequate basic state pension, but they would also value very much the opportunity to maintain a lively and active personal contribution to and involvement in society through the opportunities, experiences and interests that work can offer.

Despite the widespread agreement on those views in all quarters and the Government's stated intention of encouraging more pensioners to continue in work, Government policy on pension credits seems designed to achieve precisely the opposite effect. The Select Committee made that point clearly in its second report of 2001–02, which pointed out that the Government's proposals on pension credits disregard only the first £5 of earnings. After that, the equivalent of 40p in the pound is clawed back, effectively imposing a top rate of income tax on pensioners' part-time earnings. The Committee made this observation:

> "Many of those who submitted to evidence to our inquiry were highly critical of this aspect of the Credit's calculation. They argue that it offers little, if any, incentive for pensioners to continue working or to seek new employment opportunities. Part-time work is one of the few, simple, methods for a pensioner to increase their retirement income".

As the National Pensioners Convention stressed in its evidence to the Committee,

> "part-time earnings could have a significant impact on pensioner poverty."

The Industrial Society made this comment in its evidence:

> "By discouraging part-time work after retirement, the Government seem to be giving us an example of un-joined-up Government at its worst."

David Cairns: I have been listening with genuine interest to the case that the hon. Gentleman is making. For those of us who are weighing up the merits of his amendment, will he explain what assessment and research was done into how much more cost would be incurred if, for example, 10 per cent. of pensioners were to carry on working? Can he give us some figures?

Paul Holmes: If more pensioners were to continue working, the Government would benefit in the long run in terms of their poverty strategy. I shall deal with cost later in my speech.

The Select Committee also pointed out in its summary of the evidence that the three charities representing pensioners which gave oral evidence to the inquiry agreed that

> "a disregard of around £40 of earnings would be a very productive measure."

Sally West of Age Concern suggested that that would allow the equivalent of

> "a day's work without it disrupting the administration of the system".

She said that it would encourage people

> "to keep active in work if that is what they wish to do."

In the light of that, the Committee reported:

> "We agree with this view and were disappointed that the Secretary of State could hold out 'no hope' of a change in the rules."

It went on to say:

> "We urge the Government to reconsider its policy on the Credit's treatment of earnings".

In the face of those united views from the Select Committee, Age Concern, the National Pensioners Convention, the Industrial Society and many others, the Government's response was simply to make no change at all through its contradictory and self-defeating pension credit proposals. Various groups suggested alternatives designed to remedy the disincentive to work that is contained in the Bill. For example, the Select Committee and Age Concern suggested a fixed level disregard of around £30 to £40 a week, compared with the very low £5 disregard contained in the Bill.

Our amendment offers a simple and clear method of meeting those aims by disregarding those parts of a claimant's hourly earnings that are equivalent to the rate of the national minimum wage. That would achieve two things. First, it would encourage flexible retirement instead of discouraging it, as does the Bill. Secondly, it would provide a real cash incentive to people who wish to continue working after reaching state pension age. As those are supposed to be the stated aims of Government policy, I hope that the Minister will be able to accept the amendment. Or are the Government telling pensioners that they are not prepared to allow them to earn even at the level of the national minimum wage without seeking to impose on them the equivalent of the higher rate of income tax?

Mr. Clappison: I want to speak to amendments Nos. 14, 15 and 16, which deal with three different issues arising out of the definition of income and capital in clause 15.

The first of those is the treatment of compensation funds in cases of industrial injury or medical negligence. How will the Bill deal with income from such funds as regards the pension credit? It is fair to say that this subject generated considerable interest in Committee, not only from my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), but from the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), who drew our attention to the cases of several of his constituents who would be very interested in these provisions. Those cases are deserving of consideration by the House. It is important to revisit the issue, and we await the Minister's response with interest.

Amendment No. 15 deals with income derived from PEPs, TESSAs or ISAs, which is another matter that we raised in Committee. Hon. Members may have heard sufficient of my views on the generality of savings, but this issue falls within that generality. How will those important savings vehicles be dealt with? We are conscious of their general position within the policies of this and previous Governments.

Amendment No. 16 covers the treatment of income from capital. In respect of savings above £6,000, a notional rate of income will be set at around 10 per cent. after that disregard of £6,000. There has been a development since we considered the matter in Committee. The Government had said that well over 80 per cent. of pensioners have savings that fall below the £6,000 disregard. Indeed, the Secretary of State told the Select Committee:

> "What we are doing is we are disregarding the first £6000 worth of savings and that covers 84½ per cent. of pensioners. Now, 84½ per cent. of pensioners today do not have £6000."

Since then, my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) received a written reply from the Minister, saying that 60 per cent. of pensioners have less than

[Mr. Clappison]

£6,000 in savings. Obviously, 40 per cent. therefore have more than £6,000. The matter is more extensive than we were led to believe.

Against that background, we believe that matters now have a different complexion. We need to hear more about it and, as my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry said in Committee, one would be struggling nowadays to find something that produced a 10 per cent. return on capital. Indeed, a substantial number of pensioners have savings of more than £12,000. The Government's proposals for the treatment of savings assume that they earn between 5 per cent. and 10 per cent. on their savings. We want to hear more ministerial comments on that and I am sure that savers want to hear more from the Minister about the treatment of their income from capital under the Bill.

5.30 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw): I reiterate briefly comments made in Committee about industrial injuries. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) for adding medical negligence to that in Committee.

Industrial injuries are disproportionately important in the coalfields. The recent judgment and the roll-out of compensation in the next year or so mean that many retired miners will receive compensation for bronchitis, emphysema and vibration white finger. In the majority of cases, the compensation will exceed the capital limit of £6,000.

David Cairns: I ask my hon. Friend to take account of constituents who are suffering from asbestosis and asbestos-related illnesses. Thanks to the excellent decision in another place, many of my constituents will receive the compensation that my hon. Friend mentioned. That is extremely important for shipbuilding constituencies such as mine and former mining constituencies such as that of my hon. Friend. We want the Minister's reassurance about that.

John Mann: I endorse my hon. Friend's comments. Indeed, I was about to mention asbestosis and the landmark judgment, which has an impact on my constituency and many others throughout the country. Sadly, compensation for mesothelioma comes too late for many of my constituents. However, the principle is important, and it is vital for the families.

Although there is a disproportionate impact on some communities, the benefit should be perceived as a good thing. The money is owed and is due. It is due to negligence for various reasons, which include bad employer practice and lack of medical understanding of the issues in the past. Whatever the reasons, the money is due to those people and it would be grossly unfair if they lost any pension credit for receiving money that is long overdue.

I know that my hon. Friend the Minister is highly knowledgeable about such issues and I trust that he will give us some good news.

Mr. McCartney: The amendments would affect clause 15, which deals with the treatment of income and capital through credit income assessment. The details will be set out in regulations, which will be laid before the House in due course.

In Committee I provided much detail about the treatment of income. I do not therefore want to go through that again, but I shall repeat some of it. The debate offers an opportunity to be even more explicit about some of our proposals. As Baroness Hollis said in another place last December, we propose to ignore completely compensation received for personal injury. No income from that, whether actual income or assumed income from the capital sum, will be taken into account.

A pensioner who is attacked and seriously injured need not fear that we will stop her pension credit when she receives compensation, as happens with income support at the moment. Nor will we withdraw pension credit from, say, a miner because he receives compensation for damage done to his health. I will come back to that in a moment. Our proposals go significantly further than the amendment does. That is not a criticism; this gives us an opportunity to open up the debate.

The hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) mentioned my answer to a parliamentary question. I do not have the question here, but if I remember rightly it was in two parts, and said that 60 per cent. of all pensioners have less than £6,000 capital. Some of them have second pensions and other income. In fact, 85 per cent. of pensioners are entitled to the pension credit because they have less than £6,000. I think that I answered the hon. Gentleman's question on that basis. There is, therefore, not a chink of light between me and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State; nor am I saying one thing and my right hon. Friend another.

All I can say to the hon. Gentleman is that that was a nice try, but in cricketing terms, it was a bit of a no ball. I promise my hon. Friends not to make any more cricket jokes. I was just trying to make the point that as a Scot, I know just as much about cricket as the English do. It is just a pity about the football team at the moment.

Amendment No. 3 relates to the earnings disregard. No one would disagree with the general sentiments of the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb). This country depends on older workers, and with demographic changes, that dependency will grow. Fifty per cent. of men and 25 per cent. of women aged 60 to 64 work. A further 800,000 people aged 65 and over are at work. This is not just about ensuring a steady flow of human resources. It is about experience, handing on skills, and promoting intergenerational understanding. For many pensioners, work is a key part of active ageing and social inclusion. We want to promote opportunities for older workers and allow them to be rewarded for earning.

Amendment No. 3 would disregard earnings by linking the disregard to the level of the national minimum wage. The hon. Member for Northavon wants to do this for everybody over the age of 60. A pensioner working one day a week could therefore expect a disregard of about £35, and an older worker or pensioner working a full week could expect a disregard of about £175. This would represent an added cost of £1 billion on the pension credit. Earlier, the hon. Gentleman committed something like £9.7 billion for another proposal. When we asked him how he was going to pay for that, we discovered that far from being a little short on detail, he refused to provide us with any at all. Now he has now clocked up a total of £10.7 billion.

In the Liberal Democrats' alternative Budget proposals they have further targeted arrangements for people over 75, which would cost an extra £1.2 billion.

Those provisions, however, would end up giving the poorest pensioners an average increase of only £2 a week. Under their proposals, money is not being targeted or given directly to poor pensioners.

Mr. Webb: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McCartney: I hope that if I give way to the hon. Gentleman, he will not try to give us the third way of explaining his pension policy. On at least two occasions during the debate, he changed both the policy and the track that he was taking, and never gave us an answer about how any of his proposals were to be funded. Nor did he acknowledge the very important point that his party will not accept the overwhelming evidence that poverty relates to income, not to whether someone is 60, 70, 75, 80 or 85. That is the major flaw in his proposals. I hope that when he talks to women who are approaching pension age, he does not tell them that he is going to do something for them, because they would have to wait until they were 75 to get even an extra penny out of the Liberals.

Mr. Webb: Will the Minister confirm that the figures that he has just quoted on the effects of our proposals are based on the assumption that 100 per cent. of those who are entitled to claim means-tested benefits will do so? Will he also confirm that that is a false assumption, and therefore a false assessment?

Mr. McCartney: The hon. Gentleman's argument is dead and buried. The assumption is not wrong—he merely wants to change it. I have costed his proposals for him. He refuses to do so not because he is incapable, but because he does not want the British people to know what he is up to. He wants to travel around Britain parading his conscience to pensioners, saying to every woman, "I am on your side, I am your saviour." However, the reality is that to get a penny off him, they would have to survive in poverty until the age of 75. It does not matter how we add it up: the people who will qualify under our proposals would get nothing under those of the Liberal Democrats, which would be a bitter pill and a bitter blow.

Having exposed such opportunism, I want to point out something else. In speaking to his amendments, the hon. Gentleman showed how clever he is. He is clever because he has done a lot of reading recently. He is both a campaigner and well and truly in opposition, and he has read the Liberal Democrat document entitled, "How to be an effective opposition: a guide for campaigners". It offers the following advice: to

> "act shamelessly, stir endlessly, and embarrass the administration . . . don't be afraid to exaggerate."

[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] It continues:

> "why court the unpopularity that goes with the responsibility of power?"

Liberal Democrats have to act shamelessly and exaggerate in all circumstances. If they are talking to a Conservative voter, they are told to be anti-Labour, but if they are talking to a Labour voter, they should be anti-Tory.

There we have it. I have never read a better explanation of Liberal Democrat pension policy. It has been set out in the document, and in the hon. Gentleman's comments, so we shall not take him seriously—for the moment. I make those points because he is trying to con poor pensioners into believing that he is on their side. That is what we are taking seriously.

It is unclear how the hon. Gentleman would fund his proposals, and he is not prepared to tell us. We believe that the working tax credit, the abolition from the pension credit of the rule excluding people from working more than 16 hours a week, the disregards, and the savings credit for those over 65, are the best way to promote active ageing and reward earnings. I shall give the hon. Gentleman just two examples of how that will work in practice, and illustrate the real gains.

Let us consider a single pensioner—"John", aged 67—who works one day a week at a local DIY store, receiving a minimum wage of £35. He has a full basic retirement pension of £77 and no other income. After taking into account the disregard, his relevant earnings are £30. John's combined income of £77 and £30 takes him above the guarantee credit level of £100. However, John is entitled to a savings credit, as his earnings count as qualifying income. His savings credit is £11. Under these proposals, John is therefore better off by £572 a year. That is not pie in the sky and invented figures; it is the reality of this Government's policies for such older people.

Let us consider the second example of a couple aged 68 and 65 respectively. The woman—"Sylvia"—works two days a week as a cleaner at the minimum wage, earning £65. They receive the full rate retirement pension of £123 and have no other income. They are entitled to a £10 disregard on Sylvia's earnings, so the sum of £55 is relevant to the pension credit assessment. Their combined income of £123 basic pension and £55 earnings takes them above the guarantee level of £154. However, they are entitled to a savings credit of £9, as Sylvia's earnings count as qualifying income. That additional £9 shows how we are providing basic benefits for couples, as well as individuals. These are not exaggerated figures; they are the combined effect of the Government's proposals.

Looking at amendment No. 14, I am encouraged that Opposition Members have found a new cause, but it intrigues me that it has come so late in the day. I can think of campaigns in which we have been involved over the years—not just in mining communities, but throughout the country—over the inequities that can occur when people, quite rightly, are compensated for injuries. They have to fight to get compensation in the first place; sometimes courts take it from them or affect their ability to claim compensation. I will not go into the recent House of Lords ruling that at least reversed a terrible decision that was made in the past. All Labour Members have been closely monitoring these issues, but I am pleased that the Opposition recognise that there is potential for doing something about the matter.

5.45 pm

On 18 December, on Second Reading in the other place, Baroness Hollis, when asked about such compensation, said:

> "any personal injury payments, which are taken into account in various ways at present, will be ignored"—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 December 2001; Vol. 630, c. 188.]

In social policy terms, the outcome of a person's misfortune is more relevant than the event that caused the misfortune. For instance, let us compare a motorist who is paralysed after an accident while driving to work with someone who happened to be driving while working. Under the amendment, the driver in the second case would gain from the disregard, but the driver in the first case

[Mr. McCartney]

would gain nothing. A person who receives compensation following a terrible medical accident would gain, but an old lady who receives compensation after being the victim of a savage assault would not.

We have consistently put the case that the pension credit is an entitlement; we do not want to dig into people's lives, and we do not want to record every possible circumstance in which people find themselves. We want to get rid of as many of the old exclusions as we can. The proposals that I announced today will mean that, from October 2003, any pensioner who has received financial compensation for personal injures will be told that we will ignore this income. Whether it is actual or assumed, it will not be taken into account. This will be welcome across Britain, and in particular, across many of the communities of the former British coalfields.

I pay tribute to right hon. and hon. Friends individually and collectively, as well as to trade union groups, mining groups and others who have maintained solidarity over the issue for a long time. I was pleased to make the announcement today. I did so with the support of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and I wish to record his tremendous support for the change.

The current arrangements are complex; mainly because of the different ways in which compensation can be paid and invested. I will write to hon. Members to give further information and place the letter in the Library.

As for amendment 15, I am almost astonished at the uncharacteristic bravery involved in making such a significant commitment, in both expenditure and strategy terms. The amendment would cost perhaps £1 billion in the long term. Is this part of the strategy of the hon. Member for Hertsmere to prove that his party looks after the poor? That is a bit rich coming from the hon. Gentleman, given some of the policies he supported in previous Parliaments.

The same amendments were tabled in Committee and on Third Reading in another place. We believed that those earlier versions were probing. Now it seems that the Opposition are serious in their proposals, although I cannot understand why, because of the potential costs. Perhaps the hon. Member for Hertsmere will explain how his party leader will pay for the proposal, particularly when the right hon. Gentleman is totally opposed to the introduction of pension credit.

Bob Spink: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. McCartney: If I must.

Bob Spink: The Minister is a delightful character and I am delighted that he has given way. He takes a narrow view of the costs. Will he comment on the wider impact that improving savings and the savings ratio will have on our economy? Surely that would not be a net cost, but a net saving to the economy, and would provide a great benefit.

Mr. McCartney: I do not take a narrow view of pension credit. The hon. Gentleman's party does not just take a narrow view, it is totally opposed to pension credit. But the Conservatives are not prepared to say, either in Committee or today, whether they are prepared to repeal the measure. I do not know whether they will vote against the Bill today. Perhaps they will let us know. Would they repeal it?

I am getting old and I must be getting deaf, because I hear no reply. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) is smiling at me and perhaps he is telling me that the Conservatives have gone silent. I could ask the Liberal Democrats, and they would be just as silent.

Mr. Clappison: The right hon. Gentleman has been a Member of Parliament for some time and he will remember the long period in opposition that his party experienced. I certainly remember the long period after the 1997 election when Labour Minister after Labour Minister recanted what they had said in opposition. I will give the right hon. Gentleman a long list of specific examples to peruse at his leisure. So we take no lessons from the Labour party, on this or anything else.

Mr. McCartney: We always get one who will get up when he has no argument to make at all. That was not an argument, it was a whinge. I could give the hon. Gentleman pages of commitments given by shadow spokespersons from the Dispatch Box, including on the minimum wage, tackling pensioner poverty and doing something about Tory mis-selling of pensions.

Mr. Goodman *rose—*

Mr. McCartney: We have another one. I shall give way.

Mr. Goodman: Does the right hon. Gentleman recall the pledge made by the Chancellor, when he was in opposition, to abolish means-testing for our elderly people?

Mr. McCartney: I remember that the Labour party and the Chancellor made it clear—as we have continued to do—that tackling pensioner poverty would be our No. 1 priority. Unlike the Tory party, we have not introduced means-testing to stop people having access to income. Our proposals are inclusive. We are providing people with a chance to obtain additional access to income. We are not targeting pensioners, we are targeting poverty that the Conservatives created in the first place.

Conservative Members have tried to distract me from the amendments and the nonsense that they contain, but I shall return to the notes that have kindly been provided for me by the machine. I shall repeat some of the points that the Minister made in the other place, because she was giving a direct response to similar amendments.

Clause 15 will abolish the rules that exclude pensioners with £12,000 or more of savings from any help, so for the first time there will be no automatic cut-off. Instead we will apply a notional rate of return of 10 per cent.—half the present rate—on any capital sum over the first £6,000, which we will disregard. That figure will be £10,000 for people in residential care and nursing homes. That means that 95 per cent. of pensioners entitled to pension credit will have any income they receive from their savings ignored entirely. Ignoring the first £6,000 of savings helps all pensioners, including the better-off. For example, only pensioners with capital above £12,000 will face effective assumed rates of return greater than 5 per cent.

Amendment No. 15 seems to discount the fact that the Government's proposals take no account of actual income from PEPs, TESSAs and ISAs. Instead, we intend to apply the same notional rate of £1 in £500 that will be applied to any other capital holding. If we were not to do that, it would influence people to save more in ISAs—PEPs and TESSAs are no longer available for new savers—than in any other forms of savings, including pensions products. The immediate costs would be £400 million.

The ultimate effect on pension saving could be startling. It could increase the cost of pension credit by £1 billion a year in the long run, but the money would not reach those with little or no savings. The redistribution would go to those higher up the income scale. People who chose to put all their money into, say, an ISA would get full pension credit no matter how much they had saved.

That would skew the savings market towards such methods of saving and, as people moved their savings, eligibility for pension credit would expand further up the income distribution. So the reach of pension credit and the cost to the state would expand while private pension saving would fall. Let us remember that the amendment comes from a party that has spent this afternoon criticising the Government for not giving people incentives to save in the private sector.

A person who has already saved in a PEP, TESSA or ISA has already been advantaged because they have benefited from tax relief. Treating PEPs, TESSAs and ISAs differently would doubly advantage them, for no apparent good reason and at the expense of the taxpayer. I could go on and give a range of examples, but I shall write to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) and put some practical examples of my remarks in the Library, if that would be helpful.

I am surprised that amendment No. 16 was tabled. The treatment of capital was discussed throughout the Bill's passage in both Houses. The amendment would restrict the assumed income from capital to a rate that is more or less what people would get from their savings. That would be achieved by applying the base rate plus 2 per cent. to pensioners' capital.

Opposition Members did not listen to our arguments. Our decision was reached only after the most careful consideration of the representations made to us on the issue. In our original consultation document we proposed taking actual income into account. However, Age Concern, among others, told us of its real anxiety that that would make the treatment of capital in pension credit more complicated than in income support.

Examples were cited of the difficulties pensioners would experience in recording information about actual income. We listened to those real concerns. It was clear that the tariff-type regime in income support offered the most straightforward way of calculating income from capital. We actually did what older people asked us to do: we held consultations and we listened. The Opposition have consulted nobody and listened to nobody.

Once we had the method of calculation we turned to the other element in the treatment of capital: how much to factor into the calculation. There are two parts to that: the disregard and the rate of return. Setting the right level of disregard—the lower capital limit—was critical. We had to consider costs. We also had to consider how to reduce the intrusion into pensioners' lives that inquiries into their capital represent. The level of disregard that we have set—£6,000—means that 85 per cent. of pensioners entitled to the credit have no need to tell us about their capital at all.

The second consideration was the rate of return. Looking at the rates of return available in the High street was not appropriate: what investment would return nothing on the first £6,000 and something on top of that? That is why the amendment, with its bogus resonance with the commercial world, is so badly focused.

A further element had also to be considered. We received representations from the Financial Services Authority and the Association of British Insurers. Their concern was that if we failed to get the balance right between the disregard and the rate of return we would alter the balance between saving to build capital and saving to build a pension.

The view of the Financial Services Authority was that a rate of return of 10 per cent., after taking account of the £6,000 disregard, was the right balance to strike in considering the two methods of investing for retirement. Again, we listened to the expert advice and took it. The Opposition proposals completely ignore the fact that there is no rate of return on the first £6,000 of capital. That would cost an additional £350 million.

I hope that I have explained why we cannot accept the amendments. I have also tried to explain the difference between our policies, the policies of the Conservative party and those of the Liberal party—all three of them. I ask the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes) to withdraw the amendment.

Paul Holmes: I am sure that other hon. Members, like me, welcome the statement by the Minister for Pensions about disregarding compensation for industrial injuries. Many industrial workers in my constituency come to me with problems such as vibration white finger and asbestosis, so I am especially aware of the importance of that statement.

On amendment No. 3, however, I am disappointed that the right hon. Gentleman is still not prepared to listen to the almost universal advice of those whom he has consulted and from whom he has received comments. In particular, I note that he says that what the Labour-dominated Select Committee told him was completely wrong. I also note that Ministers cite the comments of Age Concern when it suits them—as they did twice today—but ignore its comments when they do not suit them.

All the advice received by the Government is that the measure will act as a disincentive to pensioners seeking work after retirement age. That is a serious issue, and I hope that they will come back to it with new proposals. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 17

OTHER INTERPRETATION PROVISIONS

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I beg to move amendment No. 17, in page 12, line 6, leave out from "means" to end of line 8 and insert—

'two people, who are not married, (whether of different sexes or the same sex) living as partners in an enduring family relationship, not including two people one of whom is the other's parent, grandparent, sister, brother, aunt or uncle, and where references to these relationships—

(a) are to relationships of the full blood or half blood or, in the case of an adopted person, such of those relationships as would exist but for the adoption, and

(b) include the relationship of a child with his adoptive, or former adoptive, parents,

but do not include any other adoptive relationships.'.

The Bill does not allow the provision to apply to unmarried couples who are not heterosexual, which creates four problems. First, it is unequal. Secondly, it costs the taxpayer money, which is a concern to the Minister for Pensions. Thirdly, it is not compatible with the Human Rights Act 1998 to discriminate in that way against heterosexual couples, who will lose out on extra money that same-sex couples would get, because they are treated separately. Indeed, the House recently passed legislation that recognised the right to equality—

It being Six o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *interrupted the proceedings, pursuant to Order [25 March].*

Dr. Harris: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wish to put amendment No. 17 to the vote.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. If the Question has not been proposed from the Chair, there cannot be a vote.

Order for Third Reading read.

6 pm

Mr. McCartney: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

The Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Garston (Maria Eagle), will send the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) a detailed reply on his amendment No. 17, if that will help him.

During the passage of this Bill we have heard much from Opposition Members about it extending means-testing. Obviously, they have not had first-hand, or sometimes even second-hand, experience of reliance on means-tested benefits. If they had, they would know that what we are proposing in the Bill is light years removed from the means-testing applied under the Poor Law and the assistance Acts before the war, and the National Assistance Act 1948 after it.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) reminded us so clearly on Second Reading when he recalled his childhood, means-testing was used in the 1930s to exclude people from income to ensure that they stayed poor. The purpose of the pension credit claim process is the exact opposite. It is about inclusion, to ensure that people qualify for the income to which they are entitled.

We will ask pensioners only for the information that we need to know to work out their combined income. For example, we will only need to know about their savings if they are over £6,000. Let us compare that to claiming assistance in the 1930s, when every penny had to be disclosed and, as a consequence, many households did not receive the support that they needed for food, household expenses and children and whole areas of the country were in abject poverty.

This is a landmark piece of social security legislation that will end centuries of unfairness, going back to the Poor Laws of 1598 and 1601. It will remove once and for all the disincentive to save for retirement. When it is introduced in October 2003, people with modest savings will see a reward for their efforts.

The Bill also marks another, although less obvious, break with the past. We are abolishing the criminal offence that could mean pensioners being punished for "wilful neglect" to maintain themselves. The origins of that provision go back centuries to the Vagrancy Acts and further. Those Acts enabled the courts to imprison a person who failed by his own neglect to maintain himself, or anyone he was liable to maintain, with a resulting charge to public funds. That offence dates back to 1713.

The 1948 Act repealed the Poor Laws. However, the interdepartmental committee that reported on the break-up of the Poor Laws in 1946 considered it necessary to retain the offence of failure to maintain. Although the Conservative party had two chances to repeal it—with the Social Security Acts 1986 and 1992—it remains to this day, albeit seldom used, in the shape of section 105 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992.

That offence will not be carried forward in the Bill. Along with the ending of the weekly means test, it sends out an important message to pensioners, to this effect: "pension credit is not a benefit of last resort or public charity; it is your income entitlement."

The Bill is an essential part of our pensions reforms—it will ensure that it will pay to have saved. Our ambition is for all pensioners to share in the nation's rising prosperity. We set out our plans for pensions reform in the 1998 Green Paper, which established a new framework for reforming both state and private pensions. The first stage was tackling pensioner poverty by introducing the minimum income guarantee to ensure that pensioners could enjoy a decent income in retirement. There are 1.1 million fewer pensioners below 60 per cent. median income than in 1996–97 and there are encouraging signs that we are reversing the trend of numbers of pensioners with relatively low incomes.

However, too many pensioners have not had the opportunity to build up a second pension, so our second stage concentrated on reform of the basic structure of pensions to make it possible for more people to save. For those who could not save, we introduced the state second pension. The state earnings-related pension scheme did not provide enough support for people on low earnings or for people with broken records. For those who could save, we have improved and extended the options for doing so through stakeholder pensions.

The third stage is to ensure that even those with modest savings will be able to see a reward for their thrift and effort through the pension credit. We are now beginning a fourth stage to deal with the complexity in private pensions, and we shall be consulting on those matters in the autumn. As I said, the third stage will make further inroads towards our objective of tackling pensioner poverty. Through pension credit, we can correct a fundamental flaw in the pension system that leaves people with modest savings no better off than those who have no savings.

The savings credit element of the Bill will ensure that, from the age of 65, pensioners will no longer lose a pound in their income for every pound of pensions or other savings that they have built up. The Bill will give people a guaranteed income from the age of 60, so that they need not live on less than £100 a week at the commencement of pension credit. More than 5 million pensioners will be eligible. On average, they stand to gain about £400 a year.

We know that Opposition Members have other ideas about spending the £2 billion that we have set aside for pension credit. Some have argued that all pensioners really want is an increase in their basic state pension. The basic state pension will remain a key building block of state pension provision. Restoring the link with earnings or diverting the money that we have set aside for the pension credit would not achieve our objective of helping all those pensioners who lost out because of the flaws in the current system, and those flaws would continue.

The simple truth is that the poorest pensioners would lose out if we took any of the routes proposed by Opposition Members, while pensioners with higher incomes would receive the greatest gains. We have decided to redistribute in favour of the poor and those pensioners with modest income or savings. Who said that socialism was dead on the Labour Benches?

Mr. Goodman: The Prime Minister.

Mr. McCartney: Oh, no. I hope that that will appear in *Hansard*.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions put this question plainly on Second Reading and I will do so again now: will Opposition Members oppose the Bill? Would they repeal this legislation? *Hansard* cannot record silences, so if I say the words "total silence" people will get the meaning.

I should like to remind hon. Members of the comments made on Second Reading in another place. Lord Fowler was one of those responsible for the fact that pensioners were left poverty-stricken under the Conservative Government, but he has repented: he has been on the road to Damascus and stopped off in search of victuals at the House of Lords. While he was there he said:

> "To be frank, I should have preferred it if my government had introduced the pension credit. I have no intention of jumping overboard just because that proposal comes from . . . the current Government."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 December 2001; Vol. 630, c. 165.]

So even those who were responsible for the poverty left to the Labour Government recognise that these proposals are a significant step forward.

The alternative route that we are taking is more difficult, but we believe it is the right one. It will target more help on those who need it, and we are doing that in a fairer, simpler way that does not intrude on pensioners' lives and encourages people to take up what they are entitled to.

Other hon. Members want contribute to the debate, so I shall soon end my speech, but it is important for the benefit of every pensioner in Britain that we put on record the truth about the proposals. Under pension credit, we will not need to ask pensioners reams of intrusive questions and we will not require them to notify us constantly if their income fluctuates. Of course, if their income goes down, they will be entitled to claim an increase.

When was a system ever devised in which people were invited to come along to ask for an increase if they thought that their income had gone down? That is the beauty of this system. It is not intrusive and it will give pensioners the opportunity to approach us for a recalculation if their life circumstances change on the basis that they are entitled to more income, not less.

Means-testing is about stopping people getting access. The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) refuses to accept that fundamental difference. We are not proposing an old-fashioned means test, although the Liberal Democrats continue to parrot on about that. The hon. Gentleman is the one who wants to continue the old-fashioned means test because he cannot provide for poor pensioners under 75.

The Pension Service, however, will deliver services to pensioners in a totally new way: dedicated and sensitive to their needs, and putting more dignity into the way in which pensioners are treated. Better than that, our staff will be trained to be advocates on behalf of older people—no longer doorkeepers who prevent them having access to income services but trained to watch over and befriend older people and to be responsible for managing them through the process. That is a radically different way in which civil and public servants work with citizens—on this occasion, pensioners.

Some detail will be in regulations that I hope we will debate in the near future. I promise to share that detail with Members before that debate. Although, in Committee, Members usefully probed the Government's intentions, there have been no significant or even minor changes to a Bill that allows us greatly to improve the situation for pensioners. It will be simpler—for example, 85 per cent. of pensioners will not need to report their level of capital because of the disregard and the lack of an upper limit. Most pensioners over 65 will only have to report changes in their savings and pension income once every five years. We will fully protect those on housing benefit and council tax benefit—another very important innovation—by increasing the guaranteed elements of those benefits by £13.80, or £18.60 for couples. That will ensure that those pensioners maintain their current entitlement as well as benefiting from more generous income and savings rules, as in pension credit.

That is so important. How many pensioners currently get no access to council tax benefit or housing benefit because they are 1p over the limit? We do not intend, through the introduction of pension credit, to give with one hand and take away with the other. These changes are therefore vital. Because we have also changed the income and savings rules, a further 700,000 pensioner households which will not receive pension credit itself will gain from the changes to the treatment of capital and will access housing benefit and council tax benefit for the first time. We are not just protecting those on pension credit—we recognise that there will always be people who are just above the line, whatever it is, and they should not lose out either. A substantial number of people—700,000 households—who do not currently get access to housing benefit and council tax benefit will gain from these measures.

On Second Reading, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—I think we know who he was talking about—said:

> "When someone claims to have a simple solution to pensions, people should watch their wallet."—[*Official Report*, 25 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 607.]

That has been shown in spades today. The problem is that, in truth and in practice—I shall keep repeating this, as people need to know—the Liberals are not interested in

[Mr. McCartney]

poor people from the age of 60 onwards. Their proposals are so flawed that, despite what they are saying, large numbers of people—1.7 million plus—will have to rely on a traditional means test. How can the hon. Member for Northavon say that his proposals compare in any way with the Government's? I expect nothing from the Conservatives, but at least we know where we stand with them, and we know where they are coming from. We know that they are opposed to all these measures. Despite what they are saying about a campaign, we know that they do not mean it, that they cannot sustain it, and that the public do not believe a word they say.

The hon. Member for Northavon is different. He parades himself as the human shield for Britain's pensioners. That shield is not only dented: it does not exist. As I heard it said from the Benches behind me, when it comes to looking after the interests of pensioners, he is as much use as a chocolate fireguard.

A simplification of the income process is vital. We are reducing the complexity inherent in the current system. It will be a straightforward process—a single gateway access to all state retirement income. People approaching retirement will be contacted by the Pension Service to give them information about their basic state pension, based on the contributions that they made during their working lives. At the same time, we will inform pensioners that they may be entitled to extra help through pension credit. The complexity of the current claims process is at the heart of pensioners' uneasiness in dealing with the state. The new service will transform that relationship, and pension credit is the foundation for that change.

In the past, the system has been intrusive and bureaucratic and, crucially, pensioners do not like it. We are tackling that. Our proposals will significantly reduce the intrusion and complexity, marking a radical change from the current system. Quite simply, people with weekly incomes up to about £135 to £200 for pensioner couples—can get extra income through pension credit. Or looking at it another way, if capital was the only source of income over and above the basic state pension, a single person would need at least £35,000 of capital and a couple would need at least £44,500 before they failed to be entitled to pension credit. The figures show just how radical our policy is. Pension credit is a complementary source of income alongside the basic state pension, and it is like the tax allowances that not one of us would refuse.

To conclude, I wish to return to the point made so effectively on Second Reading by my hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, South. With pension credit, we are finally leaving behind the detested historical images of the means tests that stripped people of their dignity and robbed them of their pride. Yet even though we have moved on from the dole queues of the 1920s and the unemployment assistance boards of the 1930s, our collective memory does not dwindle. It has lived on through the generations, and it continued to live on through the Tories' Social Security Act 1986. It is currently dragged up each time someone talks about pension credit using the language of pre-war social policies.

Pension credit is not about old-fashioned means-testing. Means-testing was about excluding people from income to keep them poor. Pension credit is about inclusion, taking people out of poverty and making sure that they do not slip into poverty in the first place. We will make sure that, for the first time, people who have worked hard and managed to put modest amounts away for their retirement get the income they are entitled to and see a real reward for their efforts.

The passage of this Bill will ensure that the old images of means-testing will not live on in pension credit. As with the National Minimum Wage Act 1998, I am deeply proud not only to have introduced the Bill to the House but to be the Minister who will ensure that it reaches the statute book.

6.17 pm

Mr. Boswell: I wish to express my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison). His wise advice and acuity immensely impressed me and other members of the Committee that considered the Bill.

We are used to fireworks from the Minister for Pensions. Although we have also had some measured contemplation and a helpful announcement today, I wish to refer to the fireworks. I was fascinated by his distinction between the means-testing of old and what is being introduced now. There are two characteristics of the Minister's proposal for means-testing. It is apparently all right if it is introduced by new Labour and if it is inclusive and means that nearly every pensioner will be involved. That argument will not wash, because there are serious problems with the proposal.

The Minister is impetuous and determined to get decisions out of us, but it is rather unreasonable to ask us to judge the effects of the Bill—they will be apparent not too far off, but in a year or two—before it is even passed. With regard to our decision on Third Reading, we will listen to the rest of the debate before coming to a conclusion. However, the House will not have to wait too long for that.

Our concerns remain those that were set out in the reasoned amendment to Second Reading. I have underlined our five cardinal points and they relate to mass means-testing, the complexity of the system—despite what the Minister said—the fact that many pensioners will miss out on their entitlements, the erosion of incentives and our belief, which the Liberal Democrats have been consistent in supporting, that expenditure would have been better directed towards the basic state pension, in particular for older pensioners. The argument is not about whether we should help pensioners, but about whether any additional money is being spent to best effect.

As the Minister conceded, the Bill is essentially unchanged. However, it would be churlish and inappropriate not to acknowledge the two substantial changes that Ministers made. It is often the case that if there is a consensus of opinion across the House, it acts as a good catalyst for change. In fairness, we managed to make one change in each House. First, the Government made a significant concession on hospital downrating, and we should remain grateful for that. Secondly, the Minister made a statement today on compensation payments, which will be thoroughly welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House. He also repeated his concerns about foster carers for children, so we can anticipate how we might benefit their position. Those are all welcome concessions and reflect the way in which we should make progress when we discuss Bills.

I also hope that Ministers and their officials picked up from the Committee some detailed points for consideration as we get close to making regulations. They may also have spotted some pitfalls relating to the equity of, and the ability to administer, the legislation, which will stand or fall on the regulations and the way in which they are administered.

Frankly, Conservative Members remain worried about extending means-tested benefits to 5 million pensioners. Age Concern is also worried about that. In its general briefing for the debate, it refers specifically to the difficulties of securing take-up of means-tested benefits and the large number—about 5 million—of possible claimants. It goes on to say:

> "we believe that the most important issue will be the level of take-up."

That is the cardinal test of whether the Minister's wishes are fulfilled. Whatever else happens, means-testing will put a great premium on the performance of the Pension Service, which for technical reasons we have not been able to discuss in detail today.

We remain concerned about excessive reliance on 26 call centres and a telephone system. We believe, as I think do other hon. Members, that people still need access to a local service within a reasonable time. More generally, the Select Committee said:

> "The Department for Work and Pensions must ensure that the Pension Service has the necessary resources and expertise to deal with the challenges that the Pension Credit poses."

Those remain serious challenges. Whatever the Minister may wish to happen, he and his colleagues have still to ensure that it does happen.

We need to reflect on how the Bill came about. The Minister is occasionally long on rhetoric, but the plain fact is that in trying to solve the poverty problem, the Government have widened the gap between the state basic pension and the minimum income guarantee. They are now having to bridge that gap, but the gap is of their making. That was well set out in the written answer that I received from the Minister on 7 May. He gave a detailed response to my request to give the historic levels of the minimum income guarantee and its precursors, supplementary benefit and income support, and of the basic state pension for the past 30 years. I also asked him to give the ratio between them.

It is interesting that for a long period the differences between the two were small, not generally exceeding 5 per cent. In some cases, they were negative. However, the levels began to climb slightly and in the latter years of the Conservative Government, the income support level was roughly 10 per cent. above the basic state pension. However, since the introduction of the minimum income guarantee, the figures have sharply diverged, and they now show a 30 per cent. disparity. We remain concerned about filling that gap and about the pensions and savings implications to which my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere.

We will not resolve those issues today. The Minister and his colleagues have produced what I am sure they want to describe as good news for pensioners, and we do not want to challenge benefits to pensioners. However, we will ask whether the money is being used to best effect, whether it could have been better spent, and whether there will be consequences in the long run. We are genuinely concerned that the long-term disincentives to save that are built into the system will have a depressing effect on the savings of young people.

Ministers say, and they have done so again today, that they want to produce an annual pension statement that includes both state benefits and private sector benefits, so that people know where they stand. May I float the suggestion at this late stage that what they need to do is get hold of people like my youngest daughter, who is in her early 20s and just starting her career? It should be made clear to young people where they will stand if they do not get down to saving, and what will be provided by their company pension scheme if—like my daughter—they are still fortunate enough to have one. They should be asked to think seriously about the issue, and made to realise that they are part of the £27 billion savings gap.

Will the pension credit act as a disincentive because its long-term effects and benefits will be unclear?

Mr. McCartney: I am more than happy to help the hon. Gentleman's daughter, who I believe is a solicitor or a barrister. Small practices and chambers rarely provide in-work benefits such as defined benefit schemes or even defined contribution schemes. That is why we introduced stakeholders. His daughter can start now to save for her retirement through a stakeholder scheme, and as she succeeds and moves from one practice or chamber to another in what I am sure will be an upward career trajectory, she can take her pension with her and suffer no loss. We have made the preparations; all the hon. Gentleman need do is persuade his daughter that she should get involved.

Mr. Boswell: The Minister is, if I may put it this way, very seductive, but unfortunately he has identified the wrong target. I have more than one daughter. One is employed by the civil service to look into the sorts of problems posed by person such as myself, or those who decide to litigate against Government Departments. The daughter in question has transferred from a personal pension into a company savings scheme.

To the Minister I say in all fairness and friendliness that the current take-up of stakeholder pensions is worrying, if not to him, then to many people in the sector.

Mr. McCartney: That is propaganda. Stakeholder schemes are very important. In the year after their introduction, 800,000 people who previously had no access or any chance of access to a savings product for their pension got one, and about 85 per cent. of companies that had not provided access registered to do so. That is a significant step forward. The hon. Gentleman is right, in that there is a lot more to do, but let us be clear: we are all in favour of people saving earlier in their lives, so it is in all our interests not to belittle stakeholder schemes, but instead to encourage people to take one out.

Mr. Boswell: I have absolutely no intention of belittling stakeholder pensions, but I should in all fairness point out that they are currently striking only 2 per cent. of the target group. Of the 800,000 already taken out, a significant number—174,000, if memory serves—have been through the transfer of the construction industry pension scheme. The position is generally regarded as not being as promising as the Minister and I would hope for.

[Mr. Boswell]

It would be inappropriate to widen a Third Reading debate to cover such issues, but it is relevant to the debate and to the provisions we debated and voted on earlier this afternoon to point out that the price of success in pensions policy is eternal vigilance. We need to keep revisiting the subject to see whether the proposals are working. We have reservations about stakeholder pensions, and we still have serious reservations about the long-term effect of the pension credit on the incentive to save and, if there is no long-term private saving, about the future affordability of the pension credit programme. That rolls on a long way ahead.

This is not just a matter of today's pensioners, important as they are; it is a matter of tomorrow's pensioners and the arrangements that we need to set down now to meet their needs in the future. I have a feeling that when we have finished debating this Bill and when we are no longer around to be drawing our own pensions, today's young people may be paying the price for some of the decisions that we are about to take.

6.30 pm

David Cairns: At the outset of his remarks the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) said that he would listen to the rest of the debate before deciding whether to oppose Third Reading. As I think I am the only Member on the Government Benches seeking to speak, I will assume that if he does not divide the House, it will be entirely due to the persuasive force of my argument. Of course, if he changes his mind and decides to divide the House, I will take it equally personally.

I had hoped that after the brilliant speech by the Minister we would hear no more of the scaremongering nonsense about mass means-testing. Alas, the hon. Member for Daventry continued, as if he had heard nothing of what my right hon. Friend said, to perpetuate that nonsense, and although I do not want to prejudge the contribution of the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), I suspect that he will do the same. I assume, however, that if the hon. Member for Daventry does not divide the House, it will be a principled decision and not the result of incompetence such as we saw a few minutes ago on the last group of amendments.

I want briefly to address a couple of canards from the debate. The first is the extraordinary allegation that the Bill has been introduced to clear up a mess made by the minimum income guarantee. It is quite ludicrous to assert that the Government should or could achieve all their social policy on pensioners in one Bill, and that one cannot begin, as we did, by focusing on alleviating the appalling legacy left to the poorest pensioners in this country.

Not only did we have to spend considerable sums alleviating the dire poverty of the poorest pensioners, but we had to ensure that significant sums and a great deal of parliamentary time were taken up sorting out the scandal of pension mis-selling which we inherited from the previous Conservative Government. We make no apology for focusing first and foremost on the poorest pensioners, as we did with the minimum income guarantee. We also ensured, through the winter fuel payment and other universal benefits such as free eye tests, that all pensioners who had lost out were receiving additional benefits. We were right to do all that.

What we are doing now is not an academic exercise. The remarks made earlier by the hon. Member for Northavon, when he said that giving an extra pound to someone with savings of £6 was better than giving that person £23 through the minimum income guarantee but nothing extra for savings, were like something that Alice might have found through the looking glass. The Government are being extraordinarily generous to our poorest pensioners, and rightly so, because they deserve nothing less.

We are addressing a pressing need that every single Member has heard expressed on the doorstep time after time. People say, "What about me? I have a small second pension and a few savings, and I'm no better off than the person down the road who smoked and drank all his life and didn't bother." The Government are addressing that real need in the Bill, so I hope, although I am not optimistic, that we will hear no more nonsense about the Bill clearing up a mess. We have laid excellent foundations, and the Bill builds on them, and I am very proud of that.

Let us keep our eye on the bigger picture when considering what the measure is seeking to achieve. Pensioners will be more than £400 a year better off on average, and in constituencies like mine and those of my hon. Friends, where people are poorer because their incomes are below the national average, they will be even better off. That goes a long way towards righting an historic wrong; people should not be penalised for thrift and prudence.

The other theme running through our four hours of debate has been the scaremongering about means-testing. After Second Reading, I decided that I wanted to look into the subject in depth, so I turned to what the Library told me was the definitive history of the means test, "Reserved for the Poor: The Means Test in British Social Policy" by Deacon and Bradshaw, which I am sure the hon. Member for Northavon has lectured on. Referring to the 1950s, Deacon and Bradshaw say:

> "Sometimes insurance was increased by more than assistance—at which point the Government claimed that it was reducing the role of means testing and the opposition claimed that help was not going to those who needed it most. On other occasions assistance was increased more, and then exactly the same debate was had in reverse, with the Government extolling the virtues of selectivity and the opposition complaining about the means test".

A sterile debate has been taking place since the inception of the welfare state, but the Bill takes us past that. The Government are prepared to go beyond the sterile debate about mass means-testing, but the Opposition want to drag us back to it.

Deacon and Bradshaw also write about the reality of the means test under the National Assistance Board in the 1940s and 50s. They say that it was

> "one thing for a claimant to have to tell the Board that he or she needed extra money for clothes or bedding when friends and neighbours were in a similar position and when the cause of need was so obviously beyond the control of any one person. It was quite another to have to show worn clothing to a visiting officer when everyone else had 'never had it so good'".

That was the reality of the means test, which my right hon. Friend the Minister said was designed not to lift people out of poverty but to ensure that they were given just enough to keep them in poverty. Heaven forbid that the Governments of the 1950s would give people enough money to lift them out of poverty and float them beyond range of the means test.

The Bill is quantitatively and qualitatively different. We are not talking about weekly assessments or people from the National Assistance Board coming round demanding to see people's sheets, clothing and ornaments that might have been pawned. We abhor such means-testing. We are talking about one phone call every five years, with a request for the bare minimum of information so that claimants get what they deserve to lift them out of poverty. It is an extraordinary perversion to equate the means-testing of the National Assistance Board with the income assessment in the Bill. The hon. Gentlemen on the Opposition Benches—and they are all hon. Gentlemen—know full well that those are completely dissimilar beasts, yet they are willing to perpetuate that myth for one reason alone: scaremongering.

My right hon. Friend has said on more than one occasion that, as soon as the legislation allows, he intends to publicise and promote the credit; every Labour Member will make sure that every pensioner knows about it. We will hold the Minister responsible for ensuring that the Pension Service is as proactive as he promised. I guarantee to my right hon. Friend that if I suspect that the Pension Service is not proactive and does not provide a localised service I will, to coin a Scottish phrase, be in his face. He knows that, and he knows that every Labour Member feels exactly the same way.

Our approach is completely different from the scaremongering of Opposition Members, who have only one aim in mind—to depress take-up. They will prevent people applying for the credit by telling elderly and poor pensioners, "It's the old means test. It's the humiliation and embarrassment that your parents had to endure." It is no such thing. A glimmer of recognition on the part of the Opposition that the Bill is entirely different from that sort of means-testing would be very welcome.

I commend the Government for introducing the measure. It addresses a real need, it is generous and it is clear. The complexity will be dealt with by the civil servants, not the claimants. All the claimants need to know is whether they have £135 a week coming in. If they can answer yes or no to that question, the system will do the rest. The Bill is a good measure. It is positive, redistributive and progressive, and I warmly support it.

6.40 pm

Mr. Webb: The contributions of the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) are passionate and well researched. They are fundamentally misconceived, but none the less entertaining for that.

As a parent—I am sure that there are many parents in the House—if I come home and discover that my child has made a mess of the kitchen floor but has begun to clean it up, I would applaud them for the fact that they had started to clean it up, but I might ever so gently suggest to them that they should not have made the mess in the first place. That is how we view the Bill.

The hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde mentioned the familiar cry of the person who finds that their neighbour has the same living standards as they have, even though they have saved. That very problem has been made worse by the Government over the past four or five years. A person with £20 a week of savings this year is no better off than their next-door neighbour, whereas in 1997 a person with £20 of savings would have been better off than their neighbour. In terms of dealing with the resentment felt by people who have saved, the Government have made the matter worse and are only partially remedying it through the Bill.

The hon. Gentleman says that what is proposed is not the same as the means-testing of the 1930s. I agree; however, I am not contrasting what is proposed with the 1930s but with the means-testing of the 1990s—the system from which the Bill takes over. The non-take-up rate, not under the system where claimants have to show that their sheets are worn through, but under the system operated now in modern-day Britain, is one in three. Forget about the national assistance board in the 1930s—the means-testing that does not work is the means-testing that is done now.

The hon. Gentleman's noble Friend Baroness Hollis, told Members in another place that the non-take-up rate for the shiny new-fangled benefit credit would be one in three. He can check—it is on the record. The non-take-up rate for the new pension credit would be one in three. Baroness Hollis hopes that that will build up as time goes by, but what I want to know—

Mr. McCartney *rose—*

Mr. Webb: No. I will not give way. I did not intervene.—[HON. MEMBERS: "Go on."] No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Webb: Baroness Hollis said that when the new system came in, one person in three who were entitled to it would fail to take up their entitlement. If the system is so good, so different and so simple, and if it requires just one phone call, why will one person in three not take it up?

Maria Eagle *rose—*

Mr. Webb: No. I will not give way. I did not intervene on the Minister.

We were told in Committee that the Government would allow a year from October 2003 for people to claim their entitlement and backdate it to 2003. That is entirely welcome, but why must they leave a year for people to claim it? The Minister said that the Government had done away with complexity. The Government must leave a year for people to claim the pension credit because it is so complicated they do not believe that they can get the money to people. The system is not simple; it is still extremely complicated, as the Bill clearly shows.

In his earlier remarks, the Minister said that pensioners would no longer lose, pound for pound, as though he had not been listening to what we have been saying this afternoon. Which pensioners will no longer lose, pound for pound? Women aged 60 to 64 will lose, pound for pound. Women with poor contribution records will lose, pound for pound. In the propaganda that we got on Third Reading, that is all brushed under the carpet.

The prejudice against women in aspects of the Bill explains why our campaign for justice in women's pensions is sorely needed. The fact that the Government sweep all these things under the carpet and deal in generalisations does a disservice to people's understanding of how the system will work. It is fiendishly complicated. That is why the Government assume that one in three will not take up their entitlement.

The Minister of State rightly says that the Bill is historic. It is. It will be seen as an historic turning point at which Government policy was set in the direction of

[Mr. Webb]

mass—I am not to call it means-testing, apparently—targeting and mass attempts to identify the poorer half or the poorer two thirds. In our old age, we will not want to have to report our changes in circumstances or know—or, more to the point, care—about tapers, thresholds and credits. We will want to know that we have state pension and some sort of second pension, and that we can budget on the basis of that income for the rest of our lives. That is what we will want in our old age. None of us would prefer to depend on a pension credit, but that is what we will have imposed on two thirds of our fellow citizens by the time people of my age reach pension age.

It is correct to say that when the Government came to power, they could not achieve all their social policy objectives in one go and it was important to tackle pensioner poverty, but who were the poorest pensioners in the land when they took office? It was not the people getting income support and so on who were poorest, but those who were entitled to that support but not receiving it. The Government's figures tell us that there were 500,000 such people. I have a feeling that the Labour party manifesto referred to a much bigger number; it may even have said that there were 1 million such people. None the less, the Government's figures tell us that 500,000 pensioners were not getting income support, and they did not get a penny from the MIG.

Labour Members who talk about their compassion for the poorest pensioners should be aware that the statistics that Ministers cite are based on simulation models from the Department that assume that everybody gets their money—but they do not. As long as the Government continue arguing about the effects of their policies on the assumption that everyone gets their money, they will continue to give a misleading impression, as one of the fatal flaws of their strategy is that a lot of people do not get it. The trade-off is not between a system that gives money only to the poor—let us call it targeting for shorthand—and our proposal of giving to the old, some of whom are not poor; it is between giving to some of the poor and completely ignoring the poorest, although most of the poorest, such as the elderly who miss out on their benefits, get their income through the basic pension.

The Government did have an alternative. The Bill could be called the culmination of their failure to think laterally. Some of the policies mentioned by the Minister, such as relaxation of the capital rules, are not dealt with in the Bill. We did not need the Bill to relax the capital rules. The suggestion that the pension credit is the only way in which such proposals could have been implemented is therefore wrong. It could have been done on day one or at any time.

Mr. McCartney *rose—*

Mr. Webb: I shall not give way, as other hon. Members still want to contribute in the short time that remains.

All that work could have been done without the Bill. The only thing that the Bill adds, while introducing some streamlining of the means-testing process, with which I have no problem, is the savings credit, which partly undoes the saving disincentive that the Government have created. If we are to applaud them for partly undoing the damage that they have done, the applause will be pretty limited.

I think that our goal should be bigger. The Minister tried to sound visionary and put some passion into his contribution, but my vision is much bigger than that of ensuring that two thirds of pensioners have to report their circumstances and receive top-ups. My vision is to ensure that as many people as possible are independent of the state. That is the sort of goal for which we should be striving and it is a bigger vision than that contained in the Bill.

6.48 pm

Bob Spink: British pensioners are right to feel betrayed by this Labour Government. They do not want yet more gimmicks or means-testing, whether it is old-fashioned means-testing or the new fangled type that Labour is currently trying to spin. They simply want a decent, universal and honest basic state pension so that they can live with the dignity that they deserve. They want decent Members of Parliament who can stand up in this House and represent their interests.

I should like to give the House a quote:

> "The concept of the Pensions Credit is . . . far too complex and over-elaborate . . . It inevitably draws more pensioners into means testing, which many will resent . . . We need a system which is simple, understandable, and which accords a proper dignity to pensioners."

Those are not my words, but those of Mervyn Kohler, head of public affairs at Help the Aged, in his press notice of 9 November last year. We would do well to listen to Help the Aged, and the proof of his words is clearly evident. Of the 2.5 million pensioners who qualify for the MIG, only 1.7 million take it up. That take-up is pitifully low because of the complexity of the MIG and the stigma of means-testing. Yet the measure before us tonight is if anything more complex than MIG and extends the scope of pensioner means-testing, notwithstanding the fact that the Labour manifesto pledged to end it—yet another broken Labour promise. As a result, take-up may fall even below the miserable level of MIG take-up, but I doubt whether that worries the Government, because they do not care about pensioners.

I will give the Bill some credit. The Government claim that it will help more than 5 million pensioners, which is greatly to be welcomed, and it is right to target the poorest pensioners. But I challenge their estimate that the Bill will increase benefit expenditure by £2 billion in a full year of operation, because if take-up is only 70 per cent. or 75 per cent.—around the same level as MIG take-up—there would be little or no increase in overall expenditure. That is why I say that low take-up owing to high complexity will not worry the Government.

Mr. McCartney: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Bob Spink: No, I will not. Other Members wish to speak, and the right hon. Gentleman has spent an inordinate length of time at the Dispatch Box today.

The 1997 manifesto on which the Government were elected, "New Labour because Britain deserves better", said:

> "We believe that all pensioners should share fairly in the increasing prosperity of the nation . . . Everyone is entitled to dignity in retirement."

Those are fine words, and we can all agree with them. However, under this Government the proportion of national wealth that goes to pensioners has fallen, even after fully accounting for all the gimmicks such as free television licences for over-75s, the winter fuel payment and other concessions.

Quite simply, the Government have failed pensioners. As always, the Prime Minister was long on aspiration and warm words and short on delivery. Pensioners made this country what it is. They created its wealth and established its infrastructure and enterprise base. They gave their blood, sweat and tears—some gave their lives—so that we could be a free nation enjoying prosperity and improved standards of living, yet they are denied a fair share of the very prosperity that they created through their efforts.

Let me be perfectly balanced and fair in what I say. On balance, during the 1980s and 1990s, Conservative Governments improved the lot of pensioners—although, to be honest, we did not do enough—but under this Labour Administration many pensioners have become worse off. Just as they are worse off under Labour as regards health, transport and street crime, they are worse off financially. So what is the Government's response to current levels of pensioner poverty? First, to introduce more, not less, complexity; secondly, to introduce more, not less, means-testing; and, thirdly, to create a long-term disincentive to saving. That will lead to lower pensioner take-up of their hard-earned entitlements and more, not less, pensioner poverty. In short, Labour has failed pensioners, and the Bill may compound the Government's failure by leading to an increased dependency culture. As the Minister said, socialism still lives on those Benches.

6.53 pm

Mr. Goodman: It was interesting that the Minister devoted so much of his summing up to means-testing. It was no accident that, of all the various elements in the Bill, he chose to concentrate on that one, because it is at the heart of new Labour thinking on this matter. Old Tory means-testing is apparently bad, but new Labour means-testing is apparently good.

At this point, hon. Members should remember who is, as it were, the "onlie begetter" of the Bill. It is not the Minister, nor even the Secretary of State, but the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who is absolutely confident that, by extending these credits both through his Department and—I hope that the Minister will not be embarrassed by this—his proxies in the Department for Work and Pensions he will be able to raise the living standards of poorer pensioners. I believe that it is widely acknowledged in and outside the House that the Minister is an admirer of the Chancellor. I am sure that the Under-Secretary, who is sitting next to the Minister, will not mind my putting that on the record.

There is a difficulty with the Chancellor's approach. According to the Government's figures, 2.5 million pensioners are entitled to the MIG, but only 1.7 million have taken it up. Some of us find it hard to distinguish between old and apparently wicked Tory means-testing and new, wonderfully effective Labour means-testing. As the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) ably pointed out, between a fifth and a third—the latter was his figure—do not get a penny of the MIG.

The Government have presented no evidence that the take-up for the pension credit will be higher. I acknowledge that the Government hope that it will be higher, but they cannot reassure any hon. Member about that. The fundamental flaw in the Government's approach, which the Chancellor masterminded, is becoming clearer as time goes on. The Minister placed great stress on means-testing in his summing up because he is so worried about the failure of new, apparently effective Labour means-testing that he wants to meet the point head on. However, he cannot guarantee that the take-up will be higher. He is naturally unwilling to listen to criticism from the wicked Tories, but perhaps he should take account of the concluding paragraph of the report by the Labour-dominated Select Committee on Work and Pensions. It states

> "Most importantly, it"—

that is, the Government—

> "will need to ensure that the levels of take-up for the Credit increase dramatically from those currently seen with the MIG, and that the poorest pensioners benefit in full from its provisions."

That acknowledges that the poorest pensioners do not benefit in large numbers from the MIG and that they may not benefit from the provisions of the pension credit.

In short, we know that those who take up the pension credit will be better off, but the system is gradually becoming increasingly complex. It is not so easy for my elderly constituents, especially those who are of an ethnic minority, to pick up the telephone, as the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) suggested, and get their benefit, as Tommy Cooper would have said, just like that. The Select Committee believes that, in practice, it is enormously difficult for many pensioners to cope with the complexity of the forms and take up the benefit as the Government want.

The Select Committee report concluded:

> "the Pension Credit unquestionably adds further complexity to an already byzantine system of retirement provision, which is causing confusion for pensioners, pension providers and those saving for their old age. In particular, the Credit throws the role, and indeed future, of the State Second Pension into serious question."

By placing so much stress on means-testing, the Government introduce a fundamental weakness into their plans that affects the country's poorest pensioners. I believe that they will pay dearly for it in the long run.

6.58 pm

Mr. McCartney: I simply want to place on record my thanks to my Front-Bench and Back-Bench colleagues who have taken the Bill through its stages. I also want to thank the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) and his colleagues and the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb). They have battled and put their cases with rigour. I hope that, at the end of our debates, the Bill is stronger and that many pensioners will receive a clear signal that, for the first time in their lives, they have a Government on their side, who will represent their interests. On income, social care, health care, transport or any public service, the Government are on the pensioners' side.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed, with amendments.

EUROPEAN SCRUTINY

Ordered,

That Mr. Laurence Robertson be discharged from the European Scrutiny Committee and Angela Watkinson be added to the Committee.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

STATUTORY INSTRUMENTS (JOINT COMMITTEE)

Ordered,

That Mr. Jonathan Djanogly be discharged from the Select Committee appointed to join with a Committee of the Lords as the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments and Andrew Rosindell be added.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

PETITION

Woodley town centre

7 pm

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): I would like to present a petition from 4,356 concerned residents of Woodley in the Reading, East constituency. The petition states that

> they are concerned at the levels of crime and nuisance experienced in Woodley shopping centre, and believe that the installation of CCTV in Woodley town centre would lead to a reduction of these levels.
>
> The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons inform the Secretary of State for the Home Department to take note of the concerns of the people of Woodley and to ensure that appropriate resources are made available to enable the installation of CCTV in Woodley Town Centre;
>
> And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Throckmorton Asylum Centre

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mrs. McGuire.]*

7.1 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): I am grateful to the Speaker for this opportunity to raise a matter that is of extreme importance to my constituents. My hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) wish to associate themselves with many of my remarks, but constituency engagements prevent them from being here tonight. I am particularly grateful to my hon. Friends the Members for Woking (Mr. Malins) and for West Worcestershire (Sir Michael Spicer) for informing me in advance of their interest in this debate and for their presence here this evening.

I should also like to express my gratitude to the Home Secretary, who recently wrote me a very generous letter congratulating me—and, implicitly, the local residents around the Throckmorton site proposed for the asylum accommodation centre—on the anti-racist nature of our campaign. I admire the way in which the local community has organised itself against this proposal, and those who have organised the protest group Protest at Asylum Centre at Throckmorton—PACT—also deserve to be congratulated on the splendid way in, for example, which Sunday's mass rally of 1,000 local residents was organised.

We need to acknowledge that asylum and economic migration issues are becoming some of the most pressing and difficult problems facing the world today. It is a challenge for any Government to help the vulnerable, to deal fairly with economic migrants, and to be tough on crime and terrorism, which are often the unattractive side-effects of the issues with which we are dealing here. I have great respect for the Minister who will be replying to this debate, and for her noble Friend Lord Rooker, and I am grateful for the way in which they have kept me informed about developments; they have been very unwelcome developments, but the Ministers have kept me informed none the less.

The Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), said in Standing Committee on the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill on 7 May:

> "All decent and reasonable politicians must try to calm people's fears rather than make them worse. We must ensure that reason rather than blind emotion is the order of the day."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E,* 7 May 2002; c. 83.]

I certainly want to associate myself with those remarks.

So why are we having this debate? First, I am seeking specific assurances on aspects of the way in which the Government are approaching issues as diverse as police resources and compensation for those living nearest to the proposed site. More importantly, I just hope that I might be able to persuade the Minister, even now, that she is wrong, and that the Government's policy is wrong. As Oliver Cromwell famously said to the general assembly of the Kirk of Scotland in August 1650:

> "I beseech you, in the bowels of Christ, think it possible you may be mistaken."

To put that more prosaically, "If you're in a hole, stop digging." Those of us who are looking at these developments from the outside think that Government policy on asylum looks like a dangerous mix of back-of-the-envelope calculations and panic.

There are three key arguments against the proposed asylum accommodation centre. First, it is unfair on the asylum seekers themselves to place them there; secondly, it is unfair on the local community to ask them to bear even more burdens for the sake of the rest of us; and, thirdly, it is contrary to planning policy. I ask the Minister to take one urgent action: please will she do more to help the residents whose lives have been blighted, at least until the public inquiry that will flow from this application by the Government issues its report?

I understand that the Minister will not be able to deal with all my questions tonight, and I shall welcome letters from her subsequently.

My first question concerns the worrying rumours that contractors have been told that the site will open in March. It is our understanding that the public inquiry is unlikely to report until about March, so which is right—what has been said to the contractors, or what we understand from the planning process? Importantly, will Wychavon district council have 16 weeks to respond to the planning notification submission, as Home Office officials and consultants solemnly promised at a private meeting in Wychavon, or will it have eight weeks, as last week's notification letter states?

Throckmorton is a remote rural community, consisting of about 150 people and the additional nearby small hamlets of Tilesford and Hill. There are no appreciable services or facilities. The four neighbouring parishes have a combined population of little more than 2,000. The airfield is about 8 miles from Worcester and 6 miles from Evesham. Pershore is about 3 miles to the south, with Bredon Hill beyond that. During the second world war, the base was an important facility for training and the so-called 1,000 bomber raids. In the 1960s, the runway was extended to enable Valiants from Strike Command to be based there on permanent standby. The airfield is now home to QinetiQ—formerly known as the Defence Evaluation and Research Agency—other research and training activities, and, of course, 130,000 animal carcases from last year's foot and mouth disease outbreak.

I shall deal with the three central points in turn. The first concerns the unfairness on asylum seekers. All refugee organisations, charities and Churches agree that the policy of locating 750-bed asylum centres in remote rural areas is wrong. Nick Hardwick, chief executive of the Refugee Council said:

> "We are very concerned about the proposed accommodation centres. The experience of similar centres on the continent, which are away from urban centres and where everything is provided on site is that the asylum seekers become very isolated and institutionalised and those who are allowed to stay have huge problems properly integrating."

The Immigration Advisory Service said many things in response to the White Paper, but in essence it took the same view. It considers that,

> "in line with the experience of reception centres in other European Union countries, a size of no more than 200–300 residents is desirable. Such smaller centres than those proposed could also be sited more easily and less obtrusively in urban areas with greater community facilities."

The Refugee Children's Consortium—consisting of Barnardos, British Agencies for Adoption and Fostering, the National Children's Bureau, the Children's Rights Alliance for England, the Children's Society, the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the Refugee Council, Save the Children, and UNICEF—is opposed to the inclusion of children and their families in the piloting of accommodation centres. I urge the Minister to reflect on the wisdom of including families in a population that is 80 per cent. single and economically active. That is an error of judgment that the Minister should seriously reconsider.

The diocese of Worcester has also echoed such concern. Last week, the Bishop of Dudley, the Right Reverend David Walker, said:

> "The churches have a fundamental role to play in welcoming asylum seekers and befriending them during their stay in the UK. The Church of England has a specific responsibility to recognise and respond to the spiritual needs of all who dwell in our parishes."

The bishop expressed opposition, however, to the principles that the Government propose, and to the chosen site. He was particularly disappointed that such remoteness will mean that Churches cannot play their part in making asylum seekers feel welcome in our community.

Perhaps most tellingly of all, Gurbux Singh, chairman of the Commission for Racial Equality said last week:

> "Placing asylum seekers in principally rural environments again removed from our mainstream communities is not a terribly sensible way of ensuring that newcomers are integrated into the society."

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): My hon. Friend argues his case with great conviction, but is he aware that those who object to the great size and rural location of such centres include several Labour Back Benchers, such as the much respected hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard)?

Mr. Luff: The hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) is one of many individuals whom I intended to quote, had time permitted. Nevertheless, I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point.

The simple truth is that these large accommodation centres are a recipe for tension, and a trial that is doomed to fail. The larger the centre, the harder it is to manage. Located in remote rural areas, such centres are like prisons without walls.

Serious practical problems also arise, such as the proximity of the foot and mouth disease burial site. Wychavon district council feels that it has insufficient information on the health consequences of that particular location. Proposing to dump asylum seekers 350 yards from such a burial site sends an odd signal to the wider world about our attitude to them. Given the use to which the airfield was previously put, serious environmental issues also need to be addressed. In undertaking their environmental impact assessment, I hope that the Government will listen carefully to what Wychavon district council has to say about the scope of that assessment. The question of what might be lurking on that airfield is a serious one.

Wychavon district council's planning officer, Jack Hegarty, told me:

> "We have significant concerns about placing residential uses close to the burial site. In simple terms we would ask ourselves whether we would contemplate allocating the site for residential use and I doubt very much that we would, purely in terms of residential amenity."

In other words, it is not good enough for British citizens, but it is good enough for asylum seekers.

[Mr. Luff]

There are also serious recruitment issues. The Government say that the project will create 300 jobs, but these are all in shortage areas. We cannot find teachers or social workers; it is an area, I am happy to say, of full employment. Quite how the Government will find people to work here, I do not know, and I worry about that.

Dumping asylum seekers miles from any of the nearest towns means that they will be locked in. The noble Lord Rooker said that residents would be given "pocket money" for bus fares, but there are no buses; there is nowhere they can go.

The proposal is very unfair on the local community. Lord Rooker suggested that it was time for rural England to take its share of the responsibility. This corner of rural England has already done more than most and should be left in peace. The area's major landfill site—actually a land rise site—is massive. Its hills look rather like a lunar landscape, or the scene after a nuclear attack, with hundreds of seagulls wheeling overhead. Local roads already take 500 lorry movements a day to service this huge rubbish tip. Also, there is a foot and mouth disease burial site.

Throckmorton accepted its responsibility willingly last year, despite the devastating impact that it had on local residents' lives. A decent Government would say that enough was enough and promise never to impose another burden on these people, who are not Nimbys; the truth is that their backyard is full. There are also serious implications for police, fire, health, education and social services.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): Can I draw my hon. Friend's attention to an answer that I received from the Department of Health, which said that no assessment had been made in respect of any additional health or social care needs? Does that not show, first, that there will be such additional needs and, secondly, that the Government do not have a clue how much they will cost?

Mr. Luff: I share my hon. Friend's concerns and I am grateful for the close way in which he has worked with me on this important issue.

In Committee, the Under-Secretary said:

> "We have made it clear that we intend to provide accommodation centres in non-urban areas because of the pressure that has built up on local services in urban areas."

I find it difficult to reconcile these comments with the Government's assurances that these will be free-standing centres making no demand whatsoever on local services.

There have been meetings with the local health authority and the local police service, and they anticipate demands on these services. Worcestershire is at the bottom of every funding table there is. Where are the resources to come from to meet these additional demands? The only police presence in the community at present is PC Charlie Cavendish. We will certainly need a lot more than him to cope with the implications of the centre.

Is it true that some police authorities have declined to police these centres, or to provide the protection necessary? Who will be liable if there is a fire, such as that at Yarl's Wood? Who will insure this centre in the event of a similar disturbance? Is it not time to re-examine the Riot (Damages) Act 1886, which I think puts the responsibility for damage on the police?

Serious criminals were moved from prison to Yarl's Wood; what reassurances do we have that there will be no such people at this centre? How will we know exactly who is there? Will the local police be better informed by the Home Office than Bedfordshire police clearly were? How will the Government assess the risk of the individuals put there? Will the emergency services be fully involved in the planning and design of the centre? They certainly should be; failing to plan is planning to fail.

The proposal is contrary to planning policy. No one could get away with trying to build a residential development on this site except the Government. At the examination in public into the structure plan in 2000, the panel said of a proposed new village that

> "in our view a site would need to be on the edge of an urban area and well served by public transport in order to be considered for housing development."

The panel went on to say that growth on any scale on that site would be likely to be unsustainable, would impact on the surrounding settlements and could not be said to satisfy Government policy.

The Government have gone through a bizarre site selection process, in which proximity to an airport was one of the criteria; I suppose one cannot get much closer than a disused airfield.

I do not want to play pass the parcel, but why is Defence Estates advertising a major site in the Liverpool area in this week's *Estates Gazette*? Was this site—Deysbrook barracks—ever considered? Somehow I doubt it. A team that did not know that one of the sites that they had chosen had been built on already—it is a car factory—and that another was adjacent to an oil refinery would not know about 33 acres of land, described by Defence Estates as "an outstanding development opportunity", which has outline planning approval for mixed-use development.

Many local people say that it is no coincidence that the three sites put forward by the Government are all in Conservative constituencies. I have dismissed those concerns, because the fourth site is likely to be in a Labour or Liberal Democrat seat. However, I would like the Minister to give an absolute assurance on that point now, because many people do not believe that the location is not motivated by party politics.

Can the Minister also assure us that the Home Office's money, which will boost the value of QinetiQ's site on the old airfield, is not being used to boost the value of QinetiQ before its privatisation? Home Office money will be used to build the road up to the site and that could give QinetiQ a direct cash boost. It is a bit strange that the privatisation of QinetiQ is imminent.

The property market in Throckmorton has been decimated by the decision. Houses in the village can no longer be sold. At the rally on Sunday, I met a woman in tears because her house sale had fallen through. People cannot sell their houses for one simple reason: the Government have taken the decision to locate two sites there—a foot and mouth disease burial site and an asylum centre. That is the Government's fault and no one else's. I accept that it is not the Home Office's fault or DEFRA's fault alone. Liability does not fall strictly to either of those two Departments, but it does fall to the Government.

That is why I wrote to the Prime Minister yesterday urging him to intervene and buy the houses of those people who want to move. He will be able to sell them again when the property market recovers, as it will, but at the moment people's lives are being ruined by the blight that the Government have put on their houses.

Where is the consultation that we were promised on this issue? We have had three public meetings, with the Home Office nowhere in sight. The Minister said in Committee that

"public meetings will be held in those areas where planning notifications are submitted."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 7 May 2002; c. 83–88.]

I hope that that will happen soon. I have written to Lord Rooker, inviting him to a public meeting in my constituency.

This matter is very serious. People's lives are being ruined and any asylum seeker placed in a centre in Throckmorton would also be seriously jeopardised and prejudiced by that location. The more I think about the policy, the more worried I become, not just for Throckmorton and Worcestershire, but for any community unfortunate enough to be near an asylum centre, and for any asylum seeker sent to one. I urge the Minister to reconsider the whole policy.

7.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Angela Eagle): I congratulate the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) on securing this debate and also on the way in which he has put his case. I thank him for citing the debate that I am having in Committee with the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins), who is in his place, in which I talked about the duty of national and local politicians to deal responsibly with issues that are, by their essence, emotive. I hope that we can continue in that vein, but that does not mean that the constituents of the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire do not have important views on, or emotional reactions to, something that affects them as much as he has explained tonight.

I wish to take this opportunity to dispel some of the myths about the Home Office's intentions on planning procedures. Accommodation centres are supported by hon. Members on both sides of the House, although we disagree with Conservative Front Benchers about the size and location of the centres. The proposals in the White Paper were welcomed as an effort to secure a more effective and faster procedure for obtaining final decisions than we manage at the moment with the dispersal policy and the current arrangements for asylum applications. It is important that we put that on record, because if we are to pilot such sites, they have to be located somewhere. Different people have different opinions on where they should be, but it is important to put on record the general agreement on both sides of the House that the proposals are worth pursuing.

I do not accept that we will be "dumping" asylum seekers, and that is a pejorative word to use. Asylum seekers need a better, more supportive environment while we proceed with their asylum claims. Instead of being left in dispersal areas, often in strange places with no real support services—which is the experience of many asylum seekers now—they would be placed in a cluster centre, where we could have training, language tuition, other education, access to primary health services and legal services available. We could then pursue the claims more effectively and efficiently while guaranteeing asylum seekers a safe environment in which to wait. That is a beneficial approach, and we all think so. So I do not accept that we will dump asylum seekers, but I do accept that the parties disagree about the size and location of the centres.

It is argued that the burden will fall unfairly on certain areas, and the party political point is made that all the current sites are in Conservative seats. That is purely a coincidence. We are searching for sites and shall continue to do so. Those sites will be anywhere that we think appropriate. Clearly, Throckmorton is on the radar at present, as the hon. Gentleman knows. I thank him for welcoming the fact that we have kept him and other hon. Members informed.

Currently, just over 40,000 asylum seekers are in cluster areas—the vast majority in urban areas and in cities where political representation is overwhelmingly Labour or Liberal Democrat. We need to put that point on record. I understand that people might think that the sites should not be in their area. Those concerns can be dealt with through the planning system.

It is highly optimistic to think that the site—or any site—will open in March. The first accommodation centre will probably open towards the middle of next year. I should not like people to think that the process will be sudden.

The hon. Gentleman asks how long there will be for replies. I can confirm that there were discussions between Wychavon district council and Home Office officials about the environmental impact assessment, under which 16 weeks are allowed. There were some disingenuous comments from the local authority to the effect that the Government never intended to use the normal planning processes; but, as the hon. Gentleman knows, because we are the Government we cannot use the normal planning processes—we have to use circular 18/84. However, we are following the eight-week process—not the speeded-up one provided for in the circular. We are allowing additional time for the environmental impact assessment, so there will be 16 weeks. In effect, we are mirroring the ordinary planning process in the only way that we can. As it is a Government application, there are special circumstances.

Mr. Luff: We are grateful to the Minister for dropping the original idea of using the special urgency provisions. Wychavon district council was concerned about that. Is the hon. Lady saying that the period will definitely be 16 weeks? Last week, a letter to the council from her Department stated that it would be only eight weeks.

Angela Eagle: It is my understanding that the local authority and Home Office officials have agreed to include the environmental impact assessment in the process, so that implies 16 weeks.

We never intended to use the fast-track process. That is a myth. Many such myths have grown up in all the areas where there may be detention sites or accommodation sites—but they are only myths. We want to pursue the planning process as closely as we would if this were not a Government issue.

The hon. Gentleman asked about policing. I confirm that we are holding discussions with the West Mercia police, but we have not yet submitted the planning

[Angela Eagle]

application. It will be with the council shortly and the hon. Gentleman will be given warning of its dispatch. He should understand that our discussions are at an extremely early stage. However, we shall hold consultations with all those who may be affected by the proposals so that we can make a proper assessment of the implications.

Mr. Luff: May I draw the Minister's attention to the answer that she gave me on 13 February? She stated that:

> "The Home Office does intend to apply the special urgency provisions in paragraph 22 of Circular 18/84."—[*Official Report*, 13 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 460W.]

I am grateful that the hon. Lady has backed down, but it was not a myth—it was the Government's policy.

Angela Eagle: It was a policy that we considered because it is allowed by the circular. However, we have tried to be open with hon. Members who represent areas where we may build detention or accommodation centres. We are trying to mirror the ordinary planning application process.

The Government have to balance many things. Many people are urging us to deal with asylum matters—not least Conservative Front-Bench Members. At one turn, we are asked to get on with things quickly; at another, we are asked to slow things down. Clearly, there is a tension there, but the important thing is to reassure the hon. Gentleman's constituents and those of Labour Members who represent neighbouring constituencies that this is a process that is transparent, open and above board and that will involve ordinary planning issues.

On health and assessments, discussions are taking place on the effect of having an accommodation centre in the area. The intention is that accommodation centres will have as many services as possible on site and available—certainly, access to primary health care, education for the children, training, language training and legal advice. We are considering whether adjudicators could be based at the centres to speed up the process for people who have lost a first-stage appeal and wish to continue their appeals.

That is the intention behind the accommodation-centre model and providing such services on site would minimise the effects on local services. Clearly, if someone had complex health needs that could not be dealt with on site, there might be an implication for acute services outside. We will, however, consult and work with local authorities in the areas concerned to ensure that the implications will be manageable for services in the area.

It is not true that some police services are refusing to police areas where accommodation centres may be based. Clearly, the police have a duty to ensure that any policing needs are met. We will be discussing—as we are with the West Mercia police—the implications of such a development.

Yarl's Wood is a detention centre where people were moved prior to removal from the country, because we did not know their identity, or because they were thought likely to abscond. If an asylum seeker is in the country and has a serious criminal background, we may well not know about it. It is not envisaged that accommodation centres will be used as prisons. They will be open. People will not be locked up or detained in them. Indeed, we will ensure that if they need to go off site to have access in the first stages to appeal hearings before we co-locate, that will be arranged. They will not be waiting for local buses. Services will be made available to facilitate that process.

On serious criminals, it would be wrong and alarmist for people to make the connection between asylum seekers and criminality that is anything out of the ordinary compared with what one might find in the local population. Certainly, the centres will not be used as proxies for detention centres, which are a different issue.

On planning and whether the centres are against local planning rules, clearly that will be a matter for the planning process. The hon. Gentleman will not expect me to express any opinion on that tonight.

I understand how difficult these issues are for the hon. Members concerned. Organisational issues are involved in dealing with asylum seekers and their needs, whether in a cluster area or in an accommodation centre. I am pleased that we have consensus across the House that piloting accommodation centres is a way forward that we ought to consider. I understand that there is a difference of opinion about size and location, which we will no doubt discuss at greater length when we consider the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill.

We will keep the hon. Gentleman in touch with developments. The planning process will be a proper one and, in terms of what we are intending for Throckmorton, there is no intention of suddenly doing something underhand that will circumvent the due process. I hope that with those reassurances—

Mr. Luff: What about property?

Angela Eagle: The hon. Gentleman will know that in an answer to a parliamentary question, I said that compensation would not be appropriate in these circumstances. Again, the hon. Gentleman will understand the implications for all sorts of things that the Government might wish to do if such offers were made.

Finally, when the hon. Gentleman was not quoting Cromwell—I suspect that we share an interest there—he mentioned that the site was a former RAF base. At peak capacity in 1976, 1,500 people were based there, so there is evidence to show that that number of people can be absorbed into the local area and accommodated there. We are only expecting 1,000 people if it is a site of 750 people plus the 250 in local jobs. I simply leave the hon. Gentleman with that thought, and I look forward to having a continuing dialogue on those important issues.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 24 May 2002

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Adjournment (Whitsun)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dan Norris.]*

9.34 am

Mr. Iain Coleman (Hammersmith and Fulham): The issue that I wish to raise is one of increasing concern to local authorities across the country, and especially to those in inner London. It relates to abuse of the right-to-buy scheme for local authority tenants, which I realise the Government are investigating.

Like many hon. Members on both sides of the House, I have surgeries that are booked up with constituents who are desperate for decent affordable homes for their families. Of course, the problem is particularly acute in London and the south-east, although I am aware that there is a severe shortage of affordable accommodation in most areas of the country. Whatever view one takes about right-to-buy legislation—I know that hon. Members will have sharp differences of opinion—I am sure that we can agree that the abuse that I want to highlight is one that should be stopped. I am advised by local authority officers working in home ownership units that a number of so-called investment companies that operate in this field are taking advantage of loopholes in current legislation. They acquire properties at reduced prices, rent them out for three years, and in disposing of them make a very significant return on their capital investment.

To achieve that end, such companies encourage existing council tenants to exercise the right to buy and, in return for a one-off cash sum, transfer the property to them on an under-lease. I understand that it is not unusual for these companies to leaflet entire council estates, enticing tenants to contact them by promising a one-off cash sum of as much as £10,000. When a tenant has contacted the company and agreed to the proposal, they vacate the property on the date of completion of purchase from the council.

At the same time as granting an under-lease, the tenant also enters into a contract of sale of the property, to be completed exactly three years and one day after the initial purchase and completion. Repayment of the discount on the property is thus avoided, as the sale is outside the three-year limitation period. The amount of cash paid to the tenant is dependent on the level of discount that the tenant qualifies for, which in turn normally relates to the length of time that they have been local authority tenants.

In my local authority of Hammersmith and Fulham, there have been two recent cases in which, having vacated their properties, tenants have attempted to present themselves as homeless and in need of re-housing. One of the tenants has a history of mental illness. Of course, the local authority will not accept such applications because the individuals concerned are in practice intentionally homeless, and therefore not entitled to local authority housing support. I am advised that the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions believes that, in such cases, a landlord should be able to recover the discount because a contract of sale exists. The opinions of various counsel were sought on this matter, but regrettably they disagreed with the Department.

It is true that the actions of such companies in this market are not in themselves illegal. Although many hon. Members will agree that their behaviour is deeply disreputable and constitutes theft from the public purse, little, if anything, can apparently be done to stop this activity. Many local authority housing officers, who have to deal daily with the misery and frustration of overcrowded and homeless families, have told me that a single and minor change to current legislation could put an end to this practice. What is required is to make the granting of an under-lease, following a right-to-buy purchase during the first three years of the lease, qualify legally as a disposal of the property. As a result, full repayment of the discount that applied at the time of purchase would be required. Such a move would make the current scam much less attractive to the investment companies operating in this market.

Some people have expressed concern that such a change in the regulations would affect genuine hardship cases, in which tenants who have exercised their right to buy find themselves in financial difficulty through no fault of their own. I recognise the legitimacy of such concerns in cases in which leaseholders—in other words, ex-tenants—have been forced to sub-let their properties to meet mortgage repayments and have had to rely on the kindness of friends and relatives for accommodation. The fear is that the change in the law that I propose would prevent them from sub-letting their property and put them in even greater financial difficulties. However, I do not accept that such a rare occurrence—it does not happen all that often—should prevent us from stopping abuse of the right-to-buy legislation, because landlords already have discretion to waive the requirement to repay all or part of the discount in circumstances in which they believe that such relief is warranted.

I am aware that a combined Association of London Government and London Housing Unit right-to-buy working party is looking at various options that may be available in law to stop the abuse of the legislation. A legal opinion is being sought from a highly reputable local government and housing silk to see what can be done. London boroughs are also working together to identify a suitable case to take to court in a test action to try to recover the discount following the sub-letting of a property. Identifying such an opportunity has inevitably proved to be difficult, because of the covert operations employed by the investment companies, which normally mean that the tenant who has exercised their right to buy has vacated the property and no forwarding contact address is available. In practice, the tenant cannot be contacted.

I hope that the House will agree that action of some kind is required and will welcome the work being carried out by the ALG and LHU working party. I also look forward to the time when the people responsible for such

[Mr. Iain Coleman]

conduct get their comeuppance in court and the necessary minor changes are made to the regulations to outlaw this odious abuse of the right-to-buy legislation.

9.42 am

Bob Spink (Castle Point): It is a pleasure to join the usual suspects in this end-of-term report, and I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the debate. I wish first to raise the issue of street crime in Castle Point—something that I suspect also affects most other constituencies.

Street crime and youth nuisance is becoming an increasing problem for us all. Parents should have primary responsibility for controlling the actions of young people on the streets. Parents should know where their youngsters are, what they are doing and whether they are drinking alcohol. Parents need to take an interest in what their young people are doing and ensure that they are not getting into trouble. However, when young people do get into trouble, the police have a duty to deal with them: it should not be a matter for agencies such as the social services. The police should act to prevent street crime from becoming a nuisance and making our residents' lives a misery, which is what is happening in certain areas in Castle Point, and in many other constituencies.

We in politics also have a duty to ensure that we provide suitable facilities to give youngsters something to do other than gather on the street. In Castle Point, I am sad to say that we have fallen short on that duty. I am working with several groups to provide improved facilities on Canvey Island and in Benfleet, Hadleigh and Thundersley to give youngsters an alternative to getting into trouble on the streets. When they gather in groups, they sometimes do not even do anything wrong, but their mere presence—making some noise and being a little rowdy, as youngsters can be—is intimidating for elderly people. I welcome the initiatives by various groups in Castle Point to provide skateboard parks, BMX tracks and new scout huts. I am involved in those efforts and I congratulate the people behind them. The youngsters deserve our support.

I also congratulate all those people who are involved in youth organisations, such as the scouts, the brownies, the sea scouts and the venture scouts. All those organisations do a tremendous job and help to give young people exciting alternative activities and to guide them through their important, and sometimes difficult, developmental years.

I have already mentioned Canvey Island once and I could not make this speech without mentioning its third road. Canvey must have a third road for congestion, economic and, not least, safety reasons. Some areas of Canvey Island are 8 ft below sea level. Sea levels are rising because of climate changes, so we must be vigilant and ensure that the sea walls around the Island are sufficient to protect it. Hon. Members may recall that in 1953, Canvey Island suffered a terrible flood, in which 53 people lost their lives. At the time, my predecessor, Sir Bernard Braine, was the Member of Parliament. I am sorry, I mean my last but one predecessor—I forget that I was careless enough to lose the election in 1997. Sir Bernard, who became Lord Braine, was much loved in the House.

Many people on Canvey Island still recall the flood so they are emotionally attached to the need for a third road. I hope to have a dedicated debate on the issue soon, so that I can invite the hon. Members for Basildon (Angela Smith) and for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) to explain to my constituents why the Labour-controlled councils in their constituencies are so intent on blocking Canvey's third road. Those councils do not want the road to go through their districts, although I cannot see any reason why the road would cause any harm to them. The only viable way that the road could go is through those districts, but the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), has told me that unless Thurrock council withdraws its objection to the third road, the Government will not support or seek to finance it. We need all the neighbouring local councils to agree to the plan. The roadblock on Canvey's third road lies with Labour-controlled Thurrock council, so I want the hon. Member for Thurrock, who is an excellent chap, to explain the council's reasons.

Canvey people want to march on No. 10 Downing street, because they blame the Government, or on county hall, because they blame the county councillors. I am sympathetic to their cause and I will walk on those marches with them, but that will do no good unless Thurrock council will remove its roadblock. We cannot hide behind blaming the Prime Minister on this issue, unfortunately.

We have excellent local hospitals. The two that serve my constituency, Southend and Basildon hospitals, were both listed in the top 40 hospitals in a recent survey. I congratulate the management and the medical, support and administrative staff of those hospitals on that fine achievement. We want to build on that achievement and improve provision in various ways.

We must remain vigilant and ensure that there are no cuts to the excellent cancer services provided by Southend hospital, which are much respected by the people of south-east Essex. We should improve and support them in every possible way. I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor), for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) and for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) for their excellent work in supporting those cancer services.

In improving health care locally, we need to move some services such as simple tests, treatments, procedures and medicine applications away from the main hospitals into the local communities. That is more convenient, especially for vulnerable people such as the elderly, young people with babies in prams and those who do not have access to cars. It is difficult to get to the two hospitals from places in my constituency such as Canvey Island. I welcome the fact that we now have a Canvey out-patients clinic, something for which Sir Bernard Braine, many local politicians of all parties and I fought for many years.

I am delighted that on the mainland we also have the Tyrells out-patient centre which opened very recently. I am sure that it will develop and provide excellent treatment for local people. We must take every opportunity to look at further ways to extend and improve primary care provision in the local community, thus reducing pressure on our central hospitals.

I could not make this end-of-term report without mentioning c2c, our famous Fenchurch street rail line. This time, I have good news—the services have actually improved. I have not had a single letter of complaint in the past month, which is a first in my 10 or 12 years at Castle Point as Member of Parliament and ex-Member of Parliament. The strategic rail plan gave a target of increasing passenger numbers by 50 per cent. over the next few years. However, by the time the train arrives at Benfleet station, which is the busiest on the Fenchurch street line, it is often full. My constituents often cannot even stand on the train they want; they have to wait for the next one or endure a very uncomfortable 35 or 40 minutes travelling to London. How we can increase passenger numbers without increasing capacity, I do not know.

In looking at ways to increase capacity, it occurred to me that 500 or 600 people a day get on at the terminal at Shoeburyness at the end of the Fenchurch street line and more than 3,000 people get on the train from Canvey Island every day, yet there is no terminal on Canvey Island. As part of the Thames gateway and the Shellhaven port development, there is a proposal to double up on the rail line that goes along the south of the Fenchurch street line. That line could then easily be extended for the extra mile on to Canvey Island where there is a massive brownfield site that would make a superb location for a new rail terminus.

I have raised the matter with the Strategic Rail Authority and c2c. It has had a mixed reception, although we are having meetings to discuss it. Providing a new terminus station on Canvey Island would increase capacity on the Fenchurch street line as a whole, take pressure off the main Fenchurch street line so that other people will want to use it, and achieve the excellent target of the Strategic Rail Authority and the Government of a 50 per cent. increase in passengers.

On a lighter note, in a week's time we will be watching the first game in the World cup. I am delighted to be able to mention the World cup before the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) beats me to it. I wish the England team all the very best. We are all keeping our fingers crossed, and I am sure that England will do extremely well. Indeed, I am prepared to take bets that we will get into the quarter or semi-finals at least.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): That is very brave.

Bob Spink: I think that I have a fiver on the result with my right hon. Friend.

The first game is between France and Senegal. I pay tribute to the Senegalese team—it is a fantastic, exciting, free-flowing team. I ran the London marathon in the Senegalese team strip. I have an invitation to the first game, but I will not be able to attend because I will be giving out Queen's jubilee medals to one of the excellent primary schools in my constituency. However, I hope that the Senegalese win the first match against France.

Finally, I congratulate ambassador Mahbubani, the president of the United Nations Security Council on his statement on Cyprus on 2 May. The direct talks between President Clerides for the Greek Cypriots and Rauf Denktash, the Turkish Cypriot leader, have completed their third round. As the House knows, the negotiations are geared to finding a comprehensive settlement to the Cyprus problem that takes proper account of the relevant UN resolutions and treaties. It is hoped that a settlement will be forthcoming before the European Union makes its decision later this year on the accession of Cyprus. It is also recognised that a settlement agreement does not stand in the way of Cyprus's accession to the EU. It is to be hoped that when the EU announces Cyprus's accession it gives some hope to Turkish aspirations towards entry into the European Union. Cyprus's accession will, I hope, be a positive factor in bringing forward an eventual settlement.

Mr. Mahbubani expressed the regret of the Security Council that more progress had not been made in the talks. The council said that the time has come to set down areas of common ground between the two sides, with the aim of establishing the component parts of a comprehensive settlement and, where differences remain, to narrow and remove those through a process of negotiation focused on compromise formulations.

Compromise is the key word for both the Turkish and Greek Cypriot sides. There are many heads of terms—I am sure that most of us know what they are—and everyone wants everything on each of those heads of terms. That is not the way that a settlement will look. There will be difficult and painful compromise for both communities, but in the long run it is necessary and right to get a long-term solution.

The Security Council urged both sides, particularly the Turkish side, to co-operate fully with the Secretary-General's special adviser in achieving the compromise solution. Everyone in the House must recognise our special responsibility, and hope and pray that a settlement can be achieved.

9.59 am

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink). I endorse his good luck wishes to the England team, and invite him and other hon. Members who want to make a patriotic punt to do so with Ladbrokes—the excellent betting firm based in my constituency.

I want to raise four entirely different issues. The first is the rise in hate crime that, sadly, has occurred in the United Kingdom. I shall focus my comments on the increase in anti-Semitism, although I hope that the House will soon have the opportunity to explore the wider issue more fully.

In the month of April alone, 51 incidents of anti-Semitism were recorded—the second highest monthly figure on record. They included the attack on Finsbury park synagogue, which was entirely ransacked. Swastikas were daubed on the holy ark, religious scrolls were ripped, trampled on and covered with paint. It is both sad and ironic that the vandalised scrolls came from the book of Esther, which includes the story of a tyrant's attempt to murder the Jewish community in ancient Persia. In addition, prayer books were ripped up and windows were broken. The synagogue was entirely desecrated.

Jewish communities throughout the country were utterly shocked by the scenes at the Finsbury synagogue, which is used by a mainly elderly congregation, many of whom escaped from the terrible events in Europe during world war two. The Jewish community in my constituency is worried—rightly—by the steady increase of anti-Semitism.

Other incidents included the stabbing of a Jewish student on a London bus and physical attacks on visibly Jewish people wearing head coverings or other religious

[Mr. Gareth R. Thomas]

clothing. Synagogues and Jewish schools, charities and community buildings are on a heightened state of alert following the rise in the number of attacks. In Manchester, vandalism has occurred in two Jewish cemeteries where tombs and headstones were deliberately desecrated. More than 80 gravestones in a cemetery in Hull were vandalised.

Sad to say, these are not isolated events, but part of a trend. During the past four years, there has been a rise in the number of anti-Semitic incidents monitored by the Jewish community. In 1998, there were about 385 such incidents; by 1999 that figure had risen to 402, and in 2000, it was 576. Last year, there were about 521 incidents. This year, to date, there have been about 126.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): May I join the hon. Gentleman in condemning those outrageous attacks? Our country has a strong tradition of religious tolerance that all Members try to uphold, so I am sure that, in principle, he has the support of Members on the Opposition Benches for everything that he is saying.

Mr. Thomas: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for those comments. I realise that there is cross-party concern about those incidents.

There is a sense that the number of incidents has risen as a consequence of the tension in the middle east. There is of course a genuine debate to be had about events in the middle east, but we must not tolerate the demonisation of Israel or extreme anti-Zionism, as that may legitimise anti-Semitic attacks. Such demonisation can embolden existing anti-Semites and create new ones.

Internationally, too, there is concern at the increase in holocaust denial. I am especially worried by the activities of the Iranian Government, who have granted asylum to several European neo-Nazi activists who fled their countries of origin after conviction for holocaust denial. Those activists have been involved in the organisation of conferences that promote holocaust denial, such as those that took place in Moscow and Trieste recently.

The Board of Deputies of British Jews has held a series of meetings with Ministers at the Home Office and I hope that my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office will pass on our appreciation for those discussions with the Jewish community. I hope, too, that he will continue to express the ongoing concern of my constituents and of Jewish constituents throughout the country.

The second issue that I want to raise is the need to speed up the Government's consideration of reform of the Consumer Credit Act 1974. In our general election manifesto, we rightly gave a commitment to tackle the activities of loan sharks. We noted that the Act provided that a court, at a debtor's request, could consider whether a credit agreement was extortionate and, if so, change its terms so that they were fair and reasonable. Unfortunately, a series of cases has highlighted the fact that the law is deficient.

In the autumn, consultation documents were published, which proposed the redefinition of the term "extortionate credit" in the 1974 Act; the reduction of some of the qualifying barriers before cases could be considered by the courts; and the introduction of a requirement for responsible lending. The consultation period has closed and I understand that consideration is still under way at the Department of Trade and Industry and the Treasury. I hope that my hon. Friend will pass on my concern that consideration of the issue should be accelerated.

My specific interest arose from the case of one of my constituents who took out a mortgage in the 1980s with National Home Loans Ltd.—now part of Paragon Finance plc. National Home Loans has had a somewhat turbulent career. In the 1980s, it was one of the new type of mortgage lenders known as centralised lenders. Such companies did not operate like traditional building societies or banks which take deposits to raise funds for their mortgage lending; instead, they raised funds on the wholesale markets and lent money at a higher rate.

Many of those companies were especially exposed to the property recession of the late 1980s and early 1990s, and that may explain some of the more recent actions of Paragon Finance in respect of the National Home Loans book. The annual reports of Paragon Finance have alluded to the problem facing my constituent and several others. The reports show that charging rates are much higher than those in the market, and that reflects the overall profile of the company's home loan portfolio.

After a recent court case, an article highlighted the fact that National Home Loans borrowers typically paid double the market interest rate. Back in October, two sets of borrowers challenged the company's interest rate policy. They did so because Paragon was seeking possession orders on their homes after they had fallen into arrears. They tried to argue in the High Court and the Court of Appeal that the high interest rates applied by National Home Loans or Paragon were extortionate under the terms of the Consumer Credit Act 1974 and unfair under the Unfair Contract Terms Act 1977.

Sadly, in those cases—the cases of Nash and Staunton *v.* Paragon Finance—the borrowers were unsuccessful in persuading the court to endorse their case. The Court of Appeal decided that a lender's discretion as regards the way that it sets its interest rates, although not completely unfettered, should only be restricted according to the terms of the 1974 Act in a very limited way; and that crucial, very narrow, definition of the constraints on the lender's discretion meant that the two borrowers' arguments were struck down.

I have [illegible] this issue in the House before, and the concerns that I [illegible] then were picked up by a law firm, which recently highlighted to me a case of a client who is due very shortly to be evicted from their home by Paragon's solicitors. The firm, in its preparation and its attempts to persuade the courts and Paragon Finance not to take such action, called in expert evidence to examine how the rates that National Home Loans was charging compared with those charged by more than 100 more conventional mortgage lenders. It concluded that although National Home Loans' rates had initially been very competitive, now they were traditionally 4 or 5 per cent. higher than those charged by other lenders and, in some cases, were utterly out of line with the market.

I hope that hon. Friends in the Department of Trade and Industry and the Treasury will accelerate the review of the Consumer Credit Act 1974 so that this bunch of loan sharks—I can think of no other term to describe the way Paragon Finance has operated—can be brought to book and vulnerable people who took out loans in the 1980s can have proper protection, which I am sure those who initiated the 1974 Act expected it to offer.

The third issue that I want to mention concerns funding from learning and skills councils to local authorities and colleges when they are attempting to change the structure of post-16 provision in their area. In essence, there are no sixth forms in Harrow's many excellent high schools. That has increasingly become an issue of concern to constituents. On occasion, some 30 to 40 per cent. of Harrow's 16 to 18-year-old students are educated out of the borough, the bulk of them in sixth forms in Hillingdon, Watford or Barnet.

Although we have very high standards of education in our high schools and primary schools, many head teachers and parents are drawing to my attention as their Member of Parliament the fact that many parents are taking their children out of primary school in the last year, at age 11, to get them into high schools with sixth forms. They are concerned about the ethos of the tertiary college system in Harrow, and whether their child is mature enough to cope with the structure and nature of education in a tertiary college.

I should place on the record the fact that the tertiary colleges do have high standards of education, but we cannot ignore the concerns of parents in my constituency. I am pleased to say that a debate is under way locally, initiated by the Labour council and led by the excellent leadership on that local council, as to how we can change post-16 provision to protect the excellent provision offered by the tertiary colleges but also to recognise parental concerns for a more sixth-form style ethos in local post-16 provision. Obviously, to change the structure of post-16 provision locally will require additional funding, and I hope that the Government will ensure that learning and skills councils serving north-west London are properly funded for this purpose.

The last issue that I wish to raise is that of fees for registration as an industrial and provident society. I have been lucky to have the opportunity to introduce a private Member's Bill, the Industrial and Provident Societies Bill, to reform the legal form of industrial and provident societies. During the course of discussions with a series of organisations in the co-operative movement, including the Village Retail Services Association and the National Federation of Women's Institutes country markets, they have flagged up to me not only their desire to see the legislation that governs industrial and provident societies brought up to date but their concern about the Financial Services Authority proposals to levy a tenfold increase in the annual registration charges that must be paid to enable them to remain an industrial and provident society.

There has already been debate on the Floor of the House about this issue. The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) and I have met the Financial Services Authority to press the issue and I know that Treasury Ministers are already examining the issue, but I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office, when he feeds back to other Ministers concerns that have been raised on the Floor of the House, will continue to impress on Treasury Ministers the genuine concern that exists in this area.

Mr. Greg Knight: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I was one of the Members of the House who supported what he is saying now when we debated his Bill, and I tried to bring about a change by moving a new clause. I hope that Treasury Ministers will mull over his words and decide to take action on the matter. However, if they do not, will the hon. Gentleman consider introducing my new clause to his Bill in another place?

Mr. Thomas: On Report, on 19 April, the right hon. Gentleman made a powerful case. His proposals attracted a huge amount of sympathy on the Opposition Benches, and indeed my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey) attempted to offer another proposal for consideration by Government to solve the problem. I fear that I will not be able to support the right hon. Gentleman's new clause. I could not support it when he proposed it, and I could not support it if it was moved in the other place, since it would serve to kill off the Bill, simply because the Bill would have to return to the Floor of the House and there will be not be enough time to allow that.

I hope that there will be no need for the right hon. Gentleman to press his new clause, because I know that there is considerable sympathy and increasing understanding of the concerns that have been raised by the industrial and provident society sector about the Financial Services Authority proposals. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary has heard the cross-party concerns that have again been raised on the Floor of the House. I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for contributing and hope that he will press the Treasury and the FSA on that issue.

Having drawn attention to those few issues, I hope that other hon. Members will also get their turn.

10.19 am

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): Not being one of what the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) refers to as "the usual suspects", I am particularly grateful to have caught your eye this morning, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am conscious of the fact that, when we return from the Whitsun recess, I shall have been a Member of the House for one year. When I first came here, I was told, "You'll get used to it; it's just like being at public school." No doubt, almost every new Member is told the same. I had the good fortune to be educated entirely in the state sector, so I cannot judge whether that is true, but my good teachers—the nice teachers—always allowed us to bring in games on the last day before the holidays. It seems to me that this debate is somehow the parliamentary equivalent of that, so I am particularly pleased to have the opportunity to be part of it.

I represent a constituency that does not often hit the national headlines. If I get a phone call from someone on the "Today" programme, for example, it is invariably about some cosy or couthie little story about Norway wanting to take back sovereignty of Orkney, or something crucial like that—it is never going to be about reform of the common fisheries policy, or anything that matters to my constituents.

Occasionally, however, we hit the national and international headlines—usually because of something for which the communities that I represent would rather not be known. One such incident occurred on 5 January 1993—the day on which the motor tanker Braer ran aground on the island of Horse, south of Shetland. It was, by all witness accounts, a scene of total devastation.

[Mr. Alistair Carmichael]

At a meeting in Dunrossness on the south end of Shetland last year, a constituent gave me a photograph showing the tanker on the rocks. The scene that it depicted, some days after the grounding, was unspeakably awful. The pollution was such that people could not live in their houses, and they could not go outside without breathing apparatus. It is remarkable and, indeed, regrettable that, some nine years later, the implications of the Braer's grounding continue to occupy me as the Member of Parliament for the northern isles.

Before the grounding, Shetland salmon farmers enjoyed a premium for their product, but the premium was lost and has never been recovered. We will probably never know about some of the remaining implications because, as a community that relies on our reputation for being environmentally clean, we would be mad to ask about the impact of the heavy metals in the ground off the south end of Shetland. That is occasionally mentioned to me, but so much recovery has taken place that we would not wish to look too carefully at it.

One group of constituents still feels particularly aggrieved. The group had perfectly serviceable asbestos roofs until the Braer was grounded, but as a result of the oil spillage and of oil being in the atmosphere, or possibly as a result of the detergents that were sprayed on the oil, the roofs very quickly perished, became unusable and most of them had to be replaced. That was the subject of litigation between the residents and the international oil pollution compensation fund.

For reasons that I have never been fully able to understand, the local residents lost their case. I would have thought that it was almost a case of res ipsa loquitur—something that speaks for itself. They had a perfectly serviceable roof one day, a tanker dumped 84,700 tonnes of crude oil on their doorstep the next day, and the day after asbestos roofs start to fail—yet the judge said that the residents had not established a causal link. Having heard the evidence, the judge was in a better position to judge that than I am, but I have not been able to get it straight in my own mind.

The conduct of the IOPC during the litigation might best be described as playing hard ball. One of my constituents, Mr. Rae Tulloch, prepared a report for the IOPC on the background to the failure of the roofs. People in Shetland widely believed, for whatever reason, that the report, having been prepared in the immediate aftermath of the Braer's grounding, would go a long way to establish their case in court.

Regrettably, however, the IOPC refused to allow the report to be released. It resisted the legal procedures on the basis that the report was post litem motam—it was prepared in contemplation of litigation—and that therefore it was entitled to hold on to it. That has left a very sour taste in the mouths of many of my constituents, who feel that the report contains information that would demonstrate that their case was well founded.

The IOPC has told me that Rae Tulloch gave evidence during the litigation. That is absolutely true, but he was not able to refer to his report and counsel for the IOPC made several objections to information that he would otherwise have put in the public domain. From the IOPC's point of view, a line can now be drawn under the matter. The litigation has run its course and the IOPC can move on. From my constituents' point of view, however, the feeling remains that they have somehow been short-changed by the IOPC and that the legal system has not worked as it should.

That is why I hope that the Minister will stress to the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions that this country needs to put pressure on the IOPC to release the report. The case will not cost it anything now and it cannot be sued again. If it has nothing to hide in the report, surely it also has nothing to lose by putting in the public domain.

It might be said that the IOPC was perfectly correct not to pay out for the roofs, or indeed any other claim, because, over the past two years, further information has been brought into the public domain by one of my constituents, Dr. Jonathon Wills, suggesting that the initial accident inquiry, which blamed bad weather and seamanship for the loss of the Braer after her engines stopped south of Sumburgh head, did not get to the root of the matter.

According to Dr. Wills, and there is much merit in what he says, the Braer was, in fact, unseaworthy by any normal standards long before heavy seas damaged the air vents and let water into the fuel. It also seems that the American shipowner, Michael Hudner, has been obstructive in the release of information that could settle the issue one way or the other.

The Braer's steam boilers were badly corroded and their water supply was dangerously contaminated. As a result, during the planned journey from Norway to Canada the engineers could not warm up the heavy fuel-oil to burn in the main engine and the auxiliary boiler, and used diesel instead. Even if the water had not got into the fuel tank, the Braer risked running out of diesel and steam long before it reached the refinery in Quebec for which it was destined. The boat was described by its owner, in the aftermath, as first-class—

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): Don't go second-class.

Mr. Carmichael: As my hon. Friend says, one should not go second-class. There is a great deal of truth in that if those are the standards by which ships are to be judged.

The director of the marine accident investigation branch has examined this matter, and he has described Dr. Wills's views as opinion. With all due respect to Admiral John Lang, whom I have met and whose views I would take seriously, I suggest that this matter needs to be considered again. It is more than opinion—new facts have emerged that deserve a proper public airing. A substantial body of opinion now says that the Braer inquiry needs to be reopened in some form or another. It is tempting, nine years after the event, to say, "Well, it's all happened." I suspect that the civil service attitude is that it can be put away in a box marked "sorted." These are important issues, however, which have an importance beyond the shores of Shetland.

The Government have an avowed policy—I commend them for it—of improving the standard of the merchant fleets and the safety of the ships using our waters. I commend them particularly for stationing a tug in the waters of the Pentland Firth and the Fair Isle channel. Significant improvements have been made. It seems, however, that this issue remains outstanding, and runs contrary to the whole thrust of Government policy. This is the sort of incident that will happen again, some day, somewhere. I would like to think that the lessons that are there to be learned from my constituency might be properly learned and applied in the event that something similar happens elsewhere.

I now want to deal briefly with a subject that is of immense concern to my constituents—reform of the common fisheries policy. The common fisheries policy is now an issue of fundamental credibility for the European Union. The scandalous practices that have developed as a result of its current form—I take the view that it is accepted as having failed because of the terms of the Green Paper on reform—cannot be tolerated by the House or by the fishing industry. After 30 years of the common fisheries policy, they will not be tolerated any longer. This is very much the last chance for proper reform of the common fisheries policy.

David Burnside (South Antrim): I fully support the hon. Gentleman's view of the need for reform. In response to a recent question, the Government stated their concern that, under the Spanish presidency, reform has been delayed because of the illegal activity of and Spain's protectionist policies towards its own fleet. Will the hon. Gentleman persuade our Government to stop Spain's illegal activity?

Mr. Carmichael: I am immensely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that intervention, because that was exactly the point that I was about to make. My understanding is that the Spanish are seeking to delay matters because it would be inappropriate for them to be seen to be wrecking while they hold the presidency. They are trying to kick the issue into the long grass until after the next summit, when they will be able to take a much more robust approach to it.

I have received indications—I have yet to hear anyone deny this—that the Spanish Prime Minister, Mr. Aznar, has been making telephone calls to Romano Prodi, the President of the European Commission, and that that has brought the reform process to a grinding halt. It is remarkable that the Spanish Prime Minister is prepared to intervene to protect the interests of his fishing industry; I wish that our Prime Minister would do the same. If the Minister takes back no other representation today, I ask him to impress on the Prime Minister in particular the immense frustration that exists in fishing communities, as we see the prospect of reform, which is so crucial to our industry and—I speak as a fervent pro-European—to the credibility of the European Union, being delayed and perhaps denied. The Prime Minister could make a substantial difference through a personal intervention, and it would benefit not just the fishing industry and communities such as mine—in Shetland, for example, a third of our economy depends on it—but the case for reform of the European Union, of which I know the Minister and the Prime Minister are generally in favour.

I am grateful for having had the opportunity to air these subjects, and I hope that the appropriate messages will be heard elsewhere.

10.36 am

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) said that this debate was like games on the last day of term at school. Being a workaholic, the other thing of which it reminds me is catching up on that little bit of extra work that one never got round to doing. I always find it useful to air some of those issues that I have spent several hours bobbing up and down in the Chamber trying to raise without having the opportunity to do so.

I would also like to use this time to highlight to the Government the major issues that are still being raised [illegible] my postbag. The first of those is concern about those basic services on which we all rely—education, health, social services and transport. What is coming through still is a demand for more funds. In some ways, that is surprising given that, unquestionably, there are more funds in all of those areas, and we are seeing the benefit of that. Time scale may be an issue, however, as recruitment frustrations mean that the delivery of those services does not always meet people's expectations.

In terms of education, Swindon is the lowest funded unitary authority in the F40 group, and among the lowest sixth in terms of funding. The standards, however, do not justify such a low level of funding. I am delighted that, only yesterday, it was announced that we are still on track to have a new system of education funding, and that there will be a consultation period over the summer. I was particularly pleased by the recognition that there should be a baseline for every local education authority, and that money will be allocated so that everyone can be sure that a reasonable level of services can be provided. Of course, the argument will be about what that level should be. I very much look forward to that consultation, however, and I hope that it will be very specific so that schools can recognise how that reasonable level of service can be provided.

Of course, not only the level of service but the speed at which we move towards those new allocations is important. I hope that, in the spending review, the Government will ensure that there is enough money to provide additional funds to schools in Swindon, and that growth money is properly given to those areas that have not had enough funds in the past because of unfair distribution.

Mr. Francois: All hon. Members have an interest in the review of the standard spending assessment system that is under way. I hope that the hon. Lady will forgive me if give a quick plug on behalf of Rochford district council and all the other authorities that are members of the town and country finance issues group—TACFIG—and that have done particularly badly out of the old SSA formula. They hope that they might get something positive out of the new one as a result of the review.

Ms Drown: The issue is a bit of a nightmare. A consultation carried out with local authorities showed that 98 per cent. thought that they would benefit from a new formula. However, we will not all be happy, so will continue to argue our case. I have received representations from the south-west unitary authorities as well as from the F40 group. Clearly, we shall have to have a mature debate, but I hope that the House will be able to support the proposed baseline and the simplified formula that emerges. However, the debate will be hot until that formula is determined.

It is clear that money is available for social services and health funding. People in Swindon have seen the benefits of that. We will get a new hospital later this year,

[Ms Drown]

and it will have 19 per cent. more space so it will be able to attend to more patients: it will be able to see more patients and it will have more beds. I know that the staff at our existing Princess Margaret hospital are looking forward to the change.

To double the amount of money in the health service in real terms by 2008 seems almost unbelievable. The fear is that we shall raise expectations that then cannot be delivered. However, frustrations exist when trying to deliver health and social services to people in need. Recruitment is an issue, but can we not be more flexible over the years so that those areas that face particular pressures can more quickly develop the services that they require?

I also wish to raise a few concerns about the recent announcements for foundation hospitals and delivering the NHS plan. Many of the reasons used to push for the creation of foundation hospitals, such as the argument that not everything can be run for Whitehall, do not apply to just a few hospitals. If everything cannot be run from Whitehall, why will selecting just a few hospitals deliver a better health service? Let us face it, not everything is run from Whitehall. It does not sign every invoice and contract for staff; things have already been devolved. If more issues need to be devolved, should they not be devolved across the whole health service and in the interests of all patients?

The announcements contained statements such as:

> "NHS foundation trusts will be freed from having to respond to an excessive number of prescriptive central demands, guidance and reporting arrangements."

If there are an excessive number of demands, should they not be reduced for everyone? It is odd to talk only to the most successful trusts, as defined by a fairly crude set of indicators that mean that hospitals fall into one of three categories. Should we not talk to all hospitals, all community trusts and all primary care teams about how we should develop the trusts further?

The main thrust of the Government's approach to the health service is absolutely right. The NHS plan has received solid support from across the whole health service—from the professions, unions, staff and patients. However, my concern is that we are carrying out reorganisation for the sake of it. The Government have already recognised that the service is undergoing great reorganisation and although, it might be boring to continue with the same NHS plan, it is a solid plan and should be delivered. We should stick to it.

The document "Delivering the NHS Plan" talks about introducing full-cost charging for patient services. Given that the NHS always faces pressures and must balance costs exactly with income, the introduction of full-cost charging might create the instability and problems that we faced under the Conservatives' internal market. Most people in the health service recognise that that market failed, as do the Labour party. At the general election in 1997, we stood on a manifesto to change it. I agree that our proposals are not the same as the internal market and would not introduce one to the same extent, but we must be careful that we do not create exactly the same problems that the internal market caused.

On transport, the Potters Bar crash again raised people's concerns about safety. We need to reiterate that the railways are still the safest form of transport. Although there is always something psychologically difficult about a rail crash, more people are killed on the roads. However, we do not relate to that fact in the same way as we do to rail crashes. Although we must stress that rail is still the safest way to travel, we clearly need to do more to improve rail safety as well as punctuality. Infrastructure continues to be a major issue and causes huge frustrations with my constituents who want to travel by rail.

Certain aspects of rail services, however, do not require major investment. I recently received a letter from a constituent who has a disability. She travels from Swindon to Harrogate and back again using three different rail services—Great Western, Virgin and Arriva. All of them let her down. People are not there to offer her assistance in getting on and off trains. That is not only a disappointment and a terrible thing to happen, but undermines her and other people's confidence in the next journey that they will make. They fear that people will not be there to provide the assistance that they need to get on and off trains. In the 21st century, it should not be hard to make such service provision. Train companies should be able to provide it.

The hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) referred to criminal activity and antisocial behaviour. I recognise the points that he made, because that issue features in my postbag. We are undoubtedly ready for a real push and investment in youth work, so that people have positive things to do rather than getting involved in criminal and antisocial behaviour.

In Swindon, antisocial behaviour is still associated with some travellers. Many travellers pass through Swindon and do not cause any problems, but some still cause a real nuisance to the resident community. Legislation is not strong enough to deal with the problem, but I am pleased that, in this Session, there has been a ten-minute Bill and an Adjournment debate on the issue. There has been a move in the House to promote cross-party work and we are looking to set up an all-party group on illegal camping and traveller management so as to try to push the issue up the parliamentary agenda.

Residents in my area also suffer from the antisocial behaviour associated with prostitution. It makes many of their lives a misery because they are hassled by some prostitutes and kerb crawlers. The Government have taken big steps forward by making kerb crawling an arrestable offence. However, we need to do more and we were particularly disappointed when antisocial behaviour orders failed in Swindon's magistrates court because of the evidence base. Such orders should be considered in the county courts, which are more familiar with the evidence base that must be created to have the orders imposed. That would make a real improvement to the lives of those who live in areas affected by prostitution.

Another issue that features in my postbag—and that of other hon. Members—is the problem created by fireworks and airguns. They injure many people and animals. Only last month, a man in Swindon was shot by a gas-powered ball-bearing gun. The ball-bearing went into his skull and missed his eye by inches. That is just one incident, and many animals are also injured. The Government should consider introducing firework and airgun controls so that we can reduce injuries.

In addition to receiving correspondence, I also try to take many Government consultations out to my constituents. Recently, I helped to undertake the

Government's consultation on radioactive waste, and from that came the clear view that people—68 per cent. of those surveyed—wanted nuclear energy phased out. They want the skills of people working in the nuclear energy industry, of whom there are many in Swindon, used in other industries. People are keen on the development of renewable energy sources. I know that the Government are already carrying out a lot of work on that and, only yesterday, permission was granted for the largest wind farm to be built in Ceredigion. I congratulate the county council there, the people of Ceredigion and the Government on letting that proposal through. However, we must do more.

Nearly all the 506 applications for wind farms have been rejected, and 238 have been opposed by the Ministry of Defence. That raises questions about joined-up government. Why should the Ministry of Defence object to wind farms when other European countries can manage to build many of them without such objections? The Ministry of Defence should not object to this country moving from risky energy sources, such as nuclear energy, which itself poses a danger to the Ministry, to less risky energy sources.

Mr. Carmichael: Does the hon. Lady agree that if Saddam Hussein wants to prevent an attack on Iraq by this country's low-flying aircraft, his best defence is to build wind farms?

Ms Drown: That is an interesting point. I am sure the Ministry of Defence would come up with another way of tackling the problem. Obviously we need to consider such matters.

On defence diversification, if our foreign policy is to be successful and our world more peaceful, which I hope all hon. Members want, it makes good business sense to diversify now. We have incredibly skilled engineers and scientists in the defence sector, yet we are not actively trying to diversify. We also know that the availability of weapons fuels conflicts.

The Prime Minister emphasised the importance of science in a major speech this week, and he was right to do so. He did that for two reasons: first, because science is vital to our continued prosperity and, secondly, because he was struck by a meeting that he had with academics and entrepreneurs in Bangalore in January. They were in business in the biotech industry and told him that

> "Europe has gone soft on science".

In particular, on the GM debate, they thought that we were

> "completely overrun by protesters and pressure groups who used emotion to drive out reason."

In his speech, the Prime Minister said:

> "if we don't get a better understanding of science and its role, they may be proved right."

He is keen to prove those people wrong and wants to develop

> "a culture that values a pragmatic, evidence-based approach to new opportunities."

I share and support that aim, but it is not consistent with having a neutral attitude to creationism.

Creationism is not an alternative to science which can be taught alongside it. However, it is being taught in schools and the Government seem to have a neutral attitude to that. They are not equally acceptable ways of understanding the world. If we teach fiction alongside fact, it does not lead to a more diverse and exciting curriculum; it simply blurs the boundaries between truth and untruth. It is like teaching children that two plus two equals five alongside standard numbers and then wondering why they have problems deciding which is the better. As the Prime Minister said, we need to focus on science, and that must begin by insisting on rationality in the school curriculum.

Excellent work is being carried out in the health service. The work that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence is doing to get rid of the postcode lottery about which many hon. Members have complained relies on getting the best treatments in the NHS. Those have to be based on good science and that has to be based on rationality. We will not achieve that aim if we take a neutral stance to teaching unfounded theories alongside evidence-based science.

I am not saying that those schools that teach creationism are bad; nor am I objecting to people believing in divine causes. However, we need a rational debate on that. We need to be able to say that schools can be good schools without teaching creationism. We need to keep creationism outside schools so that they can concentrate on the scientific facts and on teaching children the skills that they need in the world.

On international issues, we had an excellent debate yesterday in Westminster Hall on the United Nations in which we mentioned children and the millennium development goals on debt relief. The early-day motion that calls for more debt relief has 345 signatories, which is the third largest number of signatories of any early-day motion. It reflects the desire to ensure that the poorest countries get more debt relief.

Trade was also raised in the debate. When we return from the Whit recess, one of the largest lobbies of Parliament for a long time will take place on that subject. I get many letters pushing for all those issues to be raised more and for the aid budget to have a clear timetable so that we reach the 0.7 per cent. target. The Government have done fantastically well on that. When Labour last left power, aid as a proportion of gross domestic product was up 0.5 per cent. Unfortunately, under the Conservatives, it went right down to 0.26 per cent. I am delighted that we are reversing that by increasing the aid budget by more than 40 per cent. and ensuring that it is effectively targeted on the poorest people. Not only do we have a moral duty to achieve the 0.7 per cent. target, but it is in our interests to do so, in terms of security and of delivering future markets.

We did not have time in Westminster Hall to raise the problem of child soldiers. Approximately 300,000 children are involved in military and armed conflicts around the world. The United Nations Children's Fund has been working to stop the involvement of children in conflicts. We must consider how the United Kingdom can help UNICEF to do that. In September 2000, we recognised children's rights by signing the optional protocol to the UN convention on the rights of the child. However, the Government submitted a declaration to make an exception to the convention, reserving the right to deploy under-18s in certain conditions. That runs contrary to the spirit of the protocol and undermines the message.

[Ms Drown]

The UK actively targets under-18s to join its armed forces. More than 9,000 under-18s were recruited between 1998 and 1999. The UK is the only European country that is incapable of organising itself so that it avoids deploying under-18s in conflict zones, although they fought in the Falklands and the Gulf war, and four under-18s have been killed in combat since 1981.

The issue is important for two reasons. First, it is wrong that children under 18 can fight and die for a country when they are unable to vote for its leaders. They cannot even go into a pub and have one drink. Secondly, by flouting the UN recommendations and sending children into conflict situations, we cannot censure those military regimes that use even younger children in armed conflicts without being labelled hypocrites. When UNICEF recently raised the problem with the Sudan People's Liberation Army, it wanted to know why it should stop using under-18s when the United Kingdom has not agreed to do so, especially as it is not in a state of civil war. We need to support the UN in its work on child soldiers and apply the same standards to ourselves that we want to apply to the rest of the world.

I have no objection to having a separate training organisation that recruits under-18s as long as they can make a fully informed decision at 18 as to whether they want to join the armed forces. The Ministry of Defence says that it cannot recruit unless it gets people when they are young. There is no reason why it should not recruit to separate training organisations, however. Other countries can do it, so why not us? That would get around the operational problems. For example, if we suddenly need to send a ship that is out at sea into conflict and there is one under-18-year-old on board, we have to decide either to lift that person off and break up the team, or not to send the ship into conflict. If we had separate organisations, the operational problems could be avoided. It would not be hard for the Government to achieve that.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland mentioned modernisation. We have had an interesting debate on that. However, I am frustrated that we did not achieve everything this Session. In particular, I am concerned about the idea of paying Select Committee Chairmen more. I worry about what signals that sends out. I want to make the House more effective at representing constituents and scrutinising the Executive. An important aspect of that is to get more respect from our constituents. It is not sensible to pay a few individuals more.

Mr. Greg Knight: It is not a wish to pay Select Committee Chairmen more—it is a decision. The House has spoken.

Ms Drown: I fully appreciate that. I hope that we might have an opportunity to think about the issue again, because we did not have long to debate it. Some Hon. Members suggested that there should be a career structure, but it is a pretty flat one. If Select Committee Chairs are to be appointed for eight years or two terms, that will benefit only a few Members and the decision will be made very early on. There is a possibility that Members will be discouraged from becoming Opposition spokespeople. Money should not be the only incentive to move forward, and I do not think that it motivates many Members. A better motivating force would be to have better debates and to give Members more opportunity to influence legislation. Making the House more effective is a better way forward than rewarding just a few Members financially. It is not as though the House has terrible morale or a great problem in recruiting Select Committee Chairs.

Another issue that was debated was restricting Select Committee Chairs to two terms or eight years. That is a good idea. Some Members thought that was not fair to those who have great talents and should be able to stay on Committees for longer, but there would be nothing wrong with their taking a term off to share their skills elsewhere, then returning to chair a Committee. A degree of fluidity in that respect could help to bring in new blood and new angles. It would increase respect for Parliament and improve both the way in which we scrutinise legislation and the way in which we are seen by our constituents.

I have covered a whole range of issues, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to put them on the record.

11.2 am

David Burnside (South Antrim): I send my best wishes, on behalf of all those in Northern Ireland, to the English team in the World cup. I remember the finals in 1966, when my parents brought me to stay at the Charing Cross hotel before going to the match between Portugal and Russia to determine third and fourth places. On the Thursday night I got a phone call from my brother in Wolverhampton who said, "I've bought a ticket in a pub for 10 shillings—you're at the final on Saturday." At the age of 15, that was some present. On behalf of the holders of the home international championship, Northern Ireland, I want to issue an invitation to the England team. When they return, at whatever stage of the tournament, we are prepared to defend the championship if England, Scotland and Wales are willing to restart that fine tournament, which should be held at Wembley.

I want to refer to the situation involving Equitable Life. I had not realised that there was a crisis until constituents came knocking on the door of my office in South Antrim. More than 1 million people have pensions with Equitable Life. I believe in free markets that are allowed to operate for good or bad, but the Treasury has a role to play in putting pressure on Equitable Life to reconsider the position. It does not affect me personally in a disastrous way, but it affects many of the 1 million policyholders who are in dire financial straits owing to the company's bad management. Will the Minister ask the Treasury to use its influence to represent the needs of those policyholders?

I realise that we Ulstermen are meant to be dour and boring and to lack a sense of humour—that is part of our image—but we tend to get stuck with serious subjects because of where we are from and what we have lived through. I wish to raise a subject that gives me major concern and affects not only my constituents but all law-abiding people in Northern Ireland—the lack of consent for the way in which we are governed. I was one of those who with optimism and enthusiasm, although with many reservations, supported an agreement in 1998 that we hoped would take us on a path from the bad days to a better and brighter future. It has not worked, and those who say that it is working are deluding themselves.

Following a point of order that was raised in the House on Wednesday, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland had the courtesy to respond to a question that I had tabled in April. He declared once again that he saw no threat to the Provisional IRA ceasefire. I have tabled another question to him asking if he would define a ceasefire and on what conditions he would state that the ceasefire had ended. I do not know what a ceasefire that is not under threat means, given that those on ceasefire have carried out 14 murders in Northern Ireland since they signed it. They have carried out major robberies and other criminal activities in Northern Ireland, and they are the main line of inquiry in the Police Service of Northern Ireland's investigation into the theft of intelligence information from special branch at Castlereagh.

Sinn Fein-IRA received $2 million from FARC, a terrorist organisation in Colombia that started off in rural terrorism and has been trained in urban terrorism by 15 members of Sinn Fein-IRA, three of whom are awaiting trial in Colombia. That is supposedly an organisation on ceasefire. One of its leaders, Martin McGuinness, says, "We are not involved in drug dealing." What greater involvement could there be? FARC supplies 70 per cent. of the heroin and cocaine that enters the United States. The Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein receive $2 million dollars from that organisation, yet say they are not involved in drug dealing.

Mr. Francois: I understand how passionately the hon. Gentleman feels about these matters. Is it not bizarre that, because of the IRA's involvement with FARC and the US Administration's determination to fight a war against terror around the world, the US Administration are now taking a tougher line against Sinn Fein-IRA than the British Government?

David Burnside: I agree completely. Earlier this week, Mr. Haas, the member of the Administration responsible for Northern Ireland matters, stated that further action must be taken against the Provisional IRA, and I hope that that action will be taken, including re-establishing the ban on members of Sinn Fein visiting the United States.

I was giving examples of the farce of this ceasefire, which includes dealing in drugs and importing arms from Florida and continental Europe. Decommissioning has become a joke: it has been turned upside down. Decommissioning made sense only when it had a short deadline and could be credible and verifiable in ensuring that republican and paramilitary terrorists put guns and arms behind them. When the Government extended the deadline to 2008, they made a joke of the process. It is now used as a tactical ploy to the advantage of those in Sinn Fein-IRA, who say, "We will undertake a little bit of token decommissioning, so give us more concessions."

What disillusioned me, the people who elected me last June and the people of Northern Ireland who no longer give their consent to the institutions of this process—the next election will prove it—was the destruction of the Royal Ulster Constabulary. How, after 30 years, can the finest police force in Europe be destroyed as part of a peace process? Its royal title was ripped away. Chris Patten was sent to Hong Kong, where he had to constitutionally take away one of only three police forces in the world with the royal title, the Royal Hong Kong police, the other two being the Royal Canadian mounted police and the Royal Ulster Constabulary. The RUC had its royal title stripped away, while the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) recommended to the Crown that it should receive the George Cross. The RUC has been humiliated and thrown into the dustbin of history. That is disgraceful and has contributed to the total disillusionment of the Unionist people. The force now has the worst sickness record of any force in the United Kingdom; it had the finest record. It has been demoralised and humiliated. A peace process that does that is not worth considering.

Let us consider loyalist ceasefires. There has been a little token decommissioning by loyalist paramilitaries. There has been no deadline; they got their prisoners out and all the concessions, and gave nothing in return. The way in which the peace process has been managed is farcical.

I wish that the Government would realise that those in Sinn Fein-IRA were trained in old-fashioned Marxist socialism. They therefore have no moral or ethical problem with lying in public. Those who carry out such crimes are Machiavellian; they lie. We have an uneducated Minister of Education in Northern Ireland—Martin McGuinness. He is an elected Member of the House who will not take the Oath. McGuinness, Adams, Keenan, Ferris and Slab Murphy are members of the Army Council of the Provisional IRA. One is Minister of Education in Northern Ireland. The Government of the Irish Republic will not accept Sinn Fein in the Administration because of its illegal army. As the recently re-elected Prime Minister Bertie Ahern said, nowhere else in Europe would allow members of a terrorist organisation that had not moved to full democracy to participate in government. Yet Martin McGuinness is in charge of education in Northern Ireland.

People, especially those who are paid to be in Stormont, tell me about the benefits of devolution. The current Minister of Education is about to destroy one of our most valuable assets—the grammar school system. There are two grammar schools in my constituency, Antrim grammar and Ballyclare high. McGuinness, the uneducated Minister of Education and old-fashioned socialist claptrap, is embarking on a course of action, supported by the badly written, badly prepared Burns report. He is attempting to destroy our grammar schools. If someone said that we could have the show in Stormont or retain the grammar schools in Northern Ireland, I would be tempted to safeguard the schools because they contribute a great deal more to society than much of what happens at Stormont.

I began on a lighthearted and optimistic note by mentioning the England team and I want to end more optimistically. I do not want to be depressed about the future in Northern Ireland, but I raised the subject today because it will not go away. The Secretary of State's refusal to answer questions from elected Members or delay in replying will not make it go away. The Government must come clean.

The Prime Minister must come to the House and admit that if he, like the majority of law-abiding people, both Protestant and Catholic, wants democracy and accountable institutions in Northern Ireland, and people to work together for a more peaceful and better future, he must recognise and accept that consent for the current peace process has gone. The bulk of the Catholic community—70 per cent.—and just over half the Protestant community voted for the peace process, but the

[David Burnside]

consent no longer exists. The contract with the people must be re-established, and based on democracy and accountable institutions. The Secretary of State and the Prime Minister must act on the phoney ceasefire by the Provisional IRA.

Northern Ireland questions will take place on the first Wednesday after we return from the recess. The Secretary of State will have to tell the House the truth. The ceasefire does not exist and if the Government, like the majority of people in Northern Ireland, want accountable government and a forum for local administration in Stormont, it cannot be based on the hypocrisy and farce of the current institutions. It is not acceptable to have Martin McGuinness as Minister of Education; it is not acceptable to have a member of the Army Council of the Provisional IRA in charge of our children's education.

If Martin McGuinness was invited to a state school, how could a child of any age stand up and ask, "Minister of Education, have you ever been involved in murder or terrorism?" McGuinness is not even big enough to apologise and express remorse or regret for what he has done; he believes that all his actions were justified.

We cannot have credible institutions, a peaceful society and a prosperous future when the process has been bastardised by the Government's hypocrisy. They allow such things to happen without putting pressure or sanctions on Sinn Fein-IRA. The process does not have the support of my constituents or the majority of law-abiding people in Northern Ireland. It cannot be fudged any longer. I hope that the Government will listen to the democrats in Northern Ireland and stop responding to pressure and influence from terrorist organisations that have not yet embarked on truly accountable democratic methods.

11.15 am

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): As a fellow Ulsterman, I thank the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) for his good wishes to the England team and his timely reminder that Northern Ireland retains the domestic international championship. His call for the renewal of that championship is also timely; I have supported it for some time. I accept that it used to mean a lot more in the past, but it is a good competition and it should be reinstated. That could be done in conjunction with forming a United Kingdom team. That might not find favour in Scotland, but for some unknown reason, it has support in Ulster.

While on the subject of obscure sporting facts, it is worth remembering that the French are still the Olympic cricket champions. As they say, not many people know that. The French would probably retain that title if cricket were reinstated as part of the Olympic games. England remains the Olympic tug-of-war champion. I shall not turn my speech into a pub quiz, but the hon. Member for South Antrim set off the nerd in me.

The hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) was perceptive when he said that he thought I would mention the World cup. One would have to come from outer space, let alone Castle Point, to miss the fact that the World cup begins next Friday. It is on the front and back pages of our newspapers today. I have a lot of time for the hon. Member for Castle Point, but I was surprised by his support for Senegal. I think that his constituents should know about that. I hoped that he would explain why he is supporting Senegal. Football and politics are strange worlds and the hon. Gentleman managed to make them even stranger this morning.

The papers are full of the fact that Roy Keane has walked out of the Republic of Ireland squad. I deeply regret that, because with him he took the guts of the midfield from my World cup fantasy team. I had linked him with Paul Scholes. I hope that Roy Keane thought about that before deciding to flounce out. Clearly, it did not stop him though. *The Daily Telegraph*'s cartoon conveyed that at least he could walk out, which is more than several England players could do.

Bob Spink: I thank the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to explain about Senegal. It is a wonderful, democratic, free African country with a free press. It recently held free elections, which changed the Government without a blow being exchanged. That is more than can be said about our election, when the Deputy Prime Minister was involved in an incident. It is a wonderful nation in the north-west of Africa—a nation that believes in doing away with the begging bowl and in trading internationally to get development. Senegal is a beacon for the rest of Africa, which is why I support its team.

Mr. Banks: The world can now rest easy: the hon. Gentleman has explained why he supports Senegal. In next Friday's match, I shall be supporting France, mainly because most of the French team seems to play in the Premier league and its captain, Marcel Desailly, is a great Chelsea player. After those revelations, it appears that the hon. Gentleman and I will continue to be on opposing sides for next Friday's football.

There has been a tremendous build-up to the FIFA World cup, which everyone acknowledges is the greatest single sports event on the planet. We are all looking forward to it. When I was Minister for Sport, I was asked whether England would win the 1998 World cup, and being an honest sort of bloke who knows a bit about a football, I replied, "I don't think so, but who knows? Anything can happen in football." For that fairly unexceptional, not to say cliché-ridden, comment, I was ripped to pieces by the tabloid press and accused of being a traitor. Apparently, I did the wrong thing as Minister for Sport: I now realise that I should have said that if Glenn Hoddle, who was then the England coach, chose 11 good Englishmen from a bus queue on the Tottenham Court road, they would be capable of beating any team of Johnny Foreigners. Unfortunately, I told the truth instead, and if we did win the World cup that year, someone should tell me and explain why the French went off with the medals.

One has to be honest about our chances. We all send great good wishes to Sven-Göran Eriksson and however many of the England team are still able to walk, but the fact remains that we are in a tough group. I expect the team to do well, but I expect England to do far better at the 2006 World cup, when some of our younger players will have come through. I know that our team will acquit themselves well, and we in this country will be shouting our support for them.

Because I love football, I shall watch the matches, but I shall also watch the behaviour of English fans, because once again this country's reputation will be on the line. Hon. Members will remember Euro 2000, when the violence in Brussels and Charleroi was nothing short of a national disgrace. As I have said before, it killed off our—admittedly slim—hopes of hosting the 2006 World cup. We were told that there was no way the 2006 World cup would be given to England, because it would look like a reward for hooliganism. At that point the big teams asked why they should continue, given that it was pointless, and we recommended to the FA board that the bid be dropped—to which the board replied that we could not do that because it would look like we were bowing down in the face of hooliganism. I remain clear that, apart from being a national disgrace that shamed this country and English football, that violence dealt the death blow to our 2006 World cup bid.

None the less, we learned a lesson. It is a great credit to Parliament—not only the Government, but Parliament as a whole—that there was all-party support for new, much tougher legislation, which took the form of the Football (Disorder) Act 2000. I have held many discussions with police on the issue of football violence, in which I take a close interest, and I believe that that Act is working. More than 1,000 banning orders—section 14B orders—have been imposed. When an order is imposed, the person on whom it has been imposed has to surrender their passport before and during a competition. As I said, more than 1,000 football hooligans have had to surrender their passports.

It is interesting to compare the 1,000-plus banning orders secured in the run-up to this year's World cup with Euro 2000, when only about 100 banning orders were in place. During Euro 2000, 965 English fans were arrested, only one of whom was subject to a banning order; however, closer analysis revealed that more than 40 per cent. of those who were arrested had previous convictions for public order offences. That prompts the question: what were they doing there? At that time, there was legislation in place that the courts could have used to impose banning orders, but they clearly had not done so, despite the fact that 40 per cent. of those arrested had convictions for public order offences.

Given the number of banning orders now in place, it is obvious that this country's courts are far more ready to impose section 14B orders. However, the statistics show great variations between different court areas; that is a matter of considerable concern which the Government should investigate. Let me give a few examples. In 2000–01, 108 Everton and 78 Liverpool fans were arrested for football-related offences—a total of 186 arrests; however, the breakdown of the banning orders reveals that only 11 have been imposed on Everton and Liverpool supporters. Taking Merseyside as a whole, the courts there have imposed only 15 banning orders. Hon. Members should keep those facts in mind as I give the statistics for another area of the country. Again in 2000–01, 49 Stoke fans were arrested for football-related offences and 98 banning orders were imposed in the Staffordshire court area. In total, the Staffordshire courts have imposed 149 banning orders.

There is no simple correlation between arrests and banning orders, because not all arrests end in an appearance in court and conviction, but I could have given a range of examples to illustrate the inconsistency. That gives rise to a series of important questions. First, why is there such a wide discrepancy in the number of bans imposed by courts in different areas when the arrest figures for those areas are comparable? Secondly, does the small number of banning orders in Merseyside indicate that the Crown Prosecution Service does not press hard enough for prosecution, or are the Merseyside courts too lenient in their view of football-related offences and too reluctant to impose section 14B banning orders? Thirdly, what training is given to magistrates in respect of football-related violence, and what advice do they receive from their clerks?

I have been examining the figures carefully, and I am concerned. We need far more information if we are to discover why the impact of the Football (Disorder) Act is so patchy. We must try to achieve a degree of uniformity across the country in the application of justice following the commission of arrestable football-related offences.

Football violence and hooliganism in this country have decreased. That improvement has happened for a variety of reasons: legislation has been introduced, and the clubs are doing far more within their grounds with CCTV cameras, greater police involvement, better stewarding and more publicity. All those things have contributed to what one can only describe as a much improved situation within our game, but there is much more that we can and must do.

I do not know whether right hon. and hon. Members have been watching the BBC's programmes on football hooliganism. Last Sunday's programme was about hooliganism in and around Cardiff City football club. It made chilling viewing. It was extremely scary and at the same time highly informative. Perhaps the BBC's timing in raising the matter of football hooliganism was not brilliant, but it needed to be done. I suppose the same criticism could be applied to me, because instead of extolling the virtues of the beautiful game I am underlining some of its darker aspects.

When watching the programme, it became obvious that some serious matters need to be addressed at Cardiff City football club, not least the behaviour of the club's chairman, Sam the Man, whose behaviour was extraordinary. I know Sam the Man pretty well. He was helpful to us during the 2006 World cup campaign, when he was chairman of Wimbledon. However, something has happened to him on the road down to Cardiff, and it is not nice to see. It is not surprising, given what we saw during the programme, that Cardiff City fans top the section 14B banning league table, with no fewer than 112 banning orders.

It is not only Cardiff City. The scenes that were witnessed, and the violence, following the Millwall-Birmingham City play-off match were equally disturbing. Statistics show that only 23 banning orders have been imposed on Millwall supporters. I suspect that a much larger number will be imposed when the police have finished studying the video evidence and making their inquiries about those who were involved in the recent appalling scenes outside Millwall's ground.

Yesterday, the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis continued to amplify his suggestion that Millwall football club might be sued for damages. I do not agree with that. In the ground, the football club has absolute responsibility for the behaviour of the fans. As I have said, the level of football hooliganism has improved significantly because the clubs take the matter seriously.

[Mr. Banks]

I do not see how we can extend responsibility for the behaviour of football fans to way beyond the confines of the football club. Once fans have gone outside the club, it is a matter for the police and a law-and-order issue. There are those who say that the only reason for the fans being outside the club is that they were previously inside the club, so the club should take more responsibility. That is a perverse piece of logic because it would mean that any drunk who came out of a pub and caused problems down the street could cause the pub to be sued. The same could happen to a night club.

I suppose that we could reduce the argument to the absurd by saying that if someone's house was burgled by a couple of Millwall supporters that person could sue the club. I do not think that the Commissioner is correct in his assumption and I still do not believe that it is one that we should support, although I entirely support the action that the police are taking in respect of football violence and the fact that they are working closely with others to implement the laws that we pushed through.

If a club is not prepared to take seriously the violence of its fans or to deal adequately with them where there is sufficient evidence that they have behaved badly or criminally but have not been arrested, the football authorities should think about expelling clubs from the football league. The imposition of a £20,000 fine on Cardiff is hardly a big deal. Sam the Man is a rich man and the club can easily afford £20,000. However, the threat of expulsion from the league might concentrate minds. I am not advocating that Cardiff City should be expelled from the league, but I argue that it is one of the sanctions that the football authorities should consider. That would send a stern message to the football clubs.

Images of the Cardiff-Leeds cup match earlier this year and of violence after the Millwall-Birmingham match went around the world, because our television is seen in so many countries. English language newspapers are circulated more widely throughout the world than other countries' newspapers. Football violence in the United Kingdom is swept round the world. People pick up their newspapers and say, "It has happened again." That reinforces the image that our game is riddled with violence, which is the most pervasive and corrupting influence on our game.

Unfortunately, as I know from bitter experience of the 2006 World cup campaign, that is still the abiding image. Despite everything that we have done in this place and despite the actions that have been taken by the police and the clubs, it is still thought worldwide that English football is riddled with violence. There are far worse cases of football violence in Italy, other parts of Europe, Argentina and Africa, but they do not get the same media coverage. To an extent, other countries manage to get away with it.

It is gruesome television on a Sunday evening, but I suggest that right hon. and hon. Members try to catch the next edition of the BBC programme on hooliganism. It will deal with Lazio and the extremely racist and violent gangs that surround that club. We might think that the situation in the UK is bad, but the programme will show that it is nothing compared with that in Italy, especially at Lazio. The wrong message tends to be sent out.

The great majority of our fans are decent, law-abiding people who follow the team to enjoy the football, and hope to get a good result. We shall have 8,000 of them in Japan for the first phase—more than any other country, excluding the host country.

I have been examining the security arrangements that have been organised by the Home Office, the police and the Football Association, and without doubt they are the most extensive that have ever been put in place for an overseas tournament. Despite what we might read in newspapers, and knowing that there has been much discussion between the Japanese and the English authorities, I hope that the Japanese authorities do not treat every English fan as a potential hooligan. Of course, that is the result of hooliganism. When English fans travel abroad, the police authorities see an individual fan and say, "Hooligan," and many innocent people are caught up in violence.

It was to protect the interests of the innocent that we put legislation in place, and we might have to revisit it. We know, despite the fact that the great majority of the fans are law abiding and decent and go to enjoy a game of football, that it takes only a few individuals to ruin things for everyone.

I know that it is difficult for sane, rational people to understand this—however, it is important to do so—but there are people whose only attraction to football is the violence that they can engender. They will go to the most extraordinary lengths to beat the system, and we must be ready for that. We are not talking about the dispossessed—they are wealthy professional people. One of the individuals involved in the programme on Cardiff was a millionaire. It is behaviour that crosses economic divisions and class barriers. We must be concerned about it and be ready to deal with it.

A number of people travelling to the World cup are probably already in Thailand. They could go straight to the country where the match is taking place, but the chances are that they would get caught, so they leave as early as possible, go to a neighbouring country and jump off into the country where they want to attend the match. According to statistics that I have seen, there will be 200 or so English fans travelling whose names are known to the police and have been passed on to the Japanese authorities. As I said, many, if not all, of them are probably in Thailand already. The Japanese immigration authorities, having received those names, will refuse them entry and they will be put on planes and sent back to this country.

Given that the police knew who those people were and could identify them, why were they allowed to travel in the first place? They should not have been allowed to travel. As I said in the debate about banning orders and the Football (Disorder) Act 2000, I am convinced that there are still loopholes in the legislation and we will have to return to it. Those 200 or so should not have been allowed to leave the country. Their passports should have been surrendered to the police. We must consider extending the scope of banning orders and give the police powers to impose section 14B orders on the authority of a justice of the peace. Such a banning order should automatically apply for three months prior to a competition and one month prior to an international match.

I know that there are those who say that that is rough justice. I agree. I do not demur—it is rough justice—but we must do all we can to repair the damage to our reputation as a footballing nation and protect the rights of decent, law-abiding English fans.

I shall make one last suggestion, which I have proposed in the House many times. There are a number of ideas that I tried years ago. Eventually, someone picks them up and decides that they were not quite as mad as they seemed at the time. We will be seeing a lot of English flags—the Union flag and the St. George flag—flying in the grounds. Fine. It is good to see the national flag, but we will be seeing flags that have been defaced with slogans or club affiliations. That is totally unacceptable.

The flag is supposed to be unifying force in a country, but when it is carried by supporters of a football club who have written the club's slogan across the flag, or when supporters of a political party have put their slogan on the flag, it becomes a divisive symbol. I suggested years ago that the House should pass legislation or find some way of banning anyone from defacing the flag or using it as an adjunct to a political party. That goes for the Conservative party, the Labour party, which recently picked up the practice, and the National Front, which has been doing it.

When one sees one's flag linked to a party that one disagrees with—whether one disagrees violently or marginally—the symbol of unity is being used in a disunifying way. We will see that during the football matches. It should not be allowed and the Government should take the matter up.

Like all civilised and rational people, I look forward to an exciting, colourful and, above all, trouble-free World cup in Japan and Korea, but if there is any trouble—I hate to say that I suspect that there will be some, although it will be nothing like Euro 2000—when the perpetrators return to this country, I hope that there will be no Mr. Nice Guy waiting for them. We will revisit the legislation, and any lessons that we learn—I hope that there will not be very many to learn—from the upcoming World cup will be reflected in changes to it.

In the end, we must win this one. If people feel that football hooliganism is like waging a war on authority, we must show them that authority will win the war. I send my best wishes to the England team and all the law-abiding English fans, and hope that they all return safely and, who knows—maybe, but I doubt it—return with the World cup.

11.44 am

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), who always speaks knowledgeably about sporting matters, especially football. I join him in wishing the England team all the very best as they go off to compete in the World cup.

It is a pleasure to participate in the end-of-term debate today. I reciprocate the kind remarks of my parliamentary neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink), who has been representing his constituents in the Chamber this morning. I do not have a firm view about the third road off Canvey Island, but I can attest to the strength of feeling on the island, which my hon. Friend ably articulated.

On the cancer unit at Southend hospital, to which my hon. Friend referred, he, together with my hon. Friends the Members for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) and for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) and I intend to maintain a close watch on the issue, to defend our cancer centre at Southend hospital, which is immensely respected locally. Suffice it to say that the cancer centre there is in no way broken, and we implore Ministers, as we have been doing for several months, not to try and fix it.

I turn to the issue of tidal defences in my constituency, particularly at a place called Hullbridge. A proposal has been extant for some time to upgrade the tidal defences on the River Crouch at Hullbridge. As the work may result in the loss of some salt marsh, that requires compensatory habitat to be provided under the European Union habitats directive. A site for that purpose has been identified at a nearby location in Brandy Hole. The Environment Agency is seeking to purchase the site from a local landowner and the Blackwater Wildfowlers Association, which would manage it.

However, although the scheme has already been given planning consent by the local authority, Rochford district council, because it has a tidal defence scheme, it also requires planning approval from the wildlife division of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which to date has been withheld. To make matters more complicated, DEFRA's flood and coastal defence division is refusing to release the capital funding for the scheme until planning approval has been given by its sister division within the Department.

A number of agencies are now involved, including the Environment Agency, English Nature, Essex county council and Rochford district council, and all of them are awaiting approval from DEFRA in order to proceed. The issue has been running for more than a year, and I tabled a priority written question about it back in March. There is a strong local desire to see the work achieved this year, in which case, I am informed, construction would need to begin in June or, at the very latest, by early July.

As I understand that the purchase of the land by the Environment Agency is virtually complete and that the requisite section 106 agreements are awaiting signature, ministerial intervention might be needed to speed matters along, so that approval can be granted, the work can still begin this summer, and my constituents who live in the area can be reassured.

I acknowledge all the work that has been done on the matter by county councillor Tracey Chapman, in whose county division Hullbridge is located, and who is also the cabinet member for environmental matters on Essex county council. I also acknowledge the work undertaken by county councillor Ray Howard, who chairs Essex county council's southern area committee and who has been active in promoting the proposal.

I have asked for a meeting with the relevant Minister, the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), and I hope that he will accede to that request, to help bring about a successful conclusion to the issue before much longer.

On a related point, there is also a wider issue about the preservation of sea walls in my constituency. Some Government agencies are now claiming that even traditional maintenance work, which has been undertaken

[Mr. Mark Francois]

on the sea walls for many years, cannot now take place without compensatory habitat being provided. As a result, hardly any maintenance work has taken place for over a year, and obviously there will be safety implications if the situation is allowed to pertain for much longer.

The problem is due to an over-zealous interpretation of the EU habitats directive, which was never intended to be as constrictive as that. I see that the Minister is nodding, and I am grateful that he has taken the point on board. I sincerely hope that the agencies concerned will in future be able to take a much more pragmatic and realistic view, which would allow the maintenance work on the sea walls to continue as it has done for many years, and thus to provide protection to my constituents and to the livelihoods of those who work in agriculture in the area.

I turn now to a pressing issue in the town of South Woodham Ferrers in my constituency. Chelmsford borough council, within whose local government area the town lies, has a proposal in its draft local plan to build some 1,700 houses and an industrial estate on land to the north of the town in an area known colloquially as Radar hill. The proposal is deeply unpopular with the people of South Woodham Ferrers. The town's infrastructure simply cannot accommodate development on that scale. There is a range of reasons for that, but I shall highlight just a few.

First, the rail line connecting South Woodham Ferrers to London is single track, at least to the interchange at Wickford. That means that it is technically possible to run only a very limited number of trains along it, and already those trains are often extremely overcrowded, particularly during the morning and evening peaks. For technical reasons, it would be very difficult to generate extra capacity, and it is a reasonable assumption that many of the people who would come to live in those houses would want to work in London, as many of the people who now live in South Woodham Ferrers do. It seems simply nonsensical to attempt the development when the service would not be able to accommodate that number of commuters because it can barely take the number that it has to deal with already.

Secondly, the medical services in the town are barely sufficient for the extant population. There is a small health centre with limited facilities, although there is a local campaign called South Woodham Ferrers health care 2000, with which I am glad to be associated, which is doing its best to improve the range of facilities.

I am personally indebted to a local GP, Dr. John Cormack, who is very active in the town and, one morning, took me on an impromptu tour of all the GP surgeries in South Woodham Ferrers. I was able to speak to a number of them. The average number of patients on a GP's list is between 1,700 and 1,800. Most of the GPs in the town already have a list of more than 2,000, and one has a list of nearly 3,000. I do not see how the medical facilities in South Woodham Ferrers can possibly cope with increased development on the scale that is proposed.

Thirdly, the local secondary school, William de Ferrers, has good results and is popular, but it is already one of the largest in the county, and it is bulging at the seams. Essex county council simply does not have the money to build and, importantly, to staff another secondary school in the area. Again, I do not see the large number of children requiring secondary education who would be generated by the development of 1,700 houses could possibly be accommodated by the town's one secondary school, effective and popular as it is.

Fourthly, there is an engineering matter concerning the power lines that intersect the proposed site. National Grid Company, which has responsibility for the lines, is adamant that it does not intend to move them, and it is difficult to see how the houses could be built while the lines are in the way.

Last July, shortly after I was elected, I attended a public meeting in the town which was called to discuss the proposal. It was due to take place in the hall at William de Ferrers school, which accommodates some 300 people. Fifteen minutes after the meeting was due to start, the hall was packed and there were at least as many people outside waiting to get in. To prevent a minor riot, the then town clerk, Mrs. Peggy Carter, rapidly came up with plan B, which proposed moving the meeting from the hall to the market square in the middle of the town.

We all processed down to the square, where there is a convenient bandstand, and the meeting took place around that. We spent about three hours discussing the matter in theatre in the round, as it were. At the end of that thorough discussion, in what the Americans would call a town meeting, a vote was taken in which one person voted in favour of the development proposals and every other person in the packed town square voted against.

Subsequently there was a formal consultation exercise by Chelmsford borough council, and some 6,000 forms were returned, the vast bulk of which were from South Woodham Ferrers objecting to the proposals. When one considers that there are only some 12,000 adults in the town, that gives the House some idea of the intense feeling about the matter. I pay tribute to Mr. Malcolm Farrington and the members of the South Woodham action group for all the good work that they have done in connection with the issue.

Partly as a result of that opposition, Chelmsford borough council has delayed its response to the consultation exercise. When I spoke to the council recently, it was still unable to give me a firm date for its response, although it has promised to write to me in due course. I very much hope that when the council, which is under Liberal Democrat control, responds to the consultation, it will heed the strong feelings of the residents of South Woodham Ferrers and accordingly abandon those deeply unpopular proposals.

That takes me to a related issue with an impact on South Woodham Ferrers. I refer to national housing targets. As we know, the current system means that the Government set a national housing target, which is then broken down by region, by county and by district. I first raised the issue last autumn in my very first oral question to the Prime Minister. The practical effect of that policy is to cram ever more housing into already highly populated areas against the wishes of the people who live there.

That seems especially pernicious when empty council estates are being demolished in the north of England, particularly in the north-east, even though they are in a state of good repair, because people simply do not want to live in them. Yet at the same time we are trying to cram more and more houses into southern England, not least into my county of Essex. We have to give local people greater influence over those decisions if we want to encourage them to keep participating in local elections. One very good way to do that is to abolish the whole system of national housing targets and give local people the power to decide how many houses should be built in their area.

Ms Drown: I would expect businesses and families in my constituency to press for the provision of houses for their workers and children, to enable them to settle in the area. Does the hon. Gentleman not think that national planning guidance would restore the balance and reinvigorate the northern towns and cities that he talks about? Is he confident that local people, left to their own devices, would produce the best scheme? Surely the fact that the Government have recently begun pressing for sequential development and the development of brownfield sites will help everybody?

Mr. Francois: I disagree, because it is not true to say that, if all local authorities were left to their own devices, they would simply not allow any houses to be built. I believe that most local councillors, regardless of the party that they represent, are by and large fairly reasonable people. I am sure that they would want some housing development in their local authority areas. They are locally elected and know the areas that they serve, and they are best placed to judge where houses should be sited and—critically—how many should be built. The problem with the current policy is that, by setting arbitrary targets, houses are in effect rammed down people's throats, causing tremendous resentment. Far better to give such power to people who are locally elected, so that they can make a balanced judgment on how many houses each area can take. The Conservative party has a long-standing saying: trust the people. This is a perfect instance in which that principle should be allowed to apply.

Finally, I want to refer to the outcome of the recent Rochford district council local elections. Before 2 May, the council was run by a loose coalition of Labour, Liberal Democrat and independent members. I am pleased to report that it is now run by a Conservative administration, with a majority of 17. I offer my congratulations to its new leader, councillor Peter Webster, and I wish him and all his councillors the very best for the future. I also pay tribute to the late councillor Sylvia Lemon, the previous chairman of Rochford district council, who tragically passed away just a few weeks before her term of office was due to conclude. Although not a Conservative, she was highly respected by everyone in the area. She was a very special lady indeed, and we shall all miss her greatly.

I end by offering my best wishes to Robin Allen, an independent councillor who is Sylvia Lemon's successor as chairman of Rochford district council, and who did a great deal to support Sylvia during her term of office. I wish councillor Allen and his wife Helen the very best for the year ahead.

12.1 pm

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): As has been said, today's debate feels a little like the last day of a school term, but I cannot help wondering where the rest of the pupils are. There seem to be few of us here today.

The debate offers a good opportunity to raise constituency issues, and other matters that are not discussed sufficiently in this House. I could mention many matters that we should perhaps discuss, although I realise that time is limited. For example, we do not give enough time to certain social issues. On Radio 4 this morning, the subject of ambulance chasers was discussed. Reference was made to companies leafleting areas surrounding schools to find out whether anyone wanted to sue a school because their child had fallen over in the playground. That shows how our society is becoming increasingly prone to approaching the lawyer first. The attitude is, "I have hurt my little finger; can I sue someone?" We need to consider introducing legislation to control that development. Despite the existence of no-fault insurance, the matter still gives cause for concern, particularly in respect of hospitals. It is sad to note that time and resources are being spent on defending cases that should not go to court.

Reference was also made on the radio this morning to an American footballer who tried to sue his coach for dropping him from the team. I point that out not to give Mr. Keane, who has been sent home, any ideas, but because the situation is getting ridiculous. We have talked a lot about football, and wished England all the best. Had he still been in his place, I would have pointed out to the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) that I suspect that Senegal will be beaten by a French side that is in effect the Arsenal team, albeit with a captain who is the Chelsea captain.

I turn to an issue that was brought to my attention by Teignbridge youth council. I recommend that those hon. Members with youth councils or youth parliaments in their constituencies visit and talk to them. They are a valuable source of information, and a good way of learning about the concerns of young people, which are not heard and represented as much as they should be. I was impressed by several of the issues that it raised, but it asked me to raise one in particular—teenage self-harm. I hope that the Government will take the debate on this, and several of the issues raised today, further.

The Samaritans have done much to raise the issue of teenage self-harm in recent years, including publishing a document called "Youth Matters 2000: A Cry for Help" two years ago. It said that 43 per cent. of the population knew someone who had committed self-harm. My youth council took a poll of the youth councillors and it found, frighteningly, that 55 per cent. of them knew someone who had committed self-harm. Those councillors come from different schools, so it is not a question of them all knowing the same person who does it. That small group of people can identify three, four or five people in different schools who have committed some form of self-harm.

By coincidence, after I had committed myself to raising the issue in the debate today if I was lucky enough to catch Mr. Speaker's eye—which I am grateful to have done—*The Observer* carried an interesting and insightful article on it last weekend. Nicci Gerrard summed up self-harm in her opening paragraph, saying:

> "The 13-year-old girl rolls up her sleeve. She takes the blade in her right hand and draws it across her left wrist. She watches the blood start to flow. Then she does it once more."

That image helps us to understand what we are talking about—young girls and boys, and some older people, cut themselves with knives, or abuse their bodies in other ways.

The issue is getting an airing. Lisa from "Hollyoaks" is cutting herself; the teenage magazine "Mizz" recently had a feature on a girl who cuts herself; and a book by Emma

[Richard Younger-Ross]

Forrest, called "Think Skin", features a film star who cuts her arms and legs. As Nicci Gerrard says in the article, self-harm has

"almost become a . . . gothic kind of fashion statement".

As the Samaritans pointed out, nearly half the population knows someone who has self-harmed. It is clearly a cry for help that is not being heard. It is an increasing trend. To those who ask why we should be concerned about a few cuts, the Samaritans point out that people who self-harm are at 100 times greater risk of committing suicide than the rest of the population. Youth suicide is a growing problem in the UK and the Republic of Ireland. In 1998, twice as many men aged between 25 and 34 committed suicide as in 1983. For young women in the same age range, the suicide level is higher than it has ever been. For young women aged between 15 and 24, the rate has increased by 15 per cent. We need to address that problem.

In 1998, the Samaritans estimated that 160,000 patients were admitted to accident and emergency units in hospitals for self-harm, some 24,000 of whom were aged between 15 and 19. That means that every hour three young people self-harm. By the time we finish this debate, some 12 young people will have done so.

Ms Drown: The hon. Gentleman will know that the Government recently published a consultation document on their suicide strategy. I hope that he will take the opportunity to feed some of his comments into the consultation. Does he agree that attempted suicides need to be considered as part of the problem, because they are evidence of underlying stress and other difficulties that may lead to suicide? We discussed youth facilities and the need to help young people to express their stresses and concerns in other ways earlier.

Richard Younger-Ross: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments. Self-harm and attempted suicide are the same issue—it is all to do with self-harm, but some incidents are more extreme than others.

Two thirds of all people who commit self-harm are under 35. The highest rate is among women aged between 15 and 19 and men between 25 and 34. The self-harm rate for men in that age range has doubled in recent years. As the hon. Lady suggested, we need to find out the cause. Why has the rate doubled? People say that men have less emotional support, that there is a stigma attached to men who talk about their feelings. That is true, but it does not explain everything. We must consider the sort of society that we are creating and whether its pressures contribute to stress and strain. It could be pressure of work—because of the work ethic, people tend to work longer hours. Perhaps we have simply become more materialistic and the feeling of failure that some people have is heightened when they see the wealth and apparent success of others. There is a great deal of pressure to succeed.

We can take practical steps with regard to people who harm themselves. All accident and emergency units should have clear details of how to contact the Samaritans posted up. There must be awareness training in the health service for all medical staff who come into contact with those who self-harm. Accident and emergency units and mental health wards must have access to listening support. Hospitals cannot provide that support, so they have to go outside. Whether they bring in the Samaritans or other organisations is open to debate. There has to be someone who can listen, because that is a way of helping. Confidential emotional support must be given to medical staff if they take on that listening role.

There must be awareness in schools of the problem. Teachers must be able to say that it is a problem and pupils must be able to recognise when people harm themselves. They must be able to say that someone is hurting themselves. Very often, people will deny that they are harming themselves—they will say that they fell over to explain cuts on the arm, for example. They will say that they burned themselves in the kitchen or cut themselves when making their sandwich, and that it is nothing much. Those are excuses. Any repetition must be recognised; if people are cutting themselves regularly, they are not simply clumsy but causing themselves harm. I hope that this issue can be included in the consultation process and that we can debate it further.

The hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) touched on the time that is given to debate European legislation. I am fortunate to serve on European Standing Committee C. We have met four times in the past year; all debates have been fairly short, all the measures have been non-controversial and have gone through. However, a lot of legislation is generated by the European Union and we do not appear to be taking enough time in this House to consider it. In particular, we are not considering proposals before they become directives. We know the process and what is being debated in the European Union. We should be considering those issues and telling our Members of the European Parliament what the views of this House are. If we are to make an impact and change those European measures, the earlier we begin to scrutinise them the better. The Government's initiative on pre-legislative scrutiny should be extended to EU measures so that we can consider them more fully.

The problem is that when we consider those European directives and other issues in Committee, they often seem to be harmless, common-sense measures, but we rarely get sight of the accompanying rules and interpretation. As the hon. Member for Rayleigh pointed out, the damage is often done by the interpretation of the legislation rather than its intent.

An example from my constituency demonstrates that point in relation to the shellfish hygiene regulations. For hundreds of years, we have extracted mussels and oysters from the River Teign—very good they are, too. A small industry has been built up but it has been almost decimated by the interpretation of European legislation at CEFAS—the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science—the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and, previously, the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

In the UK, we block the extraction of shellfish for 12 months at a time, even though they are perfectly good and edible. In France and Holland, there is a far more sensible approach: when a test fails, extraction stops, but if subsequent tests show that there is no longer any pollution the shellfish can be extracted and sold. It is a stop-go system, but it works. In the UK, on the other hand, a couple of failed tests condemn that area for 12 months. That makes no sense at all. We have allowed civil servants to bury themselves in a pit of rules and they are finding it almost impossible to dig themselves out.

Before I had the good fortune to be elected a Member, I raised the issue with Graham Watson MEP who arranged a meeting with the then Minister with responsibility for food safety. As promised, there was a review. There were visits to France and Holland and consultations began, but since then we have heard nothing. In my constituency, people want to extract those excellent Teign oysters and mussels and make a living by selling them. They are being denied that opportunity by bureaucratic heavy-handedness in the interpretation of European legislation.

The hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) spoke about funding for health and social services. That issue is extremely pertinent in the south-west, especially in Devon. There are a large number of care homes for the elderly in my constituency, 18 of which have closed during the past year because the county council cannot pay the going rate for the care of the patients. The reason is—bluntly—that the social services department does not receive adequate funds from the Government for the care of children and the elderly.

A report commissioned six months ago by the directors of social services for the 15 local authorities in the south-west noted that social service departments were having to divert money from the care of the elderly to children's care. When I questioned the Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), about the matter in January, she said that it was scandalous and that it would be investigated. However, I have seen no sign of an investigation. The Minister has made no further reply and I have heard nothing more.

The Government tell us, however, that they will punish and fine local authorities if they are responsible for bed blocking. I prefer to use the term "bed locking" because it is not the fault of the patient but of the system. However, the cause of the problem is the lack of funds being made available to those social services departments.

The directors of social services estimated six months ago that they needed an additional £1 billion to start undoing that problem. That was nearly a year ago, so that figure will have increased with inflation. Social services departments now have the additional costs of the rise in employers' national insurance, which they have to pay back to the Exchequer, so those costs have increased even further. The Government have given additional funds for social services, but they have not given the money that was requested.

We must debate the issue urgently to ensure that social services departments are better funded, because the elderly and the frail are suffering from lack of funding and the problems that social services departments face. I do not know whether the worse of the problems is an increase in day centre charges or a need to move residents between care homes because the care home owners are obliged to shut up shop, but it is wrong to fine social services departments in those circumstances. If anyone is to be fined, it should be the Treasury, for not listening or putting adequate funding into social services.

12.21 pm

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): I am delighted to be able to contribute to the debate; when the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross) said that he was reaching his final, final, final point, my hope rose that I might get the opportunity to do so. I am particularly delighted because in these debates one is unrestricted by the need to be relevant—a restriction which, most Members feel, usually limits their capacity to wax lyrical on subjects that affect their constituency and—dare I say it?—the wider world.

I do not want to engage in the habit that has taken hold in the Chamber from time to time of relating a travelogue around my constituency, less still around Lincolnshire, but there are one or two pertinent matters which preoccupy my constituents, and which therefore preoccupy me, to which I should like to draw the attention of the House.

The first, which will strike a chord with many hon. Members, is the state of agriculture. My constituency, as you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is deeply rural and very agricultural. A high proportion of people employed in my constituency are employed in agriculture or agriculturally related industries such as the food industry and haulage. I was lucky enough to meet farmers in my constituency recently and they raised with me three specific matters which I should like briefly to rehearse.

The first matter is the increasing number of imported foodstuffs. That is an issue in itself because it changes the balance between what we grow and produce and sell locally and what we buy in, but it also raises serious questions about standards of food safety, human safety and animal welfare. I hope that the Minister will address the matter when he sums up. If he cannot address it—I do not expect him to be the fount of all wisdom, so he may not be able to—I hope that he will pass it on to his colleagues.

The farmers tell me that, particularly in respect of the pesticide residue in foodstuffs, imported products are not required to reach the standards that domestically produced ones are. The standards are set by the country of origin, not the country of receipt, which poses real questions about healthy eating and healthy living in this country as the proportion of imported products grows.

That observation brings me to the second matter relating to agriculture, which is the power of the supermarkets—I would go as far as to say, the pernicious power of the supermarkets—over producers. I believe that supermarkets are commercially capricious. They know no loyalty to most of their suppliers. Of course the suppliers cannot say so because they would be talking about their customers, but I can say it. I do not hold a candle for anyone except my constituents, for whom I hold a very large candle.

The truth is that supermarkets have distorted the relationship between producer, retailer and consumer. They have done more than any other agency to damage the business of local supply. Although traceability will go some way to re-establish confidence between local consumers and producers, unless the Government, and perhaps the next Conservative Government when they come—sooner rather than later, I hope—face up to the issue of the unaccountable power of a handful of retailers, we shall not address the problems of the relationship between producers and consumers, or re-establish in the consumer base a degree of market intelligence.

I suggest that supermarkets produce undiscerning consumers. When my mother bought foodstuffs when I was a boy—in the recent past, I hasten to add—she did so with a high level of knowledge not just about their

[Mr. John Hayes]

origin, but about their quality. She knew good meat, bread and cheese from bad. She bought food from a local supplier, who knew her well.

I once made a speech along those lines and said that my mother had a relationship with her butcher, which caused some hilarity among the audience, until I qualified it by saying that the relationship was entirely commercial—but it may explain why we got cheap meat, of course. The fact of the matter was that my mother knew the butcher and he knew that, if he supplied her with products that were not up to standard, word would travel in the locality, which would jeopardise his business; and that he needed to ensure that his customers were consistently provided with good-quality products.

Frankly, if someone goes to a supermarket, buys something that is a bit dodgy and complains about it, what does the supermarket care? That person is one of numerous customers, and they can come and go largely as they please. We are simply numbers to the supermarkets; we are simply anonymous characters among many other anonymous characters. I suggest that the supermarkets have produced a situation where people know neither the price nor the value of goods. That needs to be addressed by this Government—or by a Government—as soon as possible.

The third matter on agriculture that I wish to raise is drainage, which is critical in the fens. I say agriculture; perhaps I should have said the countryside, because most of my constituency would be under water if it were not for drainage. Some hon. Members might celebrate that fact—it would clearly mean that I would no longer be here—but I certainly would not celebrate it, and I hope that the majority of my constituents would not either, not purely as a matter of my self-interest, but as a matter of their survival, too.

Drainage in the fens is managed by internal drainage boards. Those boards do an excellent job of ensuring that the fens are saved from flooding, and they have done so for a long time. They are models of the relationship between the local communities and themselves, delivering a product efficiently. That was noted by the Select Committee on Agriculture when it considered those matters a few years ago, when I was a member of the Committee, yet there is a real possibility—again, the Minister may want to address this in summing up—that the regionalisation of those responsibilities will lead, at very least, to a downgrading in the IDBs' role. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will assure us that that will not take place. Even their continued existence may possibly be threatened.

I make the case in favour of the IDBs because they are lean, efficient, effective organisations, rooted in the community, doing a first-class job, as Governments of all hues have recognised. They deserve a champion on the Opposition Benches and, I believe, among Ministers. This is a real opportunity for this promising young Minister to become that champion.

Moving swiftly on, I just want to say a word about the delivery of public services in rural areas, such as the constituency that I represent. Other hon. Members will recognise that problem, too, because they also represent rural constituencies. For instance, the difficulties of providing access to good-quality health care in a sparsely populated area such as my part of Lincolnshire are profound. They will not be solved easily by any Government—this is not a party political remark—but we need to devise innovative solutions to that problem.

Part of the problem involves recognising sparsity and rurality more significantly in funding public services; part of it involves the method of delivering local services. Perhaps we need to be more imaginative about that. There are imaginative solutions—I think particularly of the SHARP project in Spalding, which works with people to ensure that they can return to their own homes after illness. Many elderly people, rather than getting stuck in a hospital—bed blocking, as it were—can regain their independence with the right kind of support, guidance and education within a project that combines the services of the local authority, the health authority and other agencies. I believe that such solutions can provide part of the answer.

Part of the answer also comes, however, from an acceptance that the decentralisation of power—devolving power, decision making and the services themselves to localities—is important. I suspect that we shall return to the view that smaller-scale local services provided in and delivered by the local community are the right way forward. Cottage hospitals spring to mind. I do not want to become too romantic about this, but I guess that that is the way we shall end up going. We will resist the idea of centralisation, but not before it is too late for a whole generation of people. Perhaps we can examine that in relation to my constituency and many other rural parts of Britain.

I also mention in passing similar difficulties with policing. I pay tribute to the good work done by the police force in my area. They do sterling work in my constituency but trying to police a very large rural area is not easy. Again, we need to consider innovative ways of delivering high-quality law and order services. Policemen do a fine job but they are under-resourced. I suspect that they have been under-resourced by successive Governments, but worst of all by this Government—the House would expect me to say that—and that needs to be considered carefully.

As the Minister will understand, part of the problem is that funding police forces on a crime-led basis—the more crimes, and the more serious those crimes, the more money and the more police an area gets—reduces non-adversarial policing work, which, ironically, is what most law-abiding citizens want. That is rightly regarded as an important aspect of policing—policemen being present, high-profile and known to the community, and anticipating crimes before they take place. I know that the response will be, "Yes, but it is more important that we react to serious crimes." Of course I understand that; this is not a one-way argument. However, we need to look at ways of funding non-adversarial policing, which is rooted in the community, sensitive to local needs and would engage the support of the law-abiding majority.

As the House will hear in a moment, these local matters are not what I have really come to speak about—they are the prelude to the main act, the B-picture before the A-film comes along shortly—but I want to say a few words about overhead power lines. We are anticipating a power station in Spalding. There are mixed views about that in the local area; I make no bones about it. Some believe that siting a power station in a small, rural market town such as Spalding will have a devastating effect on the aesthetics of the town, which we should not ignore, but it will also create jobs, directly and indirectly, which is good for the local economy. I shall not go into those arguments now.

What I shall address—I hope that the Minister will refer this to his colleague who gave permission for the power station, as he may want to consider it again—is the issue of the power lines to this new power station. We are being presented with a scenario in which, in a flat, fenland landscape, 15 enormous pylons will carry power lines over a relatively small area. That will have a dramatic effect on that sparse, rural landscape. I have had a meeting with the national grid and the developers of the power station, along with local parish councillors, and have asked them to consider this proposal again. The Government could assist in that regard.

It does not seem inconceivable that the power lines could be put underground. I know that that is more expensive for the developer, but not only would it have a beneficial effect in aesthetic terms—with a knock-on effect on local tourism and other interests to which the Minister will be sensitive in an economy that is suffering because of the crisis in agriculture—but it would allay some of the health fears, some rational and some irrational, that exist in the local community.

I was disturbed when I met a chap from the national grid. He said that, although national and international research showed that there was no causal link between overhead power lines and general health problems, there may be some association between the lines and the electromagnetic fields that they produce and certain types of childhood leukaemia. He said that that could not definitively be ruled out. He said that in front of many people at a meeting with the parish council. It was not a private meeting, and I quote his remarks, because I asked him to confirm that that is exactly what he said. His comments will undoubtedly arouse fears and exacerbate them when they already exist.

I hope that the Minister will consider how the Government can support the suggestion for power to be supplied underground to the new power station. It is a genuine, local, all-party campaign. It is not a partisan issue, and I know that the Minister with his typical and almost legendary diligence will want to draw the matter to the attention of his relevant colleague.

I did not however come here only to talk about such parochial matters, important though they are to my constituents and passionately though I feel about them. I have come to speak about human happiness. I intend to conclude my remarks in about five minutes, so I have got to say a lot about human happiness in a short time. Oscar Wilde said:

> "Some cause happiness wherever they go; others whenever they go."

We could apply that remark to colleagues in the House. In fact, we could apply it to those who are sitting in the Chamber, but it would be discourteous and make me unpopular if I were to single out any individual, given the few Members present.

Mr. Greg Knight: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hayes: This may be a candidate for the very badge of honour that I mentioned.

Mr. Knight: My hon. Friend is the official Opposition pairing Whip. Which of the statements in the remark that he quoted does he think applies to him?

Mr. Hayes: It is not appropriate for Whips to speak too much about their job, as my right hon. Friend, a former pairing Whip, will know. However, my simple function as pairing Whip is to spread as much happiness as I can among the parliamentary Conservative party. I know that those members of the parliamentary Conservative party present today will want to say that I do a very good job. At least, if they do not say that, they will not be getting much time off in the future.

I prefer John Stuart Mill's definition. He said:

> "I have learned to seek my happiness by limiting my desires, rather than in attempting to fulfil them."

That contains an important consideration for the modern world and for this Parliament. I raise the issue, simply because this debate is one of the few opportunities that colleagues have to mention not only the local matters that Members have rightly raised, but broader issues.

Members of Parliament are often driven by imperatives, the daily routine and the legislative programme—and so we should be. However, parliamentarians also have a responsibility to reflect on some of the bigger issues that drive and shape society—human fulfilment and happiness. Perhaps I can spend a few minutes reflecting on them and allow colleagues also to reflect on the issues and to contribute to the discussion.

Modern man, with his obsession with the material and the immediate gratification of material self-interest, is straying a long way from what Mill described as happiness. Happiness is born of contentment, yet I suggest that we live in an increasingly discontented world—a world dominated by the material: and not just the material, but the basest elements thereof. Man surely understands that virtue brings contentment, yet the recognition that truth and virtue will spring from within is increasingly replaced by the desire to pursue the most base motives.

I believe that the recognition of virtue springs from within, but is God given—so that virtue also exists outside man. I do not want to become too theological, but the physical world is defined by our senses and our consciousness, and that consciousness is given to us by God. I go beyond saying that consciousness is purely about the mind; I think that it is driven by the mind, the heart and the soul, inspired by the divine. The idea that it is the intellect that matters, irrespective of feeling, is to misunderstand what motivates man.

Selfish materialism is corrupting our civilisation. Free from ideals, free from faith and perhaps even free from love, people seek excitement not through the real passions of heart and soul, but through cheap kicks, thrills and shocks. The glory of love and devotion, and the passion of the pursuit of truth, are replaced by the trivial. Such trivialisation of life, with its accompanying cynicism, which leads to nihilism, is the biggest threat facing society and the next generation of children.

There is nothing worse than believing in nothing at all. That applies to many people in society, perhaps especially to young people, although obviously not all of them. I met many marvellous young people last night in my constituency who devote enormous energy to their community as youth leaders of the brownie pack in Holbeach. However, it can be argued that an increasing number of people believe in very little. Once people believe in very little, they pursue self-interest. It is such base self-interest that leads to beating up an old lady for a fish supper.

[Mr. Hayes]

Last week, the papers reported an attack on a schoolgirl because her contemporaries perceived her as being too lovely; she was too beautiful. When her father was asked why she was attacked, he said, "Because she is pretty and popular." When I read that, I thought that it is a deeply sad day for our civilisation when someone is attacked for being pretty. Such matters are worthy of our consideration. Incidentally, those people who pursue individual rights rather than collective responsibility may be unwittingly, and mainly with good will, feeding the pursuit of selfish gratification of personal desire.

We have a responsibility as parliamentarians not only to elevate our own thinking but to attempt to elevate the thinking of the people whom we represent. We have a responsibility once again to champion virtues such as responsibility, duty, compassion, care for our community and love of country. Through those things comes social cohesion—a sense of togetherness—that transcends individual achievement and unites us so that the things that we share are more important than the things that divide us; they become more important than our own successes and failures. Surely that is the responsibility of all political parties.

On senses and consciousness, common sense is always superior to book learning. An intellectual friend of mine said that we only need enough intellectuals to make a case against intellectualism. I thought that was a little harsh, but I understood what he meant. It is the common sense of the people of our country, combined with their genuine passions—their love of all things good—that gives me great hope in our struggle against nihilism. I think that most people are decent and honourable, have a sense of what is right, just and fair, and want all political parties and all those in public life to pursue those virtues. They expect that of us as they expect it of themselves. That does not mean that real challenges are not involved. Man is imperfect, but he is not irredeemable. We should not celebrate and revel in his imperfections, but aim to counter them by pursuing what is good and honourable.

Aristotle said:

> "A man is not a good man at all who feels no pleasure in noble actions, just as no one would call that man just who does not feel pleasure in acting justly".

He also said:

> "Now it is evident that that form of government which is best is one in which every man, whoever he is, can act best and live happily."

So let us make it our aim to achieve human happiness, or at least to pursue that objective, conscious of man's imperfections, but in the sure knowledge that we have a special responsibility to do our best to try to counterbalance those imperfections and to create and spread as much happiness as we can.

12.46 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate. At the outset, I thought that we would not have our three principal usual suspects with us. The hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) usually talks about Cyprus, so I am glad that another Member managed to discuss that subject. In every previous such debate, the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) has discussed Royal Hospital Haslar. As he is not here, I can only assume that something good has happened there. I hope so. I thought that we would be denied the usual diatribe from the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), who always speaks eloquently on behalf of his constituents, but I saw him slip in a few minutes ago. I am not sure whether I was more disappointed when he was not here or when he arrived, because that might delay lunch even further. I am delighted to see him, and I am sure that he will contribute immensely.

Traditionally, this debate proposes that we should not adjourn. Significantly, however, although all hon. Members' contributions were extremely interesting and thoughtful, none suggested that we should not adjourn. I am not sure whether that means that the recess is now so attractive to Members that they feel that they can get their burdens off their chests before departing, but still depart in good conscience. It is an interesting change of attitude.

Although only a few of us are here, it is an important part of Parliament's job to raise such issues. That goes right back to the origins of this honourable House. In mediaeval times, we came here with petitions on behalf of our constituents. On the night before last, the Leader of the House gave an interesting lecture to the Hansard Society in which he referred to some of the roles of this House that are as important as its scrutiny of legislation and of executive action by the Administration of the day. Although it is disappointing that not as many hon. Members are here today as on previous such occasions, their contributions have been very interesting in their variety and the extent to which they raised constituency, and wider, concerns. The House has been doing its proper job.

The hon. Member for Hammersmith and Fulham (Mr. Coleman) spoke about the housing crisis. The subject has been much debated on the Floor of the House since the last war and its immediate aftermath, when people thought that they had solved the problem. I recall that my first maiden speech was principally about housing in a rural area. The hon. Gentleman obviously spoke about the London situation. The housing shortage is an issue that successive Governments have failed to deal with. That relates to the issue of imposing development targets on different parts of the country.

I was struck by another recurring theme in our debate today: our dependence as a society on the work of volunteers. The hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) referred to that in relation to youth facilities. Not only facilities but the leadership of youth organisations is important. Perhaps that relates to the contribution of the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes). People contribute a huge amount to the local community through voluntary work and we depend on them greatly.

The hon. Member for Castle Point also referred to Southend hospital—that was before the hon. Member for Southend, West arrived. At least his subject was here even if he was not physically present.

The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) made an extremely important point about the need to reform consumer credit legislation. It is an undoubted and sad fact that loan sharks are with us. It has been said that the poor are always with us. While the poor are with us, so are the loan sharks who prey on them.

The hon. Gentleman made another important point about the way in which all forms of voluntary organisations that come within the province of the industrial provident societies are in considerable difficulty because of registration charges. That includes women's institutes, of which I am a devoted follower, if not an eligible member. Registration charges have increased tenfold. That has proved difficult for voluntary organisations.

My hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) talked about the specific and worrying circumstances of his constituents who still live with the consequences of the motor tanker Braer disaster nine years ago. He also made an important point about a more general issue: the causal link that victims of natural and human disasters have to establish before having a reasonable claim to compensation.

As hon. Members may know, I have led a small group in the House that is worried about organophosphates and their devastating effects on many people, but especially sheep farmers. Throughout my time in the House, I have also been worried about the impact on my constituents of the notorious Lowermoor water poisoning incident in 1988. I pay tribute to the Minister for the Environment, who has played a leading role in trying to deal with the problem. In both cases, the law has let people down because the victim has had to establish a direct link between the incident and his or her illness. That is a great indictment of our legal system. The victim is in such a difficult situation and often up against huge organisations. That makes it extremely unlikely that natural justice will prevail.

The hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) always presents a portmanteau of subjects in such debates and it is difficult to know which to comment on. I shall choose two. Her point about the national health service and the need for decentralisation should be applied more generally. We should not simply pick and choose those who happen to be doing well and say, "You can now take more responsibility." We have a huge problem in this country that especially affects public services. We have allowed ourselves to become far more centralised than other European and developed countries, and the health service is a classic example of that. There comes a point when the sheer scale of the operation is difficult for any human being to manage. The hon. Lady is right: we must ensure more effective decentralisation in services, especially the health service.

I also agree with the hon. Member for South Swindon about wind farms, of which there are three in my constituency. I do not claim that they are all popular, but we recognise that we are making a contribution to renewable energy. I have no doubt that there will be more wind farms in Cornwall. The one place where they would not be expected to cause additional damage to the local landscape is Ministry of Defence land. The hon. Lady was absolutely right to say that the MOD must be called to account and required to explain its attitude. It is not mirrored in any other European or NATO country, so I cannot believe that restrictions on national defence have anything to do with it.

Mr. Hayes: Before the hon. Gentleman moves on from the subject of wind farms and, no doubt, to that of my mother's butcher and her lamb chops, may I ask whether he agrees that local authorities must take greater care when considering the relationship between tall structures such as wind farms and the surrounding environment? I am thinking less of constituencies such as his than of mine, which is a flat fenland environment, and those of other hon. Members who represent areas similar to mine. Many people are considering afresh the impact of very tall structures in a landscape that is significantly affected by their imposition.

Mr. Tyler: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. My response is twofold. First, my experience is that all too often the decision is not taken by the local community, but goes to the Secretary of State on appeal. Under the Conservative Government, some devastating decisions were taken on the location of wind farms, with some sited right on the top of what we in Cornwall call mountains—although they are not quite up to Welsh or Scottish standards—and so extremely prominent in the landscape, or placed in an area that should have been protected for reasons of archaeological significance.

My second point relates to something that the hon. Gentleman said. Our recent ancestors had no concerns about the arrival of pylons because they were a symbol of electricity coming to the countryside: their response was, "Hooray! We're going to be connected up." Yet their descendants, today's residents, are far less enthusiastic about wind farms. Even if the turbines are right beside pylons, as is the case in my constituency, wind farms are a cause of great anxiety.

The hon. Member for South Swindon spoke about the modernisation programme, with which I am heavily involved. I strongly sympathise with the objectives of the Modernisation Committee and the Leader of the House. I share the hon. Lady's views on the payment of the Chairmen of Select Committees. That matter has now been put to the Review Body on Senior Salaries—as the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) said, that was the decision of the House. I regret that, but believe that it is now inevitable that other roles in the House will have to be re-examined. It is interesting that the Conservative pairing Whip, who is with us this afternoon, is one of those who draws a state-funded salary. It obviously contributes to his human happiness; no doubt he can enlighten us about whether it contributes to anyone else's.

The hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside), who is no longer present, is extremely pessimistic about the situation in Northern Ireland. People on this side of the Irish sea probably feel that, because the issue is currently out of sight, the troubles have gone away, so our being reminded that major problems remain in the Province serves as a useful corrective. However, I am sad about that because I believe that the House must stand together to support the peace efforts that are being made by all the communities in Northern Ireland. Although the hon. Gentleman's speech was on one level a useful corrective, it struck a discordant note with me to be told that all the problems were on one side of the divide. I do not believe that that is true—after all, neither side is decommissioning at the speed or on the scale for which we hoped. It is important to remember that.

I recognise that the Government's loss is the House's gain—no longer on the Front Bench, the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) is able to give us the benefit of his wisdom and his wit, and I enjoy both. However, I confess that I find his enthusiastic support for the

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second-rate football game rather depressing, although it is entirely proper for him to feel as he does. I come from Cornwall, where we play the real game—rugby. Although I am not able to follow the hon. Gentleman through all the intricacies of association football, I recognise that he is absolutely right to say that, even for non-enthusiasts like me, some extremely important issues must be addressed. If the reputation of English fans is to damage our opportunities for holding any major international sporting events in future, that is extremely serious. The hon. Gentleman is right, however, when he says that because the English language media are worldwide, far more attention is given to the actions of our fans than to others.

The hon. Gentleman was right also when he said that although important improvements have been made since we passed the Football (Disorder) Act 2000, there is still a diversity of experience in applying that legislation, which needs real attention. We may need to come back to that.

I was taken by the hon. Gentleman's final point about the use of the Union flag and the English flag. We have a different flag in Cornwall, but it is open to the same abuse. There is a case for examining whether we should be allowed in some way to protect the integrity of our flag, which unites us all. If it is effectively kidnapped by a political party, or in some instances, an extremist group, it becomes a symbol of disunity rather than unity. I am not sure whether that can be done by legislation, but it is an interesting issue.

The hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois)—I think that I have used the Essex pronunciation. Of course, the great seafarer and statesman, Raleigh, has no connection with the Essex equivalent, which is somewhere in the far east. The hon. Gentleman is right about the issue of tidal defences and sea defences generally. I share his anxiety about the bureaucracy of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. It is mind-boggling when we have concerns about our entire coastline. DEFRA has become the byword for a mire of bureaucracy. I do not blame particular Ministers because the impact of foot and mouth and then the change in responsibilities last summer was devastating. However, the low morale of civil servants in the Department has to be seen to be believed. I do not know what anyone is going to do about it, but something must be done.

I find it more difficult to agree with the hon. Gentleman about the issue of deciding all development targets at a local level. Of course, that sounds right, and I would want to do that in Cornwall. However, the hon. Gentleman should recognise the natural consequence of the free market policies of the Thatcher Governments, who said that people must move to jobs. Lord Tebbit said, "Get on your bike." That is why people have left the north of Britain, and to some extent the west, to come to the hon. Gentleman's constituency, and they want homes.

The difficulty about the provision of homes is that the homeless do not have a vote, or a voice. They are not here. No doubt they come to our surgeries—they certainly come to mine—but not in the same force of numbers as at the hon. Gentleman's town meeting.

Incidentally, the hon. Gentleman mentioned that had that meeting been an American meeting it would have been referred to as a town meeting. As one person spoke in favour of the proposed development, I assume that there was the American reaction—a lynching for that poor individual who disagreed with everybody else. Town meetings—we have all had them—will not necessarily recognise the long-term interests of all our constituents.

We as representatives have a responsibility to think more widely about longer-term interests.

Mr. Francois *rose—*

Mr. Hayes *rose—*

Mr. Tyler: One at a time, please.

I give way to the hon. Member for Rayleigh.

Mr. Francois: First, on a point of correction. My constituency is spelled with a "y" and pronounced accordingly. The great admiral, Raleigh, did not have a "y" in his name and so it was pronounced differently.

Secondly, at the town meeting one person spoke in favour of the development. He was a Liberal Democrat councillor. Being as honest as I can, part of the reaction was not merely a response to what he said. If the hon. Gentleman had been present, he would understand that it was the way that the councillor expressed his opinion that upset many of those who were there. It was a classic example of how not to behave at a public meeting.

Mr. Tyler: I cannot comment on that.

As all hon. Members will recognise, if we simply say that there will be no new housing for those who need it in the south-east, we are talking nonsense. Of course we will have to find more brownfield sites. The Governments whom the hon. Member for Rayleigh supported, particularly the Thatcher Government, put huge pressures on London and the south-east by effectively saying that they were against the regeneration of the industries of the north and the west. We must return to that situation. I feel strongly about the matter. In my constituency and my county, Cornwall, as a result of Liberal Democrat efforts, it must be said, with the co-operation of the Government, we are now able to regenerate some of our industries.

I turn to the contribution of my hon. Friend—

Mr. Hayes *rose—*

Mr. Tyler: I am coming to the hon. Gentleman's contribution in a moment. If he can restrain himself, he may want to respond to some of my comments about him.

My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross) made an extremely important point about the increasing extent to which we have become a litigious society. He referred specifically to one area, but the argument applies to several areas. As other hon. Members have no doubt observed, no accidents ever happen now—it is always somebody's fault. Nobody dies in hospital but something must have gone wrong. I am exaggerating of course, to make the point. I hope that we will find some way to reverse the trend. The insurance companies are very much to blame. They often take the easy way out and pay, rather than challenging the attitude that somebody is always at fault. That is not true.

Mr. Carmichael: Our hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross) made the point in relation to ambulance chasers. Does my hon. Friend the Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) agree that as long as we continue to underfund civil legal aid, the situation will only get worse and give rise to firms of solicitors and others operating in the fringes of compensation claims working on a no win, no fee basis, which is the driving force behind the increase in so-called ambulance chasing?

Mr. Tyler: That is true. My hon. Friend speaks from legal experience. I would add that the no win, no fee attitude discourages genuine cases that may be a little more marginal. That, too, is a problem.

My hon. Friend the Member for Teignbridge spoke of the increasing incidence of self-harm, particularly by young people, and the connection with both attempted suicide and suicide. It is a considerable problem and I do not know where we should start, but clearly we must address it. There is a consultation process under way; I hope that that will be truly comprehensive.

A further point made by my hon. Friend concerned the way in which the House handles European directives. That is a scandal. On our Procedure Committee and our Modernisation Committee we have made some proposals, but we have not got very far with them. My hon. Friend puts his finger on an important point. If we could apply the principle of pre-legislative scrutiny to some of the legislation coming from the European Union, we would be far more likely not only to influence that legislation, but to ensure that subsequently it was adjusted to the UK situation, and we did not have the gold-plating that went with it.

I come to the interesting contribution from the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings. So much of what he said was pure Liberal Democrat philosophy and policy that I wonder whether, as the pairing Whip, he would dare to make those comments if the House were full. Although I can assure the hon. Gentleman, especially in relation to the interesting section towards the end of his speech, that his human happiness would be greatly increased if he joined us on the Liberal Democrat Benches, although he would, unfortunately, lose his salary as the Conservative pairing Whip.

There are some issues that we should try to approach in the House on a non-party basis. One of the reasons why I so strongly agreed with the speech of the Leader of the House to which I referred earlier is that he, too, seems to have a real concept of trying to ensure that when necessary, the House can work on a consensual basis.

I shall give two illustrations. The hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings referred to the case of agriculture. He and I share a strong commitment to the agriculture industry. I was my party's agriculture spokesman—I do not think that the hon. Gentleman was in the House at the time—when his colleague and neighbour, the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) was the Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I spent hours on these Benches trying to persuade the then Government that imports into this country—particularly, because of BSE, of meat—were extremely problematic, for many reasons including those related to human health, animal health and support for our farmers.

However, and this takes me to the hon. Gentleman's second point, the Minister replied that the food industry, by which of course he meant the supermarkets, wanted to be able to buy as cheaply as it could from wherever it could. I find it extraordinary that successive Governments have allowed themselves to be conned by the retail sector into believing that getting good, cheap food is all about buying wherever one can. We are importing meat from a number of countries where foot and mouth is endemic, just when we think we have cleared up our own problem. I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman on that issue—I am sorry to embarrass him. The connection between the role of supermarkets and the role of imports is very close. The hon. Gentleman nods in agreement.

I regret that, although in the immediate aftermath of the appalling onslaught of foot and mouth on the livestock sector no less a person than the Prime Minister said that he was going to take on the oligopolistic tendencies of the supermarkets, we heard no more. It may be significant that the chairman, or perhaps the chief executive, of Sainsbury's sat on the Curry commission. We must look again at the role of supermarkets because it is very important, and our competitor countries in Europe do not have the same problem.

As a former member of a police authority, I very much agree with the hon. Gentleman about the police. I cannot follow him to the end of his speech, much as I would like to, but I appreciate the fact that he has helped me to write a speech for the annual dinner of the John Stuart Mill Society. That will save me a lot of extra reading. That great Liberal philosopher is clearly a significant stimulus and inspiration to the hon. Gentleman, and I hope that one day we can increase his human happiness by welcoming him to these Benches.

Mr. Hayes: I reassure the hon. Gentleman that I do not have a Liberal bone in my body, as my colleagues know. I am more driven by Burke than by Mill, the hon. Gentleman will be pleased to know. I remind him of the simple fact that when, during the 19th century, the enlightened policies of the Conservative party were reforming our factories, and taking children out of the mines and boys from chimneys, his party rejected all those reforms. The Liberal party was the most backward, negative and reactionary force of the 19th century, and I am afraid that its descendants remain rooted in many of those faults and failures. The hon. Gentleman cannot expect to welcome me to his Benches, but I thought that I should intervene to justify my small but well-earned salary.

Mr. Tyler: How can I follow that? If the hon. Gentleman and I were to swap facts about 19th-century history, which was my period of particular interest as a student, we might be in trouble with the Chair, although I suspect that this is the one debate in which we could do so. I am a great fan of Mr. Gladstone, who got more radical as he got older. The hon. Gentleman may agree that that is not a bad thing, and he may become a radical in his old age and join us then.

I thank the Minister and his office because, after the last such debate before a recess, they took the trouble, uniquely in my experience, to make contact with Members who had contributed to see whether they had had satisfactory answers from the Departments concerned. As I said, I have lost count of how many of these debates I have participated in, and that had never happened before. I only point out that the letter arrived at least two months

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after the debate, so the Minister's expectations of when his colleagues would get round to responding to our points match our own experience.

May I wish you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and all our colleagues here today an appropriate recess, both for refreshing their contacts with their constituents and for refreshing themselves? If in so doing they feel that they would like to come to Cornwall, which of course is the most attractive holiday destination on the whole globe, they will be welcome.

1.14 pm

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Today, Presidents Bush and Putin meet to sign a treaty that will reduce the number of nuclear warheads in the United States and Russia by two thirds. I am confident that I speak for all hon. Members when I congratulate them on reaching that agreement and wish them well in its implementation during the next decade.

It will not have escaped the House's sense of irony, however, that the agreement is being reached just as two other nuclear powers are squaring up to each other in preparation for what could be a terrible and devastating war. I speak, of course, of India and Pakistan. Today, the European Union External Affairs Commissioner, Chris Patten, is due to arrive in the region. Our own Foreign Secretary will visit both countries next week, and I believe it right that this House should make its views clear before he embarks on that trip.

I speak today on behalf of my many constituents who originate from the Indian sub-continent. I speak equally on behalf of ordinary people in Brent, North who have no connection with the sub-continent, but who recognise that a war between these two nuclear powers would be a human and political disaster the repercussions of which would be felt across the globe. I should also make it clear that I speak as the chairman of Labour Friends of India. I know that the House will accept that, although I count myself as a friend of India, that does not make me an enemy of anyone else. Indeed, I wish all India's neighbours only peace and prosperity.

The attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Centre on 11 September changed global politics. It turned a newly elected American President, who the world had feared would prove isolationist, into a foreign policy activist. Most critically, it enabled the United States and Russia to put behind them the rhetoric of the cold war and find common cause against international terrorism. Although that has focused the world's eye on al-Qaeda and the war against the Taliban in Afghanistan, the reality of international terrorism and Afghan involvement is that terrorism is nothing new. The largest democracy in the world—the state of India—has been a victim of international terrorism for more than 20 years. In that time, more than 60,000 Indians have been killed in terrorist attacks.

I do not wish to go back over the history of the Punjab in the 1980s, or the Mumbai bomb blast of the early 1990s, which killed 300 people in just one incident. However, I think it important that the House consider the relentless terrorist attacks made on India in just the past two years. In December 1999, Air India flight 814 was hijacked. Within a year, the Red Fort in Delhi was attacked. On 1 October last year, the state legislative assembly in Srinagar was attacked, and on 13 December, India's Parliament was itself attacked by terrorists. Any country would find that list of outrages intolerable, and all the more so given that each attack was clearly not just the work of an isolated terrorist group: the ISI, the Pakistan security force, was also actively involved.

India's democratically elected leadership are under the most enormous pressure from their own people to take decisive action to end cross-border terrorism. So what have they done? First, Prime Minister Vajpayee engaged in shuttle-bus diplomacy to Lahore. That was rebuffed by Pakistan's attack across the line of control, in Kargil. Secondly, Prime Minister Vajpayee invited General Musharraf—the very person responsible for Kargil, but by that point the new ruler of Pakistan—to talks at Agra. Those are not the acts of a bellicose leader. It should also be clear that, although both India and Pakistan are now nuclear powers, only India has committed herself to a no first use policy.

After 11 September, General Musharraf committed himself to siding with the US against international terrorism. Many saw that as a real and genuine opportunity for Pakistan to move away from the fundamentalism of the madrassahs and their involvement with terrorist training camps, and from its entanglement with the Taliban and the illegal smuggling of heroin and guns, into a new relationship with the world. We praised General Musharraf for the courage he had shown and we wanted to support him against the forces of fundamentalism within Pakistan that were ranged against him.

Everyone accepts that General Musharraf has an extremely difficult task, but the key test of his resolve is, and always was, whether he would change his policy towards India. Would he stop the training camps that were sending thousands of terrorists across the line of control to kill and wreak havoc in the Kashmir valley? On 12 January, we felt real hope that he would do so. His address to the nation was bold and new. He imposed a ban on five terrorist groups, including Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed. He detained a number of known terrorist leaders and rounded up 2,000 cadres of the terrorist groups. He spoke of there being "no need" to interfere in other countries.

The world was impressed and welcomed General Musharraf's speech. India said that it would judge by his deeds. Within weeks, the head of Lashkar-e-Toiba, Mr. Hafiz Sayeed, was released. The House may know that, ironically, he has just been re-arrested for his involvement in the murder of 11 French engineers in Karachi. The head of Jaish-e-Mohammed, Mr. Maulana Masud Azhar, although supposedly under house arrest, has been receiving a pension from the Pakistan Government. The terrorist training camps that were closed after the speech on 12 January have been reopened. Currently, there are 75 active terrorist bases along the Pakistani side of the line of control. Al-Qaeda activists who fled from Afghanistan into Pakistan have now been transferred to those camps for cross-border infiltration into Kashmir.

Earlier this month, three terrorists dressed as Indian army soldiers boarded a bus on the Pathankot-Jammu highway and launched an attack that killed 32 people, including 11 women and 11 children. The three terrorists were Pakistan nationals, and al Mansuren—Lashkar-e-Toiba by another name—and Jamait-ul-Mujahideen have claimed responsibility for the outrage. Since that attack just 10 days ago, there have been 58 other attacks, in which 14 security personnel and 14 civilians have been killed. The fine words of 12 January have given way to the same sordid state-sponsored terrorism across the line of control.

Despite repeated requests and international pressure, General Musharraf has taken no action against the most wanted list of 20 terrorists whom Pakistan is harbouring. As such, Pakistan is in clear defiance of UN resolution 1373 that mandates all member countries to refrain from giving any support to terrorist groups.

In the light of those facts, when the Foreign Secretary travels to the region next week, he should do so with the clear understanding that India, whose people are under constant terrorist threat and whose very Parliament has been attacked by Pakistan-sponsored terrorists, will find it strange to hear Britain and the US, who launched their own war on international terrorism, plead with India to show yet more restraint.

India has shown remarkable restraint, but the assassination of Abdul Gani Lone, the Muslim leader of the Hurriyat conference, by ISI-sponsored Islamic terrorists based in Pakistan has pushed that restrained to its limit. Abdul Gani Lone was no friend of the Indian Government; he wanted autonomy for the people of Kashmir, but he made what, for him, became two fatal commitments. He committed himself to the democratic process and wanted to contest the Kashmir state elections for the legislative assembly later this year. He also committed himself and his party to do so without foreign interference. For those two commitments, his son said that the ISI sponsored his assassination.

The snows are melting in Kashmir, but positions are hardening. When the Foreign Secretary arrives in the region, he must make it clear to General Musharraf that the words of 12 January are not enough. He must insist on the following essential actions. First, Pakistan must declare that it, too, will adopt a no first use policy in relation to its nuclear arsenal. Secondly, Pakistan must arrest and imprison or deport the 20 terrorists on India's most wanted list. Thirdly, Pakistan must close all 75 active terrorist training camps on the Kashmir border. Fourthly, Pakistan must arrest and put on trial the leaders of the terrorist groups. Fifthly, Pakistan must arrest the al-Qaeda terrorists now stationed in those camps.

Unless our Foreign Secretary makes these points clear to General Musharraf, and unless the general acts positively on each one of them, the world cannot express its surprise if its largest democracy acts to defend its Parliament, its legislative assembly and its citizens, 60,000 of whom have already lost their lives to terrorism.

I welcome Prime Minister Vajpayee's statement today that India will suspend a decision on war for a period of some weeks. During that period, I trust that General Musharraf will reflect on the foundations of his faith. After the battle of Khyber, the Prophet Mohammed—peace be to his name—stated that the jihad-e-asghar, the small jihad was over, but proclaimed that the jihad-e-akbar, the greater jihad, had begun. He meant that the military conflict was over but the most important conflict was the one against illiteracy and poverty.

Between them, India and Pakistan have more than 40 per cent. of the world's poor. We must all pray that the jihad-e-ashgar, the small war against each other, will be defused and abandoned so that the jihad-e-akbar, the great war on poverty, can be won for both of their peoples.

1.29 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): Before the House adjourns for the Whitsun recess, there are a number of points that I wish to raise, and I shall try to rattle through them as quickly as possible.

I was delighted that my hon. Friends the Members for Castle Point (Bob Spink) and for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) referred to Southend cancer unit. Along with my hon. Friend the Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor), the four of us are absolutely united. We will resist any move to undermine or diminish the present cancer service.

In the light of the remarks of the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), I was delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point spoke about volunteering. My goodness—our country could not function without its huge army of volunteers. Only this week, I heard about one of my constituents, Mrs. Mude, who has been a volunteer at Southend hospital for 63 years, welcoming and greeting people. That is a fantastic achievement.

While I am on the subject of volunteering, I hope that hon. Members will make a firm note in their diaries that the scouts tea party will take place on 18 June. Scouts and guides do a magnificent job and I hope that as many hon. Members as possible will turn up on 18 June to support their scout groups.

I entirely agreed with the comments of the hon. Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross) about shellfish. As the Minister knows, I have raised that matter on previous occasions. It is crazy that, as a result of those European directives, our shellfish producers are being punished, and I hope that the Minister will contact the excellent Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), who has responsibility for those matters. Perhaps we could hold a round-table meeting to discuss the issue.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) has left the Chamber, but as he seems to have dropped a pound coin on the Bench I am sure that he will be back—*[Interruption.]* Ah, he is back already.

I was fascinated by my hon. Friend's strictures on philosophy where I shall certainly not compete with him. I find the concept of happiness intangible—perhaps we could devote a day to debating it. It seems to me, however, that young people are "bored" because they experience everything much sooner and more quickly than we did when we were children. If my hon. Friend has an answer for that, I should be only too happy to hear it—we might adopt it as Conservative policy.

Mr. Hayes: I would never claim to have all the answers to human happiness; if I did, I should not be in this place but somewhere much more lucrative—I do not say "somewhere more noble", because there is nothing more noble than being a Member of the House of Commons.

It seems to me that fulfilment and contentment come from satisfaction with what one has, rather than the pursuit of the unattainable. My hon. Friend referred to

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boredom; if we reflected on the lovely and glorious things in the world instead of seeking the unattainable, perhaps we should all be a little happier and more content.

Ms Drown: How lovely.

Mr. Amess: I could not disagree with either of those remarks.

I also wanted to draw the Minister's attention to two health matters that have been completely neglected. In 1994, the Encephalitis Support Group was formed. I am sure that hon. Members know that encephalitis is inflammation of the brain and that it affects many people. Representatives of the group have contacted me; they are anxious to raise the group's profile in the House.

Another group that is subtly lobbying Members of Parliament is TOAST—the Obesity Awareness and Solutions Trust. To be hugely overweight is no joke. Many companies market ridiculous diets and rip people off with claims that they can lose stones. That is extremely upsetting. I hope that the House will reflect on that and consider how we can give more support to people who are unhappy—for whatever reason—with their appearance.

I have pontificated about mobile phones on many occasions. I loathe them. We over-use them in this country. Everywhere we go, people with mobile phones clutched to their ear are holding inane conversations for everyone else to hear. I have often pointed out that using a mobile phone while driving could result in a terrible accident—as has happened. Recently, someone who caused such an accident was sent to jail for three years. What on earth is the House doing about it? Absolutely nothing. Now we have—

Mr. Tyler: Of course the House has had an opportunity to do something about it, and one would hope that the Government will take it up, because there is a private Member's Bill on the subject—the Telecommunications Transmitters (Restrictions on Planning Applications) Bill. The hon. Gentleman may have been about to mention that.

Has the hon. Gentleman seen the very important work done for BRAKE, the pressure group on safety on the roads, which shows that handheld mobile phones are not much more dangerous than the screen ones, because both are equally distracting if used when the car is in motion?

Mr. Amess: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. I believe that it was BT who tried to seduce me in the early days by giving me one of those contraptions for use in the car, and I found it just as distracting as the type that one holds under one's chinline. The work of BRAKE is absolutely excellent, so I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support in that regard.

I want to draw to the Minister's attention a matter which I am sure will be repeated to him. We have a huge row in the constituency that I represent. We have in the town probably one of the finest restaurants in the country; it is wonderful, and it is the intention to plonk on that highly visible restaurant one of these mobile phone mast monstrosities. I have been inundated with letters and telephone calls from local residents who think that, aesthetically, it would be awful to have a mobile phone mast on top of the restaurant but who are also very concerned indeed about the health problems.

The House has discussed the subject ad nauseam but nothing ever seems to happen, and I am fed up with the buck passing. Local authorities look at the plans and turn them down. The matter then goes to appeal and the mobile phone mast goes up. I hope that the Minister will try to get some action.

I have received many letters from constituents who are totally unhappy with the 999 emergency service system. In the area that I represent, for whatever reason, we have these absolutely useless call centres, so instead of getting on to the local police station, the caller is put through to Chelmsford, and when he or she eventually gets through to Chelmsford, probably the person who is trying to mug them or has blocked them in has disappeared.

The Home Secretary needs to give greater guidance to chief constables throughout the country on call centres. Once upon a time it was possible to dial 999 and get through to someone immediately, and help would arrive. That certainly does not happen at the moment. These call centres are a disaster.

Ms Drown: On a recent visit to our local police headquarters, I was told about the increasing number of 999 calls. Would the hon. Gentleman support the introduction of another number that people could telephone for help, if the incident was not of a blue-light or ambulance degree of severity?

Mr. Amess: That is a very interesting point. I would be very pleased to work with the hon. Lady on that issue and see whether we could persuade the Home Secretary to take it up, because at the moment the emergency service simply is not working. The hon. Lady is entirely right when she says that the 999 line is blocked with other calls.

I never thought that I would be talking about the Palace theatre again in the House but, sadly, this week another crisis appears to be emerging. Once again, the theatre seems to need more funding in order to continue, but perhaps when we have more time I will wax lyrical on that.

I wish to raise two final points. First, Mrs. Narwar has contacted me about her son, who is an Egyptian in a jail in Egypt. I am glad that the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) is in his place now because I know that he has a constituent in the same jail, and I believe that three or four other hon. Members are affected. A meeting took place between Baroness Amos and the family and friends of the people in jail. Unfortunately, no hon. Members could be present with their constituents, but I should be very grateful if the Minister would have a word with the Foreign Office, because these people are still in prison. We do not have time to go into the charges, but I consider that an issue of human rights is involved.

Finally, I had the privilege and enjoyment to be present at the Ivor Novello award ceremony yesterday. It was a glittering occasion; in fact, it reminded me of what the Brit awards used to be like. There I was, sitting with one of the singers of The Three Degrees. Anyway, there were some marvellous conversations. The bottom line is—I say this to the Minister as a younger Member—that the industry is feeling slightly neglected at the moment.

We have the finest writers in the world. Our music is better than anyone else can produce—never mind the fact that we did not have a single in the American top 100 for a week or so. The Government should carefully consider the way in which the industry has been affected by the fact that people obviously no longer buy 78s or 45s, that compact discs are given away free in magazines and that the blank tape levy is no longer an issue. Those people have a right to be rewarded in some way or other. I know that the relevant Department is a supporter of the industry, but the Minister knows full well that, without persuading the Treasury on the issue, we are wasting our time.

I hope, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you and everyone else will have a very enjoyable Whitsun and, in particular, that everyone enjoys the jubilee celebrations.

1.41 pm

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): We have had a very interesting and wide-ranging debate. Although it seems as though we may not quite use all the time allotted today, that should not be a matter for concern or critical comment for two reasons. First, these debates are usually limited to three hours, so we have had more time today to deal with the very important matters that right hon. and hon. Members have wished to draw to the attention of the House; and, secondly, it is becoming increasingly clear that the constituency work carried out by Members of Parliament is becoming ever-more demanding.

More hon. Members simply find that they cannot discharge all their proper duties in their constituency just on a Saturday. They find that they have to be there on a Friday to undertake the vast range of constituency work that faces them. That is why I am one of those members who serve on the Modernisation Committee—the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) is another—who are prepared to consider the House's sitting practices to find out whether we can improve the quality of time that we have.

For example, it was a matter of regret to me that the debate collapsed on Wednesday this week, when we could have had a debate of this nature if our procedures were able to take account of such events. The Modernisation Committee, under the excellent chairmanship of the Leader of the House, is prepared to consider such matters, and I hope that we will make proposals in due course that will be widely accepted.

Ms Drown: Would the right hon. Gentleman consider starting at 10, rather than 2.30, or even the proposed 11.30, on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays? If we then sat until 7, we could have more debates in the evening. We could also finish at 3, for example, on Thursdays, which would allow more hon. Members, especially those from far-flung lands, to go home and have a full constituency day on Fridays.

Mr. Knight: The hon. Lady's comments find a degree of favour with me. I am not sure about starting at 10 o'clock, but we should certainly consider starting at an earlier hour, not only to assist our working practices, but to take account of the fact that those who report what we say in the House would probably pay more interest if it were said before they went off to have dinner.

I wish to raise with the Minister an issue of growing concern to me that directly affects my constituents' well-being. Tourism is an important feature of our economy throughout the United Kingdom, and English tourism dominates in Great Britain. The House may not know that English tourism represents more than 81 per cent. of the total United Kingdom tourism market. It is worth £52 billion, compared with £4.5 billion in Scotland and £2.3 billion in Wales. My view is that, with vigorous marketing, it could be worth even more. Despite the importance of English tourism to the UK economy, the English Tourism Council and the London tourist board receive only 23p per head of England's population. I wonder whether Members can guess how much the Scottish tourist board receives. Is it a little more? No, it is a lot more—a whopping £4.85 per head of population. The Wales tourist board receives a staggering £9.44 for each Welsh resident. Why should a person living in Dunfermline have 21 times as much spent on their behalf to promote tourism as a person living in Bridlington in my constituency? Why should Barmouth in north Wales—a most delightful place—have 41 times as much spent per head of population as Flamborough Head, which is also in my constituency?

The unfairness goes wider than money alone. Not only do the Scottish and Wales tourist boards receive more money than the English Tourism Council and the London tourist board—England receives £11.5 million compared with £24.8 million for Scotland and £27.8 million for Wales—but they also do less to help English tourism than English tourism does to help them. The English Tourism Council's website has a link to the Wales and the Scottish tourist boards' websites. That is reasonable, and I welcome it. Is it reciprocated by the Wales or the Scottish tourist board? No, it is not. That is to be deplored. The English Tourism Council's website mention Wales and the Welsh 42 times, and Scotland and the Scottish 51 times. How many times are England and the English mentioned on their websites? Twice.

Amazingly, although the English Tourism Council website blathers on about Scotland and Wales, it gives precious little mention to the tourist areas of east Yorkshire. I regard that as an affront. Clearly, it is not good enough. What are the chairman of the English Tourism Council and his colleagues doing to promote the delights of Yorkshire and other English counties? Will the Minister refer my concerns—more than that, my justified anger—about this dereliction of the proper promotion of the tourist delights of England to the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport as soon as possible? Will he ask her to consider taking action to rectify this gross imbalance?

Ms Drown: I fully appreciate the right hon. Gentleman's comments, and agree that the three countries should help each other to promote tourism, which can result in gain for all. I would not want him to leave this issue, however, without clarifying his view on support per head. I hope that he does not think that every region of the country should receive exactly the same support for tourism. We heard strong calls to promote different regions if we are to address the pressure on housing. Tourism is a real job creator, which has an impact on population and homes. Will he confirm that he is not in favour of providing exactly the same support across the whole nation?

Mr. Knight: I am happy to give that confirmation. I have a great love for Scotland and Wales. I seek not parity but justice.

[Mr. Knight]

Many issues have been raised on both sides of the House. The hon. Member for Hammersmith and Fulham (Mr. Coleman) referred to the right-to-buy abuse. He advocated legislation. The abuse that is occurring highlights the value of taking legal advice before entering into a contract for the purchase or sale of land. A house or bungalow is the most valuable asset that any of us are likely to own. It is incredible that people today are still entering into contracts to buy or sell a dwelling without taking proper independent advice. If local authorities are aware that a block of housing stock may fall prey to an unscrupulous property company, there might be a case for their issuing advice to tenants to see a solicitor or to go to a law centre before they sign anything.

My hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) is a vigorous advocate, and he did not let us down when he referred to several issues that affect his constituency. He started on the subject of street crime and the clear duty of the police to bring it under control. I sometimes wonder whether the police have a perverse sense of priorities.

For example, I mention a case that occurred a couple of years ago. It was not in Yorkshire or Humberside, so I am not referring to my police authority. A friend of mine, who is a musician, was leaving the venue where he had performed and a near-riot was taking place outside. Youths were fighting and bottles were being thrown, but not one police officer was to be seen. On his way home, he took a cross-country route and, as he turned down a small lane that is mainly used by farmers, he was astounded when two police officers with torches jumped out of a hedge. They stopped him at 1 am, and told him that they were doing a random check on motor vehicles. One questions whether the police have the right priorities in every case.

My hon. Friend discussed roads and the need for a new one to serve his constituency. I hope that his comments and those of other hon. Members will lead us to have a serious debate about the need for new road building. I hope that the debate will not degenerate into the sort of sloganising that we get from Friends of the Earth, which is currently running a postcard campaign saying "No new roads". If one takes that literally, no new roads means no new houses, because every housing estate must be linked to an existing highway. My hon. Friend made an excellent case for the third road that he mentioned, and I hope that it will be considered favourably.

Like a number of other hon. Members on both sides of the House, my hon. Friend then strayed on to the subject of the World cup. I enjoy the World cup finals, but not in the way that other Members do. I never watch the matches or pay them any attention. However, when they are on, I get great pleasure from getting out one of my classic cars and driving around the roads of Yorkshire. The roads are deserted, so it is like going back to the golden days of motoring. That is rather enjoyable.

The hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) is not here, but he kindly left me a note to explain that he had a pressing constituency engagement. He raised the important issue of anti-Semitism. My right hon. and hon. Friends and I take it seriously. I am a member of Conservative Friends of Israel, and I know the details of the many shocking cases of abuse and threats of violence from which members of the Jewish community have to suffer. We should all deplore race hate violence from wherever it comes. More than that, we should do what we can to eradicate it.

The hon. Gentleman then discussed the Consumer Credit Act 1974 and his concern that the most vulnerable members of society could be seduced into signing the agreements offered by loan sharks. He made a very good case. I am aware that such agreements are often signed, but I am pleased to say that I am not aware of a case in my constituency. However, friends of friends of mine have suffered from signing such agreements, and I am concerned that the seductive advertisements for them are allowed to run on local radio stations. The advertisements say, "Come to us. We will offer you a loan. It doesn't matter if you have county court judgments against you or have bad debts. You don't need a deposit." Such advertising puff makes those of us who are legally qualified realise that the claims made are too good to be true, but they do have an impact on vulnerable members of society.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) complained that the geographical position of his constituency is such that his phone hardly ever rings. I would regard that as a blessing, not a curse. He expressed concern about salmon farmers and the pollution caused by the Braer incident. Indeed, he explained quite well the problems that communities often face in respect of the burden of proof when a local disaster or problem occurs. The community might know what has caused the devastation, but proving that to a judge in court is a different matter. I think that the hon. Gentleman should pursue that further. Perhaps we should even consider the burden of proof as it applies to such cases. I gather from his liberal use of Latin that he is a lawyer so, inter alia, I wish him well in pursuing his case.

The hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) began by telling us that she is a workaholic. She then went on to prove it by raising more points than any other hon. Member. I was probably a bit hard on her in my intervention because she went on to say that she supported the eight-year rule for Select Committee Chairmen, which is what I proposed in the amendment that was accepted by the House. I agree that there is a case for preventing a Select Committee from becoming the fiefdom of a particular Member. There is such a wealth of talent and expertise in the House that it is right that more Members are eligible to stand for election as Chairmen of Select Committees.

When the hon. Lady began her analysis of the health service, she sounded much like my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) when he was Health Secretary. Just when I started to think that she was going to sit on the Conservative Benches, she veered off in a different direction, which was disappointing.

The hon. Lady raised many issues, such as fireworks, that concern hon. Members on both sides of the House. I am a libertarian and believe that if people want to celebrate 5 November, they should be able to do it without having to apply for a licence or being subject to a local authority restriction. However, as an animal owner I am worried how the event is spreading from the end of October to the second week in November. When I was a child, the whole community celebrated bonfire night on 5 November, and that was it. Pets had to be kept in for one night only, whereas now, the event is being celebrated over a two-week period in villages up and down the country, and that concerns pet owners.

Mr. Banks: Does the right hon. Gentleman concede that fireworks are not only used on 5 November? Other communities also use them to celebrate their festivals, which is one reason for their more widespread use. Perhaps we should consider each of those festivals and set a date before which fireworks cannot be purchased.

On the right hon. Gentleman's concern about animals, surely a limit should be set on the size of the explosive fireworks that can be bought. Some of them are huge: they are mortars. The amount of noise that they make causes enormous distress, not just to animals, but to old people and to people of a nervous disposition, of whom I happen to be one. They are frightening and it is about time that action was taken to deal with them.

Mr. Knight: I agree that we should consider the issue, and I hope that the Minister will feed that back to his colleagues. However, I have reservations about framing legislation on the hoof, so I would not want to talk today about the scope of such legislation or the clauses that it should contain.

The hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) mentioned the problems caused to 1 million people, some of whom are his constituents, by Equitable Life. Some are also my constituents, so I join him in pressing the Minister to try to ensure that an equitable conclusion is reached.

The hon. Gentleman then spoke with feeling about several aspects of what is happening in Northern Ireland, which is a tragic and serious matter. Northern Ireland politicians are not short of commentators, so I shall not give the House the benefit of my opinion other than to say that all hon. Members, on whichever side of the House they sit, hope that the peace process will succeed. I hope that the Minister will take on board the concerns that the hon. Gentleman expressed on behalf of one section of the Northern Ireland community.

The hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) devoted his entire speech to football and the problem of football hooligans. He spoke from a position of knowledge—even expertise—and I hope that Home Office Ministers and the Minister for Sport will read his speech carefully. I am pleased that he has neither lost his edge in debate nor stopped calling for action from his own side. His Front Bench has been diminished by his absence, and I hope that in the not too distant future he will experience ministerial life after death.

Mr. Banks: I would not take it for double the salary.

Mr. Knight: Perhaps the Government will be open to bids.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) covered several issues that affect his constituency. He spoke movingly about people's fear of their homes being flooded and the problems that they experience as a result of flooding. Part of my constituency has been flooded, so I know that it is an ongoing problem. The Institution of Civil Engineers recently considered flooding, and it said that one of the problems was that the Government's policy was piecemeal and inadequate and that spending should be doubled. I do not want to start to raise what may seem to be party political points, but I hope that the Minister with responsibility for flooding will bear in mind that if more money is needed to deal with the problem, Members on both sides of the House would expect the Government to vote more money to it. Nothing can be more serious than having one's home flooded and all one's assets destroyed as a result.

The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross) spoke about ambulance chasers. I think that he is on to something in that respect. I share his worry that we may be importing a trend from America. Last time I was in the United States, I heard a radio advertisement that ran, "Have you ever been affected by food poisoning? Did you get sick from a sausage or ill from an eel? If you did, telephone this number—we are attorneys at law and we will pursue your claim." That is something that we could do without. I should perhaps declare an interest in that I am a lawyer. When I qualified as a solicitor, my profession had a rule that one could not advertise, and my partner and I managed to build up a highly successful firm without ever having to do so. The legal profession has lost something now that it is able to advertise and, in some cases, chase work.

The hon. Member for Teignbridge went on to discuss the problem of self-harm. He is right to say that those who are distressed or disturbed need proper specialist care. I want to add a third dimension to his comments. Self-harm admission may mask something else.

A young woman who is an artist and a good friend of two musicians whom I know showed all the signs of suffering self-harm for a long time. She would appear with bruises and claim that she had fallen down the stairs; she would have other injuries, and sometimes her clothes were torn. After deep discussion over a long time, it was revealed that she was not suffering from self-harm but was a victim of domestic violence. She was so frightened of revealing what had happened that she preferred to blame herself rather than admit that she was a victim of domestic violence. I therefore believe that those who look after people who admit self-harm need expertise to discern symptoms that may not always be obvious when someone presents themselves to a doctor or at a hospital.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) made an excellent contribution. I agreed with his early points. As in my hon. Friend's constituency, agriculture plays a large part in my constituency, and he was right about the unacceptable power of supermarkets. Many farmers, especially dairy farmers whom I know, are worried about that. My hon. Friend went on to mention policing and then started to consider the meaning of happiness. I shall confine myself to saying that, as long as he is our pairing Whip and can decide which members of my party can be slipped from the House, my idea of happiness is listening to him.

The hon. Member for North Cornwall gave us the benefit of his perspective on the issues that have been raised today. I hear a lot from him because I sit opposite him on the Modernisation Committee. I do not always agree with him, but it is worth listening to his contributions, which are always thought-provoking. He did not disappoint us today. He mentioned pylons, which are worrying. He said that in bygone days, people living in a village gave three cheers when they saw the pylons arrive. What's new? Early adverts for smoking told us that it was a healthy pursuit. We were initially told that

[Mr. Knight]

asbestos was a wonder product that would not catch fire. It was only later, with knowledge, that we learned otherwise.

The hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) gave us his opinion on matters further from home. He made a thoughtful speech and all hon. Members are united in our support for a peaceful resolution to the dangerous situation about which he spoke.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) is a permanent feature of such debates, although he was a late arrival today. He made many points with his customary vigour and effectiveness. I believe that he agreed with in an intervention by my hon. Friend the Member for South Holland and The Deepings that happiness comes from what you have, not what you cannot attain. I am not sure whether that is true. I believe that Oscar Wilde said that there are two disappointments in life. One is never achieving one's lifelong ambition, the other is achieving it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West mentioned his involvement in the all-party obesity group. I wish him well with that venture because people tend to snigger when one refers to the problems that those who are grossly overweight can suffer. I believe that it is unacceptable in a civilised society that discrimination on the ground of size is still regarded as acceptable in many sectors of commerce.

Like the hon. Member for North Cornwall, I shall finish with an offer. If any hon. Member decides to visit east Yorkshire in the recess, I should not only be delighted to show them the Yorkshire coast, but to buy them a drink.

2.9 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Stephen Twigg): If any hon. Member wishes to visit suburban north London during the recess, they are very welcome to do so—in fact, they can join me straight after the debate and assist at my advice surgery at 4 o'clock this afternoon.

We have, as ever, had a wide-ranging debate. I am always impressed by the way in which these debates are able to fill whatever time is allocated for them. When we arrived this morning and saw that the Benches were more sparsely populated than usual, some of us feared that we might not fill the full five hours, but we have done so. I shall do my best in the next 20 minutes to respond to all of the points raised. If I fail to do so completely in respect of every speech, I shall do my best to ensure that Departments respond as quickly and efficiently as possible.

I shall draw the remarks made by the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) about tourism to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. I was not aware of the apparently enormous disparity between England and Scotland and Wales. The right hon. Gentleman's rallying cry was that he sought not parity, but justice. I am not sure how near to parity one has to get to achieve justice, but it sounds as though there is a large disparity, and I shall certainly draw that to my right hon. Friend's attention.

I am pleased to concur with the right hon. Gentleman's remarks about the modernisation of the House, especially the greater constituency work load that we all bear these days. Fridays often afford hon. Members the opportunity to do that constituency work. I have to admit that I was rather pleased that business finished early on Wednesday, as it enabled me to attend the annual meeting of Enfield council and to welcome the new Conservative mayor of Enfield, Graham Eustance, to his position.

I shall now try to respond to the points made by a combination of the usual suspects and the pre-recess debate virgins, whom I hope we will welcome back in other pre-recess debates—the usual suspects of the future. My hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Fulham (Mr. Coleman) expressed concern about the abuse of right to buy. The Government have commissioned research into the extent and type of such abuse and its effect on the housing market. The results of that research are expected in November and will be made publicly available. The Government do not rule out taking legislative action in future to close loopholes in the right-to-buy rules.

Right to buy has brought great personal benefit to many thousands of families who have bought their properties, but it has many negative features as well. In my area, about half the council property that existed 20 years ago no longer exists, and we have a serious shortage of affordable housing for rent for families in need. As the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) said, that is a major national issue that has been neglected by Governments of both main parties. We must get a grip on it.

As always, the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink), who is certainly one of the usual suspects in this type of debate, raised many issues and connected them to his constituency. Street crime is a hugely serious issue—one that most if not all of us encounter as constituency MPs. Although street crime is prevalent across the country, it is highly concentrated in a small number of mostly urban areas: it is a striking statistic that 10 police force areas account for 82 per cent. of street robberies. The Government are focusing on those 10 areas, but we must not neglect the rest of the country when tackling a major problem that must be grasped by the police and others.

The hon. Gentleman also spoke about the third road for Canvey Island and issued a challenge to my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay), who was absent from the debate. I am advised that the Government recognise the importance attached to those transport improvements and that we are working with Essex county council to resolve the outstanding issues. It should be possible to complete the work well before the next round of annual progress reports, and we will consider the case for the scheme before the next settlement. If the hon. Gentleman wants to follow that matter up, I shall be happy to pursue it with him.

The hon. Gentleman raised several other matters that I will not have time to deal with if I am to respond to other hon. Members, but let me touch on Cyprus, with which he closed his speech. I have the privilege to represent a constituency that has a large number of Cypriots, both Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots—in fact more Cypriots live in Enfield, Southgate than in any other part of the world, with the exception of Cyprus itself, of course. There was some optimism earlier this year when the latest round of talks between President Clerides and Mr. Denktash began. It is positive that the talks are continuing and that the third round has been completed.

The United Kingdom has a vital role to play. We are a guarantor power and we have an important role to play in supporting Cyprus's application to become part of the European Union.

I concur with the hon. Gentleman's remarks, including the talks between President Clerides and Mr. Denktash and the accession process. If Cyprus is to become part of the EU, as I hope it will, economically the greatest beneficiaries will be the Turkish Cypriots, if a united Cyprus comes in. If necessary, with a divided Cyprus, we would see the Republic of Cyprus coming in. I think that all of us hope that we can achieve a just and lasting peaceful settlement for Cyprus that will benefit that part of the world and all the people of Cyprus.

My hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas), who is unable to remain in the Chamber, raised a number of issues. I shall concentrate on the matter of hate crime, and especially the extremely disturbing spate of anti-semitic attacks over recent months. Like my hon. Friend, I have a significant Jewish community in my constituency. I am well aware of the real fear and hurt that there is in that community at what we have witnessed in this country and in other parts of the world. That is most notable in France, where the scale of anti-semitic attacks, and the nature of some of those in Paris, Marseilles and elsewhere, are appalling.

As my hon. Friend said, we saw the recent incident at the Finsbury Park synagogue. As he said, it affected an old and longstanding—it is quite small now—Jewish community in that part of London. Everything must be done to tackle hate crime in all its forms, including anti-semitic crime. There is often a view that somehow anti-semitism is something of the past. Tragically it is not. It is still very much alive and with us, and it needs to be tackled seriously. I know that my colleagues in the Home Office have been in discussions with the Board of Deputies of British Jews, with the Community Security Trust and others from the Jewish community to ensure that all is done to take the matter forward.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) raised a number of important issues. Like him, I went to state schools. I am not sure that it is quite the same in this place as at Southgate comprehensive school, but it is rather like bringing the games in for the last day before the holidays. He referred to what is clearly a major constituency issue on the Braer tanker grounding of nine years ago. I shall draw his remarks to the attention of colleagues, particularly in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

The hon. Gentleman raised the issue of the common fisheries policy, which was taken up by other hon. Members. Clearly the matter needs to be taken forward. The Government expect the proposals from the Commission to be produced by the end of May. We are disappointed as a Government that the proposals from Brussels did not emerge sooner. We shall continue to press, and we attach great importance to the debate and to taking matters forward as set out by the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) raised many issues, as ever. I will not be able to do justice to them all. I agree that we need to address the issue of fireworks, and it is being addressed in government. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) has raised the matter, as has my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan). The Government are taking up the issue.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon described the reform of local government funding as a bit of a nightmare. Having attended a Cabinet Committee yesterday that was considering it, I can say that it certainly is. I am sure that we shall have winners. But sadly we shall also have losers. It will be quite a task to get things right. Perhaps speaking sneakily as a London Member, I am aware that we have extremely serious recruitment problems in public services in London and the south-east. I know that they are not exclusive to our part of the country, but there is strong feeling about that.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's strong and consistent commitment to securing the modernisation of the House. I agree with her on term limits, but I disagree with her on the payment of Select Committee Chairs. That could be one way in which we can strengthen the Select Committee system and give greater weight to the task of parliamentary scrutiny, and therefore give Parliament a greater role in our national political debate.

The hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside) made a powerful speech on behalf of his constituents. It is important that we in Government listen carefully to what he said. I hope that it is not true that consent has gone from the Good Friday agreement, and that we can take the agreement forward. The hon. Gentleman raised a number of issues regarding the current status of the IRA ceasefire in relation to Castlereagh. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland wrote to him this week, stating that there will be a full reply to the hon. Gentleman's question as soon as possible. I will chase up my right hon. Friend on that matter. All of us in the House want to see a genuine and fully-fledged peace in Northern Ireland. Let us hope that we achieve it sooner rather than later.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) told us that the French are the Olympic cricket champions, which I did not know. He also told us that he would be supporting France against the team of the hon. Member for Castle Point—Senegal. As an avid Arsenal supporter, I shall have to support France as well, although we may need to look to Senegal for players in the Arsenal team.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham said that from his experience as Minister for Sport, he was careful about predicting what would happen at the World cup. Having listened to his story, I should make it clear from the Dispatch Box that I fully expect that England will win the World cup.

My hon. Friend went on to give us a detailed and highly informed analysis of the impact of the football disorder legislation that was introduced following the appalling events at Euro 2000. Clearly, significant progress has been made, but my hon. Friend highlighted disturbing differences in the impact of that legislation in different parts of the country. He raised the issue of training for magistrates. The figures that he set out, contrasting Merseyside with Staffordshire, were striking. I shall draw the matter to the attention of colleagues in the Home Office and in the Lord Chancellor's Department. My hon. Friend also told us about football violence in other parts of the world, and gave a plug for the BBC's series on the issue, the next episode of which will focus on the Italian club, Lazio.

[Mr. Stephen Twigg]

Like the hon. Member for North Cornwall, I think that in his closing remarks about protecting both the Union flag and St. George's flag, my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham made a powerful point, which I hope we will consider further. It is important that the flag should unite the people—the English people in the case of the flag of St. George, and the people of the United Kingdom as a whole in the case of the Union Jack. I will draw that to the attention of colleagues.

The hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) raised a number of important issues, as did others, including the shadow Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire, concerning flood and coastal defences. I am advised—it is nice to get advice on these occasions—that the Government are committed to sustaining flood and coastal defences.

Funding for DEFRA's programme for investing in flood warning arrangements and flood and coastal defences is increasing from £66 million in 2000-01 to £114 million in 2003-04. Funding for future years is being considered as part of the current spending review process. Significantly more money is thus being made available, and I am sure that hon. Members' arguments today will be taken into account as part of that important review.

Mr. Francois: I am grateful for the Minister's remarks about funding, which is clearly important. However, part of the problem is bureaucracy and the over-interpretation of EU regulations. Can the hon. Gentleman reassure me that he has taken that on board?

Mr. Twigg: The hon. Member for North Cornwall referred to the DEFRA bureaucracy. I confess that the DEFRA bureaucracy provided me with the answer on funding, but not on the other matter. I will pursue the matter with DEFRA after the debate, rather than making something up off the top of my head, which might not be the wisest thing to do.

Mr. Greg Knight: Very honest.

Mr. Twigg: Perhaps too honest. I shall be more careful in future.

The hon. Member for Rayleigh raised the issue of a proposed new estate of 1,700 houses and an industrial estate in South Woodham Ferrers in his constituency. Any such proposal, particularly on the scale that he describes, would cause concern in any of our constituencies. We face difficult dilemmas in striking the right balance between national targets and local autonomy. I endorse the point made by the hon. Member for North Cornwall that, although local autonomy is clearly the ideal, complete local autonomy on these matters would probably cause us greater difficulties in relieving some of the housing pressures that have been drawn to our attention in this and other debates. I am not necessarily saying that we have got the balance right; much more needs to be done.

The hon. Member for Teignbridge (Richard Younger-Ross), who is becoming one of the usual suspects, even though he has only been in the House for just under a year, raised a number of issues that have been dealt with by the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire and the hon. Member for North Cornwall, and I largely concur with their remarks.

The hon. Member for Teignbridge talked about his local youth council. The low turnout by young people in last year's election highlights the fact that one of our responsibilities as parliamentarians, individually and collectively, is to go out and seek the views of young people. I am impressed that in my area the Enfield youth council has developed into a youth assembly. All the secondary schools held elections, most of which were hotly contested and had a very high turnout. The youth assembly will provide a voice for local people, and that is very important and most welcome.

The hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) raised a series of important issues, including constituency matters on which I will ask the relevant Departments to reply, and general issues about rural areas and agriculture. He also made a number of philosophical points, and it made a wonderfully refreshing change to have a little dose of philosophy in one of our debates.

The hon. Gentleman drew our attention to the fact that, instead of focusing on materialism as a source of human happiness, we should look a little deeper and a little wider. Although individual rights matter, it is important that we balance them against the responsibilities that we have as individuals and collectively. The hon. Gentleman made that point very powerfully.

Arising from that is the question of voluntary activity, to which many hon. Members referred. There are many positive examples of volunteering. When I got on the tube at Southgate this morning, people were collecting for ActionAid. I believe that collections are occurring throughout the country as part of a big charity appeal. Such initiatives are very positive and very welcome, but we need to encourage more of them, and I welcome the remarks that the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings made in that respect.

I have referred to a number of the points made by the hon. Member for North Cornwall. I did not have him down as a rugby player, and it was interesting to hear that he is one.

Mr. Tyler: Was.

Mr. Twigg: He is a former rugby player.

We had an interesting exchange about the relative merits of the 19th-century Liberal and Tory parties, but the main conclusion that I would draw is that neither really succeeded in liberating the poorest, which is why the Labour party had to be founded 100 years ago. *[Interruption.]* I had to make one tribal point in my speech.

I pay great tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North who made a very passionate speech. His work as the chairman of Labour Friends of India is widely respected in all parts of the House. The situation with India and Pakistan is very grave and disturbing. All efforts are being made to bring about a de-escalation of the present tension, but clearly there is a very real terrorist threat, as my hon. Friend noted. It is vital that the Pakistani Government do all that they can to end terrorism so that dialogue about the situation in Kashmir can begin.

The hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) made a number of very important points. Letters about the siting of mobile phone masts fill every Member's constituency postbag. The health case is not proven, but that works both ways and it is perfectly understandable that our constituents are concerned. I have to confess to being terribly addicted to my mobile phone, but I do not drive a car, so I am never guilty of the other practice to which the hon. Gentleman referred. I know that the Government are keeping that matter under review.

I thank everyone who has taken part in what has been a fascinating, wide-ranging and good-humoured debate. We now break for two weeks for the Whitsun recess, although listening to hon. Members today I was under the impression that it is really the World cup recess, but it would probably have to go on a little longer if that were the case. Of course, we are marking the Queen's jubilee as well. I thank the House authorities and all those who work here for what they do to assist Members of Parliament. In particular, I thank my private office, for briefing me throughout the debate and for the general work that they do to assist me in my task as Deputy Leader of the House.

It being half-past Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Climate Change (HFCs)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

2.30 pm

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise this important matter, even if in getting to this point the ride was a little bumpy along the way.

My main concern is to expose an international fix that is designed to prop up the right of an industry—the refrigeration and air conditioning industry—to pollute, and to block the progress of a green alternative technology. The industry is dominated by hydrofluorocarbon interests. Some might think that area rather technical, and be tempted to dismiss the matter as a side issue, but in fact it is crucial to our success in delivering on our Kyoto targets.

HFCs are extremely powerful global warming gases. On average, they have 2,274 times the global warming potential of carbon dioxide. It is no surprise, therefore, that Kyoto included HFCs among the emissions that must be reduced to stop global warming. The UK fully recognises the pollution potential of HFCs, and the Government's stated position is clear. According to "Climate Change: the UK Programme", published in November 2000:

> "HFCs should only be used where other safe, technically feasible, cost-effective and more environmentally acceptable alternatives do not exist . . . HFCs are not sustainable in the long term . . . HFC emissions will not be allowed to rise unchecked."

According to the same document, alternative technologies do exist to counter what the Government identify as a

> "steep upward trend in emissive uses of hydrofluorocarbons".

For example, in Germany, which has some of the strictest health and safety standards in the world, about 95 per cent. of domestic refrigerators use hydrocarbons. HCs have negligible global warming potential. They are flammable, but the technology is well proven and safe. After 70 million operational years in Germany, not a single accident has taken place.

In October 2000, the Department of Trade and Industry commissioned the Swann Report, entitled "The Public Policy Interest in the UK in Standardisation". It stated:

> "Standards can be used to create trade barriers as well as to remove them. It is important for government to work against the danger of standards being used to create trade barriers, but rather to promote the very beneficial effects of standardisation."

Professor Swann was right to identify this potential generic problem with standard setting.

Turning to product standards for refrigeration, there are four key European and international standards committees, including the CEN—the European Standardisation Committee and the ISO, the International Standard Organisation. The HFC industry predominates, with majorities over rival HC manufacturers and users of 12:4, 9:3, 12:0 and 15:4. The TC182 committee is overwhelmingly dominated by HFC interests, and is chaired by a consultant for the American Air-Conditioning and Refrigeration Institute, which has a formal policy against the use of HCs. That committee has proposed a standard for hydrocarbon air conditioning that would outlaw 80 per cent. of units currently in use, and which would also cover refrigeration equipment. The

[Jane Griffiths]

introduction of such requirements would have the same effect on commercial refrigeration equipment for supermarkets, convenience stores, pubs, restaurants and so on, for which similar restrictions would apply.

A review meeting in Switzerland is scheduled for early June, but it is still likely to be HFC-dominated, with the HC voice either not heard or overridden. The refrigerant charge in air conditioning is relatively large. If that sector of the market is shut off to HCs, it will remove most of the incentive for market entrants to invest in the cleaner technology. That offends against a sense of British fair play. As I said, Professor Swann underlined how important it is for the Government

"to work against the danger of standards being used to create trade barriers".

My purpose today is to discover what work the Government have done against that danger lurking in refrigeration and air conditioning.

The response from the Department of Trade and Industry to complaints about the issue has been standoffish. The Department told one HC manufacturer, Calor, to take the matter up with

"European and international fora as appropriate".

The Department claims that the standardisation process is voluntary and independent of Government. That is true up to a point—the European Commission can mandate its committee, the CEN. What moves have our Government made in COREPER to encourage the Commission to mandate the CEN that HFCs should be used only when other, safe, technically feasible, cost-effective and more environmentally acceptable alternatives do not exist, or that HC standards should be set by HC expertise rather than HFC vested interests?

Lamely, the DTI has also urged Calor to cultivate "natural allies" and

"collaborate with other HC producers"

to

"try to persuade others in the industry"—

the HFC industry—

"to be more positive to HCs."

That, I am sorry to say, is naive. Although they have existed for years, HC refrigerants are effectively in the position of market entrants with relatively little clout against a vast industry that dominates the standard-setting process and is backed by a richly endowed international lobbying front known as EPEE—which, incidentally, is the French for "sword". My view is that the Government have a strong interest in ensuring that the international standard-setting procedures are above suspicion, and not driven by the wish to create trade barriers and market closure. Calor has made representations to the CEN on the issue, but what representations has the Government made to it to ensure that the process can reclaim international respect?

I understand that a better regulation action plan will be published soon by the EU and that the European Parliament will be urged to devolve some of its responsibilities to self-regulating industries. In principle, that sounds good, but, as the evidence shows, self-regulation is in practice subject to anti-competitive abuse. What signals does that send? What confidence can we have in such a well-intentioned process if it is manipulated by vested interests against market entrants, against innovation and against the environmental policies of several EU Governments, including our own?

It will not be good enough for Governments and Ministers to wash their hands of the matter by claiming nobility of intent. Far from being self-standing, the process will be tarred as self-seeking. What are the Government doing to protect the honour of better regulation and self-regulation from flagrant manipulation?

If that move is left unchecked, the losers will not only be the HC manufacturers—for whom I hold no brief—but the integrity of the CEN and the better regulation initiative. The global environment will continue for generations to pay the price exacted by greenhouse gas manufacturers clever enough to manipulate the system.

One way to examine the Government's attitude to HFCs is to look at what they have done when installing air conditioning and refrigeration systems in their own buildings. Do the Government walk as they talk on HFCs? The Government's stated position is clear:

"HFCs should only be used where other safe, technically feasible, cost-effective and more environmentally acceptable alternatives do not exist".

So, one would have thought that when installing air conditioning and refrigeration units in their own buildings the Government would ensure that they would do so only where other safe, technically feasible, cost-effective and more environmentally acceptable alternatives do not exist.

The good news is that they have followed that policy. I am grateful to Star Refrigeration for informing me that the government building leased to the International Maritime Organisation—just across the river from us here in the House—is having two large 1.4 MW building services water chilling systems installed, using ammonia refrigerant. So is the message is getting through? Unfortunately not.

In the past few weeks I have tabled questions to various Departments to find out what they have been doing. I tabled the questions on 22 April and out of the five Departments questioned, I have not yet received a reply from the Ministry of Defence. I hope that that is a sign that I will receive a full answer to the question. I do not, of course, expect my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs to respond to that now.

The first to reply, on 30 April, was the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. It said that it had no significant building projects under construction—I will come back to that—and that the Department sought to avoid or minimise air conditioning but where it had to be used, the use of coolants that contribute to climate change will be avoided wherever that is safe, cost-effective and technically feasible.

We have seen a watering down of the Government's policy. We have moved from a presumption not to use HFCs unless there are other safe, technically feasible, cost-effective and more environmentally acceptable alternatives to one where coolants that contribute to climate change will be avoided wherever it is safe, cost-effective and technically feasible to do so.

The next answer came from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, which had been asked about the coolant for the new Government Communications Headquarters building. It said that the building will use the refrigerant HFC 134A, a commercially available, non-ozone-depleting refrigerant. That is true, but what about the climate change impact? The Greenpeace position paper on 134A states:

> "We must not attempt to solve the ozone crisis by contributing to another environmental disaster, such as global warming leading to climate change."

An answer to a separate question reveals that HFC 134A was responsible for 2.61 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions in 2000. That is not quite the Government climate change policy of not using HFC unless there is no choice.

The Secretary of State for Health provided me with a list of 77 building projects currently under way, but the information on the coolant is not collected centrally. However, the Department did say that NHS Model Engineering Specification Rev 3 November 1997, MES C10 Refrigeration Plant General advises that HFC 134A or 407C and its associate blends are used. That is even further from the climate change policy.

I will not detain the House with lengthy resumés of other parliamentary answers I have received. However, it is significant that the Lord Chancellor's Department states that although it has no building projects under construction, it has a number in the planning stage and its policy is not to use a coolant if possible, but if it has to, it must be non-ozone-depleting. There is no consideration of climate change impact. Disappointingly, the Government are not doing very well in implementing their own climate change policies.

I have shown the problems that are being created by the standard-setting process which is working against the Government's climate change policy and how the market for coolants and refrigerants will continue to be skewed towards a product that has massive climate change implications. I also think that I have shown that, perhaps unwittingly, the Government may be undermining their own climate change programme. The question to my right hon. Friend, to whom I am most grateful for coming to the House this afternoon, is what are we going to do about it?

In conclusion, I have two specific questions for my right hon. Friend. What will the Government do to prevent standard setting for refrigerants from undermining our climate change programme and meeting our Kyoto undertakings? Secondly, what will they do to ensure that when they buy refrigerants or coolants for their own buildings, they do not act against their own climate change programme?

May I make a suggestion? How about placing an item on the agenda of the next Green Ministers meeting stating that all Departments should draw up their construction advice or specifications so that they marry up with the climate change programme? I would begin the parliamentary recess feeling happier if I could get such an undertaking from my right hon. Friend today.

2.44 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I shall do my best to respond to the debate. When I am speaking on matters that are outside the direct subject of my portfolio, I try to be as well-informed as possible and to get up to speed on the topic. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) has raised highly technical issues on a subject that is itself highly technical, and neither the title of the debate nor any of the advance information enable me to respond in the focused way that she requests. As my hon. Friend is aware, my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment, whose commitment to and knowledge of the issues is undoubted, is attending an international conference on matters within his portfolio.

My hon. Friend has raised issues that are the responsibility both of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and of the Department of Trade and Industry. I will try to address the points that she has made and I also undertake to respond to her in writing after the debate.

Our input to CEN, to which my hon. Friend referred, is primarily through the British Standards Institution, which is an independent body. We have input through officials, too, but the situation is slightly more complex than she suggested.

My hon. Friend made it clear that her speech drew largely on briefings from Calor, which produces a range of hydrocarbon refrigerants. Calor has written to Ministers and officials at DEFRA and the DTI about the difficulties it has experienced with the standard-setting process. As my hon. Friend observed, the company sees that process as heavily influenced by the HFC industry. The current standard means that hydrocarbons could not be used to replace ozone-depleting substances in some of the smallest refrigeration equipment. The only alternative would be to use HFCs.

The prevailing view is that if Calor focused its energies more towards discussions with refrigeration compressor manufacturers—for example, by forming alliances with the hydrocarbon industry in Germany, where most domestic refrigerators use hydrocarbon refrigerant, as my hon. Friend pointed out—it would have been more successful in reaching a satisfactory outcome. I understand that that point has been made directly to the company.

My hon. Friend has raised an important issue and I welcome this opportunity to address it. Climate change is a significant global concern and some change in the world's climate is inevitable. Some of the worst effects of climate change could be avoided, however, if global action were taken to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

The United Kingdom continues to put climate change at the top of its environmental agenda. We strongly support the Kyoto protocol as the international framework for global action to tackle greenhouse gas emissions. We are one of the few OECD countries to have met, and gone beyond, the target agreed at the Earth summit in Rio in 1992 to return our emissions of greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2000.

We published our climate change programme in November 2000. It sets out how the UK will deliver its Kyoto target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5 per cent. below 1990 levels by the first Kyoto commitment period—2008-12. The programme also explains how we shall move towards our domestic goal of cutting carbon dioxide emissions by 20 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010. We estimate that the programme could cut the UK's greenhouse gas emissions to 23 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010, which would be significantly beyond our Kyoto target.

HFCs are one of the six gases in the Kyoto "basket". They are man-made, fluorinated greenhouse gases which, in some cases, have a global warming potential more than 1,000 times greater than carbon dioxide. Gases such as

[Alun Michael]

HFC 134A were developed about a decade ago, mainly to replace ozone-depleting CFCs in refrigeration and air-conditioning equipment.

In 2000, the Government recognised the importance of giving industry a clear signal on the future of HFCs.

In the UK climate change programme, therefore, we set out the four key elements of our position. First, HFCs should be used only where other safe, technically feasible, cost-effective and more environmentally acceptable alternatives do not exist. Secondly, HFCs are not sustainable in the long term. The Government believe that continued technological developments will mean that, eventually, it may be possible to replace HFCs in applications where they are used. Thirdly, HFC emission reduction strategies should not undermine commitments to phasing out ozone-depleting substances under the Montreal protocol. Fourthly, HFC emissions will not be allowed to rise unchecked.

At European level, EU Environment Ministers agreed in December 2001 that legislation to control emissions from HFCs and other fluorinated gases would be introduced as part of the European climate change programme. We expect the European Commission to come forward with proposals later this year.

My hon. Friend specifically raised the relationship between standard setting and HFCs. Product standardisation is a voluntary industry process facilitated, as I said at the start of my speech, by standards bodies such as the British Standards Institution. Its purpose is to provide the certainty that industry requires on market needs. I emphasise again the fact that BSI is independent of Government.

Product standards are discussed in various committees made up of technical experts drawn from business, who provide their time and expertise voluntarily. BSI provides the framework for discussions in the UK, and representatives from its committees act as UK delegates to, and prepare for, the European and international standards bodies. The arrangements underline the fact that Government and industry together need to tackle many of these issues in order for this country to be successful in meeting its obligations.

European and international standard-setting bodies are currently looking at standards for refrigeration and air-conditioning plant and equipment. That covers the use of both HFCs and hydrocarbons, which are alternatives to HFCs in certain applications. In doing so, their key focus is safety. Hydrocarbons are flammable, which does raise safety issues when they are considered as refrigerants. I do not want to get that out of proportion, but it is an aspect that must be taken into consideration. The refrigerant, if it escapes or leaks, is in electrical equipment, so there is the possibility of fire.

Also, it is not a simple matter of substituting one refrigerant for another. To work with hydrocarbons, equipment needs a good deal of modification. The industry would probably need to use equipment designed for hydrocarbons rather than to convert, as it would be difficult to accommodate such a change in design. However, the problems are not insurmountable and manufacturers of air conditioning and refrigeration plant and their component suppliers have technical solutions to those problems.

We are encouraged that some products using hydrocarbon refrigerants are already on the market, both in domestic and in commercial appliances. Of course it is important to be able to determine safe levels of hydrocarbons to be used in those products. There will be no quick fixes on that, and discussions in European and international bodies will be needed to ensure that the safety issues are addressed adequately, while at the same time enabling environmentally beneficial new technology to become established.

Emissions of HFCs have the potential to make a significant contribution to greenhouse gas emissions. In refrigeration and air-conditioning markets in particular, considerable growth in usage and emissions is expected as ozone-depleting refrigerants are phased out. It is therefore important that action be taken soon at European level to limit and minimise emissions, providing the stimulus to industry to develop more sustainable solutions in the longer term.

Initial estimates prepared for my Department indicate that hydrocarbons may currently comprise between 5 and 10 per cent. of the UK refrigeration market. At present levels, these already enable us to avoid emissions of some 23 kilotonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent. To put that in perspective, it is the equivalent of about 0.7 per cent. of current emissions from the refrigeration sector. We expect that this will grow over the current decade, even without further controls on HFCs.

Pending EU-wide action, the Government are taking a number of steps with both the refrigeration and air-conditioning sectors and other users of HFCs. In the UK climate change programme, we proposed the definition of minimum qualifications for people who handle refrigerants, including HFCs.

The industry is now working up a national registration scheme for refrigeration and handlers. Setting minimum training requirements will help limit refrigerant emissions. When we receive a final agreed framework from industry, we hope to introduce, with industry support, legislation to make the scheme mandatory. A scheme would also cover personnel handling mobile air-conditioning systems in cars. It will be important to limit HFC emissions from that fast-growing sector. We also plan to ban the supply of HFCs and other refrigerants in disposable containers.

We recognise that HFCs have made a considerable contribution to vital efforts to tackle ozone depletion. We cannot be complacent about the state of the ozone layer, but an internationally accepted and effective framework is in place to ensure that we remain on track. However, climate change now presents us with an equally pressing environmental challenge—perhaps the biggest that the planet now faces.

In that context, HFCs will pose an increasingly significant problem. It is therefore vital that the industry work constructively in collaboration with the Government to address this new challenge. On the industry's side, those efforts must be made in developing new technology, but industry bodies such as those setting product standards also have a role to play. The Government need to ensure that we send the right signals to industry about long-term sustainability, so that the industry can adapt to meet those imperatives.

The Government are urging the European Commission to produce effective proposals on how to control HFC emissions as soon as possible. The industry's response to the need to ta[illegible]zone depletion has been a success story, and I loo[illegible]orward to similar successes in tackling climate change.

2.56 pm

Mr. Allstair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Since the conclusion of the last debate, I have received news that a helicopter engaged in duties on behalf the lighthouse board has been involved in an accident in Orkney. I am not yet fully aware of the circumstances, but I understand that the helicopter, which was working in fairly high winds and carrying a load underneath it on a steel rope, crashed into the sea when that steel rope snapped and became entangled in the helicopter's rotor blades.

People in coastal communities throughout the country are always deeply aware of the risks that those who work for bodies such as the lighthouse board, the Royal National Lifeboat Institution and the Maritime and Coastguard agency take upon themselves in the course of their duties. I am mindful of the fact that we are about to go into recess, and I would not wish the House do so without placing on record our concern not only for the missing pilot—we hope that he will be recovered safely—but for his family and work colleagues at what must clearly be a very difficult time for them.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Although that is not a point of order for the occupant of the Chair, I too wish to express my concern at the news that the hon. Gentleman brings. The House would wish to express its concern to the pilot's family and its grateful thanks and appreciation to the emergency services for the work that they are no doubt currently undertaking.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 10 June 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Parenting

1. **Mr. David Kidney** (Stafford): What steps his Department is taking to establish local schemes for the promotion of positive parenting. [57044]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Hilary Benn): As well as supporting parents through Government initiatives such as sure start, the Home Office is currently funding a wide range of projects across the country by means of the family support grant. We are also funding parentline plus, a national 24-hour telephone service that gives advice and support. To date it has helped some 400,000 parents.

Mr. Kidney: I thank my hon. Friend, and congratulate him on his new position in the Government.

Does my hon. Friend accept that if all parents raised all children with love, giving warm and responsive care and setting clear boundaries, future generations would be more emotionally mature, responsible and self-confident? Are there not also great financial gains to be made from additional educational needs provision, health and social services and law enforcement? Is there not a case for universal provision of information, advice and classes for all parents, from a range of providers, promoting positive parenting?

Hilary Benn: I very much agree with my hon. Friend's comments about the basis of good and effective parenting, and particularly with what he said about love, support and encouragement. Those are the most important things that we, as parents, can give our children. I also entirely accept the need to ensure that there are places throughout the country to which parents can go for help and advice. That need not be seen as a mark of failure; there are times when we may all need some support and encouragement. We must put across the idea that asking for help and advice is something that all parents may need to do at some time during their lives as parents.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): I, too, congratulate the Minister on his new duties.

Given that a third of all male children will be convicted of a serious criminal offence at some stage, that more than that will become teenage smokers, and that about 40 per cent. will be involved in a conception ending in a termination—all those being issues of family confidence and competence—will the Minister try to encourage broadcasters to devote as much attention to family functioning as they give to cooking, cars and gardens?

Hilary Benn: I can only agree with the hon. Gentleman. Indeed, I will go so far as to suggest that Members on both sides of the House would welcome a little less focusing by broadcasters on dysfunctional families and a bit more encouragement for functional families.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): I welcome my hon. Friend to his post, and wish him well.

Is not positive parenting—through parents being given the tools with which to manage their children positively and effectively, without physical punishment—the key to dealing with so many problems in society, especially delinquency and antisocial behaviour? Should we not do far more of that, rather than locking up children in prison?

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend has raised an important point about the need for positive encouragement for children. As he will know, and as I can attest from my experience as a constituency Member, there are occasions when the behaviour of young people causes great distress and havoc to local communities. My constituents come to me in distress, and ask what we will do to protect them from the consequences. We also know, however, that such behaviour is strongly associated with problems in family upbringing and poor literacy skills. Those are the issues that we must address if we are to reduce the likelihood of reoffending by those young people.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I join others in congratulating the Minister, who certainly suffered no lack of positive parenting.

Is the Minister aware of the work of Dr. Stephen Scott of the department of child psychiatry at King's college London, which suggests that 80 per cent. of children who show behavioural problems by the age of five go on to develop more serious antisocial behaviour? Does the Minister know of the enormously important work being done by groups such as Befrienders—whom I recently visited—the Parent Network, the child development programme, and the child and adolescent psychiatry unit at the Maudsley hospital?

Is it not very sad that despite the sure start initiative, which the Minister mentioned, there is generally no response whatever in the United Kingdom to a child who shows behavioural problems at the age of five, and that all too often we wait until criminality emerges before we do anything?

Hilary Benn: I thank the hon. Gentleman, and my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Mr. Kidney) and the hon. Member for Worthing, West (Peter Bottomley), for their kind references to my appointment.

I was not aware of the research mentioned by the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) until I read a very good speech given to a conference recently by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, in which he too referred to it.

I agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about the need to provide support and help when children are at an early age, and we can identify those who are at risk. That is the purpose of sure start, which applies to children from birth until the age of three; but the hon. Gentleman is right to say that we must do more, and intervene early to prevent small problems from becoming larger problems later.

Mr. Letwin: I must read the Home Secretary's speech, as I am about to make one myself on the same subject. I wonder whether he mentioned the conclusions of the Rowntree Trust's study, which I think is called "Prevention through Family and Parenting Programmes". It concluded that successful programmes were those based on United States examples. Is it not a national disgrace that we have nothing remotely comparable to the Headstart programme, which has taken care of 15 million children with early behavioural problems and has mobilised vast resources in the voluntary sector and local communities as well as nationally? Does the Minister agree that we need to emulate that if we are to begin to tackle youth crime?

Hilary Benn: Yes, I do. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the sure start programme is modelled on the American Headstart programme, which was initiated by the Johnson Administration in the United States in the 1960s. Long-term studies of the Headstart programme demonstrate the benefits of such intervention. I have not read the research to which the hon. Gentleman refers. I shall add it to the very large pile of reading on which I am currently engaged in my new responsibilities.

Asylum Accommodation Centres

2. **Mr. Mark Lazarowicz** (Edinburgh, North and Leith): If he will consult Scottish Ministers on the provision of services within accommodation centres for asylum seekers which may be located in Scotland. [57045]

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): As my hon. Friend knows, the operation of accommodation centres is a reserved matter. However, my officials are working closely with the Scottish Executive. My hon. Friend will also know that clause 34(1) of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill requires us to consult Scottish Ministers prior to establishing an accommodation centre in Scotland.

Mr. Lazarowicz: I congratulate my hon. Friend on her new post in Government and thank her for her answer, which is helpful. As she pointed out, the proposals going through Parliament specifically provide for consultation with the Scottish Executive on the provision of accommodation centres, but there is no requirement for consultation with the Scottish Executive on education. Given that asylum matters are reserved to this Parliament but that education is a devolved matter, does my hon. Friend accept that it may be more consistent to make specific provision for consultation with the Scottish Executive on education, not just on the provision of centres?

Beverley Hughes: The Scottish Executive have agreed that education in accommodation centres is part of a specific regime for asylum seekers and that it is therefore properly a reserved matter, but we recognise that to achieve our objectives—good quality education on-site, and consistent education for children in accommodation centres, wherever they are in the United Kingdom—we need to work with the grain of the practicalities and structure of education in Scotland. That is why officials have been working closely with colleagues in Scotland, especially on education matters. Those discussions will continue. Although there will not be a specific requirement to consult on education, we accept that in the provision of accommodation centres we need to consult specifically on education provision as we go forward.

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): I, too, congratulate the Minister on her new post. Does she agree that, as well as consulting Scottish Parliament Ministers, it is important that the Home Office has discussions with the local authority, the wider community and organisations with experience in the sector, such as the Refugee Council, before any final decisions are made on locations in Scotland?

Beverley Hughes: I thank the hon. Gentleman and also my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) for their welcome.

If a planning notification in relation to the proposal is eventually made, we will want the widest consultation possible. We have already made that clear. We will be taking the advice of the planning authority about how that should best be done, but wherever planning notifications are laid, we intend to consult local people as well as the local authority and others.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Given that the Minister wants to work with the grain, as she put it, of Scottish education, is there any pressure on Scottish education to act in the same way as the Home Secretary would wish to act in England?

Beverley Hughes: As I have already made clear, we want to ensure that children who are in accommodation centres, wherever those centres may be, have the same standard of education as children elsewhere, and that there is a consistent standard in accommodation centres across the UK. We will work with whoever is providing those services in accommodation centres in Scotland or elsewhere to ensure that that happens.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): May I congratulate the Minister on her new post and wish her well? I recall that we had some happy times together on the Home Affairs Committee.

As the Minister discusses with Scottish Ministers key issues such as educating children in or outside accommodation centres, the size and location of such centres, and the need for a statutory duty to provide legal help on-site, does she think that those Ministers will agree with the Government's proposals, or with the dozens of her own Back-Bench colleagues and all the respected non-governmental organisations, who oppose her totally on many of these matters?

Beverley Hughes: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his words of welcome. He is widening the issue, and as he knows, in the next two days some of the matters that he raises will be debated more fully during the remaining stages of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill.

We welcome the fact that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues have in no way objected to the principle of accommodation centres. It is clear that a range of views exists on size, location and so on. A full debate took place in Committee, and in the past week I have studied *Hansard* and read all the points of view that were expressed in Committee. They make riveting reading, and those debates will continue tomorrow. As we move forward and establish accommodation centres, we want to ensure that we can trial a number of variables, and the Home Secretary has already given a commitment to do that in respect of size. If such variables prove to be the way forward, we want to ensure that we can learn from the trials about the best way to implement them.

Police Resources (Greater Manchester)

3. **Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): If he will make a statement on police resources in Greater Manchester. [57046]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): It is good to be back, Mr. Speaker. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where have you been?"] To the Palace and the Mall. The increase in the policing grant for Greater Manchester is £9.5 million higher this year, and a further £5 million has been allocated for the security and policing of the Commonwealth games. There has been an increase of £2.7 million in available capital spending for equipment and technology—an increase of more than 40 per cent. on the previous year. Following the Budget, I am today announcing an increase of £2.4 million for policing and security in Greater Manchester, as part of a wider announcement nationally. Taken together with the crime fighting fund, the overall increase for this year is 6.9 per cent.

Mr. Brady: It would be wrong for me to take too much credit for the announcement that the Home Secretary has just made. However, he will be aware that the additional cost of policing next month's Commonwealth games in Manchester will be in excess of £8 million. The £5 million that has already been announced accounts for less than two thirds of the cost, and even if we take into account the £2.4 million that he kindly announced in advance of my question, we are still some way adrift of the additional cost. Which other budgets does he expect Greater Manchester police to cut as a result of his refusal to fund in full the policing of the games?

Mr. Blunkett: It is certainly true that the estimate provided by Greater Manchester police is higher than the 63 per cent. of the cost that we envisage finding, but that figure is £1 million higher than the formula that we inherited in 1997. On the hon. Gentleman's specific question about which budget will be cut, we expect Greater Manchester police to find the additional £3 million from the £7 million that it has in reserve.

Mr. Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central): I refer my right hon. Friend to the situation in my constituency and in other inner-city constituencies. We have a combination of low-level but extremely aggravating crime that destroys the quality of life in those communities, and—as he knows—a serious problem with murder. In considering future funding, will he take into account the fact that each murder costs about £1 million to investigate, and that peculiar circumstances apply in Greater Manchester? Perhaps he can also say whether he will ensure that we get value for money from Greater Manchester police and the chief constable, so that we can be certain that Greater Manchester gets the policing that it deserves.

Mr. Blunkett: I have been interested in the initiative taken in Greater Manchester and in the display of public disquiet and the commitment by the people of Manchester—particularly in the south of Manchester—to joining the police in tackling this serious issue. I was pleased to discuss with my hon. Friend how best to invest in, first, preventing and then overcoming the difficulties faced. We need to take into account the size of the challenge faced in Greater Manchester. On a slightly lighter note, I am sure that my hon. Friend would not wish us to allocate funds according to the number of homicides committed. I shall have to consider how best to balance those two factors.

Violent Crime

4. **Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): What targets he has for reducing levels of violent crime. [57049]

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): The Government are working to reduce all violent crime. The 2001 British crime survey showed that violent crime overall was down by 19 per cent. in 2000 as against 1999. Last year, street crime rose in some of our large towns and cities. We are working with 10 police forces and other agencies in those 10 areas to tackle street crime. The earlier announcement of resources from my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary includes details of an allocation of £27 million across those 10 forces today to enable them to tackle street crime.

Mr. Osborne: I noticed that the Minister did not repeat the Prime Minister's target of reducing street crime by the end of September. To clear up the confusion that has followed since the Prime Minister blurted that out at Prime Minister's questions seven weeks ago, will the Minister confirm that the Government expect street crime to fall in absolute terms by the end of September?

Mr. Denham: I have made it clear what we want to achieve. Street crime rose last year. First, we must reverse that increase, and then we must deliver long-term and sustainable reductions in street crime.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): What plans are there to tackle the violent crime of rape? It is nearly two years since the publication of the sex offences review, which suggested changes to the current defence of an honest but unreasonable belief in consent. When can we expect legislation to get that wholly outrageous defence off the statute book?

Mr. Denham: A number of aspects of the matter are currently under consideration, and in the near future we hope to make announcements that will be of interest to my hon. Friend. At the last Home Office questions, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary was asked about the joint report into the prosecution of rape. He said then that the Home Office would be leading a review by officials across Government Departments of how to respond to the low level of successful rape prosecutions. That work will be completed within the month.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Is it not the case that a growing amount of violent street crime involves guns? How can the Minister justify a situation in which an armed police officer who opens fire—even in self-defence—at an armed criminal is automatically suspended from all police operational duties for a long period of time, usually a minimum of 18 months? Is that not enormously wasteful and demoralising to some of the most highly trained and courageous officers in the police?

Mr. Denham: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. Thankfully, it is still the case that the use of firearms by the police in this country occurs on a relatively limited number of occasions each year. It has always been accepted by the police service that there should be proper procedures when someone is injured as a result. The hon. Gentleman's important point is how long it should take to satisfactorily conclude any investigation. That is a matter that I shall look into.

Mr. Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port and Neston): I welcome my right hon. Friend's response to the question. Does he agree that violent crime on the roads needs to be looked at carefully? We must drive forward our targets in that regard. I welcome also the speech of my noble Friend Lord Falconer last Thursday at the RoadPeace conference. Victims were at the heart of that speech. When are we likely to see a response to the sentencing review in that respect?

Mr. Denham: I shall write to my hon. Friend. I do not know precisely when the sentencing review will be completed. I am sure that everybody acknowledges the underlying point that he raises, as many of those maimed by dangerous drivers—and the relatives of those killed in road incidents—feel unfairly treated by the present system.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): May I take the Minister back to his reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne)? Is the Minister unwilling to endorse the Prime Minister's comments? Less than 48 hours later the Lord Chief Justice said:

> "you can have initiative after initiative . . . but if you don't touch the basic problems, you will never achieve public confidence".

Is not that a better approach? Part of the problem is that the Government have contributed to making the police's task of tackling violent crime more difficult by introducing such restrictions as best value, which has led to greater bureaucracy, and the new stop-and-search procedures, which will also add considerably to bureaucracy. Would it not be better to give adequate support to the police to carry out that task and leave alone the sort of gimmicks that the Prime Minister came up with?

Mr. Denham: I presume that the hon. Gentleman includes in his attack on gimmicks the actions taken by the Metropolitan police in their safer streets campaign which, in its eighth week, has already delivered a fall in street crime in the target boroughs of 21 per cent. compared with last year. In those areas that we have targeted across the country we will stop the rise in street crime, then cause levels to fall and take the measures necessary to sustain that fall. We will do that through practical support for the police—first, by delivering record and rising numbers of police officers; secondly, by ensuring that they are supported by the rest of the criminal justice system; and thirdly, by introducing, as we have done in the past few weeks, video identity parades to cut bureaucracy and time-wasting. It is those practical measures and others, undertaken in partnership with the police, the criminal justice agencies, education and local communities, that will enable this country to get on top of street crime.

Crime Reduction (Devon and Cornwall)

5. **Linda Gilroy** (Plymouth, Sutton): If he will make a statement about crime reduction in Devon and Cornwall in the last 12 months. [57051]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Michael Wills): In the most recently published recorded crime figures, in the 12 months to March 2001, crime in Devon and Cornwall fell by 7 per cent.

Linda Gilroy: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer and welcome him to his new position. If he is not already aware of the role that crime and disorder partnerships have played in the drop in crime figures, I recommend that he investigates them. Does he share my concern that the advent of crack cocaine to the streets of Plymouth in the past year threatens to reverse all that good work? Will he pay early attention to the bid for a pilot project for a seamless health-based approach to tackling drug crime and give us his opinion sooner rather than later?

Mr. Wills: I thank my hon. Friend for her kind words of welcome. Crack cocaine is a problem in Plymouth and we share her concerns. We guaranteed funding of nearly £500,000 from the communities against drugs programme in 2002-03 to tackle drug-related crime. As she is aware, the Devon and Cornwall constabulary has initiated Operation Ovidian in response to the emerging crack cocaine problem in Plymouth and throughout the area covered by the force.

We are aware of the funding bids that have been submitted to the criminal justice reserve fund and the recovered assets fund. The Under-Secretary who has responsibility for drugs policy, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), stated in his letter to Superintendent Isaac that Home Office officials have made an initial assessment of the bid, but no formal decision has yet been made. Bids are being considered by a Cabinet Committee and we expect to announce the successful bids shortly.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): Given the undoubted link between drugs and crime and the vital need for those who feed their heroin habit by committing crime to have access to treatment as soon as they wish, what does the Minister propose to do about the waiting time for access to detox and rehabilitation treatment in Plymouth, which is currently 65 weeks?

Mr. Wills: The hon. Gentleman makes some valid points. Until 15 months ago, no treatment was possible, but we now have a national treatment agency and waiting times are falling. He is right to say that we must take action to tackle the problem, and that is what we are doing. We must deal with the problem across the range and choke off the supply, which is what my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is doing. He is liaising with the Jamaican authorities to make sure that we tackle the problem of crack cocaine.

The hon. Gentleman is right about the need to treat addicts, which we are doing. We must also educate our young people about these matters, which is why we have drugs education programmes in schools. Some 93 per cent. of secondary schools now have such programmes in place.

Street Crime

6. **Mr. Win Griffiths** (Bridgend): If he will make a statement on the steps he is taking to reduce crime on the streets. [57052]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): We are undertaking an end-to-end review of the criminal justice process, including the development of more training, more police officers, the introduction of community support and street warden provision to back that up. We have provided extra resources this year for police technology and investment in closed circuit television. Other measures taken include the premium Crown Prosecution Service, the establishment of 67 specialist street crime courts, the availability of the video ID system referred to earlier, the extension of electronic tagging and the use of intensive supervision, including bail conditions. In addition, we have introduced the Mobile Telephones(Re-Programming) Bill. All these measures are enabling us to bring down the street crime figures, which worried everyone earlier this year.

Mr. Griffiths: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. However, I am sure that he is aware that old people in particular still fear going to their local shopping centres, especially at night, because of the youths who wander about aimlessly and sometimes threaten them. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that even more CCTV cameras are made available? The residents of the Wildmill estate in Bridgend greatly appreciate that the number of officers patrolling the streets has doubled, but they would still like to see CCTV cameras in the shopping precincts.

Mr. Blunkett: I thank my hon. Friend for welcoming the doubling of the number of officers doing the job out there on the street.

The use of CCTV has proved extremely popular against the predictions that were made when the programme started. There is no doubt that the quality and use of CCTV are crucial, so that the reassurance that it provides can in turn ensure a conviction when people are captured on the video screen. The combination of the use of CCTV and video ID parades, the emphasis that we are placing on pressing down on antisocial behaviour by giving it a focus at national policy level, and the encouragement that we have been giving the police to respond positively to any kind of intervention at that level will provide people, young or old, with the reassurance that they need. It is a fact of life that although elderly people are the least likely to be attacked in the street, they are the most likely to fear such an attack.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I am sure that the Home Secretary agrees that to reduce crime, we need to deal with the causes of crime, as well as with the criminals. After the highly successful past few days in which the country has seen success in the cricket test against Sri Lanka, in the world heavyweight title match in the United States, and against Argentina on Friday, does the Home Secretary accept that bringing youngsters from primary school age upwards into sport—not just as participants, but as competitors—is as likely as any other activity to prevent them from getting into crime? Can the Home Office work with the Departments for Education and Skills and for Culture, Media and Sport to ensure that we give young people, from the age of five to 25, constructive alternatives to crime so that they can do positive things instead of being told only what they cannot do, which too often appears to be the Government's message?

Mr. Blunkett: "All Our Futures", the work of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the splash schemes that we are introducing and the social cohesion programme for the summer are all very valuable, but I accept what the hon. Gentleman says: a win against Nigeria on Wednesday would do wonders for street crime, social cohesion and youth offending.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I welcome the measures that the Government have already introduced to reduce street crime, but I feel sure that my right hon. Friend would agree with many of my constituents who welcome technological advances but put their faith, as I do, in the deterrent power of a uniform. I sincerely hope that both he and the police will accept that bobbies on the beat can do a great deal to reduce crime and, more importantly, the fear of crime.

Mr. Blunkett: We are all very pleased to see my hon. Friend back in the Chamber and we wish her well. I agree with her entirely: 4,500 extra uniformed police on our streets over the past two years, more than 1,100 of them in London, have been very welcome. That visible presence, combined with intelligent and community-based policing, will make the difference.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): Given the success in reducing street crime of the experiment in Lambeth in which police resources were diverted from traffic control to patrolling the streets, is it not time to extend the policy nationwide?

Mr. Blunkett: It is important to get the balance right between the various hot spots and difficulties at any one time, but the hon. Gentleman will realise that it is an operational decision, for the Commissioner in the case of the Metropolitan police, and for chief constables elsewhere. I respect that fact and know that they carry responsibility as well as power, and I answer the questions at the Dispatch Box every month. The honest truth is that if we can manage to get people focused where the greatest danger is we will not only provide reassurance but ensure that the police get the respect and support that they need, in the end, in order to drive down crime.

Andy Burnham (Leigh): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Greater Manchester police and Wigan council on last week's successful introduction of a drinking ban in Leigh town centre, which I believe will reduce street crime in Leigh? Is he aware of the belief of that force and others that, under the wording of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, they are unable to seize unopened bottles and cans from under-age drinkers? Will he consider amending the wording to enable the police to bear down effectively on under-age drinking and youth crime?

Mr. Blunkett: I do indeed congratulate Greater Manchester police on that initiative, and I hope that it works well over the summer, not least in the few weeks ahead during the World cup. There is a real issue here, and we have asked the police to provide us with chapter and verse on the extent of the problem with unopened alcohol containers. If there is a problem, we will be prepared to include measures to put it right in the sentencing and criminal justice Bill for next Session. We all want to ensure—I am sure that this goes across political parties—that we reverse as quickly as possible, at the request of those on the ground, any anomalies that have been built in.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I pay tribute to the Metropolitan police for the way in which they rose to the immense challenge of maintaining the security of the streets of central London during the jubilee celebrations.

The Home Secretary's desire to reduce street crime will be shared by everyone in the House and outside, but does not he understand that there is widespread concern in the police that the powers that he is seeking to be able to dictate precisely the contents of any action plan for improvement will mean that Ministers in Whitehall will be usurping the local knowledge of chief constables in their task of reducing street crime? The objective may be shared by everyone, but the method of achieving it should be the responsibility of chief constables and police authorities, and not interfered with by any Minister of any political party in government. There is wide concern in the police force and police authorities that he is seeking to reintroduce centralising powers.

Mr. Blunkett: I agree with the beginning of the hon. Gentleman's contribution: there was exemplary, light-touch, sensitive and good policing.

On the hon. Gentleman's second point, there would be great, justified fears if his statements this afternoon were correct. We are asking police chiefs to draw up action plans—we make no apology for that, nor for the fact that we shall be able to comment on the plans. We make no apology for asking the police to consider readjusting their plans in the context of the overall national plan—for instance, if they are giving only low-level attention to antisocial behaviour, which most Members regard as a scourge that we want to be tackled.

We are not seeking powers to dictate the action plans, to overturn them or in any way to take hold of operational policing. The sooner we debate what we really disagree on, the more we shall be respected by the public.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): My police service experiences real difficulties in ensuring that we get enough police officers on the streets, because it trains everybody else's police officers. Thames Valley has provided officers to every other force in the United Kingdom. Will my right hon. Friend think about a system of transfer fees for police officers, so that police authorities that train young officers have the resources to train new officers, because everyone else has nicked the ones that we have trained?

Mr. Blunkett: I have a lot of sympathy with my hon. Friend. The level of crime and the difficulties experienced in Slough and some other parts of Thames Valley cause problems and the force has been vulnerable as a result of officers moving out of the area owing to the provision for recruitment in the Metropolitan police area. However, I am pleased to say that, as part of the provision of extra resources, Thames Valley will receive an extra £1.5 million this year. Taken with the flexibility in the new police negotiating powers, such as the use of priority payments, Thames Valley will be able to build on its success and to hold on to the trained police officers who are so crucial in my hon. Friend's area.

Police (Early Retirement)

7. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): If he will make a statement on early retirement from the police force. [57053]

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): We want to ensure that the skills and expertise of experienced police officers are retained by forces for as long as is practicable. The level of ill-health early retirement has fallen under the Government, but it is still important to ensure that we resort to it only where necessary. We therefore welcome the fact that the Police Negotiating Board has agreed in principle a fairer and more consistent approach towards early retirement due to ill health.

Miss McIntosh: Will the Minister join me in congratulating North Yorkshire police, especially the chief constable, on reducing the number of officers applying for early retirement through ill health? Does he agree, however, that a pensions timebomb is ticking? North Yorkshire police cannot be unique in having more retired officers being paid out of the police budget than active operational officers. Earlier this year, the Home

Secretary promised a statement and proposals on the funding of police pensions. When might we have that statement?

Mr. Denham: I hope that we shall introduce proposals on pensions, in line with those set out in the White Paper, as soon as possible. One of our aims was to try to ensure that police forces are more insulated from the fluctuating cost of ordinary retirements. However, it would probably be a step in the wrong direction to insulate police forces entirely from the costs of poor management or mismanagement of, for example, ill-health retirement. I welcome any moves to improve the situation in North Yorkshire, but it is a matter of fact that in the last full year—to 2001—58 per cent. of its officers retired due to ill health. That is a very high proportion indeed and one that has inevitably put a pensions cost on the people of North Yorkshire.

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that many officers approaching retirement age, and indeed many women police officers, are exactly those most suited to community policing and to being bobbies on the beat? Will he therefore consider what has happened recently in the city of Nottingham? On 2 April, a community beat officers system was introduced, yet within seven weeks that decision was reversed. Will my right hon. Friend make some inquiries into why certain chief constables are not living up to the Government's rhetoric?

Mr. Denham: As my hon. Friend has raised the matter, I shall certainly familiarise myself with the situation in Nottingham, but I have to say that the decision about exactly how to deploy the rising number of police officers is an operational one for chief constables. My hon. Friend is right to say that we want to ensure that, as the number of police officers rises, one of the key roles that they fulfil is to be visible in local communities, identifying and solving problems and tackling and reducing the fear of crime, as well as tackling crime itself.

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): In the year to the end of March 2002, 82 Sussex police officers retired at the normal retirement age, yet almost as many—77—resigned early, let alone those who retired early through ill health. Why does the Minister think that is?

Mr. Denham: The level of wastage from the police service in England and Wales has remained remarkably unchanged for a number of years at under 5 per cent. It is true that a small number of forces have shown a much higher rate of early retirement than the vast majority of police forces. That is why officials from our Department are working with those police forces to identify the reasons why and to make sure that everything is done to ensure that their performance on retention is in line with that of the rest of the police service.

Air Weapons

8. **Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): What plans he has to review the regulation of air weapons; and if he will make a statement. [57054]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): All aspects of firearms law are kept under continual review. We are determined to tackle the problems caused by the misuse of air weapons and believe that much can be done through the enforcement of existing legislation and public education. At present, we are considering advice from the Firearms Consultative Committee on how that might be taken forward. We shall also examine ways to tackle those who misuse air weapons, as we move forward with measures to combat antisocial behaviour and street crime.

Mr. Mullin: Scarcely a week goes by in Sunderland without an incident involving an out-of-control youth and an air weapon. May I put it to the Minister that, if the bureaucratic obstacles to some form of licensing are too great, we could at least significantly raise the age limit for using those weapons? Will he think about that, please?

Mr. Ainsworth: My hon. Friend is fully familiar with these issues. He knows that the Select Committee on Home Affairs reported on them not so long ago, and I am aware of the incidents that have been recently reported in his local press. As I have said, my response is not dogmatic; it is about being practical and proportionate to the problem. The issue is kept under review, and if we can find a way to be more effective, I am more than happy to consider it. Yes, of course I shall examine my hon. Friend's proposal, as we examined the Home Affairs Committee's proposals, but we need to be effective and to use resources as effectively as possible, and I ask him to consider the fact that those problems also need to be overcome.

David Burnside (South Antrim): Could not the Minister learn from the positive experience in Northern Ireland on the registration of air rifles? Air rifles are used by parents to train children in a disciplined, secure and safe way to shoot for sporting purposes. The legislation in Northern Ireland is simple: air rifles' serial numbers and the amount of ammunition bought are listed on firearms certificates. The system is well disciplined and well policed, and it causes no problem to sportsmen and women who want to see greater regulation and secure and safe shooting for young people as they make progress through life.

Mr. Ainsworth: I will be honest with the hon. Gentleman: I was not aware of the regulatory system as it exists in Northern Ireland. If there are lessons to be learned, we shall be more than happy to consider them. The issue has been debated a great deal, and we all understand that there is a very real problem, but we should consider how best to tackle it without unnecessarily wasting resources, while being as effective as we can in bearing down on the misuse of those weapons.

Ms Claire Ward (Watford): My constituents are becoming increasingly concerned about young people having access to firearms. A 13-year-old boy in my constituency was shot in the face just three weeks ago, and almost lost his sight. We have had at least two exclusions from school of children found carrying these weapons into school. An urgent review is needed. Will my hon. Friend consider what controls and enforcement mechanisms exist to stop local shopkeepers selling these weapons to young children, not just to those who are under-age but to those who clearly are not entitled and will not have a sensible use for the weapons?

Mr. Ainsworth: In response to my hon. Friend and other Members who have raised this issue, I say that I shall consider it again and talk to the police about how we can be as effective as possible in bearing down on the misuse of these weapons. I give that guarantee; I do not dismiss the concern. Clearly, we want to be as effective as we can, and I assure her that I will consider again the issue of age. This is not the first time, however, that these issues have been examined. There are barriers, but we should give constant consideration to whether we can improve in this area, precisely because of the points that she raises about the distressing and dangerous circumstances that arise repeatedly up and down the country.

Bob Russell (Colchester): The Minister has just referred to instances up and down the country, and I urge him to follow the recommendations of the Home Affairs Committee, which have been repeated today. These incidents do not happen only in Sunderland. On Friday, in Colchester, which has a relatively low crime rate and is normally a peaceful town, a 12-year-old boy was attacked in the street, robbed, and shot with an airgun. Will the Minister explain what possible justification there is for teenagers roaming streets in urban neighbourhoods with airguns?

Mr. Ainsworth: There cannot be a justification for teenagers roaming the streets with airguns. There is no justification, and it is illegal for them to do so. The hon. Gentleman should be aware of that. The main thrust of the Home Affairs Committee report was a desire to introduce a registration scheme. That is not opposed by Ministers, but there are questions about the practicalities, and the police have raised issues about the effective use of resources and the burden that running an effective registration scheme would place on them. I assure the House that those issues can be considered and that they ought to be kept under review. The hon. Gentleman should not pretend to the House or anyone else, however, that the kind of behaviour to which he has just referred is legal in this country, and that action should not and cannot be taken against people who behave in that way.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): May I support the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), and draw the Minister's attention to the case of my constituent. Nicola Diston, who has permanently lost the sight of one eye as a result of being attacked with an air weapon? I urge the Minister to consider the definition of weapons that should come under a licensing scheme. At the moment, many air weapons that are capable of causing permanent damage are outside controls, should not be outside controls, and should be brought under regulation as soon as possible.

Mr. Ainsworth: I am aware of the case. Indeed, my right hon. Friend has spoken to me, and seeks a meeting with me on this issue. She is not right to say that these weapons are outside controls, but she is absolutely right that they are outside the more stringent controls that are placed on more powerful weapons. We can consider and discuss those issues, which have been raised before, and there are problems that we would need to overcome. I am happy to talk to her about how we can be more effective in this area.

Retail Crime

9. **Barbara Follett** (Stevenage): What representations his Department has received from the British Retail Consortium about tackling crime against retailers. [57055]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): We appreciate the input that the British Retail Consortium makes to tackling retail crime. We have received a number of representations from the consortium in the past year and we are in regular touch with it at both ministerial and official level.

My hon. Friend does a lot of work for and on behalf of the consortium, so she will know that the Home Office is providing £170 million for closed circuit television initiatives, £50 million for communities against drugs and £15 million in grants to retailers in deprived areas to enhance security. Other measures will inform retailers of how better to protect themselves against crime.

Barbara Follett: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply and for all the work that he is doing on behalf of retailers. However, given the importance of the reduction of retail crime in Government programmes for social cohesion and urban regeneration, why is the reduction in retail crime not yet one of the official police force performance indicators?

Mr. Ainsworth: I think that my hon. Friend knows that, after consultation with the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Association of Police Authorities, we cut the number of performance indicators. We would be loth to add to them. I think that she also appreciates that there is a problem of under-reporting of crime in this sector, and that might undermine the value of a performance indicator. However, she is right about the importance of tackling retail crime and about its connection with social exclusion and community cohesion. I assure her that we will continue to work with the consortium to bear down on the problem.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): My constituency contains the west end of London, one of the largest retail areas in the UK. Retailers to whom I have spoken and Westminster city council have welcomed the idea of working in partnership with the police force so that street wardens ensure that, as far as possible, retail crime is kept to an absolute minimum. Will the Minister be looking to drive that initiative forward not only in the centre of London but in other centres that are important in terms of their retail excellence?

Mr. Ainsworth: We have found a Conservative in favour of street wardens, and I am quite surprised by that. We are looking at all kinds of issues and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be able to support those covered by the Police Reform Bill. We are also constantly talking to the British Retail Consortium about specific issues and are keeping them under review to see how we can help.

However, there is much that retailers can do themselves, so responsibility for bearing down on retail crime does not lie all on the Government's side.

Neighbourhood Wardens

10. **Martin Linton** (Battersea): What plans he has to give neighbourhood wardens powers to demand names and addresses and detain suspects. [57056]

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): Members of street warden schemes, such as the one being set up in Wandsworth, are already able to be given local authority enforcement powers. Subject to the wish of Parliament, we intend that the Police Reform Bill will enable limited police powers, including the right to require a name and address in respect of certain offences, to be extended to wardens and others who are part of community safety accreditation schemes.

Martin Linton: May I tell my right hon. Friend how much I welcome the fact that neighbourhood wardens started working in Clapham Junction last month? When I spoke to them on their first day at work, they said that they could certainly do with the additional powers proposed for community safety officers. If neighbourhood wardens catch a fly tipper red-handed and the alleged offender refuses to give a name or gives a false name, there is very little that they can do at the moment. If they witness an arrestable offence, they have to rely on the powers of citizens arrest. Would it not be better for all concerned if neighbourhood wardens had the same powers as community safety officers?

Mr. Denham: I understand my hon. Friend's point. Although the important power to detain with reasonable force that we have proposed for CSOs has currently been removed from the Police Reform Bill by the other place, it is the Government's judgment that that power should be exercised only by someone who is directly an employee of the police service rather than by someone who is an employee of a local authority. If local authorities wish to work in partnership in, for example, London with the Metropolitan police, it is open to them to provide funding for the CSOs who would be directly deployed in their local government area. I believe that the important power to detain with reasonable force should be exercised by and under the auspices of the police service, but I welcome my hon. Friend's positive comments about the impact of street wardens. They perform an important role in its own right.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): There is a further problem concerning the identity of suspects. Last week, in Exeter court, there was a case involving a paedophile who had served a custodial sentence, then, on the expiry of his licence period, changed his name by deed poll and reoffended. That caused huge problems to the police in identifying him as a suspect for the second crime that he committed. Will the Minister ensure that that loophole is closed, so that paedophiles who have served sentences cannot change their names by deed poll?

Mr. Denham: The hon. Lady raises a very important matter. I have not read the details of the case, but it is not immediately obvious why fingerprinting and other evidence would not have identified the individual. It is essential that something as simple as a deed poll change of name should not be used to evade the proper powers of the law or of the police. If the hon. Lady would like to give me the details of the case, I shall look into it as a matter of urgency.

India/Pakistan

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement about the situation in India and Pakistan.

Intense diplomatic efforts and decisions made in recent days by the Governments of India and Pakistan give grounds for some optimism, and tensions have eased a little. None the less, with 1 million men under arms on either side of the line of control in a high state of readiness, the risks of a conflict remain significant. As both countries are in possession of nuclear weapons, the potential consequences for the region and for the wider world are devastating.

Let me give some brief background, then set out the action that has been taken by Her Majesty's Government, working particularly with the Government of the United States.

The territory of Kashmir has been the subject of dispute since independence in 1947. Three major wars have been fought between India and Pakistan—in 1948 to 1949, 1965 and 1971—and in 1999 there was a particularly bloody battle in Kargil on the Indian side of the line of control. The people of Kashmir have been caught in the middle of that, at a cost of tens of thousands of lives and even more people displaced. There has long been serious concern in the international community about the human rights deficit in Jammu and Kashmir and about the conduct of some elections there.

During the last decade or so, the character of the conflict has changed as a result of the incursion of armed militants across the line of control into India from the Pakistani side. A number of terrorist organisations—including Laskhar-e-Toiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed and Harakat Mujahideen, each of which I proscribed when I was Home Secretary—have been at the forefront of violent activity in the region. India has long charged that such terrorism has had the covert support of successive Pakistani Governments and, in particular, of the main intelligence agency in Pakistan, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate—ISID. Her Majesty's Government accept that there is a clear link between the ISID and those groups.

Towards the end of last year, India suffered two serious terrorist outrages. On 1 October, more than 40 people died in an assault on the state assembly in Srinagar, the capital of Jammu and Kashmir. On 13 December, the Indian Parliament building in New Delhi was attacked, leaving 14 people dead. In response to intensive diplomatic pressure, including the visit to the region by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, President Musharraf delivered a speech on 12 January in which he pledged:

> "No organisation will be allowed to indulge in terrorism in the name of Kashmir".

From early May, when the heavy winter snows began to melt, there was nevertheless an increase in terrorist activity in Jammu and Kashmir and a rise in levels of infiltration across the line of control. That renewed violence included an attack on 14 May on a passenger bus and residential quarters of the Indian army base at Kaluchak, killing 34 people, mainly women and children. A week later, the prominent moderate Kashmiri politician, Abdul Ghani Lone, was assassinated.

The dispute between India and Pakistan is at root a bilateral matter which can only be resolved by direct dialogue between the parties. But it is a dispute with potent international implications, both because of the potential scale of any military action, including the possible use of nuclear weapons, and because, post-11 September, new imperatives have been imposed on all member states by United Nations Security Council resolution 1373 to take effective action to counter terrorism.

Since last autumn and particularly since the resurgence of violence in recent weeks, the conflict has been high on the international community's agenda. There has been intensive diplomatic activity from the United States and the United Kingdom Governments, Russia, China, other European Union and G8 countries and, of course, from countries in the region. As part of this co-ordinated diplomatic effort, I visited Pakistan and India on 28 and 29 May. I had discussions in Pakistan with President Musharraf and Foreign Minister Sattar, and in India with Prime Minister Vajpayee, External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh, Home Minister Advani, Defence Minister George Fernandes and the Leader of the Opposition, Sonia Gandhi.

In Islamabad, I underlined to President Musharraf the need for Pakistan to take visible, decisive and verifiable steps to seal the line of control; to stop supplies to militant groups; to help restrain the violent activities of those groups; and to close the militant training camps on Pakistan's side of the line of control.

In my meetings in Delhi with Prime Minster Vajpayee and Jaswant Singh, I stressed that as Pakistan had demonstrated that it was taking the necessary steps to clamp down on terrorism, India should respond positively. A number of possible steps to reduce tension were discussed with both sides. I also underlined to the Indian Government once again the need for them to take steps to improve the human rights situation in Jammu and Kashmir and to ensure free, fair and inclusive elections in Jammu and Kashmir this autumn.

Before my visit, Commissioner Patten of the EU visited the region and held discussions with both sides. Last week at a regional conference in Almaty, both Russian President Putin and Chinese President Jiang Zemin met separately with President Musharraf and Prime Minister Vajpayee. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has spoken at length to both sides, and to Presidents Bush and Putin, about the situation.

Following my trip, US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage visited both countries last week. Mr. Armitage was given a categorical undertaking by President Musharraf that sealing the line of control would be "permanent". The Government of India described that as a "step forward" and said that they would respond "appropriately and positively." Separately, the US and UK Governments have assessed that there appears to have been a significant reduction in incursions across the line of control since towards the end of May.

I am pleased to tell the House that when I spoke this morning to my Indian counterpart, Jaswant Singh, he told me that India was announcing today that restrictions on overflights from Pakistan over India were to be lifted, and that the name of the next Indian high commissioner to Pakistan was being made public. I also understand that the western and eastern Indian fleets are returning to port.

We have, therefore, seen both sides take first steps in the right direction, but the position is still precarious. Terrorism is still a threat and the situation will continue for some time to require the engagement of the international community.

Like my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and President Putin, President Bush has made it clear that he intends to remain personally involved. I should like to express my thanks and appreciation to US Secretary of State Colin Powell and his deputy Richard Armitage for their indefatigable work in trying to help to resolve the crisis.

US Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld will be visiting India and Pakistan this week. The international efforts against terrorism and the Kashmir crisis will be an important agenda item for the meeting of G8 Foreign Ministers in Whistler, western Canada, which I shall be attending later this week. Fellow EU Foreign Ministers are discussing the matter today.

The present crisis has, of course, had direct consequences for many UK citizens and their families. The UK has up to 3 million citizens who are of south Asian origin. As Secretary of State, I have to balance our wider foreign policy interests with my direct duty of care for all UK citizens in the region and for all British Government staff and their families, whether UK based or locally engaged. In response to specific terrorists threats, I decided on 22 May to reduce the level of staffing at British Government posts in Pakistan. At the same time, our travel advice was amended to advise against all but essential travel to Pakistan. As the House was about to rise, there was no opportunity for me to make a statement. I wrote to all colleagues in this House and the other place to set out the changes that had been made and set out in a separate letter what we are seeking to do on the issue of Kashmir.

As tensions increased between the two countries, I announced during the recess, on 31 May, a drawdown of less essential British staff and their families from all posts in Pakistan and from New Delhi and Mumbai in India, and also issued new travel advice for India. Last Wednesday, 5 June, I announced further strengthening of our travel advice in respect of both countries.

We have been working hard to keep the south Asian communities here properly informed of what we are doing and to understand and respond to their anxieties. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary therefore met representatives of those communities on 29 May to listen to their concerns. As soon as I returned from the sub-continent on 30 May, I held similar meetings, including some with a number of colleagues from this House, to explain what I had been doing in New Delhi and Islamabad.

As every hon. Member knows, our high commissions in New Delhi and Islamabad are among the busiest visa and consular operations in the world. Throughout this difficult period, we have maintained a service in India, albeit at a reduced level. Visa and consular operations in Pakistan had to be temporarily suspended, but I am pleased to tell the House that a limited service resumed last Thursday, 6 June.

Notwithstanding the more hopeful signs, the situation in the region remains dangerous. The problems between India and Pakistan cannot satisfactorily be resolved by military means. That would only lead to more suffering and potentially have devastating consequences for everyone. Working with our international partners, particularly the United States, our diplomatic efforts are there to encourage both sides to take the necessary steps to end terrorism, reduce tensions and enter into effective dialogue. Only then can we hope to break the cycle of crises and secure a permanent peaceful settlement to the issue of Kashmir.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): In thanking the Foreign Secretary, may I first congratulate the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the hon. Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), on his return to the Front Bench, and wish him well in his new role?

This is clearly a period of the greatest anxiety for the people of the sub-continent. However, there are millions of our own fellow British citizens in this country whose family origins lie in the sub-continent, in India, Pakistan and Kashmir itself. This is a time of special concern for them in respect of their friends and loved ones in the region, and our thoughts are very much with them. I hope that the most recent reports saying that there is some easing of tensions will provide some comfort.

Shortly after the events of 11 September, my right hon. Friend the shadow Foreign Secretary warned that any instability between India and Pakistan was one of the greatest threats that the world might face in future. Sadly, it appears that that warning has now been realised. I welcome the Foreign Secretary's steps to withdraw staff and advise British citizens and those holding dual passports to leave India and Pakistan. What estimate has his Department made of the number of those warned who have taken the Foreign Office advice? What ongoing measures is his Department taking to ensure that British citizens abroad are kept informed of the unfolding situation?

There have been press reports over the weekend saying that the Government are making contingency plans for a considerable number of refugees coming to this country in the event of war. Will the Foreign Secretary confirm that; indicate what arrangements are being made and for how many people; and tell us where such refugee camps would be established?

We have heard the threat of clashes and skirmishes and the rhetoric of "no first strike". Surely, the only acceptable language is that of "no war." The lack of a nuclear doctrine was raised before the Foreign Secretary's visit to the region. What progress did he make in establishing such a doctrine between the two countries?

During the cold war, there were direct communications links between the Kremlin and Washington at the highest level. If, as we understand, they do not exist in this case, surely every encouragement should be given to the two countries to establish a hotline without delay. Does the Foreign Secretary agree that the risk of nuclear conflagration means that the matter is now no longer purely domestic, or even bilateral, but has been effectively internationalised? As we know from Chernobyl, terrible consequences will be felt well beyond the sub-continent.

Last week, the Secretary of State for Defence did not explicitly rule out UK troops being part of an international force to patrol the disputed line of control, the aim being to reassure India that serious attempts are being made to bring to an end guerrilla infiltration. Is the Foreign

[Mr. Richard Spring]

Secretary aware of estimates of how many troops would be required to patrol the line effectively? The Indian Government have proposed a joint patrol force only. What discussions has the Foreign Secretary had with the Secretary of State for Defence about the possibility of internationalising the force, and has he received any understanding of what British forces might be available, especially given the extent to which our armed forces are already committed abroad? What is the current state of discussions with the Indian and Pakistani Governments about that possibility?

The UK Government were signatories to the United Nations resolutions of 1948 and 1950 which, inter alia, called for Kashmiri opinion to be tested. What is the British Government's present view of that matter?

Those are important issues which the Foreign Secretary needs to clarify. We welcome his involvement in encouraging both sides to take a step back from conflict and his visit to the region, but it is of the utmost significance that the US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage has been in the region, followed by Donald Rumsfeld, whose visit took place this week. The US has a crucial role to play. Equally, we welcome President's Putin leadership and involvement, and note the role that the other regional power, China, is playing, given its relationships with Pakistan and India.

Following the terrible events of 11 September, President Musharraf won many admirers by his statesmanlike response to those events and subsequent events in Afghanistan, despite intense domestic pressures and difficulties. Equally, the people of India have every reason to feel affronted by terrorist attacks on their own territory and especially on their own Parliament. For more than 50 years, India has been the world's greatest democracy. It therefore seems tragic that Kashmir, the most beautiful corner of the sub-continent, continues to act as the catalyst for mistrust, conflict and war.

With the apparent easing of tensions, it is to be hoped that high-level diplomatic representation can be re-established quickly in situ in Delhi and Islamabad, leading to a direct dialogue. We shall of course support any genuine attempt to broker a peaceful settlement of the dispute. In their endeavours to achieve that, with our allies and friends, the Government have our full support.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments and for the support he offers. On a personal level, I am also grateful for his welcome back to the Front Bench to the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien). Since he, too, is sitting on the Front Bench, I should like to express my appreciation to the Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), for the way in which he dealt with his portfolio as a Foreign and Commonwealth Office Minister.

The hon. Gentleman asked several specific questions, each of which I shall endeavour to answer. I cannot say precisely how many British citizens have returned. We have given clear advice which has been relayed not only in the United Kingdom, where it will have been heard by relatives and friends of those who are in India and Pakistan, but in the media in both India and Pakistan. The advice is also available worldwide on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website. Advice in respect of Pakistan has been issued not once, not twice, but three times, and has been upgraded each time; and advice in respect of India has been issued not once but twice. I think that no potential visitor to India or Pakistan or British citizen in either country can be unaware of the advice that we have given.

The hon. Gentleman asked about contingency plans. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, in association with the Home Office and other relevant Departments, maintains contingency plans on evacuation for about 100 countries. Obviously, countries in the sub-continent are among them; the hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not go into details, except to say that if and when we judge it appropriate to make those contingency plans active and public, of course the House will be the first to know. At the moment, while we obviously have to prepare for all contingencies, we live in hope that maybe—maybe—the better news over the weekend can be sustained.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether there has been a well-developed nuclear doctrine between India and Pakistan. While each side is developing what it describes as a nuclear doctrine, there is nothing like the level of sophistication nor anything like the failsafe measures that were developed by the Warsaw pact and NATO countries during the cold war. One lesson to be drawn from the history of east and west Europe is that as a result of the raising of the bar against the use of nuclear weapons by either side, east and west—the Warsaw pact and NATO—eventually decided to resolve their intense disputes and arguments not by resorting to nuclear weapons but by peaceful means. Who would have thought, even 15 years ago, that Russia would now be effectively part of NATO? That is what we have achieved by peaceful means; we could never have done so by nuclear exchange.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the number of troops patrolling the line of control. In all our discussions, the main proposition has been for joint patrols of Indian and Pakistani troops. Given the dangers on the line of control, its length and the terrain, that is effectively the only candidate for patrolling that difficult territory. If we were asked to provide military advisers, not infantry to patrol the line of control, of course my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence would consider that but, as he has made clear on a number of occasions, no request has been made, still less have any decisions been taken.

The hon. Gentleman's last point was about the status of the United Nations Security Council resolutions passed in 1948, 1949, 1950 and 1951. For the benefit of hon. Members, I shall arrange for those to be placed in the Library in a single form. It is worth while right hon. and hon. Members on both sides reading the original texts, because there are myths around them which are not sustained by the texts themselves. Suffice it to say that Pakistan believes that the Security Council resolutions should still be implemented; India says that the Simla agreement of 1972 superseded them. As for the British Government, we think that there is not a huge amount of point in getting involved in a historiographical exercise about which position is correct. We have to deal with the here and now and how we can best resolve the dispute, which is bilateral, but has obvious international implications. It is therefore right that the international community has been engaged in the way that it has.

Mr. Menzies Campbell (North-East Fife): May I tell the Foreign Secretary that neither in his analysis nor in his cautiously optimistic conclusions do I find anything with which to disagree? I commend him too for his sure-footedness in recent weeks in circumstances in which, as his predecessor found out, it is not difficult to become embroiled in controversy. He was right to underline to both Governments, as he did again today, the apocalyptic consequences of a nuclear exchange between them, which would not—indeed, could not—be contained within their own borders. Do not those events underline the pressing urgency to bring both India and Pakistan into the nuclear non-proliferation regime and, in particular, to persuade both of them to sign the comprehensive test ban treaty?

Finally, does the Foreign Secretary understand that in recent weeks the policy of Her Majesty's Government on arms sales has, to put it mildly, seemed to lack coherence? When the crisis began to reach critical levels, why did the Government not announce an immediate suspension of arms sales both to India and to Pakistan, and seek to persuade others to do the same?

Mr. Straw: First, I thank the right hon. and learned Gentleman for his welcome for the actions that have been taken. That is much appreciated. On such a sensitive and difficult issue, it is extremely important for any Foreign Secretary to have the support of those on his own side of the Chamber, which I hope may be forthcoming, as well as the support that has been forthcoming from the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring), the official Opposition spokesman, and from the Liberal Democrats.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman asked about the comprehensive test ban treaty. I hope that from this terrible and potentially devastating situation we may be able to get some good. We want to encourage both sides by bilateral dialogue to seek to resolve the long-standing dispute. In the past, there have been discussions that failed in the end, as they did in Agra last year, but came quite close to agreement. We hope that the parties will agree among themselves on the appropriate forum for such bilateral discussion and, in the end, resolution of the issue.

We hope, too, that both parties will consider joining the various international treaties, which in turn have helped to make the signatories much safer from the risks of nuclear war than they were before.

On the issue of arms sales, the then Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw) in a detailed written answer of 15 March, set out that we were further restricting the sales of any sort of obvious nuclear material, or dual-use material, that could be used in the manufacture of nuclear weapons and delivery systems in respect of both India and Pakistan. There was widespread approbation for that decision.

On the wider issue, the consolidated criteria that have been approved by the House, which are European Union and national criteria, contain sufficient flexibility, in our view, not to require there to be imposed a blanket arms embargo. There is every coherence in these criteria. For that reason, we have resisted such an embargo.

Given the potential conflict, I fully understand those who ask why there is not a blanket arms embargo. I have heard no argument that demonstrates how an embargo by the UK, or even by the European Union, will be different from what is set out in the consolidated criteria, and could help to resolve the crisis. I sense that the way in which we resolve the crisis will be, I hope, the way in which we have been seeking to resolve it, which is by intensive diplomatic measures.

Mr. Piara S. Khabra (Ealing, Southall): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, which sets out a positive and sensible approach. I have genuine concerns because my village, where I was born and educated, is only about 60 miles from the border with Pakistan.

May I ask my right hon. Friend to comment on the recent reports regarding the Kashmir international relief fund and the Regent's Park mosque, which have been collecting funds for Islamic fundamentalists, and reports that President Musharraf is unable to prevent incursions into Kashmir by fundamentalists? What are the prospects of peace between India and Pakistan?

Mr. Straw: I understand my hon. Friend's huge knowledge and experience of the area from which he comes, which is so close to the border. If any hon. Member, or anyone else, has evidence that anybody resident or in this country is raising funds for causes that are banned by the Terrorism Act 2000 or by the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, I know that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and the Metropolitan police will be pleased to hear from them. Such evidence will be fully investigated.

As for President Musharraf's position, I said in my statement that he set out clearly in his speech of 12 January that no organisation would be allowed to indulge in terrorism in the name of Kashmir. He has taken a series of actions since then to bear down on terrorist organisations, three of which I personally proscribed—banned—when I was Home Secretary. That proscription was endorsed by an overwhelming majority in the House.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): Does the Foreign Secretary agree with my constituents of Pakistani and Kashmiri origin that there will be no just and lasting final settlement in Kashmir until the people who are caught in the tragic situation there are allowed to determine their own future, and that that cannot be a matter for India and Pakistan alone?

Mr. Straw: The resolution of this dispute does lie in the hands of Pakistan and India alone. How they resolve it is another matter, and of course we hope that in seeking to resolve it they will take full account of the wishes of the people in Kashmir. One of the reasons why we have sought to encourage the Government of India to ensure that there is a climate in which free and fair elections can take place in Jammu and Kashmir is our wish to ensure the provision of a democratic outlet for people's concerns in those regions.

Mr. Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr): In this conflict, the people who are being used as table tennis balls in a game of power politics are the Kashmiri people. It is time that India and Pakistan stopped using them in that way and messing around with people's lives.

We have lost more than 70,000 people in Kashmir. Others have been lost through acts of terrorism. I condemn all the acts of terrorism, and all the human

[Mr. Khalid Mahmood]

rights abuses and violations, that have taken place. Unless and until we move to secure international action, we will not resolve the issue. Will the Home Secretary—*[Interruption]*—consider resolving it by means of third-party negotiation, and pressing both Governments to do something?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the compliment, but I assume he was addressing me in my current rather than my previous capacity.

My hon. Friend is right to say that more than 70,000 people have lost their lives in this terrible conflict. Those people were members of all religions—Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the statesmanlike position he has taken in saying that it is the Kashmiri people who have been caught up in the conflict; but because it is a dispute between two sovereign nations, it can only be resolved through direct dialogue between those two sovereign nations.

Obviously the dispute has substantial implications for the international community, which is why we have been taking the action we have been taking. As I have said, however, it is a direct territorial dispute, and it is through direct dialogue that a resolution is possible. If the two nations seek outside intervention or conciliation of any kind, of course the international community will stand ready to offer it; but it must be a decision that they take.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): May I ask a question arising from the Foreign Secretary's helpful statement? What is the Government's policy on the continued existence of terrorist training camps? What will be their approach should President Musharraf not respond positively to urgent representations made to him by the Foreign Secretary for the camps to be closed immediately?

Mr. Straw: United Nations Security Council resolution 1373 imposes clear obligations on all United Nations member states to take action in respect of terrorism in their territories. That plainly includes the operation of training camps in which terrorists are trained. We look to the Government of Pakistan to take effective action in respect of those camps, and we are monitoring the situation.

The right hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not speculate on what action may or may not be taken if—and we do not think this will happen—President Musharraf does not follow through the undertakings he has given.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): While I welcome some reduction in the tensions in the area, I think my right hon. Friend will agree that we cannot walk away and ignore the situation again, or we will be brought to the brink of a nuclear war in just a few months' or years' time.

Many of my constituents are Kashmiris. Over the years, I have not heard one of them say anything other than that they want the right to determine their own future, and they want it through the United Nations resolution of 1948. Is it not time we all started to ensure that this goes back to the UN, that the international community remains involved, and that the Kashmiris have the right to a plebiscite?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is correct to say that we cannot walk away and ignore the situation. During the earlier part of this year, there was intense diplomatic activity to try to resolve the immediate crisis over Christmas and the new year. Then crises elsewhere in the world, particularly in the middle east, tended to take over the headlines and to consume the immediate concerns of Foreign Ministries around the world. It is extremely important that the international community stays engaged in this matter.

I understand what my hon. Friend's constituents feel because I have a great many constituents of Kashmiri origin, but we have to deal with the world as it is. To suggest or imply that the dispute can be resolved by an argument about the history is to suggest to the people who have been the victims of all this conflict that it is through the history that a solution lies. May I give a parallel example? If we put the adversaries in Northern Ireland in a room, they will argue until the cows come home about the history. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and his predecessor sought to get people to look forward rather than looking back. If there is to be a resolution of the Kashmiri dispute, it can only be by looking forward and by a direct dialogue between those two sovereign nations, India and Pakistan—with international encouragement, of course, but that is what has to happen.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Does the Foreign Secretary accept that the capacity for direct diplomatic intervention by the United Kingdom is somewhat restricted by the fact that all sides in the conflict allocate to the UK, the ex-colonial power, a certain responsibility for the conflict in which they are engaged? Given that he thinks that the United Nations resolutions are unclear on the question of self-determination for the people of Kashmir, will he give his interpretation of what those UN resolutions mean? In that respect, he might find that the history of this matter is rather more important than he thinks.

Can the Foreign Secretary point the way forward in the current situation? He asks why it might be important not to sell conventional arms to either side in the conflict. May not our arguments for peace carry more moral force if we were not simultaneously selling people weapons of war? Might not that moral force be a factor in increasing the right hon. Gentleman's persuasiveness in these matters? If he does not think that, I fear the moral compass on the basis of which he has acted.

Mr. Straw: Neither in India nor in Pakistan were my hosts impolite enough to mention Britain's less than entirely glorious role in the initiation of this dispute. The hon. Gentleman is right to acknowledge it, but it has not so far affected our capacity to encourage both parties to resolve the matter peacefully.

On the UN Security Council resolutions, I think the best service I can provide the hon. Gentleman and the House is to make those available in the Library of the House, and I shall do so. They extend, particularly one of the key ones, to a great many pages and hundreds if not thousands of words.

On the issue of arms sales, I may be wrong but I do not recall approving a single arms control licence in the past two months—neither does my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter, so the assumption that the hon. Gentleman makes is inaccurate. Since we have agreed robust national and EU criteria for arms control, it seems that that is the appropriate way in which to run our arms control system, rather than by some ad hoc process. The simple truth is that we have one of the most effective and thorough systems of arms control of any country in the world.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Having visited Jammu and Kashmir on a number of occasions been to both sides of the line of control and seen the festering misery in the refugee camps of Kashmiri Muslims in Azad Kashmir and of Hindu Pandits in Jammu, may I put it to my right hon. Friend that whatever force India is capable of deploying, there is no chance whatever of the dispute being settled until the Kashmiris' problem is settled? There is no more chance of its being solved by leaving it to India and Pakistan alone than there is of the middle east problem being solved by leaving that to Israel and Palestine alone.

Will my right hon. Friend confirm the policy of his predecessor, whereby the United Nations Security Council resolutions would remain valid? Will he also make it clear that until India is ready to negotiate, there is no possibility of its becoming a permanent member of the Security Council?

I further ask my right hon. Friend to take note of what Adya Rajkotia-Luthra, a seven-year-old Hindu girl, reportedly said a few days ago:

> "I wish I could go to Vajpayee's house and ask him not to have a nuclear war over Kashmir. I would also tell him to settle Kashmir and stop all talk of war".

Are those not the most sensible and wise words to come out of Delhi for a long time?

Mr. Straw: As I have already said, I accept that the conflict has caused the death and suffering of thousands of Muslims and Hindus, and of thousands of Sikhs as well. My right hon. Friend has a particular criticism of the Government of India, and that is his privilege, but I should point out that there is a great deal to be said on both sides about the history of this conflict. For example, the fact cannot be avoided that over a period of years, successive Governments of Pakistan have, through their Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, encouraged and funded terrorists—otherwise known as freedom fighters—to make incursions across the line of control as outsiders in that dispute, and to engage in mayhem and terrorism. I understand why many people of Kashmiri origin—including some of my own constituents—do not like to acknowledge that reality, but this House must acknowledge it, as the international community does.

As to the Government of India's becoming a permanent member of the Security Council of the United Nations, that has long been the position of Her Majesty's Government; indeed, it was the position of my predecessor.

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): I strongly commend the Foreign Secretary's statement, but I should point out that it is only in the most serious situations that a Government should ask their citizens to leave another country. If that is done in any other circumstances, it devalues the product to such an extent that in future dangerous situations, people might not leave the country concerned, and some might even travel to it. Given that we have seen on our television screens expatriates in Delhi and elsewhere suggesting that there is no need to leave, is the right hon. Gentleman totally satisfied that such recommendations are right in respect of all of India? Will he give the House a guarantee that if the situation continues to improve, he will keep his decision under constant review?

Mr. Straw: These decisions have been very difficult. We are caught between trying not to raise the anxiety of people in the region unnecessarily or "devalue"—to use the right hon. Gentleman's description—the currency of advice, and recognising our clear duty of care to British citizens and to our staff. Today's news could have been very different, as could tomorrow's. My judgment was that the changes to travel advice were appropriate and calibrated, and in a sense I am comforted by the fact that similar judgments were made by the American Secretary of State, Colin Powell, by the United Nations Secretary-General in respect of his staff, and by many other Governments around the world. Of course, the last thing that we wish to see is any restriction on travel to Pakistan or India, or—following on from that—any restriction on trade. Trade with India has taken off, and with our active support trade with Pakistan has expanded, following a change in the EU-Pakistan textile agreement that was reached at the beginning of this year.

The right hon. Gentleman asked whether we would keep the matter under review and change the travel advice when we think it safe to do so, and the answer to that question is yes.

Mr. Ben Chapman (Wirral, South): I share my right hon. Friend's pleasure at the optimistic signs that are emerging, not least because my daughter is currently in Madras and is seeking to fly home. Needless to say, I make no special plea for my daughter, concerned about her though I am; I know that she will work to find a solution to her own problem. However, her experience of going to the airline with which she is travelling was to find, at the end of last week, that all flights this week were full and waiting lists were closed. If Governments are to issue advice that their citizens should leave a particular country, it follows that matching provision should be made for airline capacity to carry those individual citizens out of that country. What steps are being taken to ensure that seats will be available to those who seek to travel?

Mr. Straw: I know that my hon. Friend is not seeking to make a special plea for his daughter, but such an example is a useful way of illuminating what may be a problem. Our general information is that although there are heavy bookings for flights out of the main airports in India and Pakistan, flights are not fully booked. I hope to follow up the matter that my hon. Friend has raised, and I will let him and the House know the result.

On the wider issue, we have made contingency arrangements to charter a number of flights if we judge that the news is going the wrong way, and we ourselves have to organise an evacuation of British citizens from the sub-continent—but I hope that that does not happen.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): Is there any evidence to support the Indian Government's claims

[Hugh Robertson]

that the terrorists have direct links to al-Qaeda? If so, what are the implications of that for our relations with the Pakistani Government, given our position in the war against terrorism?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I do not go into detail—but I have seen the speculation as well.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will my right hon. Friend return to the points raised by the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) and the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) about the sale of arms to both India and Pakistan? They are both countries with enormous structural problems and tremendous poverty—huge problems that could be resolved with better attention, shall we say, to internal issues. However, the west, and Britain in particular, has been very happy to do enormous arms deals with both countries. There must be an increased danger of war between them the longer these arms sales go on. Will my right hon. Friend impose an arms embargo on both sides and encourage the rest of Europe and the western world to do exactly the same?

Mr. Straw: My hon. Friend is right to say that those countries have devoted to military expenditure considerable resources that otherwise could have gone to civilian expenditure. That is why we in the international community—including the UK Government, myself not least—have been working so hard to encourage the parties to the dispute to reach their own solution to the dispute. As I said at the end of my statement, the problems between India and Pakistan cannot satisfactorily be resolved by military means. However, I have seen no evidence that a unilateral arms embargo by the UK, or even by the EU, would help to resolve this issue or lead to less defence expenditure by these countries. I simply do not believe that that would happen.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I compliment the Foreign Secretary on his diplomatic efforts, but will he tell us what applications for arms sales in the last two months, if any, have been blocked by the Government? Could he give guidance to UK companies that are perhaps thinking of trying to sell arms to India or Pakistan as to which licence applications would be blocked in future? We need more information about what the Government will and will not allow.

Mr. Straw: So far as I am aware, no applications have been blocked; they have been subject to processing in the normal way. However, I shall be happy to set the record straight for the right hon. Gentleman and for the House if my recollection is inaccurate.

The criteria were clearly laid out in the consolidated criteria that were put before the House on 26 October 2000 by my right hon. Friend who is now the Minister for Europe. The criteria on which we make decisions, which are the consolidation of national criteria and mainly EU criteria, are clearly set out. They are criteria that the defence industries themselves properly understand. I have had no request from the defence industries for us to provide a gloss on the criteria, as it were. The best way that we can provide certainty is by saying to the defence industries that we will apply these criteria, which are sufficiently flexible to take account, for example, of changes in the level of conflicts and potential conflicts between different parties.

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East): I am slightly disconcerted by the Foreign Secretary's approach in his statement, which seemed to view the Kashmir problem only in the context of the US war against terrorism. I am also slightly disconcerted by his apparent dismissal of past UN resolutions as historic and not worth arguing about. However, I am totally disconcerted by his view that this 50-year-old dispute can be settled only by the two parties concerned. It is 50 years of such advice from the Foreign Office that has led to the present situation. Is there not a case for the Foreign Secretary, on behalf of the Government, to approach the US Government and the other two regional powers involved to see whether the two parties to the dispute can be brought to the table, so that the issue of Kashmir can be settled? Clearly, after 50 years, it cannot be left to the two parties alone.

Mr. Straw: It is simply not the case that I have approached the issue solely in terms of the fight against terrorism. I have a fair knowledge of the dispute, not least after 25 years of representing people from both India and Pakistan who live in my constituency. I could turn my hon. Friend's argument back on him and suggest that if United Nations resolutions could have solved the matter, it would have been solved more than 50 years ago. I am happy to talk about the UN resolutions, but while Pakistan adopts them, India claims that they were superseded by the Simla agreement between the two countries in 1972. I shall put the terms of that agreement on the table for hon. Members to discuss.

I accept that the dispute is a bilateral one, but—as I said in my statement and have said on many previous occasions—it has serious international implications, both because of the potential consequences if war breaks out and because of wider humanitarian concerns for the benighted people of Kashmir on both sides of the line of control. That is why the Government have been so heavily engaged in seeking to encourage the parties to resolve the dispute by peaceful means. So too, have the US, Russia and China, to which my hon. Friend referred. However, external parties can do all that they can, with the best will in the world—President Putin and President Jiang Zemin both held meetings separately with President Musharraf and Prime Minister Vajpayee in Almaty some 10 days ago—but in the end the matter can be resolved only by the two key parties who are arguing about territory. We do not have the international law behind us, or the military might—even with the US, Russia, China and the UK combined—to police an agreement that has not been made by the two parties.

Mr. David Chidgey (Eastleigh): The Foreign Secretary has already confirmed that there are contingency plans for British military advisers to be sent to help to seal the line of control if asked to do so. Are there contingency plans, or any extended contingency planning, to provide a helicopter fleet to assist with sealing the line of control? Will we send any other assets to assist, either on our own or with the help of the US?

Mr. Straw: No, although I cannot rule out what might happen in the future. The hon. Gentleman may be referring to reports suggesting that some 300 helicopters might be provided, but the point that I was making to my Pakistani interlocutor was that to do as we have been requested and insert monitors along the line of control would require 300 helicopters and a large contingent of external forces. Such forces are not available, and the British Army does not have 300 spare helicopters—nor has even the US. That was my point.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): The Foreign Secretary has already alluded to the number of people in this country who have direct and personal involvement with affairs in India and Pakistan. What interdepartmental talks have there been about deterring and containing any outbreak of violence that might spill over from the sub-continent on to the streets of this country?

Mr. Straw: I understand the burden of the hon. Gentleman's question, but I do not believe that anyone has that idea in mind. However, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I, along with other colleagues, are well aware of the anxieties and strong passions, some of which have been expressed this afternoon, that are felt on the issue. As I said in my statement, my right hon. Friend deemed it appropriate to hold a meeting with representatives of south Asian groups, including Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs, on 29 May. I met a similar group the next day to talk about community relations in this country, along with colleagues from both sides of the House and Lord Filkin, the new Home Office Minister with responsibility for race and community relations. We intend to stay very closely in touch with the communities in this country.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I welcome the relaxation of tension to which my right hon. Friend referred in his statement. However, given the apocalyptic nature of the weapons available to India and Pakistan, despite the answers that he has given this afternoon and that his Department has given in the past, many of my constituents were, and remain, deeply concerned that the Government will not impose an absolute ban on arms sales from this country to that region at a time of such tension. Will my right hon. Friend look at the issue again, as the Government's approach seems to do little or nothing to contribute to what everyone in this country, regardless of nationality or creed, wishes for—that is, that there should be no war in that part of the world?

Mr. Straw: I understand the deep concerns of my hon. Friend's constituents, and I do not dismiss them for a second. However, some of the supplies that I have approved in the past, such as de-mining equipment, have been extremely benign, albeit that they are classified as arms sales. A blanket ban would involve a complete ban on any kind of material at all. I have already said that to the best of my recollection—I will correct this if I am wrong—I have neither seen nor approved any arms control licence in respect of India or Pakistan in the past two months.

The criteria that I mentioned earlier are applied very carefully. Moreover, the decisions that Ministers make are the subject of retrospective scrutiny by the so-called Quadripartite Committee. Although I know that there has been a separate discussion, led by my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), about strengthening that machinery, ours is among the most thorough parliamentary scrutiny of arms control licences anywhere in the world. When I gave evidence on behalf of the Government before the Quadripartite Committee about five weeks ago I was, quite properly, given a very thorough cross-examination by the right hon. and hon. Members present.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): I thank my right hon. Friend not only for the consistent attention that he has given this issue but for meeting many community leaders on his return from the sub-continent, including many of my constituents and those of colleagues throughout the House. We appreciated that.

Does my right hon. Friend agree that Abdul Ghani Lone's fatal error was to commit himself exclusively to following the democratic process in the state legislative elections coming up later this year, for which reason he was then, as a leader of the Hurriyat conference—and no friend of the Indian Government—targeted by the ISI and assassinated? Does my right hon. Friend also agree that when Donald Rumsfeld is in both capitals this week, he could do a lot worse than come away with a commitment from the leadership of Pakistan matching that already given by India that there will be no nuclear first use by that country? Such a level of equality in the nuclear relationship would greatly defuse the situation.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks. He is right to draw attention to the great bravery of Mr. Lone and the fact that he—as no friend whatever of the Indian Government—paid for his moderation with his life. There are some extremely unpleasant people operating in Jammu and Kashmir in the name of freedom. This country, too, has had experience of people operating in the name of freedom committing the most outrageous terrorist acts, and we should bear that experience in mind. I should say for the record, however, that I have no evidence about the provenance of the murderers.

On my hon. Friend's last point, we want both sides to say that they simply will not use nuclear weapons to resolve the conflict, and that they will resolve it by other means.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): I declare an interest as chairman of the parliamentary friends of India. The Foreign Secretary will understand the importance that I attach to strengthening and deepening the historic trade and economic ties between our two nations. I want to reinforce the concerns of my right hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. MacKay) about the impact that unnecessarily severe travel advice could have on economic and trade relations. Does the Foreign Secretary understand that there is concern in India that travel advice may have been issued in order to be even-handed between India and Pakistan rather than on the merits of the case, and will he ensure that the advice is kept under constant review and can be relaxed at the earliest possible moment?

Mr. Straw: It is worth repeating that I have every interest in and commitment to encouraging trade and commercial, business and tourist intercourse between the United Kingdom and Pakistan, India and all the other countries of that region. To reassure the hon. Gentleman,

[Mr. Straw]

I can say that the advice issued in respect of India was not issued in order to appear even-handed. I took quite separate decisions, which I spelled out in a letter to all colleagues—as the House was not sitting—giving reasons for the travel advice and the drawing down of our staff in Pakistan, which was to do with extant terrorist threats there. I held off from issuing travel advice in respect of India until I had been to the region and discussed my experiences, in particular with United States Secretary of State Colin Powell and European Union colleagues. I judged it appropriate, and it was required by my duty of care towards United Kingdom citizens, to issue the advice that I did on 31 May, and then to strengthen it on 5 June.

I promise the hon. Gentleman and the House that we will change the travel advice as soon as it is prudent to do so—back to normality, we hope, but that remains to be seen. Meanwhile, our albeit limited staffs in both India and Pakistan are making every effort to run as near normal a visa service as possible.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I, too, commend my right hon. Friend for his worthy efforts on the matter. He is walking a tightrope in respect not only of what is happening on the sub-continent but of the communities here. He has been assiduous in trying to secure a peaceful settlement. However, let me take him back to his statement about the entry clearance operation. I know that it is to be increased in New Delhi, but I have had complaints over the past few days from constituents who simply cannot make applications. That involves not only visitor visa cases but compassionate cases. I know that my right hon. Friend has an interest, because of the number of his constituents in Blackburn who will be affected. Unless we consider how to tackle the problem now, there will be a backlog of cases. Perhaps we can consider an alternative method by which people can make applications.

Mr. Straw: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. I understand what he says about the entry clearance operation. I was reluctant to make any changes in the visa processes or to draw down staff until I thought that it was absolutely necessary—but it had to be done. We have arranged a drop-box system in Delhi. As of this morning, I understand that our processing of applications across India as a whole is running at 65 per cent. of the level at June 2001, and 80 per cent. in Delhi. We will do everything that we can to get back to as near normal a level as possible. If my hon. Friend has specific constituency complaints or concerns, I hope that he will draw them to my attention or to that of the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Warwickshire, North.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): Does the Foreign Secretary agree that part of the continuing tragedy is that millions of the poorest of the world's poor live in India and Pakistan, as is evidenced by the fact that India is the largest recipient of bilateral aid from the UK? Does he also agree that every penny spent on armaments and nuclear devices by India and Pakistan could better be spent on primary education and health care in those two countries? What realistic prospect is there that India and Pakistan would actually be willing to try to resolve the difficulties between them bilaterally?

Mr. Straw: India is a huge country and contains about one third of the world's poor, according to figures from the Department for International Development. Per head of population, India and Pakistan are significant recipients of aid from this country and from around the world.

As for the hon. Gentleman's question about realistic prospects, I have given an explanation why the matter has to be resolved by the parties, albeit with encouragement from others—*[Interruption.]* I am neither an optimist or a pessimist in such situations. We have to work hard for a peaceful solution to be agreed between the parties, and we shall continue to do that. However, it is also crucial that although the issue may fall away from the front pages, it should not fall away from the concerns of the House; it is not least a consequence of the international community's having moved on to something else that the issue blew up into a crisis and then festered without being resolved.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): I support everything that my right hon. Friend has done to achieve an easing back from the crisis that we face. He will know that I went right up to the line of control just before Easter. May I urge him to ensure, in the short term, that the United Nations has equal access to both sides of the line of control and that its reports on incursions and shelling across the line are made public, so that we have a neutral view of the position? In the long term, although I realise that the issue can be resolved only when Pakistan and India are willing to resolve it, we must take account of what people on both sides in Kashmir want. We must ensure that the problem is kept on the agenda; 54 years is far too long, and the problem must be solved.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He is right to say that 54 years is far too long. As regards the specific issue of the UN monitors, I shall take up the points that he raised and will write to him.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): In the Foreign Secretary's remarks this afternoon, he appeared to rule out the formal deployment of British military units to Kashmir, but he has posited a scenario in which individual military advisers could be sent. Will he tell the House whether any British military personnel have been given warning orders or otherwise put on notice of possible service in Kashmir?

Mr. Straw: Although, as the hon. Gentleman will understand, I am not directly responsible for military forces—that is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence—I am tolerably certain that no warning notices have been given.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Earlier today I had a meeting with the leadership of the Ilford mosque that my right hon. Friend visited a few years ago. Concern was expressed to me that nothing that happens in the conflict should be used in any way by extremists of any kind to damage community relations in this country. Given that the period from the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombs to the Cuban missile crisis was 16 years, how confident can we be that it will not be 16 years from the inception of Indian and Pakistani nuclear weapons before those countries realise the need for a hotline and a proper relationship to control and manage the fact that there are two nuclear states in that region?

Mr. Straw: First, I commend the very responsible approach taken by my hon. Friend's constituents as represented by the mosque in Ilford, which I well remember visiting.

Secondly, I cannot give a time line, but with good fortune, one better consequence of the current crisis and the international attention being paid to it may be that both sides understand the need better to develop a sophisticated nuclear doctrine, and above all, the need to improve their back-channel methods of communication so as to avoid a nuclear war starting by accident or misunderstanding.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. We must move on.

Point of Order

4.40 pm

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. My point of order arises from a report in *The Mail on Sunday* yesterday, to which I have drawn your office's attention, by that newspaper's political editor. You will recall that, throughout the last Parliament and at various times during this Parliament, various hon. Members have complained that Government announcements have been made to the media before being made to the H[illegible]e. The political editor of *The Mail on Sunday* claims [illegible] have documentary evidence that that practice dates from [illegible] meeting at No. 10 Downing street during the last Parli[illegible]nt, called by the communications director at No. 10, Al[illegible]r Campbell, in which he stated:

> "We have got to think [illegible] new ways of communicating our message and be less tied by p[illegible]mentary rules."

That seems to suggest a pattern, and a hand behind that pattern, of flouting parliamentary convention. I should be most grateful to you, as I am sure many other hon. Members would be, if you would endeavour to investigate this matter.

Mr. Speaker: I will not comment on media articles—it is not for me to do so—but I reiterate that I want Ministers to come to the House when any important matter has to be announced, rather than releasing a statement to the press. I hope that that helps the hon. Gentleman.

Orders of the Day

National Insurance Contributions Bill

Considered in Committee.

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

PRIMARY CLASS 1 CONTRIBUTIONS

4.41 pm

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I beg to move amendment No. 1, in clause 1, page 2, line 4, leave out—

'the current upper earnings limit'

and insert "£100,000".

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 2, in clause 1, page 2, line 8, leave out "1 per cent." and insert—

'10 per cent. on earnings over £100,000'.

No. 4, in clause 1, page 2, line 30, leave out—

'the current upper earnings limit'

and insert "£100,000".

No. 5, in clause 1, page 2, line 34, leave out "1 per cent." and insert—

'10 per cent. on earnings over £100,000'.

Dr. Harris: These amendments were tabled by myself and my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor), whom I am pleased to see in his place. I had imagined that we might be joined at some point in our proceedings by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, the right hon. Member for Brent, South (Mr. Boateng), who deserves to be congratulated on his new position. Indeed, I hope that he will join us in today's debates.

It needs to be said at the outset of this debate that the Liberal Democrats welcome the resources for the national health service that will be provided under the Bill. However, we have four very clear concerns. First, the resources have come five years too late. Secondly, in the sense that they were not advertised at the last election, they have been introduced by stealth. Thirdly, we do not believe that the Bill represents the fairest way to act. Fourthly, we believe that significant difficulties will be created for business—in particular, but not only, manufacturing business. These amendments represent an attempt to resolve the last of those problems.

Significant difficulties will be created for those who run and work in businesses by the Government's decision to use a rise in employers' contributions to fund the health service. For that reason, we propose in the amendments a 10 per cent. national insurance contribution rate above the current upper earnings limit—indeed, above earnings of £100,000 a year. That is as close as we can get, using the vehicle of this Bill, to a selectable amendment that reproduces our policy to fund public services in the fairest possible way and to do so progressively and by avoiding placing extra burdens on business.

Taken together, these amendments—especially if considered with amendment No. 3, which has not been selected for debate—would provide an alternative approach to funding the health service, instead of raising employers' contributions. There may be disagreements between those on the Treasury Bench and ourselves; they may consider that our proposal would be too fair and too good for business because they want to penalise business. I hope that they will accept, at least, that it is a statement of our position. When we say that we want improvements in the health service, it is right that we are asked how we will pay for them, just as the Government have said how they will pay for them. We have set out the ways in which we shall do so, as I am doing now. In contrast, Conservative Front-Bench Members are on much more difficult ground, as I suspect, for reasons that we may share, that they will express their concerns about the impact on business of the rise in the employers' national insurance contribution. They will have to answer—the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) is perhaps eager to address this now—how they would pay for improvements in the health service if they are not going to support some of the measures in the Bill.

4.45 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to know that I await the explanation of his arguments with eager anticipation, bated breath and beads of sweat on my brow. Given that he has just referred to an amendment whose purpose and effect would be to limit the size of national insurance contributions paid by employers, will he confirm whether an amendment that has been tabled by Liberal Democrats will confine the limit on national insurance contributions by employers to those in Great Britain? The Liberals appear to have neglected to consider the situation in Northern Ireland.

Dr. Harris: If that is the best that the hon. Gentleman can do on this key issue—I believe that the amendment to which he refers has not even been selected in this group—it shows the weakness of his position. The Chairman of Ways and Means has made his selection, and my intention is to make the general point that the funding of the health service should be progressive. For preference, that should be done without putting extra burdens on business, but, in the end, the health service needs to be funded.

I had hoped that the hon. Gentleman would answer the point that I put to him, and I hope that he will do so. If he opposes some of the resources of this Bill—I share some of the concerns that he may express later about some measures—he must state which parts of the health service he wants to cut, which parts he will not allow to grow, or what other taxes he would increase. That is important. However imperfect the drafting of our amendments, they are a genuine attempt to explore why the Government have chosen to go down this path.

Our approach to raising the resources that are needed for the health service is progressive. We made it clear in our alternative Budget that we wanted a 50 per cent. rate of income tax for those earning more than £100,000—the very well-off and those best able to afford such a rise—to pay for this vital public service. Clearly, it is not possible to frame amendments to propose such a rise in income tax. As the next best thing—given that the

Government have sold the pass on the upper earnings limit—we would have liked a much better method than this tax on jobs, which is a much more second-rate option.

The Government must say why they are opposed to the proposal set out in these amendments. They must have considered it, given that the upper earnings limit is no longer sacrosanct. Given the 1 per cent. increase in the upper earnings limit, the Government have conceded that it is not absolute, regardless of what they failed to say about it before the election. The drawbacks must therefore be addressed. It does not appear that it is unfair, because we would be asking high earners to pay more. It does not appear that it is the sort of tax that can easily be avoided—clearly, that will be an issue in relation to taxing high earners. Given all the evidence that a 50 per cent. rate on incomes over £100,000 is about the going rate worldwide, it is difficult to envisage how people will move their earnings abroad, especially when, in this context, we are talking about a payroll tax that is much more difficult to avoid. In New York, for example, when taken together with local taxes, the tax on salaries equivalent to £100,000 is about equivalent to the rate under our proposal.

Are the Government concerned that our proposals are not explicit enough? I do not see how one could be more explicit than saying before the election that we wanted to ask the better-off to pay more tax in a fair way for the health service. We restated that proposal in our alternative Budget and we are seeking to make that case in Committee today.

The Government cannot argue that our proposals are not a transparent way of raising money. The complexities that the Government have already introduced into the national insurance contributions system do not give them strong grounds on which to attack the transparency of our approach.

There are strong reasons for seeking to make the changes proposed by the amendments. They would raise approximately the same amount of resources as the Government intend to raise from their tax on employers that will result from the Bill's proposals for employers' national insurance contributions. We weighed up whether we would prefer the money to be raised via our approach or from employers' national insurance contributions. Because of the significant drawbacks on business that will result from the tax that the Government propose, we believe that our approach is preferable.

It is peculiar that the Government should seek to raise so much of the money for the health service from a tax on business. In previous debates such as that on the 1999 measures to deal with pollution, the Government have said that they did not want to tax jobs. They said that that would be bad and that employers' national insurance contributions would be reduced when other taxes on pollution went up. However, the bad tax that the Government have previously opposed is now being used as a vehicle.

We believe that the top priority is extra money for the health service, but we do not believe that the Government's approach, as set out in the detail of the Bill, is the right one. Raising the employers' contribution will cause problems for employers, manufacturing and the businesses facing difficulties in exporting because of the strong pound. In addition, public service employers, including those within the health service, will lose money as they gain. It is not clear that the Government have taken that point into account.

It is clear that the amendments would be fairer and would not have such a severe impact on business. Our proposals are transparent and it would not be possible to avoid them. Those are strong reasons for supporting the amendments, and I ask, Sir Michael, that we be allowed to vote on amendment No. 2, which expresses the bulk of what we are trying to say. The Conservatives must also explain where they would get the money from if not from a tax on business.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): Will the hon. Gentleman tell us why, when the Government's proposal was introduced in the Budget, the Liberal Democrat Front-Bench spokesman described the 1 per cent. increase on employees' national insurance contributions as not being a tax? In fact, he asserted that income tax should have been raised by 1 per cent. However, when it comes to employers, the Liberal Democrats describe the increase as a tax. Why is it a tax on employers when it is not a tax on employees?

Dr. Harris: I regret that the hon. Gentleman was not able to provide me with the direct quotation, but I shall set out again the position of those on the Liberal Democrat Front Bench. We recognise that national insurance contributions are a form of payroll taxation. Our position is clear in that we believe that income tax is a preferable way of raising money for the health service, and we said that to the electorate at the last election. We were clear about introducing a top rate of 50 per cent. on income of more than £100,000, and that would cover unearned income and wealthy pensioners. The Government's proposal excludes the wealthiest third of pensioners from contributing to the extra money that the health service needs.

We must now decide how we want the money for the health service to be raised. Five years ago, we would have supported such a measure and we still want money to go into the health service. However, because the Government will put extra burdens on business through the national insurance contributions paid by employers, the amendments reflect our disappointment that the Government did not take the alternative open to them and apply a top rate equivalent to income tax through national insurance contributions on incomes of more than £100,000.

Mr. Hendrick *rose—*

Dr. Harris: I thought that I had answered the hon. Gentleman's question.

Mr. Hendrick: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the Liberal Democrats would much rather that pensioners paid income tax at an extra 1 per cent. than businesses paid 1 per cent. towards the health costs of their employees?

Dr. Harris: We have been clear that wealthy pensioners who can afford it—

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): Rupert Murdoch.

Dr. Harris: Not only Rupert Murdoch, but other newspaper magnates, should, when they become

[Dr. Harris]

pensioners, contribute to vital public services according to their ability to pay. I have answered the hon. Gentleman's question. He is saying that people such as Baroness Thatcher and Rupert Murdoch should not pay for the health service. Given that one of them was partly responsible for reducing it to its present state, that is charitable of him.

Matthew Taylor: My hon. Friend may want to go a little further and point out that the Labour party's policy is not only that Rupert Murdoch and Baroness Thatcher should not contribute extra tax to the NHS, but that low-paid employees on as little as a few thousand pounds a year should pay extra. So those on very high incomes do not pay extra, but those on very low incomes do. That is an odd policy for the Labour party to pursue.

Dr. Harris: I direct the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) to page 46 of the Library research paper on the Bill, which shows the curve of the percentage of income paid in national insurance contributions according to gross income. Under the Government's plans, those earning £600 a week will pay 9 per cent. and those on £2,000 will pay around half that. That is no one's definition of progressive. People on around that earnings limit should make a significantly increased contribution to public services.

Labour Members may be embarrassed that they do not have as progressive a policy as they might and will end up supporting a tax on businesses in their communities in preference to asking the better-off to pay more. That is hard to defend. We have clearly stated our position. A progressive form of taxation through asking the better-off to contribute is far preferable to asking business to do it, as are the Government.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): I say at the outset that we shall oppose the amendments. They position the Liberal Democrats to the left of Labour, and if they want to establish those credentials there are better ways of doing it than by tabling such amendments.

I am confused about how the amendments fit in with the Liberal Democrats' alternative Budget. When that was published on 8 April, they pledged to increase the rate of income tax by 1 per cent. for all income up to £100,000. As I understand it, the amendments would not increase by 1 per cent. national insurance contributions for employees in the range of earnings between £35,000 and £100,000, but increase to 50 per cent. the burden on employees earning more than £100,000.

Matthew Taylor: I do not know if the hon. Gentleman did his own research or got someone else to do it, but it was pretty poor. We proposed 1p on the basic rate plus a new 50 per cent. rate—a 10 per cent. increase—on earnings of more than £100,000. Combined with the Government's 1p national insurance rise, the amendment would replicate that, and that is its purpose.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for explaining that. The Paymaster General and I were under the impression that the alternative Budget was expressed in terms that would cause a lot of confusion.

5 pm

The idea of imposing a 50 per cent. marginal rate of tax on individuals earning in excess of £100,000 is obscene these days. Political parties on the continent—most recently in France—are campaigning to reduce the burden of taxation. They realise that it directly affects the willingness of individuals to participate in the economy and, in particular, their ability to attract the most able employees. It will be very damaging for our economy if we burden employees with penal tax rates of 50 per cent. for those earning more than £100,000.

Many anomalies flow from the proposal. For example, if two married people each earn £60,000, they would pay tax at the 40 per cent. rate, but if one of them is at home looking after the children while the other earns £120,000, £20,000 of their earnings would be subject to the 50 per cent. marginal rate of tax. That would not be fair.

Matthew Taylor: As the hon. Gentleman is questioning the Liberal Democrat position, will he clarify whether he intends to oppose the employers' national insurance rise? If that is the case, and as he does not agree with an alternative way to raise the money, does he accept that the NHS will not get the extra money? Are the Conservatives now opposing extra money for the health service?

Mr. Chope: I thought that the hon. Gentleman was here for Second Reading when we alone among the Opposition parties firmly declared that the Bill was bad and voted against it, unlike his party which supported it. We are against the Bill. The NHS is already wasting a great deal of money, as the figures suggest. It is worth repeating what I said on Second Reading. Stuart Emslie, a senior civil servant, has said that the NHS in England alone is estimated to be wasting between £7 billion and £10 billion from a budget of £54 billion as a result of, for instance, fraud. We want to see the reforms. The Government continue to say that they will invest more money in the health service and that that will be accompanied by reform, but we have seen no sign of that and yet they still inflict the higher imposts.

Matthew Taylor: So that we are absolutely clear on this: the Conservatives are against extra money for the health service, reformed or otherwise.

Mr. Chope: That is a travesty of what I said. The hon. Gentleman might disagree, but people can make their own judgment by reading the *Official Report*. It is obvious that I did not say what he claims because otherwise he would not have felt the need to intervene again to put words in my mouth. I have given way three times to him and it is clear that he realises that he is on the losing end of the argument.

I agree with the Liberal Democrats that the burden on employers will damage the economy. I am not prepared to accept, however, that the solution is to impose a high burden of extra taxation on those who earn more than £100,000 a year, which is not so unusual in London and the south-east. It will damage our economy if we send out a signal to the ablest and the best entrepreneurs in the world that we are no longer an entrepreneurial society and wish to penalise people by imposing higher rates of tax. One of the best things achieved by Margaret Thatcher's Government was the reduction of the penal high rates of personal taxation.

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): This is already developing into an interesting debate as we watch the fisticuffs between the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives about some of the finer points of deciding how funding for the national health service should be raised. In the case of the Conservatives—this is not such a fine point—the argument is about whether that funding should be raised in the first place.

I say to the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) that he is wrong on every count, and I should like to explain briefly to him the reasons why. He started by saying that the Liberal Democrats were against the measure because it was imposed by stealth. He also said that it was not good for business, even though the amendments are only about employees, and that it does not raise money in the fairest way. He went on to argue that there was a more progressive approach for raising money for the national health service.

In this Committee of the whole House, the Government lay before hon. Members a judgment. First, the national health service needs more resources after sustained underinvestment for a long period, and those resources have to be considerable and guaranteed for a period. Secondly, the approach to how that money is raised must be taken on the fairest basis that can be achieved. Thirdly, the Government pinned their decisions on the basis of the Beveridge principle. I have to say to the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon that his amendments are neither progressive nor fair, which indicates the folly of trying to tinker with a little bit of the system, rather than looking at the whole system and how it is to be managed. Indeed, it could be argued that his amendments would introduce taxation by stealth. What he said that he was seeking to achieve is not what his amendments would deliver.

First, the amendments would mean that people who earn less than the upper earnings limit would still pay the extra 1 per cent. on all their earnings. Secondly, those whose earnings are between the upper earnings limit and £100,000 a year would pay the extra 1 per cent. only on a part of their income. I assume that a drafting error was made in relation to the amendments' implied reference to people who earn £100,000 a week: I assume that they were intended to refer to people who earn £100,000 a year. I will be generous to the Committee and assume that that was the intention.

The amendments would also ensure that those who earn £100,000 pay 11 per cent. on their first slice of income up to the upper earnings limit, but nothing at all between the upper earnings limit and £100,000. People would then pay 10 per cent. on £100,000 and more. I do not know what definition of the word "progressive" the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon is using, but that is not a progressive system.

Mr. Bercow: There are very few occasions on which the Paymaster General and I agree, but we do so at least in part today. She is guilty of a characteristic understatement in her critique of the Liberal Democrats, whose amendments are, frankly, hare-brained and madcap in equal measure—and there is nothing unusual about that. I say to the Committee and the hon. Lady that there is one thing of which we are not accusing the Government in relation to the Bill's tax increases, as distinct from a number of their predecessors: we are not suggesting that they are stealth taxes in any sense—far from it. The Liberal Democrats are hopelessly behind the times and have got it wrong. These tax increases are brazen, brutal and a triumph of hope over reality.

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Gentleman has never knowingly understated anything in this House, and he rises to the challenge now.

I was trying to make the point that when the Opposition advance a principle in debate on the Floor of the House, it is their responsibility to ensure that their amendments would deliver on that principle. Perhaps the amendments have indicated to the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon how difficult it is to combine in practice the whole cascade of principles—progressiveness, fairness, certainty and delivery of necessary resources—that he articulates so readily. That is probably one of the many reasons why we are the Government and the Liberal Democrats are not.

The hon. Gentleman cannot even get his figures right. He went on to say that the amendments set out a much fairer method—that his party is committed to raising the money for the national health service, but in a different way. I have news for him: the amendments would raise less, not more, for the NHS. That is true even before taking into account the fact that, as experience has shown, the tax system has to be sensitive in understanding that people, especially those whose pay is in the higher earnings range, sometimes engage in finding ways not to pay tax. Benefits in kind, whereby people find other ways to have their salary paid, are a classic example.

Dr. Evan Harris: The Conservative spokesman described a 50 per cent. rate of tax on earnings of more than £100,000 as "obscene". Does the Paymaster General think it is obscene? If so, is that why she opposes it, or is she just frightened of the possibility of avoidance or evasion? This morning we heard that the Government are to clamp down on benefits scroungers—the poorest people who cheat the system. Why are they not equally committed to dealing with the best-off people who cheat the system through evasion?

Dawn Primarolo: That is a very poor intervention; I am disappointed in the hon. Gentleman. This is not a sixth-form debating society, but the House of Commons. I have explained patiently and carefully why the Liberal Democrat amendments would not deliver more resources for the health service and why they are not progressive. In fact, they have all the characteristics of stealth, in that the hon. Gentleman claims he is trying to advance one principle but his amendments relate to another. He claims, in his party's name, that what he proposes is fairer.

Fortunately, I do not have to account for the views of the shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury, and I am sure that he is eternally grateful for that. He will advance his party's views. Equally, I can say without fear of contradiction that I have never flinched from advancing the views that I believe to be right, either in the House or anywhere else.

The principles of the Bill represent the fairest way to build on the Beveridge principles and to guarantee the extra resources that are necessary for the NHS. I look forward to the next group of amendments and to debating the reasons why it is right and proper that employers should make their contribution. I ask my hon. Friends to reject these

[Dawn Primarolo]

amendments because they are incompetent, they would cut money from the health service, they are unfair and they reveal the Liberals undertaking a stealth tax.

Matthew Taylor: I shall respond briefly to the key points made in the debate.

Once again, we have heard the Conservatives advance the argument for not imposing tax increases while they remain unprepared to defend the logical consequence of that argument, which is that they believe the NHS should get less resources than the Government plan. That would mean patients not getting the doctors and nurses they desperately need. In that respect, there is nothing between us and the Government: we both believe that the NHS desperately needs that money. We have been arguing so for many years and we at least explained at the general election that we would raise taxes accordingly as we could see no other way of achieving that end. It is a pity that Labour did not do the same, but we are glad that it has now accepted that argument. People outside the House must understand that the Conservatives are hiding a stealth cut that would deny the NHS the doctors and nurses that it desperately needs to treat patients.

5.15 pm

We thank the Minister for her response, but let us be clear about the proposal. First, the contributions are a stealth tax because Labour did not present a case for them at the general election. We regret that, not simply because they should have been debated properly and democratically, but because there is public cynicism about politicians' promises—and that affects all political parties, not just the Labour party. The proposal has simply reinforced people's belief that they cannot trust politicians when it comes to getting votes at the ballot box, as what they do afterwards bears little relation to what they say in their manifesto.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): First, I am not quite sure how one hides a stealth tax. Secondly, the Liberal Democrats have set out plans for tax increases for those earning more than £100,000, and taxation for pensioners. Will "Focus" go through people's letterboxes in the next few weeks saying that the Liberals will put up taxes for those people?

Matthew Taylor: The hon. Gentleman asked how an increase in national insurance can be hidden. The answer is that one does not tell people about it before the election, which is how the Labour party behaved; that is what was stealthy. Everyone can see that now, but they do not have a chance to vote on it.

As for whether we would campaign on the tax rises, we did campaign on them at the last general election. We issued leaflets saying that taxes would have to rise and that ordinary taxpayers would have to pay an extra penny on their income tax, which is more than Labour Members did. However, they have effectively replicated our plans in their proposals for national insurance. We also spelled out the need for an extra increase for people on high earnings. Although some people agreed, others attacked our proposals, but at least there was a chance for them to do so, which is not what happened with the Labour party's hidden policies.

Mr. Jones: So, "Focus" will go out in the leafy suburbs of constituencies in the south-east, saying that there will be an increase in income tax for pensioners.

Matthew Taylor: We told people that before they voted, not after. The hon. Gentleman has no grounds on which to criticise us. Our strategy may have been foolhardy and risky and may even have lost us some votes, but we made sure that people knew where we stood before the election, which is more than the hon. Gentleman's party did.

The Minister said that our proposal would not raise as much money as the Government's, which is true. We made it clear before tabling our amendments that we would use the income tax route, which is broader based than national insurance and does not suffer from the problem of evasion that she raised. The only reason that the amendments did not include that proposal is that it would not be in order in our debate. To be honest, any Front Bencher will always criticise details of their opponents' proposals, which may even include a drafting error. However, we have made clear the principle of our amendments—there cannot be a Member in the Committee who misunderstands it—and we hope that it will be accepted.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): By and large, we are inclined to support the income tax route rather than the national insurance one. However, will the hon. Gentleman comment on the Government's point that there is a gap in the upper earnings limit of £100,000, which would mean that people earning substantial sums, like ourselves, would not pay increased national insurance, which is hardly fair?

Matthew Taylor: That is not right, because the hon. Gentleman would pay extra national insurance, as would everyone else. However, it is true that we would not extend the limit on national insurance from £40,000 to £100,000. That replicates our policy at the last election and, I think, the Conservative party's policy. We argued for an increase in the basic rate, which is roughly what the national insurance increase, as is, replicates. We argued also for an extra tax rate on those earning more than £100,000.

Dawn Primarolo: I remind the hon. Gentleman of what his amendments would do. Those who earn £100,000 would pay 11 per cent. on the first slice of their income—that is, up to the upper earnings limit. They would pay nothing on the second slice of their income up to £100,000. They would then pay 10 per cent. on everything above £100,000. A zero rate would be interposed. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is fully aware of what his amendments would do. Perhaps he will explain why that is progressive.

Matthew Taylor: The hon. Lady will find that that is the present position. The difference is that we are asking people on more than £100,000 to pay more. We believe that at that level people can afford to pay more. If she believes that people can afford to pay more at a lower level than that, she is welcome to argue accordingly.

That is our view, and it was our view at the general election. We believe that very wealthy people can afford to pay substantially more as a contribution towards the NHS. Crucially, that is a better route than that of imposing an increase in tax on employers.

We know that manufacturing industry particularly, and other industries in internationally exposed sectors—farming is another good example—are suffering hugely because of the exchange rate. Industries such as car manufacturing are withdrawing from the United Kingdom: Ford cars are no longer produced in the UK; there has been a major closure of a Vauxhall plant; and BMW is pulling out of Rover, for example. These moves will all be made worse by the Government's decision to choose to increase employers' contributions. That is the tax on jobs, the very tax that the Government argued should be cut on the basis of their pollution taxes. They said, "Let's cut the tax on jobs and tax pollution instead." Now they are to increase the tax on jobs as if the previous arguments never existed. It is the Liberal Democrats who are following through on the argument against the tax on jobs.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): The hon. Gentleman mentioned public cynicism. Does he recall the campaigning leaflet—in fact, it was a guide—that the Liberal Democrats produced a few months ago, which was leaked? On these types of issue, it said, "Be shameless. You don't have the responsibility of administration. You do not have to worry about how things actually work. Agitate; cause trouble." Are not the Liberal Democrats' amendments a classic example of a lack of responsibility?

Matthew Taylor: Only the Conservatives have been shameless. They say that they want more money for health services, but they always vote against extra spending. The direct result of the policies that the hon. Gentleman supports would be fewer doctors and nurses treating patients. That would mean ever longer waiting lists under the Tories, and we know why—it is because Conservatives do not believe in the NHS. They want to get rid of it.

No doubt the hon. Gentleman will support amendments introduced by those on the Opposition Front Bench that would subsidise by tax breaks those who take up and can afford private insurance at the expense of investment in the NHS for the great majority.

Mr. Bercow: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Matthew Taylor: I shall be happy to give way to the hon. Gentleman and to debate his point. If the Conservative party is opposed to increases in employers' national insurance but is in favour of extra money for health services, how would it raise the extra money?

Mr. Bercow: I wish that the hon. Gentleman would follow the logic of the argument and—*[Interruption.]* It is no good Liberal Democrat Members chuntering from a sedentary position, in evident ignorance of the progression of the amendments to which my hon. Friends and I will shortly be speaking. The hon. Gentleman should be aware that the late Harold Macmillan famously and wisely said that the Liberals had some good ideas and some original ideas. He added that unfortunately their good ideas were not original and their original ideas were not any good. Today, they have produced ideas that are neither good nor original. They really have surpassed themselves.

Matthew Taylor: The difference is that the Conservative Front Bench has no answers at all and no ideas. It was, after all, Harold Macmillan who criticised the Conservative party in the 1980s for selling the family silver, and part of that sale was the rundown of investment in the health service to pay for tax cuts. This debate is, in part, about how we can raise money to rectify a decades-long underinvestment that has left patients suffering, and doctors and nurses struggling to cope in under-equipped and worn-out wards.

The hon. Gentleman must recognise this. It is perfectly legitimate for him to say that he does not want investment in the national health service—that he does not even want the national health service, and would not spend money on it but would cut taxes instead. It is not legitimate for him to argue against a way of funding NHS improvements, while pretending that the Conservatives nevertheless support those improvements. The improvements cannot be made unless the money is found.

The Conservatives' position is wholly illegitimate. They try to pander to those who want tax cuts—and of course we all want tax cuts if we can get them—without admitting that the cuts will be made at the expense of the national health service. That is the effect of the amendments for which the hon. Gentleman will presumably attempt to argue later, although so far he has presented no arguments, just a bit of bile. That is the stock in trade of the Conservative Front Bench at present, because it has no arguments.

I hope that the Committee will divide on the principle, but I think we would best do that by voting on amendment No. 2.

Dr. Evan Harris: I endorse what has been said by my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor). I said at the outset that we would try to press amendment No. 2 to a Division. I therefore beg to ask leave to withdraw amendment No. 1.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment proposed: No. 2, in clause 1, page 2, line 8, leave out "1 per cent." and insert—

'10 per cent. on earnings over £100,000'.—*[Dr. Evan Harris.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee proceeded to a Division.

The Second Deputy Chairman: Will the Serjeant at Arms investigate the delay in the No Lobby?

The Committee having divided: Ayes 43, Noes 384.

Division No. 254] **[5.27 pm**

AYES

Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*

Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Tyler, Paul
Webb, Steve
Willis, Phil
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Tom Brake and
Sir Robert Smith.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin, John
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Barker, Gregory
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Burns, Simon
Cairns, David
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chope, Christopher
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Conway, Derek
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom
Cran, James
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Fox, Dr Liam
Francis, Dr Hywel
Francois, Mark
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Edward
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Hayes, John
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoban, Mark
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hunter, Andrew
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Key, Robert
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leigh, Edward
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell. Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luff, Peter
Luke, Iain
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Malins, Humfrey
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Maples, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian

Perham, Linda
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prisk, Mark
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Randall, John
Rapson, Syd
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Ruffley, David
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sayeed, Jonathan
Sedgemore, Brian
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simmonds, Mark
Simon, Siôn
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tredinnick, David
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Vaz, Keith
Viggers, Peter
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watts, David
Weir, Michael
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wills, Michael
Wilshire, David
Winnick, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Noes:
Angela Smith and
Jim Fitzpatrick.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): On a point of order, Sir Michael. You will be aware that great difficulties were encountered by many hon. Members from both sides of the House in getting into the No Lobby. In fact, many hon. Members who were here in time to vote could not do so because of the numbers voting. Happily, the numbers were great because the Government and Her Majesty's Opposition were voting together, which shows that this House can occasionally work together. This matter should be looked into. The numbers coming in from behind the Speaker's Chair into the Lobby were so great that many Members who would normally have had their names registered as voting will not have their names registered. Sadly, they were unable to get in to the Division Lobby in time to vote. Would you look into this matter?

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Further to that point of order, Sir Michael. The hon. Member for Macclesfield (Mr. Winterton) has drawn your attention to one problem and I wish to draw it to another. The Division bell did not ring on my corridor and I did not know that the Division was on until I happened to look up at the Annunciator. I am sorry to say—and I confess to the Whips accordingly—that I could not vote, and I would therefore be grateful if you could have the functioning of the bells investigated.

The Second Deputy Chairman: I have heard both points of order. They will be recorded in the *Official Report* and I am sure that they will both be investigated.

5.45 pm

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Chope: Clause 1 goes to the heart of the Bill. We are against the Bill and against clause 1 in particular because it will effectively raise the rate of income tax on everybody, even those with very modest incomes. People on just £4,615 a year will have a marginal rate of tax next year of 21 per cent., instead of 20 per cent. The clause is in breach of the Government's promises made before the general election. It will provide more money for the health service but without the reforms that we see as an essential part of any extra funding.

Dawn Primarolo: Clause 1 provides the changes to the class 1 primary contributions paid by employees and lays out the increase to 11 per cent. up to the upper earnings limit and then the 1 per cent. beyond. The people of Britain have clearly stated that they wish the health service in the UK to be the best in the world. They also recognise that to have the best health service in the world, the resources need to be made available. They have also stated loudly and clearly that they believe that they should pay to ensure that that first-class health service is delivered fairly, based on the Beveridge principles. That funding will ensure that we can correct the underinvestment over which the Conservatives presided in their terms of office. It will ensure that the NHS is available comprehensively and on the basis of need, not ability to pay. I commend clause 1 to the Committee.

Dr. Evan Harris: I rise briefly to express my astonishment that the Conservatives can oppose a clause standing part without saying what they would put in its place. Clause 1 will provide significant additional funding for health services, and the Conservatives oppose the raising of those resources. However, they are unwilling to state which hospitals they would close, which health service staff they would not employ, which drugs would not be provided or what other taxes they would raise. That is not responsible opposition and it is certainly not effective opposition. Because we need the resources for the health service, the Liberal Democrats will support clause 1 standing part of the Bill.

John Mann (Bassetlaw): *The Sunday Telegraph*, which is known as a reputable newspaper that takes a wonderful

[John Mann]

array of polls—doubtless with extreme accuracy—managed to come up with a figure of 76 per cent. of the public approving of the 1 per cent. increase in national increase contributions to fund the health service. That is certainly mirrored in my postbag.

I recall challenging the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) to put a question about national insurance contributions on his excellent website, alongside those on immigration and asylum. Indeed, I offered the services of my webmaster to assist with framing such a question. Unfortunately, my kind offer was rebuffed, so we still do not have the definitive view from Aylesbury. However, the view from Bassetlaw, as I know from visiting the Bassetlaw district general hospital and talking to patients and staff, has been unanimous. A cross-section of 60 staff held a unanimous view. Indeed, not one was interested in talking about the 1 per cent. increase coming out of their salary.

Patients were also unanimous in their view. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Health kindly accompanied me on the visit. Every patient whom she and I saw in a visit lasting two and a half hours was asked his or her view, and it was unanimous. I do not expect the unanimity felt in Bassetlaw, which has an excellent hospital and a tradition of good NHS provision, to be mirrored 100 per cent. in every corner of the United Kingdom. However, a figure of 76 per cent. across the country is reasonable.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. We first jousted in 1986 and carried on doing so on Lambeth council until 1990. As I told him then, I thought that he was a peculiar individual, and nothing in the intervening 16 years has caused me to revise that opinion. Does he accept that people are likely to be anxious about a tax when they pay it and not before? Does he appreciate that, faced with the prospect of giving modest and gentle assent to his arguments or being embroiled in a lengthy and anorakish exchange in the middle of a hospital, some of his constituents might have decided that it was easier and less painful to ignore him?

John Mann: The pain is greatly reduced by the fact that we were celebrating the first anniversary of the day care centre at Bassetlaw district general hospital, which, as my hon. Friend the Minister said, is the best facility that she has ever seen anywhere in the national health service.

The hon. Gentleman refers back to May 1986, when he and I were both elected to Lambeth council. That was just when the Conservative increases in employers' national insurance contributions kicked in. I do not recall him hiding away in horror because of that during our successful campaign to get elected, or, indeed, the electorate raising the issue at all, let alone with any great ferocity. The issue throughout our campaign was the health service and how to fund it.

Finally, there is obviously a great air of anticipation about the World cup. I commend Radio 5 Live for its superb coverage; I have listened to it at every opportunity when travelling in my constituency over the past two weeks. On 31 May, two hours before the World cup was about to kick off, it took its road show to Ashford in Kent, where it had a large screen. It asked French business people why they were doing business in Ashford. One after the other, they stated that France was a high-tax economy in which to do business while Britain was at the moment a low-tax economy, and that that was why they had relocated from France to Britain, under this Government. I rest my case.

Question put, That the clause stand part of the Bill:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 315, Noes 125.

Division No. 255] **[5.55 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Cairns, David
Caton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*

Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tyler, Paul
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe and
Mr. Nick Ainger.

NOES

Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Cameron, David
Chope, Christopher
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*

Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Desmond Swayne and
Mr. John Randall.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 2

SECONDARY CLASS 1 CONTRIBUTIONS

Mr. Bercow: I beg to move amendment No. 6, in page 3, line 1, leave out from beginning to end of line 3 and insert—

'(2) For the purposes of this Act the secondary percentage is

(a) 12.8 per cent. the "full percentage", for all employers who do not provide health insurance;

(b) 11.8 per cent., the "reduced percentage", for employers who do provide health insurance in respect of those employees for whom they provide health insurance.'.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 7, in page 3, line 1, leave out from beginning to end of line 3 and insert—

'(2) For the purposes of this Act the secondary percentage is

(c) 12.8 per cent., the "full percentage", for all employers who are not themselves subject to Class 4 contributions, as set out in section 3 below;

(d) 11.8 per cent., the "reduced percentage", for employers who are self employed, meet the conditions of subsection (3) below, and are, themselves subject to Class 4 contributions, as set out in section 3 below.

(3) The reduced percentage is available to employers that have business turnover less than £1,000,000 per annum.

(4) For the purposes of subsection (3) above, the business turnover of all persons in partnership with the employer is taken in aggregate. The reduced percentage is available only if the aggregate meets the conditions of subsection (3).'.

No. 12, in page 3, line 1, leave out from beginning to end of line 3 and insert—

'(2) For the purposes of this Act the secondary percentage is

(a) 11.8 per cent., the "reduced percentage", on the costs of employment, on which Class 1 Secondary National Insurance Contributions are levied, of employees who meet the conditions set out in subsection (3) below;

(b) 12.8 per cent., the "full percentage", on the employment costs of all other employees.

(3) For the purposes of this Act, the reduced percentage is payable on the costs of employment of an employee, on whom Class 1 Secondary National Insurance Contributions are levied, where the employee is employed by a service company, which has turnover less than £1,000,000, of which the employee is also the main shareholder. For these purposes, main shareholder means that the employee owns more than 75 per cent. of the ordinary share capital of the service company that employs him.'.

No. 15, in page 3, line 1, at end insert—

'except for employers contributions in the public sector which will remain at 11.8 per cent.'.

No. 8, in page 3, line 12, leave out from beginning to end of line 14 and insert—

'(2) For the purposes of this Act the secondary percentage is

(a) 12.8 per cent. the "full percentage", for all employers who do not provide health insurance;

(b) 11.8 per cent., the "reduced percentage", for employers who do provide health insurance in respect of those employees for whom they provide health insurance.'.

No. 9, in page 3, line 12, leave out from beginning to end of line 14 and insert—

'(2) For the purposes of this Act the secondary percentage is

(c) 12.8 per cent., the "full percentage", for all employers who are not themselves subject to Class 4 contributions, as set out in section 3 below;

(d) 11.8 per cent., the "reduced percentage", for employers who are self employed, meet the conditions of subsection (3) below, and are, themselves subject to Class 4 contributions, as set out in section 3 below.

(3) The reduced percentage is available to employers that have business turnover less than £1,000,000 per annum.

(4) For the purpose of subsection (3) above, the business turnover of all persons in partnership with the employer is taken in aggregate. The reduced percentage is available only if the aggregate meets the conditions of subsection (3).'.

No. 13, in page 3, line 12, leave out from beginning to end of line 14 and insert—

'(2) For the purposes of this Act the secondary percentage is

(a) 11.8 per cent., the "reduced percentage", on the costs of employment, on which Class 1 Secondary National Insurance Contributions are levied, of employees who meet the conditions set out in subsection (3) below;

(b) 12.8 per cent., the "full percentage", on the employment costs of all other employees.

(3) For the purposes of this Act, the reduced percentage is payable on the costs of employment of an employee, on whom Class 1 Secondary National Insurance Contributions are levied, where the employee is employed by a service company, which has turnover less than £1,000,000, of which the employee is also the main shareholder. For these purposes, main shareholder means that the employee owns more than 75 per cent. of the ordinary share capital of the service company that employs him.'.

Mr. Bercow: We move speedily on to a group of amendments that may absorb our attention for a little longer than the previous group. The amendments embody several important issues on which I want to focus in some detail.

John Mann: Excellent.

Mr. Bercow: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm for these debates is as boundless as mine.

I want to consider together amendments Nos. 6 and 8. The Paymaster General will be aware that the Bill as drafted imposes an increase in national insurance contributions on employers that applies universally.

The Government have advanced the rationale that the purpose of the measure is to provide the wherewithal to finance improvements in the national health service. The gravamen of our argument on the amendments is that many businesses already provide health insurance for their employees and that it is fair in those circumstances that they should be relieved of the additional burden that I, in my understated way, described as "brazen, brutal and a triumph of hope over reality" a few moments ago.

It appears that the Government have no intention of providing that relief, but it seems—at any rate to Conservative Members—that there is merit in doing so. I would, therefore, like to say something in relation to amendments Nos. 6 and 8 at the outset. They would enable employers who are providing health insurance packages for their employees to be relieved of the 1 per cent. increase in the national insurance contribution. For the avoidance of doubt, if the amendment were accepted—obviously, I am keenly hopeful that the Committee will be persuaded of the merits of the arguments and will vote accordingly—employers who already provide health insurance for their employees will continue to pay what is described in the amendments as "the 'reduced percentage'" in national insurance contribution of 11.8 per cent., whereas those who provide no health insurance—

John Mann: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: In a moment, if the hon. Gentleman will contain himself.

Employers who provide no such insurance for their employees will be obliged to pay the increase and will therefore pay 12.8 per cent.

I am eagerly enthusiastic to explain some of the background to, and arguments for, our proposition but I am afraid that I can resist the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) no longer.

John Mann: Before the hon. Gentleman elucidates further, I have a question on the clarification of definitions. When he talks about employers providing for their employees, does he mean individual employees or the company? In other words, where a company only provides such insurance to a percentage of the work force, how would that affect his proposal?

Mr. Bercow: I think that the hon. Gentleman means "provides only" rather than "only provides", but we will not quibble unduly about the semantics as the purport of his remarks is reasonably clear. He raises a fair point and my answer, which I shall try to make clear for the benefit of the Committee, is that someone would be eligible as an employer for payment of the reduced percentage as opposed to the increased percentage if, and only if, he or she as an employer were providing health insurance for a substantial majority—probably the majority, if not all—of his or her employees.

John Mann *rose*—

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman is a hard taskmaster and not easily pleased. I should have thought that my answer was so abundantly clear that only an extraordinarily clever person could fail to see the point, but I give way.

John Mann: I merely seek slightly more clarification: definition of the word "substantial". The amendment is an attempt to frame legislation, so it is important for the hon. Gentleman to assist our deliberations by giving us a definition of "substantial". Will he be precise about the basis on which an employer would pay the lower rates under his proposal?

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman is a new Member but he is astute and well informed so I think that he will be aware that when one tables amendments one discusses them with the Clerks, who provide guidance on such matters. The drafting requirements of the Bill, as we have been informed, are such as not to enable us to go into the full details that we would want in due course to pursue. If the hon. Gentleman is putting it to me that, to guarantee efficacy and avoid abuse, we would need some precise definition in practice and some scheme that might require the approval of the Secretary of State, he has a fair point.

There was a very poorly drafted amendment in the last group, on which it would be cruel to focus for too long, but in respect of which the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) and his sidekick, the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor), observed in cavalier fashion that the fact that they had not provided for its application to Northern Ireland was a piddling point that it was pedantic of me to insist on raising. In this case, I think that the hon. Member for Bassetlaw will accept—

John Mann *rose*—

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman might get a third go in due course but he must exercise what patience he can muster. The fact that I have not gone as anorakishly into the detail as his natural earnestness and curiosity demand does not of itself invalidate the purpose of the amendment.

6.15 pm

The hon. Gentleman would, I fear, like to take us away from the thrust of the argument, which is this: some employers are helping their employees by providing health insurance packages; under the Government's Bill, those employers—despite their forward-looking and employee-friendly policies—will be obliged to pay the tax hike in respect of care for which they are already privately making provision for most of, or even all, their employees. We are suggesting—

Mr. Hendrick: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: I am always happy to give way, but the hon. Gentleman must be patient. He is doing considerable damage to the leather of his Bench by the frequency of his springing up and down from it—not something that I have ever done, as he will readily testify.

My right hon. and hon. Friends and I think that it is unfair that employers should be obliged to pay twice. We can dilate on that matter. Indeed, I have a suspicion that, subject to your patience and restriction Sir Alan, we might be in for something of a dilation on the subject in the period ahead. However, I do not want in any way—

Mr. Hendrick: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: In a moment. I promise the hon. Gentleman that I shall give way to him. I am always intoxicated by his interventions—there is no reason why tonight should be different.

[Mr. Bercow]

We must not leave the central argument. Is it fair that employers pay twice, or is it unfair? If hon. Members believe that it is fair that employers should have to pay twice, they will support the party of iniquity and vote with the Government. If they believe that it is unfair—if they have a social conscience and favour a progressive approach—they will support the Conservatives. That is the thrust of the choice that lies before us.

John Mann *rose—*

Mr. Hendrick *rose—*

Mr. Bercow: I shall in due course give way again to the hon. Member for Bassetlaw if he is patient, but meanwhile I must give way to the hon. Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick).

Mr. Hendrick: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way and I hope that I can intoxicate him to a level at which he feels satisfied.

Given his concern for responsible employers who want to provide private health packages for their employees and his concern that some employers might, as a result of this debate and the subsequent vote, end up having to pay twice, is he in favour of making all employers provide private packages so that no individual in any company in the land is without private health insurance, thereby removing the need for the extra 1 per cent. that the Government are adding?

Mr. Bercow: No. I applaud the hon. Gentleman's ingenuity. I do not want to get too personal, because I like him very much and enjoy jousting with him, but it is unfair—purely, of course, in the context of the amendments on which we are narrowly focusing—that his efforts have not been rewarded so far. I shall have a private chat with him, but in view of how hard he is trying he is suffering cruel and inhumane treatment by having to sit on the Back Benches and not on the Treasury Bench.

The hon. Gentleman is ingenious, but the answer is no, we are not advancing the proposition that all employers should have to provide health insurance. We are not arguing for the privatisation of the system. On previous occasions, he has discussed with us precisely what our health proposals will be. It is to his credit that he tries to establish the answer through both the back door and the front door, through punching above our heads and punching below our feet. He goes hither and thither, this way and that but as yet he has been disappointed, because we are not prepared to provide him with the answer that he would find convenient for his purposes.

However, so that we can be clear and so that it will not be necessary for the hon. Member for Bassetlaw to intervene in a similar way—although he may use different devices in due course—I make the argument explicitly. We are looking at our health care policy. We are doing so with an open mind, in contrast to the closed minds of Labour Members.

The Government's position is clear—it is not in any sense stealthy—and it is honest. Their position is to say that they have learned nothing over the past five years from the countries of continental Europe which translate care more effectively from a word to a deed than they do, and they do not think that they have anything to learn from them in the next five years either.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman does not enjoy the truth being blurted out, but I am afraid that he will have to suffer the results, at least for a short time.

The position of Conservative Members is that we can learn a lot from other countries, whose records on cancer care, cardiac surgery, choice among GPs, guaranteed treatment after 28 days, and no national waiting lists, as in Germany, show that they do things better than we do. We want to look open-mindedly and in detail at those countries. We will consider all the different systems, establish what is best practice, discover what is in patients' interests and, as I have said before, make a judgment.

I do not suppose that the hon. Member for Preston heard me at lunchtime yesterday—it would probably have spoiled his digestion if he had. I do not blame him, but I made the point yesterday—I have to repeat it now—that the Conservatives will consider what needs to be done in the health service, what reforms are required for the purpose, how much those reforms will cost and in what way they should be financed. When we have gone through that considered and logical process of study, we will produce a conclusion. It will be a detailed, credible, costed and attractive alternative to this Government's persistent and disappointing failures in health policy. In due course, that policy will be unveiled by my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), the shadow Secretary of State for Health, and I hope that the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Mr. Harris) will not be disappointed with the results.

John Mann *rose—*

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman has had several goes. He favours equity of treatment, so he will expect me to give way first to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Cathcart.

Mr. Tom Harris: The hon. Gentleman claims that the Government have not learned from the experience of others. May I suggest that they have learned a great deal from the experience of 18 years of Conservative Government, and so have the electorate? That is why a huge investment in the NHS has been planned, in complete contrast to what the Conservative Government did in those 18 years.

Mr. Bercow: That is a disappointing intervention. I have listened many times during the past 12 months since the hon. Gentleman was elected, and I have been impressed by what I have heard. He is capable of so much better than what he has just delivered, so I am sorry that he delivered it. I say that in relation to the arguments that we shall enunciate for assistance for employers who provide health care insurance for their staff, and I do so conscious of some of the facts in Scotland.

I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman, of all people, would be well informed about the position in Scotland. If he is as well informed as I thought that he was and as I know that he should be, he will be aware of the extraordinary combination of facts on health care provision in Scotland. On the one hand, since his party took office in 1997, there has been a 28 per cent. real-terms increase in expenditure on health but on the other, concurrent with that increase in expenditure, there has been an average increase of 25 per cent. in the waiting time for treatment.

That emphasises the patently true fact that, in health care, it is not simply a matter of increasing spending. Sadly, the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) is not in his place today, as he had some difficulty grasping that point when I explained it to him. Manifestly, if expenditure is increased without an accompanying reform, we will not achieve the improvement in performance that we all want. We know in relation to many aspects of health delivery in Scotland that there is more money, but there is not a better performance.

I have already been in danger of straying from the narrow course of the amendment, which I want to commend to the Committee. That is ultimately my responsibility, but because of my natural generosity of spirit, I wanted to give way to Labour Members to allow them to release their frustrations.

The Chairman: Order. The hon. Gentleman will realise that the more he dilates, the more he attracts interventions. If he were to return more to the detail of the amendment, the Committee would benefit.

Mr. Bercow: You are always fair, Sir Alan. You are right to castigate me in your gentlemanly fashion, and I shall do exactly as you say. I am very grateful to you for providing me with the protection of the Chair from the needless dilations suggested by right hon. and hon. Members.

Dr. Evan Harris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: I shall give way once more, on the explicit understanding that the hon. Gentleman intends to focus his remarks very specifically on the purport and contents of the amendment.

Dr. Harris: The amendment deserves careful scrutiny because it raises important issues. If the increase in national insurance contributions is used to pay for improvements in the health service or extra resources not only for elective surgery, but for primary and emergency care, and given that most people with private health insurance use their insurance to pay for elective surgical care and a few other things, but generally not for primary or emergency care, is it reasonable to say that they are paying twice for emergency and primary care when, in fact, most of them use the NHS for those services? Should not the hon. Gentleman be talking about—not that I support this—a third relief, not a full relief in this measure?

Mr. Bercow: The answer is no. *[Interruption.]* A couple of my hon. Friends generously observe from sedentary positions that the hon. Gentleman alludes to the third way. I am not sure whether it is the third way, the second way, the first way or the fourth way, but it is a characteristically confusing and muddle-headed Liberal Democrat way, which I do not intend to follow. I want specifically to deal with the unfairness—possibly even the incongruity—of employers financing packages that their employees will use while being obliged to pay in full the increase that the Government are demanding to provide for the NHS.

If the hon. Gentleman disagrees with me, he will no doubt have the opportunity to catch your eye, Sir Alan. However, I have a little sheaf of material on such matters through which I should like briefly to canter before proceeding to other amendments. The Committee will be relieved if I resist the temptation to refer to any hon. Member's intervention before those arguments have been reasonably aired.

We are talking about employers providing private medical insurance. It is important to place this debate in the context of subscriber numbers. The Committee will be very familiar—if it is not, it should be—with "Laing's Healthcare Market Review 2001–2002". *[Interruption.]* As the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) rightly observes, I am sure that his constituents speak of little else. He will probably be very familiar with paragraph 3.2 on the demand for private medical insurance and, indeed, some of the subsidiary paragraphs. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman says that it is the best paragraph. I am not sure about that; it is a copious document that contains many good nuggets, and I would not want to discriminate between them, except inasmuch as time requires me to focus on only a part of the report.

Paragraph 3.2 states:

> "Demand for PMI, in terms of subscriber numbers, picked up in 2000 with the highest annual growth rate since 1990."

The significance of that is that, between 1991 and 1999, the growth trend in demand was fairly flat. Subscribers rose by 3.6 per cent. in 2000, following a fall of just under 1 per cent. in 1999. The important point is that the private health insurance market has struggled in relative terms—to some degree, it has struggled absolutely—in relation to individual subscribers.

We have witnessed strong growth in corporate business since 1997. That is relevant in the context of arguing for a modicum of tax relief in the corporate sector. There has been a substantial increase in the quantity of private medical insurance provided by the corporate sector. For example, since 1990—this has happened over a substantial period—the number of company-paid subscribers has grown by an estimated 23 per cent. A number of factors are commonly cited to explain that trend: the underlying strength of corporate economic performance; high employment and low unemployment; and strategic price discounting.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): And the Labour Government.

Mr. Bercow: No, I want to focus in particular on the factor of strategic price discounting, which is important and of which the hon. Gentleman will have a full and impressive grasp. The other factors include the increased concentration of marketing and, indeed, changing employers' attitudes to private medical insurance. We are talking about the use of strategic price discounting—in which I am encouraged to hear that the hon. Gentleman

[Mr. Bercow]

has a substantial interest—in the context of an increasingly competitive marketplace. That is what we now see. The review observes:

> "Attitudes to PMI from employers may also be slowly changing as more employers are valuing employment benefits in general"—

of which I know that the hon. Gentleman will approve—

> "and are recognising the potential risks of losing employees for long absences through accident or sickness."

6.30 pm

Mr. Francois: My hon. Friend makes the point that growth in private medical insurance has often been because of group schemes, which he is talking about in the context of employers who have participated in such schemes for their employees. It is also interesting that several trade unions, including those that oppose bringing further private capital into the health service, have private medical schemes of which they encourage their members to take advantage. Is that not a curious dilemma from the point of view of some Labour Members?

Mr. Bercow: As so often over the years, my hon. Friend anticipates me. We have known each other as long as I have known the hon. Member for Bassetlaw. I shall not bore the House excessively on this matter, Sir Alan, as you would not allow me to do so, but I have jousted with the hon. Member for Bassetlaw since we joined Lambeth council together in 1986. It is fair to observe, however, in the context of the important point made by my hon. Friend, that he and I have also been jousting against each other—although we now do so together—since 1986, when we competed for the chairmanship of the Federation of Conservative Students. He was always more quick-witted than me at the time, and he clearly remains so now.

My hon. Friend alludes to an important point about the use of private health care by trade unions on behalf of their members and employees. I was tempted to focus for a little longer on "Laing's Healthcare Market Review 2001-2002", but the central point will be clear to the House: a substantial number of companies provide private medical insurance for their employees, and there is merit in the argument that, if they are doing that, they should not also be burdened with the tax hike that the Government wish to foist on them. My hon. Friend gently prods me to remember the importance and perhaps even the curious tension and inconsistency on the part of trade unions in relation to this matter. He has effectively fed me a bone, and he would be disappointed if I did not choose to chew on it. We know that trade unionists who are publicly critical of private health care have benefited from health care themselves or led unions that offer forms of private health care insurance. That is the point that he keenly picked up. In the context of the advocacy of relief for employers spending money on these matters, it is notable.

The Conservative party agrees with the Government that more money needs to be spent on health, but we disagree with their view that the NHS is the only mechanism by which to deliver that health care. That is why we have looked around Europe at alternative social insurance schemes.

John Mann *rose*—

Mr. Bercow: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman just yet, Sir Alan, as I have had an instalment from him. It was stimulating, and I should like to store him up. It would be unfair to squander him at this relatively early stage, so if he can be patient I shall return to him in due course.

We have looked around Europe at alternative social insurance schemes and the work of a range of for-profit, not-for-profit and voluntary health care providers. In that context, it is interesting to focus, as I shall in a moment, on the attitude of trade unions to this important subject.

Mr. Weir: I was under the impression that most of these schemes also had an employee contribution. Nothing in the amendments affects employees who contribute to these schemes; only employers' contributions are involved. Is that deliberate or an oversight? Can the hon. Gentleman explain why he has gone down this route?

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point. As he will be aware, the bulk of the cost of the schemes in question is borne by the employer providing those schemes for the employee. The relief was therefore intended to be targeted on the employer providing the scheme and footing the bulk of the bill. If the hon. Gentleman is asking whether it is a fair point and factually correct that the employee bears some costs as well, the answer is yes. Our amendments, however, are focused on assistance in terms of national insurance contribution relief on the employer.

The Chairman: Order. So is the clause.

Mr. Bercow: So is the clause, as you rightly observe, Sir Alan. I must therefore not digress, despite the temptations of the hon. Gentleman, who I know will have read the clause in detail. He is probably able to recite it word for word, unscripted, for the benefit of the House.

It is important to be specific, and I am keen to be so, if only hon. Members will allow me that opportunity, Sir Alan. Unison, for example, promotes its own health care scheme entitled Medicash. That does not win any prizes for originality but it does help members buy treatment outside the national health service. Specifically—this is interesting from the apotheosis of egalitarianism as represented by Unison—the Medicash scheme offers no fewer than three levels of cover: bronze, silver and gold. Members are offered a broad range of services and everything apart from overnight stays in hospitals can be bought from the private sector. Unison claims that Medicash—it is important to represent it fairly—

The Chairman: Order. I am not at all clear that it is important that we should discuss in detail trade union arrangements. That seems to be outwith the scope of the amendment that the hon. Gentleman seeks to explain to the House.

Mr. Bercow: I am always grateful to be guided by you, Sir Alan. If I am not entitled to develop the argument in detail in relation to the arrangements of particular unions, I shall refrain from doing so. I was enjoying developing the point, but I shall desist.

Mr. Kevan Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: Not for the moment. Suffice it to say that if a union is providing such a valuable benefit for employees, notwithstanding what it might say in excoriation of private health insurance and denunciations of those who support it, it seems fair that that union should be aware that it would benefit from the relief that the Conservative amendments would provide. I can summarise the point neatly, I hope, by saying that supporters in practice—whether or not in principle—in the trade union movement, as employers, of the provision of private health insurance, as represented by Unison and others, can rest assured that the Conservative Opposition see the merit of what they are doing for their employees. We would want, courtesy of these amendments, to provide relief from the damage and pain that the Labour Government's policy would inflict on them.

John Mann *rose—*

Mr. Kevan Jones *rose—*

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Member for Bassetlaw has been very greedy, and I can indulge his greedy instincts not a moment longer. I shall give way, however, to the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones).

Mr. Kevan Jones: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I shall contact the general secretary of Unison about the hon. Gentleman's advocacy of that great union. Do not the schemes of Unison and many other trade unions cover dental care and other aspects of health care that are not necessarily covered by the NHS? As for what Unison and other trade unions such as mine—the GMB—advocate, the difference is that they do not favour a system whereby those in work pay through a national insurance contribution but if they fall out of work, they fall out of the system. They support a system in which delivery of health care is free at the point of need. Is the Conservative party now saying that it is against health care that is free at the point of need?

The Chairman: Order. I listened to the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones), but I feared that he would tempt the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) away from the straight and narrow. He did so, and I hope that the temptation will be resisted.

Mr. Bercow: I am obliged to you, Sir Alan. As you know, there is no more partisan enthusiast for straightness and narrowness than I, especially when the gentle tickle of the rod of the Chair is felt on my back. I am very grateful to you, Sir Alan, and I will not misbehave a moment longer, despite the cheeky temptations of the hon. Member for North Durham.

I will now move at a modest pace to amendments Nos. 7 and 9, and I know that you, Sir Alan, will be excited, not to say delighted, at the prospect. Intellectually, these amendments can be grouped together. The arguments for amendments Nos. 6 and 8 are clear. The attempt has been made, with a good deal of wriggling and scraping of the bottom of barrels, to defend the unions, but we see the merits of the arguments in favour of those amendments even if Labour Members do not.

I wish to turn the Committee's attention to the Conservative party's desire—it is certainly not the desire of the Liberal Democrats—to support the self-employed. Amendments Nos. 7 and 9 are designed to do that by relieving the self-employed of the burden of the Bill's provisions that will increase costs. Specifically, we propose in amendment No. 7—amendment No. 9 is similar—that employers, when facing the secondary percentage, should pay the full percentage if they are not themselves subject to class 4 contributions. We specify that the 11.8 per cent.—the reduced percentage for employers who are self-employed—should be provided, and the proposed subsections (3) and (4) in amendment No. 7 make it clear that the reduced percentage that we are proposing would be available to employers who have a business turnover of less than £1 million per annum.

Labour and Conservative Members will realise that the proposal would cover a great many businesses with relatively modest turnover which will be hit if the Government get their way but to whose rescue the Conservative party is trying to come. The amendment would be of particular benefit to a number of unincorporated businesses, because it would offer the reduced rate of employers' national insurance contributions to employers who are themselves self-employed and hence subject to an increase in their class 4 NICs as well as in their employers' NICs. Subsections (3) and (4) in the amendment would target the relief at small, unincorporated businesses as an incentive to their continuing to employ people.

The case for our proposals is powerful and we have received considerable support from outside organisations that are shocked and infuriated by the provisions in the Bill and by much of the content of the Chancellor's Budget. When a small, unincorporated business has employees, the self-employed business person will be hit twice. It is interesting for my hon. Friends to note that, as I make the point that that self-employed business person will be hit twice, the new Chief Secretary to the Treasury—whom I warmly complimented on his justified and long overdue promotion—has slunk out of the Chamber. Well might he slink, because he is an extremely talented defender of his case—and no more obviously so than when the case that he has to defend is an extremely poor one. The track record speaks for itself, and I am not surprised that he has preferred other attractions to attending a debate that describes the damaging policies that it will now be his doubtful privilege to defend.

We are talking about self-employed business people hit twice by the NIC increases proposed by the Chancellor—first, on the costs of employing staff and, secondly, on their own income. As is perfectly proper in parliamentary debates, Labour Members very often cite cases from their constituencies to support their arguments. For example, the hon. Member for Bassetlaw—I must be careful not to provoke him unduly for fear of the consequences in terms of further dilations from him—will refer to people in his constituency who think that everything is absolutely magnificent. That will leave the rest of us to wonder what is in the water in Bassetlaw.

6.45 pm

I think that it is right to deal with practicalities and to consider the specifics and details. An unincorporated business person who employs two staff each with an annual salary of £15,000 and whose own income after expenses is £17,500 will be personally £262 a year worse off because of the changes to national insurance contributions and other tax imposts contained separately in the Budget measures.

John Mann: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman must restrain himself, then I will give way.

I compare the figures that I have just cited with those for an employee who earns £17,500 a year and who will be £158 a year worse off, or a self-employed person with no employees and an income of £17,500 who will be £100 worse off in 2002–04. I am itching to return to the thrust of my argument, but the House wants to hear the hon. Member for Bassetlaw.

John Mann: I refer to the figures in the hon. Gentleman's first example, and ask him what the costs would be should that employer choose to go forward with private health insurance. Should the hon. Gentleman not have those figures to hand? Would it not be right to suggest that, according to BUPA's statistics, the minimum cost would be about £800 a year? That would be four times more than the employer will pay in national insurance contributions.

Mr. Bercow: If I can put it in the vernacular, I fear that the hon. Gentleman is spouting off the top of his head, with modest regard, if any, for the accuracy of what he described.

John Mann *rose—*

Mr. Bercow: No, I will not give way, and I make that clear beyond doubt. I always enjoying the inquisition of the hon. Gentleman, but focusing on the specific costs of a scheme that has not yet been introduced and for which approval from the Secretary of State has not yet been sought let alone provided is a trifle illusory on the hon. Gentleman's part. Depending on one's preference, the extremely detailed interest that he takes in the subject is either a tribute to his parliamentarianism or a commentary on what a sad anorak he is. I do not know the answer to that, but the Committee will form its view on the dilemma that I have just unveiled.

John Mann *rose—*

Mr. Bercow: I admire the hon. Gentleman's diligence and I am impressed by the exercise that he is giving to his knee muscles, but I wish to make progress. There are other amendments to consider and other right hon. and hon. Members might wish to speak if any time is left. Massively though I enjoy my periodic skirmishes with the hon. Member for Bassetlaw, we should not be so self-indulgent as to imagine that the House of Commons consists of the hon. Members for Bassetlaw and for Buckingham alone. The hon. Gentleman must not forget constituencies beginning with the letter A—or indeed those beginning with the letters C to Z.

The Government's proposal is clearly a tax on jobs and an attack on the most vulnerable members of the business community. My hon. Friends and I have focused much in recent times on our championship of the vulnerable. The crusading theme of the leadership of the Conservative party by my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) is the absolute determination that a one nation Tory party should identify with, and champion the cause of, the vulnerable, the oppressed, the downtrodden and those who have been consistently let down and betrayed by the Government—who have been treated with indifference, disdain and contempt by a Government who fondly imagine that everyone in business and employing others is somehow wealthy and undeserving of the concern of a modern Government.

Our position is this. We are arguing for the relief for unincorporated businesses proposed in amendments Nos. 7 and 9 because 3 million self-employed business people have average incomes that are significantly lower than the average salaries of employees, yet the Bill effectively forces them to pay the NICs increase twice. We are trying to offer some relief and succour to the self-employed by exempting small unincorporated businesses—defined in the amendments as those with a business turnover of less than £1 million—from the increase in employers' NICs. That would help the self-employed—market traders, household decorators, builders, retailers and a plethora of others—to employ more staff, to keep the staff that they have, and to stay afloat despite the competitive pressures and Government imposts that rain down upon them. My hon. Friends and I are concerned about those people because we know what tough times they face and how difficult the climate is.

I remind Labour Members that our arguments enjoy the support of an organisation that toils effectively and creditably on behalf of the self-employed—the Federation of Small Businesses—and refer them to the comments of John Walker, its policy chairman, about the increased national insurance contributions that are expected from the self-employed.

Mr. Pound: The policy chairman?

Mr. Bercow: Yes, the hon. Gentleman will find that that is accurate. I know that—I would have a problem with my short-term memory if I did not—because I met the good Mr. Walker this morning. He explained to me, eloquently and in detail, the damaging effects of the Government's policy and the helpfulness of the amendments in offering relief to benighted businesses the length and breadth of the land.

Mr. Walker said:

> "It is a tragedy that the Chancellor has decided that the self employed will also pay higher National Insurance Contributions. The average income from self employment is just £13,890 compared to an average income from employment of £21,842 per annum. This undermines any attempts the Chancellor has made to help the low paid."

If Labour Members do not see that as a faithful reflection of the legitimate worry of a representative of business who is concerned not with politics, but with the impact of policy on businesses and their staff, I do not know what will cause to be opened minds that are closed. I hope that the hon. Member for Preston is about to show me that his mind has opened.

Mr. Hendrick: It is kind of the hon. Gentleman to give way to me again. Does he agree that the figure of around £13,000 that he quoted is most likely to be the amount that many self-employed people are advised to pay themselves by accountants who look after their best interests, especially as regards income tax?

Mr. Bercow: That is an interesting intervention, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will want to develop the point further. It is probably relevant, but it does not have a great impact on the thrust of the amendments.

This morning, I visited a business that would benefit from the amendments—the appropriately named Buckingham Coffee Lounge. It is appropriately named not only because it is near to Buckingham gate—it is situated at 19-21 Palace street, SW1, a short canter from the Palace of Westminster—but because I visited it as the interested Member of Parliament for Buckingham as well as in my capacity as a Treasury spokesman. I met Mr. Jose Pose-Silva, who is a member of the Federation of Small Businesses. He explained that the impact of the Government's NIC increase on an unincorporated business such as his will be to raise costs by about £500 a year. He faces paying £500 a year extra unless the Government are prepared to provide some relief. That is a regrettable state of affairs, and I should like it to be changed.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): My hon. Friend may be feeling some trepidation about having visited a business in my constituency without my consent. I hope that he took advantage of all that the Buckingham Coffee Lounge could give him not only in economic matters but in relation to its no doubt excellent products.

Is not the real concern that the measure will force many businesses that are happy to remain small and flexible as unincorporated businesses to incorporate in order to avoid such punitive taxes? Does not that go against the alleged highbrow pro-enterprise instincts of the Government? Under the current arrangements, companies can choose to avoid national insurance contributions by paying in the form of dividends instead of salaries. This is an absurd measure that will bring in no additional revenue to the Treasury.

Mr. Bercow: I am obliged to my hon. Friend for providing that welcome and timely in-flight refuelling. I hope that he accepts my personal apology for having failed to inform him of my intended visit in advance, in accordance with parliamentary convention. I am grovelling to him, and I hope that he will excuse me.

As always, my hon. Friend makes a compelling point. The Buckingham Coffee Lounge is a small unincorporated business that is struggling to make its way, providing a decent service and trying to prosper. As such, it should be helped, not hindered, by Government. The best way to do so is to provide it with better tax treatment than it presently enjoys. Labour Members should go to the Buckingham Coffee Lounge. It provides an excellent service, and the gentleman who runs it would benefit from our policies and suffer from theirs. If they do not want to support policies that would help it, they should at least have the decency to patronise it.

Amendments Nos. 12 and 13 are designed to help personal service companies. Hon. Members will be familiar with the lengthy and detailed debates about IR35 that we enjoyed—if enjoyed be the word—during the previous Parliament.

Mr. Pound: Oh God!

Mr. Bercow: I am disappointed that the hon. Gentleman's reaction to my reference to IR35 is to say, in an extremely distasteful and impolite fashion, "Oh God!" because these matters are of the gravest concern to many thousands of small independent contractors who have been hammered by this Administration. There may not be many such businesses in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, but if that is his attitude to them, I can only say that I have a more accommodating and respectful attitude to the businesses of Buckingham than he has to those of Ealing, North.

Mr. Pound: I was not speaking from any blasphemous origins, but merely out of deep regret and sadness. I was calling on the deity to intervene and redirect the hon. and bumptious Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) back to the subject under discussion because his tour d'horizon of every health care provider in Europe and every coffee house in Westminster is exhausting the legendary patience of hon. Members.

7 pm

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman must speak for himself. I happen to think that the impact of increased national insurance contributions is important and will be damaging. I am concerned that people who provide health care packages for their employees, people whose businesses are unincorporated and, indeed, people who are involved in personal service companies should be offered a ray of light at the end of the tunnel. The fact that the hon. Gentleman is prepared to compound and exacerbate the depredations that they have suffered from five years of a Labour Government, with further imposts contained in the Bill, does not surprise or impress me. Like my hon. Friends, I want to ease the plight of vulnerable businesses that create the wealth that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues have an insatiable and legendary appetite to spend. I want those companies to have some hope.

We are not proposing to remove IR35. That would not be within the scope of the Bill and would not be permitted. The Professional Contractors Group is principally and legitimately concerned with that agenda. However, we are proposing to provide relief on the increase in national insurance contributions to benefit personal service companies. That is sensible. The amendments would exempt individuals who are involved in personal service companies from the increase in employers' NICs. They would still pay increased NICs as employees, but would not be penalised twice. That is fair, decent, right, proper and, if we persuade Labour Members to support us in the Lobby, will be effective.

Let us be clear about what will happen to personal service companies if they are not given the relief that we advocate: they will face big increases in costs. The cost

[Mr. Bercow]

of the Budget changes to a personal service company with an annual income of £100,000 will be £1,865. That is a big deal. It is an important subject and should not exhaust the self-proclaimed legendary patience of the hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) or any other hon. Member. That is what we are here to debate. I look forward to hearing his well-informed, erudite and scintillating contribution.

Our amendments are good. We intend to press them to a vote. We look forward to hearing whether anyone from another political party supports them. I commend them to the Committee.

John Mann: Having failed to intervene as many times as I wanted, I have several points to make. The blusterer from Buckingham masked the vagueness of his proposal while he meandered through alternative models of health care provision in Europe. We all know, however, that Germany takes a slightly higher percentage of gross domestic product in taxation than we do, and that in France it is 8 per cent. higher. The low taxation regime in this country and the reduction in the take from taxation contrasts with those western European models and, indeed, with the model when the Conservative party was in power from 1979 to 1997, when the percentage take increased by one third.

The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) described me as an anorak—and it strikes me that anorak manufacturing might be a good small business for him to go into. While he was a special adviser—which I am sure has a lot to do with small business—some of us were taking risks in the business community, so we can speak with a modicum of knowledge. Ironically, and unfortunately for the hon. Gentleman, the first example that he gave—a three-person company—was precisely the type of company with which I was involved. Mine had similar salary levels and was set up in a similar way.

Had the hon. Gentleman bothered to listen to previous contributions or to read *Hansard* assiduously, he would know that the BUPA example that I used relates to a quote for the minimum cost that that organisation gave me three or four weeks ago. On average, private health insurance would impose on business a burden five times greater than the increase imposed by the change in national insurance contributions. The argument that the increase in national insurance contributions is a burden on business whereas private health care insurance would not be, is a fallacy that needs exposing. That is the American model rather than the continental model.

The hon. Gentleman used the words "pay twice". I was unable to intervene to demonstrate conclusively that the proposal is so vague that it is a case not of paying twice, but of paying somewhere between one and two times. I may be a new and inexperienced Member, but I know that the amendments that he has tabled to this important Bill are vague. They give no idea of what the payment will be, and we cannot judge what their impact on employers would be.

The hon. Gentleman compared his proposal with Liberal Democrat policies, but that raises the question: who are the official Opposition, with the Short money to do the necessary research? His flabby explanations show the paucity of his argument—and the vagueness goes even further.

When he was talking about the definition of health insurance the hon. Gentleman referred to trade unions, but he failed to explain that with most trade union health assurance policies the member pays a small amount to receive income when he is incapacitated, and in particular, when he is in hospital. Trade union policies are not about paying for private health care, but about getting payments into people's pockets when their wages are not being paid in full, or at all, by the employer.

Mr. Tom Harris: Does my hon. Friend agree that the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) failed to mention that, in contrast to the spirit expressed in his amendments, even trade unions that offer private insurance do not come cap in hand to the Government for tax relief?

John Mann: Indeed, I accept that point. However, the key issue is that the health assurance whereby individuals pay a premium to get income into their pockets when they are ill has nothing to do with private health insurance. The flabbiness of the definition—by the hon. Gentleman's own admission, it incorporates all the trade union schemes—leads to this question: what is the minimum level of private health insurance that would qualify?

As we all know, there is a wide range of types of health insurance. There are some whereby health care is paid for, with various exceptions. I was reading about an example of insurance under which one third of the cost is paid, and this morning I challenged a GP in my constituency who had a leaflet about that sort of insurance in his surgery. Not all the cost is paid, and the insurance is a halfway house—or we might call it a "third way" house. It, too, would qualify. Even worse, there are policies such as the trade union assurance schemes, under which nothing is paid. The service is provided by the national health service, but the tiny amount that somebody could have in their pocket when they were incapacitated in hospital would also qualify. It seems to me that there is a potential for scam in the system.

How do we define the percentage of employers who are involved? While the hon. Gentleman was a special adviser, I found in my dealings with employers, and in industrial relations, that the vast majority of schemes were for a section of the work force, not for everyone. Indeed, it was very rare for all the work force to be covered, although the senior management were usually covered. Sometimes, as quickly happened after privatisation of the utilities, the senior management and some of the middle management were given private health insurance as a so-called perk. The question of what qualifies cannot, therefore, be dismissed by saying, "This is like the Liberal Democrats ignoring Northern Ireland, and we can get away with it because the good ladies and gentlemen from the Clerk's Department have allowed it." This should be about policy making.

Mr. Hendrick: My hon. Friend is making an important point, which the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) seemed to sidestep when I intervened. If the Opposition were keen for employers to take up private health insurance for all employees, and wanted all the firms in Britain to take it up, I could see some justification for the proposed exemption from the extra 1 per cent. charge. However, the hon. Gentleman is not saying that. He is saying that just because some employers look after some employees, it is a good idea for the Government not to ask them to make any further contributions in respect of other employees, and to encourage other companies to do the same. Does my hon. Friend not think that that is a dishonourable position?

John Mann: I think that it is a muddled and confused hedge of a position. It is an attempt to give some spin to the outside world, the business community and the financial pages of certain newspapers, but the substance is missing.

Mr. Bercow: I assure the hon. Gentleman that our position is not muddled, but his is assuredly disingenuous. Will he not honestly admit that he opposes any reduction in the national insurance burden borne by employers in respect of their employees if they choose to provide private health insurance? Can he not get his mind around the notion that, in respect of employees for whom an employer provides private health insurance, a respectable argument for a reduction in the NIC burden can be, and has been, advanced?

7.15 pm

John Mann: Like the president of the Bassetlaw chamber of commerce, I should say that I am no longer an active director or participant in my company. I am merely a shareholder, so the so-called burden on business has only one direct impact on me: a potential minimal reduction in dividends year on year. As someone who has been prepared to take forward the entrepreneurial challenge of creating 1.5 million new jobs since Labour came to power in 1997, I have no problem with helping business. From a business point of view, however, the option of private health insurance is not financially prudent. As a shareholder, rather than an active participant or director, I will press my directors never to have the poor business acumen to throw money away precisely when this Government are building up the national health service, which is growing in exactly the way that any good business would wish it to grow—so as to give us a work force who are protected in sickness and a community and future work force who are healthier overall. That is exactly the politics of this debate.

I shall finish on the precise point about national insurance contributions with which the amendment deals. It is woolly and weak. It panders to posturing politics instead of providing an alternative. I think that it is disgraceful, as was the hon. Gentleman's contribution, because it failed to address any of the specifics. The difference between paying one or two times is a grey area, where we can pick and choose in any way we want. That is a bad way of making policy and legislating, and it is a shame that the official Opposition are reduced to taking such an approach instead of making a substantive proposal.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I shall confine my comments to amendment No. 15, which is tabled in my name alone but enjoys considerable support from Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National party. Hon. Members in all parts of the House will be relieved to know that I aim to make my comments a good deal more succinct than those of the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), whose speech was not so much exhaustive as exhausting. Nevertheless, we shall continue to support amendments Nos. 7, 9, 12 and 13, which support small business.

Our position in Plaid Cymru and the SNP has been consistent with what has been—certainly for the past hour—a long and arduous debate about the Bill. We believe that the provisions are necessary, but insufficient to meet the challenge that we face in revitalising our public services. The underlying motives are correct, but the means of the achieving those aims are not necessarily provided.

Our principal concern is enshrined in amendment No. 15. The use of employers' contributions as a mechanism for delivering new investment in public services is fundamentally flawed. As the Bill introduces a payroll tax, and as the public sector is the biggest employer in many—if not all—of our constituencies, it will reduce the positive impact of the extra resources going into health and social services. It will also exert additional strain on other parts of the public sector that have so far received no definite promise of extra funds.

As has been said on many occasions, the Government are giving to the cash-starved public services with one hand, but taking with the other. That is greatly to be regretted, especially in the context of what is already a difficult financial environment for public services. It is difficult for two reasons. First, there is the growing doubt about whether the Chancellor will achieve his forecasts for economic growth. We discovered during the recess, in figures from the Office for National Statistics, that the economy has been at a standstill since autumn last year, and is therefore teetering on the brink of recession. We now have the slowest economic growth in the G7.

Secondly, while economic growth has ground to a halt, which will have an obvious impact on the ability to deliver extra resources for the public sector, inflation in the public sector is also increasing apace. As we have heard from city analysts, including Michael Saunders of Schroder Salomon Smith Barney, public sector pay and input costs are increasing faster than those in the private sector because of pent-up demand. The worry is that the extra investment promised and so badly needed will be dissipated by a combination of lower economic growth and higher costs.

I mention in parenthesis that Wales and Scotland face the additional pressures of the Barnett squeeze, of which the Committee might not be aware. That means that the rates of increase in health expenditure will be lower in our two countries than in England. The figure for England will be 7.5 per cent., whereas for Wales it will be 6.8 per cent. and for Scotland 6.3 per cent.

It is in that context of doubts about the impact on public expenditure of lower economic growth and higher public sector inflation that we have to consider the proposal to increase public sector employer contributions. Our amendment is designed to ensure that we get the full benefit of the extra resources, that we get the full force of that benefit in years to come, and that we get the resources in early. In health, for example, we are aware that it takes time to train new nurses, doctors and consultants.

It is vital that we do not impose any impediment or additional constraint through the public sector employer contribution. In previous debates, for obvious reasons, we focused on additional costs to the health service resulting from the measure. The Library estimates a cost to the

[Adam Price]

NHS in Wales and Scotland of an extra £37 million a year, and that money will come out of the NHS budget in Wales and Scotland. The cost to the NHS in England is estimated to be £205 million a year.

As a result of the Bill, that outcome will be replicated in other sectors that will not receive additional hypothecated funds, and as an internationalist I should point out that it will be replicated in England as well. For example, next year the further education sector in England will probably receive an additional £85 million, which is similar to this year's funding increase and represents about 2.5 per cent. extra in its annual budget allocation. However, according to the Department for Education and Skills, £25 million of that £85 million will be eaten up by the national insurance employer contribution increase, and because of additional charges for utilities and various other equipment costs, a further £25 million to £30 million will be needed simply to achieve a real-terms standstill.

That will leave a maximum of £35 million to cover pay increases, which will mean a pay award in the sector of only slightly more than 1.25 per cent. That is less than the headline inflation rate, for which the latest figure is 1.5 per cent., and far less than the average wage increase throughout the economy as a whole, which is about 4 per cent.

That will happen in a sector that is already experiencing considerable difficulties with pay agreements and pay differentials with teachers—and the problems in further education will be mirrored in secondary and higher education. Local government is experiencing similar problems: the Labour chair of the Local Government Association, Jeremy Beecham, has said that 80 per cent. of the additional money going into local government for social services will be eaten up by the increase in local government employer contributions alone.

That is why we, through our amendment, are attempting to provide some insulation for the public sector at a difficult time. We acknowledge and welcome the fact that in the Bill the Government have taken two steps forward, by recognising the need for extra investment and the need for taxation to fund it. Unfortunately, for two small steps forward they have taken one step back—or, as the accident and emergency consultant Peta Longstaff said during the post-Budget photo-opportunity for the Prime Minister and the Chancellor, the Government have scored an own goal by providing additional resources with one hand, but taking a substantial amount back with the other.

Unfortunately, by raising national insurance contributions as they have chosen to do, the Government have raised expectations but simultaneously limited the ability to deliver on them. Despite the long debate that we have had, it is inevitable that we will have to revisit the subject because of the hole in the Government's finances and the inconsistency in their thinking. We will have to continue this debate until we get an adequate solution for the public sector—one that does not give with one hand and take with the other.

Dr. Evan Harris: The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) is a pleasant and eloquent man, but it is a pity when he speaks as he did when moving the amendment, because to speak at such length causes us to have a far more diffuse debate than we might otherwise have had about issues that are worthy of punchier debate. Sometimes, unfortunately, he wastes his eloquence. By contrast, the hon. Members for Bassetlaw (John Mann) and for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) made speeches that were clear and to the point.

The hon. Member for Buckingham made significant points about his concern for certain businesses, and there are points of principle that should be addressed, especially those that relate to tax relief for businesses that pay for private health insurance. I hope that he will respond to some of the points that I make in that respect. The hon. Member for Bassetlaw raised some practical issues that make it difficult to see how such a system could work, but it is worth exploring the matters of principle as well.

If their amendment reflects the approach that the Conservatives have chosen to adopt, they have to say where it will end. It is reasonable to ask whether, if an employer decided that to attract highly sought-after staff who are often highly paid they would offer a contribution toward fees for private sector education, the hon. Member for Buckingham would advocate that there should be some remission of or exemption from income tax or corporation tax, which comprise the general pot out of which education funds are paid. Similarly, if an employer decided to give sick pay provision that was more generous than the basic statutory package, would he say that the employer should benefit from a reduction in tax on the ground that they should not pay twice for statutory sick pay provision that is paid for by the state through taxation? If a person did not use local schools or had long-term care insurance, should that person receive a deduction or relief on their council tax payments?

I contend that it would be difficult to argue both that the answer to those questions is yes and that we would still have a fair system wherein the better-off are engaged in state provision of a welfare safety net. If one believes that people should not pay twice, the better-off will be even more reluctant to pay tax at all and might be tempted to plough their own furrow, and that will undermine the tax base for important public services. That is an issue of principle, and it is important that the Conservatives make it clear whether that is to be their general approach.

In a similar vein, if a company did not provide a benefit—private health insurance—from its receipts, it may well be that it would pay tax on the money it used to do so. Therefore—I do not mean this in a derogatory way—the company might use the Conservatives' proposal as a way of avoiding paying a different tax. A relief on such a use of employers' funds might amount to a relief that is sought—or already achieved—by not paying a certain amount on profits or dividend payments.

As the hon. Member for Bassetlaw said, the extent of insurance is variable. In an intervention when the hon. Member for Buckingham was in full-on mode, I tried to make the point that—to use his terms—an employer pays private health insurance to ensure that their employee is available to work and doing so therefore contributes to their business. However, people who are off work sick often use primary health care provision or emergency provision, which are never covered by private health insurance schemes, or they may suffer from chronic illness, which is often not covered by private health insurance schemes. In that case, why should there be full relief?

Imagine two employees who are using an emergency service—an NHS intensive care unit or ambulance provision. One does not benefit from private health insurance, the other benefits from private health insurance outwith the particular health incident that has caused them to use the emergency service. If both employees are using the national health service, why should only the latter's employer receive some benefit? There is therefore a problem with this approach.

There is also an issue about fairness. Some firms provide private health insurance for all their employees from the cleaners upwards, but generally speaking, the hon. Gentleman will accept, private health insurance is a perk for the better-paid. He is therefore proposing a subsidy for people who are better-paid; it would not be directed at people on average pay or those who are less well-paid.

7.30 pm

The hon. Gentleman may argue that his amendment provides an incentive that would encourage people to take out private health insurance; they would get the benefit of tax relief so, in some way, the amendment may reduce the pressure on the NHS. He did not make that point, but a similar point was made earlier about tax relief for better-off pensioners. However, he will know that elasticity in demand for private health insurance has not been demonstrated. Between 1990 and 1997, when tax relief for private health insurance for better-off pensioners operated, there was not a significant increase in the take-up of private health insurance so, if that was one of the aims of the hon. Gentleman's policy, it will not be delivered. He must deal with significant issues of principle; it is unfortunate that during such a long speech we were not able to intervene and invite him to comment on them.

The hon. Gentleman made some valid points about the burden of taxation on small businesses in amendments Nos. 7 and 9. He knows that I share his concern, which is why I should have preferred a tax rise for high earners with an income of more than £100,000 to a tax on employers, especially in small businesses, where the average take-home pay is £13,000 after, as he almost conceded, accountants' adjustments—that may not be a genuine figure for take-home pay. Nevertheless, I share his concern and I cannot understand why he does not feel that it is fairer to ask wealthy people earning more than £100,000 to pay more.

The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), described 50 per cent. tax rates on income over £100,000 as obscene, which was the strongest term used by Conservative Front Benchers today and shows an imbalance in priorities; they are seeking to defend the better-off from what the hon. Member for Christchurch described as an obscenity rather than seeking to defend people who cannot get the health service that they need because of lack of funding. I return to the point that I made at the beginning of this afternoon's debate; the hon. Member for Buckingham is effectively offering tax cuts in his amendment to various parts of the business community. He did not say how he would pay for them, although he tried to explain why he did not do so; as yet, he does not have a policy to put before the electorate. However, it is not responsible politics to salami-slice the provision on tax-cuts, even in deserving cases, without explaining the way in which that would be paid for.

Mr. Hendrick: I certainly agree with the hon. Gentleman's criticisms of the Conservative position. However, does he not agree that his own policies of clobbering people on more than £100,000 with a 10 per cent. increase—

The Chairman: Order. We cannot go back to that as we are not on that amendment.

Dr. Harris: The Conservatives must explain how they will pay for their proposal. In the previous group of amendments, we made clear the way in which we would have preferred to raise the money. However, having failed in our attempt to achieve that fairer method, we now face the question of whether the money should go to the health service or whether there should be tax relief for businesses. While we sympathise with businesses which have problems—the hon. Member for Buckingham knows that we share his view about the iniquity of IR35, on which our Treasury spokespeople have campaigned alongside his colleagues—funding has to go to the health service, which is why we cannot support his suggested tax reliefs.

Finally, the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr made some good points when speaking to his amendment. To a certain extent, using employers' national insurance contributions is self-defeating, particularly when social services departments have to pay more than they may get from the Government's disbursement of the receipts, which is why on Second Reading we said that it is vital that more of the money raised by the Bill goes to social services than is planned by the Government, otherwise they may not get any benefit and, indeed, are in danger of getting a net disbenefit. That situation has been created by the underfunding of other public services; we are robbing further education and police authorities, for example, to pay for the health service, which cannot be right. The Government should not look at each public service in isolation, but should recognise that there is still underfunding across the board. They should raise their ambitions for getting resources into public services fairly and announce changes, preferably before an election, to income tax. We therefore share the view of members of Plaid Cymru that income tax is the best way to pay for increased funding. The Government have missed the opportunity to tackle all those services, but it is not appropriate to go into that now. However, we cannot support the Conservative amendment.

Dawn Primarolo: The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) took 55 minutes to introduce his amendments. While they are important, I hope to be a little briefer in my response to them and amendment No. 15, which was tabled by the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price).

I shall deal with the amendments in the order in which the hon. Member for Buckingham introduced them. Amendments Nos. 6 and 8 cover private health care. The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) made some good observations about the

[Dawn Primarolo]

problems of funding that, and the treatment that private medical insurance may or may not provide for, as opposed to the NHS funding that our arrangements seek to secure, such as the funding of primary care and emergency treatment.

The amendments are interesting, as was our debate and the enthusiasm with which the hon. Member for Buckingham introduced them. The House will realise that they provide the first hint of the Conservatives' intentions for the NHS and propose little more than a thinly-veiled subsidy for companies offering private medical insurance to their employees. That is not the most efficient way of trying to support the NHS indirectly, and it is certainly expensive. As the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon said, when the Conservatives introduced relief on private medical insurance for people over 60, between 1990 and 1997, there was precious little growth in the number of people who took out such insurance, although it cost the Exchequer £650 million. If we look carefully at the way in which companies operate, we see that private medical insurance is provided as a benefit; the company pays for a company policy, which usually means that large employers can negotiate such policies for groups of employees at a discount, whereas smaller companies cannot. The amendment would therefore help some, but not all, employers.

The Government reject the basic proposition that companies should receive payment for providing private health care. If companies decide to provide private medical insurance for their employees that is up to them, but the Government do not believe that the taxpayer should subsidise them for providing such insurance. We remain convinced that the best way to use the resources available is to provide for the health care of all residents in the United Kingdom by funding the NHS directly.

About 120,000 employers are already providing private medical insurance to about 1.9 million employees. They do that in the knowledge that they are still making as well a contribution to the NHS through employers' national insurance contributions. They have never suggested that because they are providing private medical insurance there should be a reduction in national insurance contributions. We know, because employers have repeatedly made the case, that they have a strong interest in a healthy labour work force. The CBI has made it clear that it is important to companies that they have an efficiently funded NHS to which their employees have access, a service that is comprehensive and available on the basis of need.

The hon. Member for Buckingham referred also to fairness. He talked about costs to employers. Let us take employer contributions to health care benefits for the year 2000–01. In France, an average employer will contribute about £58 a week. In the United States, it is £37.50. In Germany, it is £31, and in Britain, it is £9. Nine pounds contribute to a comprehensively available health service on the basis of need. The system ensures that employers get an extremely good deal.

The hon. Gentleman moved on to the self-employed when dealing with amendments Nos. 7 and 9. They are designed to help small unincorporated businesses. My problems with the amendments is not necessarily the intention that lies behind them, but the suggestion that contributions would not be made to the health service.

The Government have demonstrated time and again their ability to assist these very businesses, whether it be through reductions in the threshold for the reduced rate of national insurance or in helping the self-employed and service companies in taking forward their business. However, the amendments would give the self-employed further benefits in a system that would cost the taxpayer £450 million, and would give self-employed companies a greater benefit than they already have.

If we compare the national insurance contributions paid by the self-employed with those paid by employees and employers, it is estimated that the self-employed already under-contribute by about £2.4 billion. That figure takes into account the fact that the self-employed would have a reduced benefit position. The self-employed are already getting an extremely good deal from the national insurance fund. The hon. Member for Buckingham seeks to make everyone else pay for the service while suggesting that the self-employed should not.

7.45 pm

The hon. Gentleman overlooks the fact that overall the self-employed continue to get an extremely good deal. How much would they pay in national insurance contributions on profits of £30,000 a year, and how much would an employee pay on earning that amount? The hon. Gentleman also overlooks the fact that the national insurance contributions of an employer who is self-employed are deductible from his profits and gains. That deduction reduces their class 4 liability. Such employers already have an advantageous position in the national insurance system. Through the amendment the hon. Gentleman seeks to reject the basic principle that all of us should contribute something to assisting growth and investment in the NHS.

I move on to the amendments that relate to service companies. These amendments seek to ensure that a one-person service company with a turnover of less than £1 million should pay employers' national insurance contributions at the old rate of 11.8 per cent. rather than the proposed new rate of 12.8 per cent. The amendments may be intended to apply only to those service companies that come within the legislation on service companies that is commonly referred to as IR35. However, the hon. Gentleman does not define the term "service company". There is not such a definition in legislation. The amendments as drafted would allow a huge number of firms that he would not intend to have relief to have access to it. Drafting problems aside, we do not believe that the intended objective is appropriate, and I shall briefly explain why.

We introduced the service company legislation to address a specific unfairness in the tax system. Put broadly, the legislation ensures that someone who works through a service company or for an intermediary, such as a partnership, but who is otherwise no different from a conventional employee, pays broadly the same tax and national insurance contributions as an employee. That means that anyone choosing to work through a service company, but otherwise working in a way that makes them no different from a directly employed employee, will pay essentially the same tax and national insurance contributions as a direct employee.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon went on about fairness, equity and progression. Yet he objects to the idea that people in the workplace who are in exactly the same working position as others should be able to play with the tax rules to ensure that they pay less than somebody working alongside them.

It is important to recognise that in the working arrangements in service companies, there are two separate and distinct legal bodies. There is the service company as the employer and the person employed by it who is on PAYE. Each is a separate body and each has their own rights and responsibilities and access to different parts of the tax system.

Where someone chooses to be employed in a service company, that company will have full employer responsibilities, and that includes the 1 per cent. increase. I do not believe that it is fair or appropriate to say that those service companies as employers will not be expected to discharge their responsibilities. The amendments are a sop to try to find as many Trojan horses as possible to come into tax legislation so that employers in future will not have to pay their contributions. That is not acceptable. I ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote against the amendments. They are about breaking the principle that all of us, employers and employees, should make a contribution to the NHS.

The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr talked about the public sector. Amendment No. 13 provides that we excuse public sector employers from paying the 1 per cent. national insurance contribution increase on employee class 1 secondary NICs. I will not detain the House because I know that the hon. Gentleman spoke specifically about the principle for the public sector. That being so, I will not go into the fact that the amendment does not cover Northern Ireland, for instance. There are other rather important points. Effectively, however, the amendment suggests that we should excuse the Government and other public bodies from making their own employer contributions.

Although the Government believe firmly in the public sector, we do not think it should be treated as a special case in terms of national insurance contributions. We believe that public and private sectors should be on a level playing field. Let me add that trying to agree on a definition of a public-sector company could lead us down some difficult and complex routes.

It would be strange to suggest that public-sector employers should not be subject to the same requirements as all other employers, but I think that the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr made a genuine point about future investment in all our public sectors. Let me say this to him. The increases in national insurance contributions must be set against a background of high levels of growth in spending on key services. Spending on services will be £19.5 billion higher in 2003–04 than in 2002–03, which is itself a substantial increase.

I think it entirely wrong, in terms of principle, to try to distinguish the responsibilities of employers by virtue of whether they belong to the public or the private sector. Whichever sector they are in, employers have responsibilities in regard to their employees, not just in national insurance but across the board. It is dangerous to suggest that we can somehow make an exception in the case of national insurance contributions.

We are discussing a proposal in the context of wider spending on public services. No doubt the hon. Gentleman will want to pursue his point in the future—indeed, he said that he would—but if he presses his amendment I will have to ask my right hon. and hon. Friends to oppose it. I hope that, as the principle has been given a good airing, he will decide not to do so.

If any of the amendments are put to the vote, I shall ask my colleagues to oppose them.

Mr. Bercow: I am mortified that the Paymaster General has not been persuaded by the quality of the amendments.

Dawn Primarolo: Nearly.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to the Paymaster General for that, but apparently she was not quite persuaded. Methinks, Sir Alan, that she doth protest too much.

When there was some incentive for the provision of private medical insurance for pensioners, there was also some increase in take-up. Since the vicious and unnecessary removal of that tax incentive, we have seen the damage that has been done: people who benefited from the provision and afforded the insurance have since been unable to do so. We were offering some encouragement to employers providing private medical insurance packages for their staff. As Labour Members know, the atavistic hostility to that incentive was plain for all to see.

We were in favour of helping unincorporated businesses suffering under the heavy, and increasingly heavy, burden of taxation imposed by this Government. The Paymaster General made it abundantly clear that she did not sympathise, that she thought that those businesses already had it very easy, and that she did not want to assist them. We wanted to help personal service companies, but she did not.

I am very disappointed, and we intend to press our amendment to a vote.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 126, Noes 338.

Division No. 256] **[7.54 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Cameron, David
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip

Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Desmond Swayne and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*

Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Straw, Rt Hon Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Jim Fitzpatrick.

Question accordingly negatived.

Mr. Chope: I beg to move amendment No. 10, in page 3, line 3, at end insert—

> 'provided that, in respect of employees of pension age or over at the beginning of the year of assessment, the secondary percentage shall be 11.8 per cent.'.

The Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 11, in page 3, line 14, at end insert—

> 'provided that, in respect of employees of pension age or over at the beginning of the year of assessment, the secondary percentage shall be 11.8 per cent.'.

Mr. Chope: During the earlier part of the debate, the Government said that it would not be fair if pensioners were penalised as a result of the Bill. The amendment would ensure that pensioners would not by being employed attract an additional 1 per cent. levy for their employers. It would also—I hope hon. Members on both sides of the Committee will support this—give a modest but important encouragement to employers to employ people of pensionable age.

There is an increasing feeling that age discrimination operates in the employment market. We know that those who are of pensionable age wish—*[Interruption.]*

The Second Deputy Chairman: Order. There are general conversations throughout the Chamber. It is important that the Committee listens to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Chope: Thank you, Sir Michael.

It is important that the Committee should address seriously discrimination in the employment market. It is increasingly necessary for many pensioners to try to obtain employment to make ends meet. It is a separate hobby horse of mine, but as a result of successive increases in council tax far in excess of inflation, an increasing number of pensioner households are in financial difficulties. To an extent, people below pensionable age who are in financial difficulties can use the labour market and change jobs, or at least get themselves in employment, but that option is not so easily available to pensioners. The amendment would give a modest incentive to employers to take on people of pensionable age.

In the past, when this issue has been raised the Government have been dismissive. They have argued that the income from employers' national insurance contributions pays for many other services, including—but not exclusively—pensions. They have also argued that the principle that people who are self-employed or not employed should not have to pay class 1 and class 2 contributions after they reach pensionable age should not be extended to their employers.

The Bill hypothecates the proceeds of such charges to the national health service, but elsewhere in the Bill the Government have accepted the argument that it would be unreasonable to expect pensioners to contribute to additional costs in respect of the health service. That is why the hon. Lady rejected the argument advanced by the Liberal Democrats, who wanted to raise the money through income tax—a move that would clearly affect pensioner income from investments. Such income is exempted under the terms of the Bill, because the insurance charge falls only on the earnings of employees below pensionable age.

[Mr. Chope]

When, on behalf of a constituent, my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) raised the issue in correspondence with the Paymaster General last year, she replied:

> "The National Insurance scheme is a social scheme. Amongst other things, its purpose is to fund the payments of contributory benefits such as Retirement Pensions, widows' benefit and incapacity benefit."

However, the provisions in the Bill are designed expressly to fund the health service. We have argued that the amount that the Bill will yield will greatly exceed the additional sum that the Government say they will give to the health service, but be that as it may. In my submission, the Paymaster General's argument against exempting men over the age of 65 from having to suffer employees' contributions does not wash in the case of a specific policy that is designed to fund the health service.

In the letter to which I have referred, the Paymaster General says:

> "there is no comparable age restriction on employers contributions and the liability continues whilst the employee is working and earning over the threshold for paying contributions. I must point out that if the liability were removed, then younger people could be discriminated against and it could result in a situation whereby some employers may actively seek to recruit employees in this category."

However, the amendment presents a useful opportunity to give a modest but significant incentive to employers to take on senior citizens as employees. By so doing, they would save themselves 1 per cent. of the employer's costs.

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) could be employed as a Minister.

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend mentions a Member of the House who is of retirement age, and who could be employed by the Government. The provision could indeed provide a modest saving for the Government and the parliamentary authorities, but, with respect to my hon. Friend, that is not the strongest argument for it. Many pensioners would like to have jobs but cannot get them. The amendment would enable them to say to an employer, "If you take me on your books, you will save 1 per cent. of payroll." It is a modest measure, and I hope that it will find favour with the Government and with the House.

8.15 pm

Dawn Primarolo: It seems that the Conservative party's clarion call at the next general election will be, "Force pensioners to work after 65 by making them cheaper to employ than anyone else in the labour force." That is the only point that we could possibly glean from that rather potty introduction to the amendments.

The national insurance increases proposed in the Bill spread the burden of paying for the improvements in the health service that we all—or most of us—want as widely and fairly as possible across employees, employers and the self-employed. The amendments deal specifically with the contribution of employers, and propose that they pay a different national insurance contribution—even though the level of earnings is exactly the same—by using a definition of age. That proposal is made by a party that normally complains about increased complexities, form filling and difficulties in policing the borderline.

Under the proposal, an employer would pay a national insurance contribution of 12.8 per cent. on the earnings of a male employee aged 64, but in respect of a male employee aged, say, 65, the same employer would pay an 11.8 per cent. contribution on the same earnings. That appears neither logical nor fair, even when measured against the Opposition's apparent new objective of dealing with labour shortages in the British economy by forcing pensioners back into the labour market, even if they do not want to go.

Mr. Chope: The Paymaster General thinks that the proposition is unfair, but in what way is it fair to require an employee aged 64 to pay the additional contribution, but not an employee aged 65?

Dawn Primarolo: If the hon. Gentleman knew anything about the national insurance fund and the decisions that his Government took in 1995 on the movement in retirement ages and the complex link with the contributory system, he would understand exactly why such measures were introduced. If he was so concerned about the issue, why did he not deal with it when in government? Indeed, I think that he was even a Minister at one stage. As he well knows, under the agreement to phase in equality of age of retirement, the particular point that he identifies will move out of the system in respect of employees. However, he is in fact proposing that we add an extra layer of complexity to employers' national insurance rates.

The amount of secondary class 1 national insurance that employers are liable to pay is based on the level of their employees' earnings. Introducing a different secondary rate that depends not only on employees' level of earnings but on their age adds a complexity that simply is not necessary. It does not follow that excluding pensioners from paying national insurance means that employers should not pay their extra 1 per cent. national insurance on the earnings.

Under the existing structure of the national insurance fund, employers contribute at the same rate for all of their employees. The Bill maintains that principle. Employers recognise that it is in the interests of employers to have a healthy labour supply. They do not say, "Except when the person who is employed gets to 65, when we do not need to contribute to the health service through the national insurance system." Employers recognise that all their work force will benefit from the additional investment in the NHS.

I do not believe that the amendments would make pensioners more attractive to recruit. Even after the 1 per cent. increase in employers' national insurance, employers in the UK will still be paying less than employers in France and Germany towards their employees' health needs. Pensioners have demonstrated that they can, when they choose to and want to, compete in the labour market on equal terms and be judged on their skills and the experience that they offer the employer.

There is absolutely no basis in logic for saying that the employer has a lesser obligation to the contributions to the national insurance system simply because of the age of the employee. I ask the House to reject the amendment, not only because it would introduce complexity for employers, but simply because it is extraordinarily naive and wrong in the distinction it seeks to make about the obligations that employers have to employees, regardless of their age.

Matthew Taylor: These amendments are possibly the most bizarre of the evening. It is unclear why they have been tabled. Probably the original thought was that pensioners were exempted from national insurance, so perhaps employees should not pay for pensioners. However, the employer is getting the benefit of the financial contribution that the pensioner makes. It is frankly insulting if the implication is that someone who happens to be of pensionable age is making less of a contribution to the employer and that, therefore, in effect, a subsidy has to be paid for their employment.

Mr. Bercow: That is wrong-headed nonsense.

Matthew Taylor: It is the only possible implication of the policy. Why else should there be such a differential?

Alternatively, it may be that the Opposition believe that, in some sense, there is a need to pay a cash incentive to employers to seek to employ or to keep in employment pensioners. But that is also extraordinary; again, why should businesses not wish to employ pensioners if they can make a good contribution and wish to work with them? The only possible conclusion is that, in some sense, the Conservative party believes that pensioners are less able, simply because of their age, to make a good contribution to business. The Conservative party has failed to think it through, and the uncertainty with which the argument was advanced from the Conservative Front Bench rather reinforces me in that view.

As we have made clear, Liberal Democrats would not have chosen employers' national insurance as our route for raising money for the NHS and we have explained the alternative mechanism. The amendment is an entirely unthought-through salami-slicer. It does not make sense, it does not add up, it is not helpful and I would be surprised were the Conservative party to press it to a vote.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way.

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman has only just wandered in.

Mr. Hancock: No, I have been listening to the hon. Gentleman for the last two hours on television, and riveting stuff it was. I ask my hon. Friend to allow Tory Front Benchers to intervene on him to clarify their position, or maybe to help them out of the hole into which they have dug themselves.

Matthew Taylor: Conservative Front Benchers have popped up and down this evening with their usual gusto, but not on this issue. I did not intend to argue on this case for long, as it is poverty-stricken.

On reflection, the Conservatives will regret tabling an amendment from which the only possible conclusion that can be drawn is that they believe that pensioners have to be subsidised to work in business. In the process, once again, they are denying the NHS an unquantified amount of money for doctors and nurses that those pensioners and everyone else in the country desperately want to see in the NHS.

Mr. Chope: The hon. Gentleman says that he wishes to remove totally this new impost on employers. I have tabled an amendment that would remove it from employers of people who are over pensionable age. He argues that those employers should have that impost. There is nothing consistent about his argument.

I wish to refer to a letter that I received from an individual. It says:

> "My wife and I are still very busy with our little travel agency which is run as a limited company with our owning 100 per cent. of the shares. Although I am now 81 years old, I still work full-time as a director of the company. Unfortunately, I find that the company is paying an NHS surcharge on my salary which is a burden in these difficult trading times."

The surcharge at the moment is 10 per cent.; under the Bill, it will go up to 11 per cent. That individual is aged 81 and his wife is of a similar age. As the company is 100 per cent. owned, he finds that the additional burden will be borne by him, as the owner of a company, in circumstances where, were he an employee, he would not have to pay the new contribution. That is the principle.

Once again, we on the Conservative Benches are arguing for the small business person who is working and serving this country by working beyond pensionable age. The Government have made the spurious argument that the amendment will introduce extra complexity. However, the amendment seeks not to extend that complexity to those who are employed beyond the age of 65.

The amendment is a modest measure and I am disappointed by the Paymaster General's negative response. The weakness of her argument has reconfirmed for me the strength of the message that we are sending. I am sure that we will wish to return to this as an increasing number of pensioners ask why employers should be penalised for the fact that they are on the books of employers and are of pensionable age. Should they not have a similar benefit to those who are employees of pensionable age?

This is an important issue of principle that is well worth putting to the vote and testing the mood of the House on. I hope that the Government will, in due course, accept our arguments even though they have not done so this evening. Certainly nothing in this amendment will try to force people to work after the age of 65, although as a result of the increases in council tax, an increasing number of pensioners are finding that they do have to work after 65 to pay those taxes.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 123, Noes 337.

Division No. 257] **[8.29 pm**

AYES

Amess, David
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Cameron, David
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward

Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie

O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Desmond Swayne and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*

Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin

Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John

Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Ho[illegible] Jimmy
Hop[illegible] Phil
Hop[illegible]s, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, Rt Hon Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie
(Welwyn Hatfield)
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann

McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Marlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil

Sedgemore, Brian
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Jim Fitzpatrick.

Question accordingly negatived.

It being after 8.30 pm, THE CHAIRMAN, *pursuant to Order [13 May], put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Clauses 2 to 8 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedule 1

CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendment made: No. 14, in page 11, line 43, at end insert—

'(4) In subsection (6), for "subsection (5)" substitute "subsections (5) and (5A)".'.—*[Dawn Primarolo.]*

Schedule 1, as amended, ordered to be the First schedule to the Bill.

Schedule 2 ordered to be the Second schedule to the Bill.

Bill reported, with amendments.

Order for Third Reading read.

8.44 pm

Dawn Primarolo: We have had a very good, interesting debate in which the House has explored in detail the Government's plans to use the national insurance fund to raise additional resources for the health service. In one way, the Bill is unprecedented, unlike previous changes to national insurance contributions, which have been linked to changes in the state of the national insurance fund. This Bill increases contributions for the other great pillar of the welfare state—the national health service. In another way, however, it is not new at all. Ever since the post-war Labour Government introduced the national insurance system and the national health service, part of the funding for the NHS has come from national insurance contributions.

National insurance contributions are paid by those who work and by their employers. Everyone who has a stake in the national health service will contribute while they are in work, when they can best afford it, and everyone has an interest in the improvements in the health service that this extra money for investment will deliver.

Let me remind the House of the scale of new investment that we have promised. The plans announced in the Budget represented the biggest ever increase in investment in the national health service, raising spending on average by 7.4 per cent. in real terms in each of the next five years. United Kingdom health spending will grow from £65.4 billion this year to £105.6 billion in 2007–08. Since 1997, health service investment has already doubled in real terms, and it will increase as a share of national income from 6.7 per cent. in 1997 and 7.7 per cent this year to 9.4 per cent. in 2007–08. That will mean 35,000 more nurses, midwives and health visitors, 15,000 more doctors and consultants and 42 major hospital schemes—real changes and improvements, giving the people of this country a standard of health care that they can be proud of.

The Government have also published plans to ensure that the public and the House can judge whether those improvements are being delivered. There will be independent audit, inspection and scrutiny of patient complaints, with a duty to account for money spent and standards achieved and to report to the public.

In future, an annual report to Parliament will be prepared by the new independent auditor, accounting for the money allocated to the national health service, stating where it has been spent and the results that have been achieved. There will also be local reports from every primary care trust that will spell out to each household in its locality the services available and the value for money that is being achieved.

[Dawn Primarolo]

The Bill is simple and transparent. We have increased the rates of national insurance contributions for employers, employees and the self-employed by one percentage point. For employers and the self-employed, whose contributions are currently limited by the upper earnings limit and the upper profits limit, we have ensured that the burden is spread fairly, by applying the additional 1 per cent. to all earnings, including those above the limit.

We have also ensured that the national health service gets the benefit of the additional revenue by increasing the proportion of the national insurance contributions earmarked for the NHS by an equivalent amount. The Bill ensures that none of the changes will disturb existing arrangements for determining entitlement to contributory benefits or for the financing of contracted out, personal or occupational pension schemes.

Much of the debate that we have had on the Bill would have sounded familiar to those involved in the introduction of national insurance in the 1940s. We have heard a lot about the supposed unfairness of making employers pay a share of the cost of improving the health service. In response, the Government have quoted the CBI, which said that time off for sickness costs British industry some £10 billion a year.

We might as well have also quoted the Beveridge report, which said in 1942:

> "Disease and accidents must be paid for in any case, in lessened power of production and in idleness, if not direct by insurance benefits."

I certainly echo the words of the then Minister of National Insurance, James Griffiths, who said during the debates on the National Insurance Bill:

> "I have no hesitation in saying—I have said it before outside and I will say it now in the House—this scheme"—

the national insurance scheme—

> "is the best and cheapest insurance policy ever offered to the British people, or to any people anywhere".—[*Official Report*, 6 February 1946; Vol. 418, c. 1751.]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer made similar comments during his Budget speech when he introduced the principle of using national insurance contributions as a way of raising money for the national health service.

The Bill shows that the Government are not afraid to be honest about what needs to be done to improve the health service and about the need to pay for it. The public appreciate that and have shown by their reactions to my right hon. Friend's Budget that they are willing to trust us to do what we have promised. The Bill is the first step and I commend it to the House.

8.51 pm

Mr. Chope: The Bill has been debated in the House on repeated occasions during the past few weeks. It appears to be almost a dialogue of the deaf. On the Opposition Benches, we are alone in saying that throwing more money at the national health service is no guarantee that there will be a better service. The Government have said on other occasions that they would put extra taxpayers' money into public services and that there would be public service agreements to ensure that that expenditure was worth while, yet they have not fulfilled those promises.

In 1999, the then Chief Secretary to the Treasury, now the Secretary of State for Health—I congratulate the new Chief Secretary on his elevation to the Cabinet—said:

> "We have fulfilled our commitment to publish Public Service Agreements covering all the public services. They set out the concrete improvements to be delivered in return for the extra investment we are making."—[*Official Report*, 24 June 1999; Vol. 333, c. 458W.]

However, the Paymaster General has just told us that we are starting again. We are forgetting about the three years that have passed since that commitment was made and there will be a fresh start. The Government tell us that—after more legislation—a fresh monitoring process will be set up and that in a few years we shall be able to see whether it has delivered any benefits in terms of better health care for the people of our nation.

We know that many of the new improvements—the extra nurses, doctors, hospitals and primary care centres about which the Secretary of State for Health tells us—are not even expected until 2008. We know that the Secretary of State merely hopes that legislation to establish the commissions for health care, audit and inspection will be introduced during the next Session, and that the first inspection report is unlikely to materialise before 2005. That is before we shall even know whether the extra billions of pounds taken in the higher taxes that the Government said they would never introduce have been well invested.

The Government, far from being unafraid to be honest about what must be done, as the Paymaster General claimed in her speech, failed to face up to the truth at the general election. They realised that they would have to put up taxes. They needed to put up taxes but denied that they would do so, and they specifically denied that they would increase national insurance contributions.

We shall continue to cite against the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry her comments on the "Powerhouse" programme on 29 May 2001. She said:

> "We've got no plans at all to raise that ceiling on National Insurance contributions."

We have not received an apology for that gross inaccuracy from a senior member of the Government who was trying to persuade people to vote for her party during the general election campaign. The Paymaster General has the gall to tell the House that the Government are not afraid to be honest about what has to be done. That is just laughable. The Government disguised the truth from the electorate at the general election. We tried to expose the fallacy in the Government's thinking. Sadly, the people did not realise that our predictions were correct. We are now landed with what is, in effect, emergency legislation, introduced to raise national insurance contributions to fund the health service and to try to make improvements.

A host of Audit Commission reports, all of which are set out on the internet—some 10 or 12 of them have been issued in the past 18 months—contain recommendations on what should be done to improve the efficiency of our health service. What has been done to implement those recommendations? Of course the Government may be embarrassed by the fact that the Audit Commission has been so effective in probing in the past, but the trouble is that the Government have not followed those recommendations.

What prospect is there that some new commission will investigate all these things and that somehow everything will be better in future? The Government do not even apply the recommendations proposed by their own audit body, and we have many examples of that. A new development since Second Reading is the Bank of England's May 2002 inflation report, page 28 of which states:

> "the cost of higher employer and employee contributions will ultimately be borne by employees."

That is very different from the story that the Government have put about that the burden will be shared by employers and employees, as though they can be separated. The national insurance increase represents an additional impost on the British economy and our competitiveness. As a result, it will damage our economy.

As the Bank of England says, if the burden were not ultimately borne by employees,

> "firms would reduce their demand for labour in the face of a higher real product wage, leading to a temporarily lower level of employment and downward pressure on wage growth until equilibrium was restored. In the shorter term, however, the impact will depend on whether and the degree to which employees resist lower growth in their take-home pay."

The Bank of England says in its report that it is too early to say what the effects will be because we will have to see what happens in the marketplace, but it is obviously anxious that there will be inflationary pressure in the economy, fuelled by the increase in national insurance contributions for employers and employees.

I certainly have not seen any evidence in recent weeks that employees are saying, "Yes, I don't mind taking a cut in my take-home pay so money can go to the health service." I have not heard people who work in the NHS, the social services or the police, or head teachers say, "I'm looking forward to a reduction in my take-home pay, so more can be put into the health service."

People, especially those in the public sector, seem to be telling the Government, "Give us some extra money to compensate us for the additional national insurance tax, and we'll be content." Indeed, pay demands in the public sector are escalating frighteningly. Obviously, the demands from the fire service are the most prominent at the moment. The Government are fuelling that inflationary pressure by their actions in the Bill. That is why the Bank of England reported as it did in May. I hope that the Paymaster General will say in winding up the debate what she and the Government think of the Bank of England's observations. What the Bank of England has said is echoed by employers and employers' organisations up and down the land.

People working in the public sector and local authorities, as employers, are saying that they will have to pay extra because of the Bill. Will they be compensated? The only way that they can be compensated is with extra public money, again raised from taxes. So we have the spiral that we have seen so often under Labour Governments of increasing taxes to fund public sector organisations, which, in turn, have to spend a lot of money on additional employer costs rather than being able to put that money into better-quality services.

We are therefore extremely sceptical about the value of this Bill. The evidence of the Government's own experts is that, in England alone, waste and fraud in the national health service is of the order of £7 billion to £10 billion every year. We are amazed at the arrogance of a Government who, when faced with that evidence, rather than sort out that fraud and waste and improve the health service, come along to the taxpayer and the person paying national insurance contributions and say, "We are not going to sort out the fraud and waste, but we do expect you to make an additional contribution, and it will be all right in the end." That is not the way to run a Government in the thriving, competitive economy inherited from the Conservative Government. The Bank of England report makes the position clear:

> "In the shorter term . . . the impact will depend on whether and the degree to which employees resist lower growth in their take-home pay."

In the longer term, however, the damage to the competitiveness of this country will be obvious. That is why people who are concerned about the future of our country are worried about this Bill and the additional taxation that it involves.

The Government did not go into the last general election saying, "We are going to increase taxes. These are the arguments for increasing them. Although we said in 1997 that there are only 24 hours to save the national health service, and we can save it without increasing taxes, we now realise, after four years, that we got it all wrong." What they are saying is, "Oh, now that the general election is behind us, we will increase taxes by stealth as much as we can. People will now have to see those tax rises." The Paymaster General has not heard the last of this. Next year, when people see the impact of this Bill in their pay packets, they will say, "What have we got in return? The health service has not been reformed, and the Government have once again broken their promises. They have put forward a proposition that has not been borne out in reality." That is why experts from the left and the right, from employers' and employees' organisations, are very worried about the Bill.

The Bill is best summed up as having been born out of a broken general election promise. The Government went back on what they said during the climate change levy debate—that imposing increases in employers' national insurance contributions was bad, which is why they made a virtue of reducing the burden on employers' national insurance. They have now abandoned that argument altogether. They have broken their promises and they are facing the country with additional taxes that we can ill afford.

That is why we shall vote against the Bill this evening—it will not deliver the improvements in the health service that we want, it will damage the economy, and it will raise taxes from people who are already being put under severe pressure as a result of stealth taxes introduced by the Government.

Mr. Pound: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will understand me when I say that I do not mean to be presumptuous, but to my mind his dire prognostications for the United Kingdom economy echo precisely the comments that were made from the Conservative Benches about the national minimum wage. The Conservative party was wrong then. Why should we believe it tonight?

Mr. Chope: I am not making any dire prognostications about the economy. All I am saying is that, each time the Government increase the burden of taxation, they make our economy less competitive. The process occurs gradually—a point that is flagged up in the inflation report produced by the Bank of England. I do not know whether

[Mr. Chope]

the hon. Gentleman had the chance to read the Bank of England's inflation report of May 2002 during his recent two-week break in his constituency, but I commend it to him. It shows that the Bank of England is on the ball and realises what is happening, even if the Government are not prepared to face up to its criticism.

We will see the consequences over a period of time. We will not see much immediately, because the national insurance contribution increases will not come in until next year. However, when people get their pay packets next year, they will see exactly the high costs that they are paying and, over time after that we will see the damage that the Government have done to the economy.

9.5 pm

Dr. Evan Harris: The Liberal Democrats' support for the Bill is based on reasons opposite to the Conservative party's reasons for opposing it: we support the increase in funding for the health service. The health service and social services desperately need extra funding, and that has to be welcomed.

We are not entirely happy with the precise way in which the funding is to be raised. For the reasons that have been outlined in the debate, we have made it clear that we would rather have an increase in the top rate of income tax on incomes of more than £100,000 and not an increase in employers' national insurance contributions. Such an increase will impose a burden on businesses that are struggling to cope with a strong pound and the difficulties of exporting.

The Government have previously recognised that taxing employers for employment is a negative approach. As the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) said, when we debated the climate change levy in 1999, the Government said that they wanted to reduce tax on good things such as employment. Although we support the extra funding and support raising the extra money through taxation on income, we are not happy about raising the money from businesses. However, the NHS is so desperate for the increase that we will not take the position that it should not receive any extra funding at all. Unlike the Conservatives, we do not want to defend a view that means that there would be no extra money, or a cut in the growth in funding. We are therefore prepared for the money to be raised in the way suggested in the Bill.

Mr. Bercow: Goodness gracious. I never thought I could be taken aback by a contribution from a Liberal Democrat Member. However, on this occasion, the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) has confounded me. In the light of what he has just said about how the Liberal Democrats opposed the increase in national insurance contributions, did not want it to happen and tried to stop it but are prepared to support a Bill whose principal element is such an increase, is he surprised that the Liberal Democrats are regarded as two-timing, fence-sitting, unprincipled political chameleons?

Dr. Harris: When the hon. Gentleman grows up, he will know that grown-up politics is about making choices that are not necessarily in one's hands. He must understand that a mature attitude to politics involves saying that this is what we would like to happen, but that we have a second-best option if it cannot happen. For us, the second-best option is to raise money partly through employers' national insurance contributions even though we are concerned about that.

Our top priority—the hon. Gentleman will rue the fact that the Conservative party does not recognise this—is public investment in the public services. Although we accept that they need changes and reform, they fundamentally need resources, and we are prepared to accept tax changes that we would not otherwise have supported because that is such an important priority. That is nothing new and, if the hon. Gentleman is dumbfounded by that approach, he will have a dumbfounded political career.

We are critical of the way in which the Government have governed the health service and their history of investment in it. The investment has arrived five years later than it should have done under a Labour Government and five years later than people expected when they voted in 1997 for a party that said that it would save the NHS as soon as it was elected.

Let us consider how much the Labour party has put into the health service in those years and compare that with what the Government are proposing now. On Second Reading, I invited the Paymaster General to specify by how much social services spending—adjusted for special transitional grant, community care arrangements and population changes—had increased between 1997 and 1999, because the figures for 1997–98 and 1998–99 are missing from the Wanless report. She did not answer that question, but a Library paper clearly states the percentage changes. In 1995–96, under the Tories, it was minus 2.9 per cent.—a real terms cut in funding to social services for the vulnerable. In 1996–97, again under the Conservatives, it was minus 1.8 per cent. In 1997–98, under Labour—despite "24 hours to save the NHS"—the change in real-terms spending, adjusted for special transitional grant and population changes, was minus 2.7 per cent. In 1998–99, it was minus 2 per cent.

So after years of Tory underfunding, when many social services departments could not take any more, they got another hit from the Labour Government from which many, including the social services department in Oxfordshire, have not recovered. Five years later, we have the opportunity to give social services departments, as well as the health service, the funding that they need. However, we do not believe that the Government will adequately allocate the funding provided by the Bill into social services. It is clear from returns from social services departments around the country that they are more than £200 million overspent on their budgets. The Government may say that that is tough and that they should simply cut £200 million from caring for the elderly, the mentally ill, the disabled or the vulnerable young and children in care. Many are having to do that. However, as the bulk of their funding comes from central Government, central Government will have to account for that.

On top of that, there is a £1 billion gap between what the Government say social services departments should be spending—the standard spending assessment—and what they are spending. That is £1 billion taken from other services and from steep rises in council tax, which is a more regressive tax than that proposed in the Bill. Before considering tackling the problems of delayed discharges and the underprovision of funding to deal with the crisis in care for the elderly and for children, the Government should deal with the £218 million overspend and the £1 billion reality gap between what social services departments are having to pay and what the Government say they should be spending. The Government are giving a welcome few hundred million pounds to tackle the issue of delayed discharges, but that in itself will not be enough.

As the hon. Member for Christchurch said, there are questions to be asked about how well funding for the health service is being spent, and it is right that we should ask those questions. There are false economies in three areas, for which the Government must take some responsibility. I hope that the new Chief Secretary, who is in charge of public service agreements for spending Departments, will ask the Department of Health to explain how huge amounts of NHS capacity can be lost because of delayed discharges. If funding was made available to social services departments and, indirectly, to the private health care sector, we could at a stroke release significant amounts of capacity—much more quickly than by training more nurses to open more beds, as we need to do and are doing.

John Mann: The hon. Gentleman may care to visit my constituency to see what a Labour county council can do. I am perplexed by his prognosis on cuts. Where does the money come from for the 20 brand new intermediate care beds that were opened last year in my constituency? Where does the money come from for the 20 or more additional intermediate care beds at an alternative site that is being developed in my constituency? Is that the difference between the prioritising of a Labour county council and that of his county council?

Dr. Harris: Oxfordshire county council has been subject to cuts under Liberal Democrat-Labour administrations, Labour-Conservative administrations and Conservative-Liberal Democrat administrations. I have never criticised those administrations in the House, even when my party was not involved. All local politicians recognise that without central funding to ensure that services grow, let alone remain the same, we let down the most vulnerable in society.

The hon. Gentleman should look at the figures on delayed discharges, especially for areas outside his constituency, with its ministerial visits. I am delighted that a few more beds have been provided in his area. I suspect, however, that he does not issue a press release every time a private care home bed closes there. What we have is closure by stealth and announcements by acclamation. I am happy to visit Bassetlaw to see what is happening there, and I urge him to come to Oxfordshire where councillors of all parties are in despair at the cuts. I suspect he does not want to come—see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil. Nevertheless, the cuts are taking place in many authorities, including some that are Labour run.

The second false economy is the cost of employing agency staff. The Chief Secretary and I know that the problems of health service staffing, including under-recruitment and under-training, are predominantly the fault of Conservative Administrations and have been inherited. None the less, the fact that the investment was not provided as early as it should have been has meant that the problem of paying agency staff over the odds remains because of a shortage of established posts in the NHS. That has cost a huge amount of money that need not have been spent. Indeed, we could be five years into a significant increase in funding.

The third false economy is the use of the private sector as a short-term measure. Some people are getting their operations quicker than would otherwise be the case, but in terms of value for money, the Chief Secretary must understand that it is highly likely that spot contracts, the costs of which are usually kept secret because of commercial sensitivity, are more expensive than releasing the capacity in the health service to tackle delayed discharges. We have to consider whether the money raised from an increase in NICs will simply be chucked away as we pay over the odds in secret contracts with the private sector. Even when private firms bid for contracts, they do not bear the same overheads as the NHS, which provides almost all the training and research. It is the only market for contracts in which one competitor trains the staff of its leading competitor, which has to bear none of the overheads. The time must come when we impose a training levy on private sector employers to pay back the costs to the NHS of training those staff.

The Government did not announce before the election that the increase would be needed. To some extent, I agree with the hon. Member for Christchurch on this. He said that the Labour party failed at the election to recognise the truth that taxes would have to rise to pay for the health service. On that basis, the Conservatives also failed to recognise the truth, although they would say that taxes do not need to rise to pay for the health service, and we discussed how they would pay for everything that is needed.

On Second Reading, I asked the Chief Secretary's predecessor why, as No. 2 to the Chancellor, he could not forecast that a year after the election he would be raising taxes in such a significant way through national insurance contributions. He did not answer, but the hon. Member for Christchurch kindly put the point to him again in summation, for which I am grateful. He said:

> "At that time"—

during the general election—

> "no one was much closer to the Chancellor of the Exchequer than the Chief Secretary. Earlier in the debate, the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) challenged the Chief Secretary to deny that he knew a year ago that national insurance would have to be raised."—[*Official Report*, 13 May 2002; Vol. 388, c. 603.]

The right hon. Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith) said that he had no such knowledge.

The right hon. Gentleman is a man of his word—he is an hon. Member—and I am sure that that is true, but it worries me, as it should all hon. Members, that the second-in-command at the Treasury had such a poor grasp of the economic outlook and of Government receipts for public spending that he could not predict at the general election a year ago that taxes would have to increase in this way. I think that that is either frightening or that he was mistaken. I would be interested to know whether the post's current incumbent believes that it was reasonable for his predecessor to be out by a factor of a few billion pounds and in terms of significant tax changes within one year. Can he not look a year ahead?

One aspect that has not been covered in our short debate is the complexity that the Bill produces in the tax regime. In an ideal world, we would have a simplified tax system that would make things more transparent, keep money from accountants and leave more money in taxpayers' pockets. We have a very complex tax system.

[Dr. Harris]

My hon. Friends have been proposing that simplification should be one of the Government's priorities. It is sad that the welcome resources that are to be raised by the measure are to be raised in such a complex way.

We must consider how the Government will face the next election in terms of delivery. What worries me is that it will take a long time for the health service to produce the changes. I am worried for the patients who have to lie in pain awaiting their surgery, and I also worry that people will think that the extra resources that are going in so late were not sufficient to do the trick. Hon. Members should realise that even the resources that are going in now will take some time to work through to increased capacity. I am worried that the Government have been five years late, so that people will think in the next few years that the money is going in and will not allow enough time for improvement. In that respect, the Government are hoist with their own petard. They announced huge increases in 1997 and 1998, but the significant increases that we have seen recently were not made at that time. I think that the health service as a national service is more under threat now than at any other time as a result of the Government's complacency in terms of giving it the resources and reform that it needs.

I fear that the Government will seek to blame anyone but themselves for their slowness to deliver. They will blame the hard-working staff in the health service, scapegoat a few hospitals that do not have sufficient capacity and seek to pick fights with the unions for opposing untested and unreasonable reforms. As we have heard, they will also seek to blame patients for not turning up. The reason why many patients do not turn up for appointments is that they are either already dead or in hospital. The idea of fine collectors wandering around cemeteries to try to fine patients for not turning up to appointments is beyond the pale.

I hope that the Government will accept in humility some responsibility for the delay in delivery that their lateness in putting in the resources has caused. In supporting the Bill on Third Reading, it is right to let the Government know that the resources are welcome but that to date their record on managing the health service has not been good.

9.23 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): May I say what a privilege it is to see the new Chief Secretary to the Treasury in his place? I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will be as robust in dealing with his colleagues in spending Departments as he is in dealing with sloppy arguments in Committee or on the Floor of the House. I wish his colleagues in those spending Departments well in their negotiations during the coming weeks and months.

There are at least five reasons why the Bill should be resisted with absolute clarity and certainty. The first is the impact on the business sector. The second is the cost to the public sector. Thirdly, there is the cost to individual voters, who will pay the taxes directly or indirectly. Fourthly—this is very important—the Bill represents a massive broken promise by the Government. It should be a matter of considerable concern to the House that they have broken their promises as spectacularly as they have done by introducing the Bill. Finally, the Government are simply proposing to pour money into the existing health system without seeking the reform of that system that is essential to ensure that it will use those additional resources effectively.

To put it simply, in the past five years taxes have gone up and up, but as we all know, public services have got worse. The country deserves a great deal better, not more of the same. The Government have increased taxes with great abandon, but they are not addressing the problems in our health service with the open mind that they should have in dealing with such an important matter. I am particularly concerned that the Government seem so unprepared to learn lessons from other countries—lessons that Her Majesty's official Opposition are most anxious to learn.

Let us look at the first of the reasons why the Bill should be resisted: the impact on businesses. Under the Labour Government businesses have been hit by higher taxes, and in particular by increased red tape and regulatory burdens. In my discussions with the south Worcestershire council of the Hereford and Worcester chamber of commerce shortly after the Budget, I learned just how concerned businesses were about the Bill, coming as it does on top of all the other burdens that they now have to bear.

John Mann: What is those people's view on the reduction in corporation tax, and what is the hon. Gentleman's?

Mr. Luff: As far as I know, they have no view on that matter—but in inviting me to express mine, the hon. Gentleman has anticipated my next remarks. In that tantalising interventior he alluded to the fact that the Chancellor claims to have cut business tax. He has announced—I think I have the litany right, but I am sure that the Chief Secretary will correct me if I get it wrong—a cut in small companies corporation tax rate from 20 to 19 per cent.; the exemption of companies from corporation tax on sales of substantial shareholdings; a reduction in the starting rate of corporation tax from 10 per cent. to zero; and a cut in capital gains tax to 20 per cent. for business assets held for one year and more, and to 10 per cent. for assets held for two years and more. Is that the sort of list that the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) sought? *[Interruption.]* Obviously, the hon. Gentleman broadly agrees.

That is all very well, but it is more of the smoke and mirrors—the spin—that we are used to from the Government, because the Chancellor's changes to employers' national insurance contributions will raise as much as a 3 per cent. rise in corporation tax. He gives a little with one hand and takes a great deal more back with the other. That is the fundamental point.

Employers who pay national insurance contributions on all earnings above the threshold—that is frozen at £89 a week—face a rise from 11.8 to 12.8 per cent. That is a big increase, which more than makes up for all the good things in the Budget. The hon. Member for Bassetlaw is right—there were good things in the Budget.

John Mann: Is it not the case that the main rate of corporation tax has been reduced by 3 per cent. and the rate for small companies by 4 per cent., which, with the changes in capital gains tax for any entrepreneur who sells his business, will mean that the overall benefit for any small business will be 10, 20, 30 or 40 times the increase in national insurance?

Mr. Luff: I am glad to have flushed the hon. Gentleman out. He appears to be greatly concerned about that point. I could not persuade him with my previous argument, but perhaps I can persuade him with this one.

When the Chancellor announced his business tax cuts, of which the hon. Gentleman is so proud—it gives me great pleasure to hear Opposition Members—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry; they will be Opposition Members again soon, but I meant to say that it gives me great pleasure to hear Government Members boast about their desire to cut the rate of business taxation. Even if they are not succeeding in doing so, I am glad that at least they seem to want to try. When the Chancellor announced his so-called business tax cuts, he did not mention—

John Mann: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Luff: I will deal with one intervention at a time. If when I have finished, the hon. Gentleman is not satisfied with my answer, I shall happily give way to him a third time.

Let me make this point: a company that does not make a profit does not pay corporation tax, but it does pay national insurance contributions. That is tremendously important. For struggling businesses, new businesses, or businesses facing short-term difficulties, the national insurance contributions increases are far more damaging than any corporation tax increase, and any NIC cut would be far more beneficial than any corporation tax cut. The hon. Gentleman should remember that even in the brave new world created by the Chancellor, many businesses find life tough. That is why the national insurance contributions increases are so serious for business.

John Mann: The hon. Gentleman suggests that the cuts in corporation tax are illusory. They are real cuts that any business person can see—real cuts, year on year, for anyone who runs a business. That is why there are so many more successful businesses, and 1.5 million people back in work. For anyone running a business, the key issue of certainty centres on interest rates. Are not current interest rates the lowest since the 1960s? Is not the cost of borrowing money for a business, small or large, lower than ever? Is that not the reason for the increased profitability in the small business sector in the past five years?

Mr. Luff: I ought to invite the hon. Gentleman to make his own speech, because that was a long intervention. I suspect that you would rule out a discussion on interest rates policy, Mr. Deputy Speaker—I am glad to see you nod in agreement, Sir.

I agree that not everything is a problem in the modern British economy. I am glad that not everything that the last Conservative Administration put in place has been squandered by the incoming Labour Government. I fully agree that we have enjoyed a sustained period of growth over many years—much longer than the Government have been in office. That is excellent news, but it does not justify swingeing increases in business taxation, which are disguised in the Bill and have been condemned by the business sector.

I am worried that the Government are not prepared to assess the implications of the changes for employment. They were happy to boast about the impact of reductions in national insurance contributions accompanying the climate change levy, and their beneficial effect on employment, but now they are increasing national insurance contributions, that willingness to calculate has disappeared entirely. The CBI estimates that companies will pay £4 billion more in tax because of the 1 per cent. increase in national insurance from next April, which comes on top of the additional £6 billion a year net in extra taxes that has been imposed on the business sector and the £5 billion-worth a year of extra red tape. Those burdens are beginning seriously to impede companies' ability to win orders and create jobs.

John Mann *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Luff: It is no good the hon. Gentleman shaking his head in disbelief. Ernst and Young, in its ITEM—independent Treasury economic model—club report for spring 2002, said:

> "Many companies will be taking another look at headcount before the increase in payroll tax comes in next April".

The report also said:

> "The risk is that employers, already under pressure from high labour costs, and in many cases unable to pass costs on to the consumer"—

the hon. Gentleman needs to bear that important point in mind—

> "will take another look at staffing levels before next April. An extra 1 per cent. on the wage bill may not seem much but it adds up to £3.9 billion in a full year, 12 per cent. of the corporation tax bill. For many companies, an extra 1 per cent. on labour costs may prove to be the last straw".

I do not share the hon. Gentleman's optimism about the Bill's impact on the business sector; far from it—the impact could be serious.

The Bill's impact on the public sector concerns the whole House. There are, for example, about 1 million NHS workers in England alone; the 1 per cent. rise in employers' national insurance contributions will increase the cost of employing them by about £200 million. In my constituency, that is of particular concern to general practitioners. In south Worcestershire, the settlement for our primary care trust was not generous, as the area was split up to form the new trusts that replaced the old primary care groups.

Pay settlements for ancillary workers in surgeries impose a burden on GPs' budgets, and on top of that, those doctors have to pay a 1 per cent. increase in national insurance contributions. Local GPs are wondering what economies they will have to make in the running of their surgeries and what reductions in service they will offer my constituents—their patients—as a direct result of the increase in national insurance contributions and other factors of the Government's making. There are therefore genuine concerns about the Bill's impact on the quality of the service provided by the NHS in my constituency.

The police are another interesting example. Today the Home Office announced that three constabularies in the west midlands, including West Mercia police, would get an extra £900,000 to help in the fight against terrorism, which would mean an extra £300,000 each. I am sure that that figure will be dwarfed by the increase in the national

[Mr. Luff]

insurance bill for the West Mercia constabulary alone; the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. It was ever thus, I suppose, but the impact is serious and will impose a further burden on a service that had to raise its council tax precept by 33 per cent. to achieve an acceptable level of policing in my constituency.

Those changes, coupled with the changes in income tax, will have a direct impact on ordinary people—the voters themselves—not just the businesses or public sector services that employ them. A nurse consultant on £34,000 a year will be £26 a month worse off from next year, a police inspector on £37,000 a year will be £30 a month worse off, and an employee earning £20,000 a year will be £15 a month worse off. Those increases in personal taxation directly break the Government's promises to the people of Britain in the election campaign. That is an important point. For a Government, within a year of an election, to bring forward legislation that directly contradicts the promises that they gave to the people at that election should be a cause for shame, not for pride. However, that is what this Government have done.

On 22 May 2001 the Prime Minister was interviewed by Jeremy Paxman, who asked him:

> "I am merely asking why you could give this guarantee"—

not to abolish the national insurance ceiling—

> "last time but you can't give it this time and whether any reasonable person wouldn't suppose that you therefore propose to increase national insurance contributions."

I agree that that is rather a convoluted question, but the Prime Minister's reply was, "They shouldn't." He said that people should not make that supposition. However, a year later legislation is introduced to do precisely what the Prime Minister clearly implied would not happen.

The previous Chief Secretary, who is now the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, was asked on the Dimbleby programme:

> "You say that you won't rule it out because you can't afford to. Do you also accept that as far as voters are concerned, National Insurance is regarded as a tax on income?"

This is the nearest that we get to an honest answer from a Minister to such a question. The right hon. Gentleman said:

> "Well, certainly it comes out of the wage packet."

It certainly does, and people will feel it next year.

I am glad to see that the hon. Member for Streatham (Keith Hill), the Government Deputy Chief Whip, is in his place. On "Your Call" on Sky News on 4 June 2001, he said:

> "We have no plans to raise any kind of so-called stealth taxes. Gordon Brown has made it perfectly clear that we have absolutely no plans to raise the ceiling on National Insurance."

You know now, Mr. Speaker, that if Ministers or their representatives say that they have absolutely no such plans, you should start reaching for your wallet as a matter of urgency, because plans certainly exist.

I should add that I have great affection for the Government Deputy Chief Whip, who made possible an important bypass in my constituency, for which I shall always be in his debt, as will the people of Wyre Piddle—but I will not labour that point for fear of upsetting the hon. Gentleman any further.

Then there is the reform of the health service itself. The Government are effectively hypothecating their national insurance increases for the health service. I have said already that they have had a closed mind about the reforms that are necessary in the health service to make sure that it can use the moneys effectively.

I now have four questions for whichever Minister will wind up the debate. I am not entirely sure which of the two present that will be, but I am sure that whoever it is will do it extremely well. By the time of the next election, spending on the NHS will have increased by 70 per cent. in real terms since 1997. Does the Minister think that the NHS will have improved by 70 per cent. in that period? When patients in Britain are dying of diseases that they would not die of if they lived in other European countries, why did the Chancellor tell Mr. Wanless not to consider any of the ways of administering health care that have proved more successful elsewhere?

Next, can the Minister explain why despite the fact that NHS spending has increased by nearly one third since the Government came to office, the number of people waiting to get on the NHS waiting list has increased by 113,000? During Prime Minister's questions my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition asked:

> "By the time of the next general election when health spending in Britain has reached the European average, will we have European standards of health care?"—[*Official Report*, 24 April 2002; Vol. 384, c. 328.]

The Prime Minister refused to say that we would. Why did he refuse to answer that question? These are important questions that the Government need to answer.

I remain unconvinced by my experience that the Government are making effective use of the spare resources that exist in the private health sector in my constituency. I remain concerned that some of the problems of the health service have been created directly by the policies introduced by the Government. The question of social services beds, which was referred to by the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris), is crucial. The burdens imposed on the caring sector have been huge, and have contributed directly to delayed discharges from hospitals in Worcestershire. Those problems could have been avoided not by spending money but by having a more friendly and sensible regulatory regime.

The Bill should be resisted, for the five reasons that I have set out. There is the impact on business, the cost to the public sector, the cost to voters, the broken promises and the Government's failure to reform the health service appropriately to ensure that money is spent appropriately. I am sad that the Government have not seen the error of their ways, and I hope that the House will vote to oppose the Bill on Third Reading in a few minutes' time.

9.39 pm

Mr. Chope: With the leave of the House, Mr. Speaker. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) on an excellent speech, and hope that the Government will respond to his powerful comments. Let me make a few more points, very briefly.

The hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) made an important observation when he said that throwing more money at the NHS would not produce quick results. I think that if the Government deployed their resources in tackling existing inefficiencies immediately, they would secure much quicker results. Only last month, an Audit Commission report suggested that inefficiency in the NHS was costing the equivalent of 150,000 operations a year—the number of operations that the NHS plans to buy from the private sector this year. Think of the enormous sums that could be saved if the existing system were reformed.

We still feel that the Government have gone for the easy socialist option of increasing taxes and throwing more money at the public service, when what we really need to do is make the public service better. That can be achieved only through proper, substantial reform.

9.41 pm

Dawn Primarolo: There are now more than 107,000 fewer people on NHS waiting lists. No one is waiting more than 15 months for operations, whereas nearly 60,000 were doing so in March 1997. There are 6,000 fewer people waiting more than 12 months for operations, and we are on course to eliminate that figure by the end of next year. Just 500 people—500 too many, admittedly—have been waiting more than six months to see consultants, compared with more than 70,000 in March 1997.

There are now 25 per cent. more heart operations—some 10,000—every year. There are 171 more cardiologists, an increase of over 40 per cent. More than 95 per cent. of people urgently referred by their general practitioners with suspected cancer now see consultants within two weeks, compared with 63 per cent. in 1997. There are 566 more cancer consultants, an increase of 18 per cent. There are 50 per cent. more computerised tomography scans, and 86 per cent. more magnetic resonance imaging scans. An additional 500,000 operations are performed in the NHS every year, an increase of 10 per cent.

Last year there were 700 more general and acute beds in the NHS—the first increase in bed numbers for 30 years. NHS Direct has been rolled out across the country. The number of delayed discharges has been reduced; 4,700 such people now occupy acute hospital beds. Of course we desperately need to ensure that those people have appropriate care and support, but that compares with 6,800 delayed discharges in 1997.

Twelve major hospital schemes have been completed, and a further 15 are under construction. Every accident and emergency department that needed modernisation has now been modernised. Moreover, there are now 31,000 more nurses and 9,500 more doctors, including 2,000 new, modern matrons.

Despite all that, the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) has the cheek to suggest that nothing has changed and that the Government have not been investing more money in the health service and ensuring that it grows. I must tell him that his constant parroting of "We, the Liberal Democrats, will cost you 1p," or "We, the Liberal Democrats, would raise the money in a different way," is no substitute for hard policies and delivery of services in the NHS. As the Chancellor of the Exchequer has made clear, the Bill sets out plans for an unprecedented increase in spending in the NHS, together with responsibility for proposals for financing that increased spending.

What of the Tories? We have gone through yet another debate on national insurance, but are we any the wiser about their policy? No. The Tories are still thinking about it—open-minded and empty-headed. There are no proposals from them. They are so empty-headed that they cannot even make it clear on the Floor of the House that they are committed to a comprehensive health service available on the basis of need, not ability to pay. Have we heard one of them utter that principle? No.

What we have heard the Tories say is why we should use taxpayers' money to subsidise private medical health care, why they believe that employers should not meet their obligations in contributing to a fine and first-class NHS, and why they believe that there is a magic formula out there to produce a health service that will respond to people's requirements and needs but will not require any extra resources. If they had learned anything from their defeats in 1997 and 2001, it would have been that the British electorate rejected their policies of underfunding the public sector and the NHS, and that the British electorate want their health service to be the best in the world and are prepared to pay for that on a fair and equal basis built on the fine principles of the Beveridge proposals. Yet again, all we have heard today from the Tories is why they want to stop that happening.

I say to the House and to the British electorate that if they had any doubts that the intention of the Conservative Opposition is to privatise the NHS, to cut it and to create a two-tier NHS, they have seen the proof of that intention in the debate tonight. This Bill guarantees, for the first time in the history of the NHS, consistent investment in the NHS: staff, beds, buildings and services to respond to the needs of the British people. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read the Third time:—

The House divided: Ayes 336, Noes 129.

Division No. 258] **[9.48 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*

Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Rt Hon Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*

Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCafferty, Chris
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice

Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian

Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. John Heppell and
Mr. Phil Woolas.

NOES

Amess, David
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim

Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey

Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Desmond Swayne and
Mr. Julian Brazier.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

INVESTIGATORY POWERS

That the draft Regulation of Investigatory Powers (Interception of Communications: Code of Practice) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 8th May, be approved.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Question agreed to.

DEREGULATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 18(1)(a) (Consideration of draft deregulation orders),

VACCINE DAMAGE PAYMENTS

That the draft Regulatory Reform (Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 29th April, be approved.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Question agreed to.

NORTHERN IRELAND GRAND COMMITTEE

Resolved,

That—

(1) the matter of the scope for a Bill of Rights in Northern Ireland, being a matter relating exclusively to Northern Ireland, be referred to the Northern Ireland Grand Committee;

(2) the Committee shall meet at Westminster on Thursday 27th June at 2.30 p.m.; and

(3) at the meeting—

(a) the Chairman shall interrupt proceedings at 4.30 p.m.; and

(b) at the conclusion of those proceedings a motion for the adjournment of the Committee may be moved by a Minister of the Crown pursuant to Standing Order No. 116(5) (Northern Ireland Grand Committee (sittings)).—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Overseas Students

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

10.4 pm

Sue Doughty (Guildford): I am grateful for the opportunity to bring a matter of great concern to me to the attention of the House. In brief, the Government promise great things to foreign students who study here, but fail spectacularly to deliver when they arrive, not in the nature of their studies—our universities and colleges do a fine job—but through a series of extraordinary hassles with their passports and visas. I have had many examples in my constituency. The immigration and nationality directorate of the Home Office appears to be the main culprit. It makes Railtrack under the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) look like a shining example of efficiency by comparison. The story that I shall tell shows a saga not so much of joined-up government as of one Department frantically working to undermine the work of another.

The background to the problem is this: British universities and further education colleges, supported by the Department for Education and Skills, have much to offer overseas students, who, at the same time benefit the economy and education funding. We hope and expect that students gain not only an excellent education but a positive impression of this country which is of benefit to international relations as well as our international trading position. We hope that they will tell their friends what a good place the United Kingdom is to study so that more will come and extend that benefit.

Figures produced by the Higher Education Statistics Agency for the academic year 2001–02 show that nearly 240,000 overseas students were studying in the UK. In total, they represented 11 per cent. of all students in these institutions—an increase of about 17.5 per cent. above 1995–96 levels. The income to higher education institutions in 1999–2000, the most recent year for which figures are available, was £672 million—5.2 per cent. of the total income for that sector.

The Prime Minister is aiming to increase the number of overseas students, and in June 1999 he launched a campaign to make the UK a world-class leader in international education and lifelong learning. Two key objectives were set for further education and higher education institutions—to be the first choice for quality among international students at higher education level, with an increase of 50,000 non-European Union international students by 2005, and to be the world's leading nation for international students to undertake further education, with an increase of 100 per cent. in full-time students by 2005.

To help achieve these targets, the Government put in place a four-element package of measures, consisting of a £6 million investment in the development and three-year promotion of a new UK education brand, led by the British Council, with enhanced marketing in priority countries, including India, Pakistan and China, the streamlining of visa arrangements for students applying to study in the UK, the easing of procedures on permission for students to work part time and in vacations and the expansion of the Chevening scholarship scheme.

International nursing students want clarification from the Minister on these improvements. They want confirmation that there is no requirement for them to commit to leaving the UK as a condition of obtaining a visa and that they are entitled to work up to 20 hours a week during term time and for an unlimited time during vacations.

Our further and higher education institutions have risen to the challenge that the Government have set with these new measures. The provisional data show a fall, as requested, of 6 per cent. of students from other EU countries, and an increase of 12 per cent. of students outside the EU. Moreover, there will be additional income from off-campus spending by overseas students.

This should be a good news story. Guildford college of further and higher education and Surrey university have marketed strongly in these countries. However, what should be a purposeful and pleasant visit to the UK by overseas students has been turned into forced exile for some and misery for many.

Like other right hon. and hon. Members who have the privilege of serving constituencies with higher and further education establishments, I regularly see cases in which an application for a student visa has resulted in an unacceptably long time before a passport is returned.

An example lies in the events that led up to my calling for this debate. A student at Guildford college, a Hungarian national, contacted me last October. She had first applied to the Home Office for a visa in April 2000 when she came to start a course of study at Chelsea. She then applied for an extension in good faith, having gained a place at Guildford college. I know that she is studying hard: her English has come on in leaps and bounds since I first met her. She has been here quite a while now.

The student submitted her passport and trusted that all was in order. She registered her home address as that of her English relatives, to be absolutely certain that documents would reach her. She lives in Guildford. A member of my team telephoned the Home Office on 14 November and was assured that the matter would be looked into. We made follow-up calls, and having heard nothing by December, I wrote to the then Minister, enclosing further documentation and evidence of her current course, as requested. We asked for a progress report but got no reply. A member of her family also wrote to the Home Office.

We followed up the problem in early February, having given the Home Office the opportunity to find the file, which we were told was in Becket house. We were promised a return call but never received it. On 27 February, we followed up again and were told that the file was with the Minister's correspondence officer. Meanwhile, the student was concerned that, after all this time, with my intervention, she should get her passport back. She wanted to go home for a visit before her exams. Having originally applied in April 2000, she thought that the passport would turn up and she booked a return ticket home.

We were told that the passport was not in the Minister's office but with the immigration control inspectorate. The student rang Lunar house and was [illegible] that the papers were there and she should go there at 6 o'clock the next morning. This is like Kafka. She duly got up at 4 o'clock, but when she got there she was told that the passport was not there and was probably in Becket house, so she came back. We followed up and the Home Office said that it had probably been lost and she should apply to the Hungarian embassy for a replacement. She was really worried that the embassy would take a dim view of her having lost her passport, so we got a letter from the Home Office and she applied for a passport from the embassy.

By the end of March, we had learned from the Minister's office that the entire application had been lost and the student would have to start the whole process again. By the end of April, she received a new passport from the Hungarian embassy—it was rather more efficient that the IND—and by 8 May we were following up yet again and, lo and behold, the original passport turned up in Becket house. By late May, her file was back with the Minister. I am afraid that that is my fault, because with all that was going on we had by then requested this Adjournment debate.

Surprise, surprise, having written three letters to the then Minister with no response to any, since securing this debate I have received a response from the current Minister. It came by fax at 1.20 pm last Friday. Half the information in it is wrong. Information requested has already been supplied, and other information about the history is simply inaccurate.

I shall not go into the detail of the letter here, and I would not have brought the matter to the House if that was the only problem, but it shows the complete lack of competence in the handling of some applications. There is a fast-track scheme, and it works brilliantly. I have a student who does some cleaning for me who is really pleased with it, but when a student application is not allowed within the scheme and has to go through the standard route, there are problems.

The system is unacceptably slow. Delays of six months are commonplace, and Surrey university and Guildford college have examples of delays of more than a year. The standard letter of reply mentions a likely delay of nine months. To deny a person his or her passport for so long is completely unacceptable and possibly an abuse of human rights. A person cannot travel or use the passport for identification, for example to set up a bank account or get part-time employment or concessionary student cards. Students without their passport feel insecure. They are brought up to have identification and expect to have it if asked by the police. They have a constant nagging feeling that they are doing something wrong. When we raised some of those points, we were told that a student could get their passport back by withdrawing their application, but that is fatuous because the student would have to start all over again thus prolonging the delay, or return to their own country to await the renewal of their visa there, thus interrupting their studies.

I can understand the IND's concern about citizens from certain countries of the world. Among the student population it is strongly believed that applications from Libyans, Iranians, Pakistanis and Zimbabweans will never go through the fast-track system. That can be due only to suspicions that they do not desire to return home on completion of their studies, and the IND may want to check the facts. However, to create anxiety among people does no good; it does not help relations with their countries and makes a lasting impression on those people.

Furthermore, there is deep suspicion among many students that those from more affluent families experience longer delays because money might change hands. I cannot substantiate that suspicion as I have no evidence, but it is a common belief.

The university has regularly called on me and on my predecessor to untangle problems—as has Guildford college. I shall quickly refer to other cases, to show that the situation that I described earlier is not a one-off.

A Libyan student wants to spend a short period at a French university, with which her department has had contact, as part of her PhD programme. Her passport has been with the IND for six months and she cannot go to France.

Two Turkish Cypriots sent separate visa applications in October and November 2001. Despite their requests, the visa stamps were put in their passports, rather than their identity cards as required by their home country. One ID card was never returned, while the other was returned without a stamp and had to be sent back. All the documents were mislaid—they are still missing. The students experienced great problems in travelling to their home country and incurred considerable expense in obtaining replacement documents.

An Indian who visited my surgery made an application in December 2001. He had heard nothing by May when he was anxious to return home for a family wedding. His presence was urgently required as a close relative had been involved in a car accident and was in a critical condition. I managed to get that passport returned, but it needed my intervention.

Iranian students frequently cannot return home when they want to. A Russian submitted an application in November 2001 and is still waiting. He has to go home on a visit this summer.

It is embarrassing to have to apologise on behalf of my country for the way that we treat people who are not only our honoured guests but are also customers of education UK, yet I have to do so regularly in my surgery. I am repeatedly told that these events occur not only to students but to others, although we do not have time to deal with those cases.

The purpose of the debate is to find out what on earth is happening and to get to the bottom of it. Will the Minister tell me how things have got so bad? Why has it taken so long to do anything to sort out the mess? I am sure that it is not a Guildford special.

Will the hon. Lady tell me why we are advertising courses in other countries even though we know what will happen after students arrive in the UK? Do they know the hell that they will have to go through to sort out their documentation?

Is the Minister aware that many new students from Pakistan and India—priority countries according to the Prime Minister—who are expecting to start courses in September and October are being denied access to entry clearance services and will not be able to take up their places? We are trying to sell courses to such people.

Is the Minister aware that, although international postgraduate students are crucial to our economy and to the academic viability of many universities, the Home Office often takes more than eight months to process applications for extensions of leave? During that time students do not have their passports and cannot go home for vacations or travel elsewhere.

Is the Minister aware that, although China has been identified as a priority one country by the Prime Minister, the majority of Chinese students experience delays of many months in the processing of their extension applications,

[Sue Doughty]

because of the inefficiency of interdepartmental security checks? Is she aware that, despite the resumption of diplomatic relations with Libya in 1999, there has been no change in the way that the Home Office processes applications from Libyan students, granting them only six months leave at a time and taking months to process their applications, so that they are unable to leave the UK during their entire stay in this country?

Is the Minister aware that, despite the Prime Minister's initiative to recruit more international students to the United Kingdom, passport stamps and vignettes have still not been amended to reflect students' rights to work as accorded as part of that initiative? Is she aware that students who succeed in appealing against the refusal of entry clearance will usually be delayed in joining their courses for the whole academic year? Is she aware that the Home Office's public inquiry office in Belfast is now closed, leaving international students studying in Northern Ireland with no way to make applications in person?

I know of many more examples from Guildford college that relate to the IND's friendliness. Getting the IND to do something—friendly or not—would be a good thing, but being helpful to those people and making them feel good while they are here might help to sell education UK. In short, we are trying to get joined-up government, but the IND does its best to undermine education UK—the British Council and the Department for Education and Skills in their work in attracting foreign students to our country. The situation is bleak. Can the Minister give me any hope for the future?

10.20 pm

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): I congratulate the hon. Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) on securing this debate, and I do not blame her for seeking it, certainly on the basis of the case with which I am familiar and about which she has written to the Department.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to make our position clear. I have to say that the person in the case with which I am most familiar—the one that I have investigated—was treated unacceptably. Although the hon. Lady raised several other cases, that treatment is not typical, but I want to set out our general student policy and some of the difficulties that have affected a number of people, as well as to say something about that case.

In the time left to me, I probably cannot deal with all the questions that the hon. Lady asked me at the end of her speech, but I will write to her following the debate to deal with anything that I do not cover now. She is right to say that the United Kingdom welcomes overseas students and wants to welcome them. More than 300,000 students entered the UK in 2000, up from about 200,000, 10 years previously. So there is clearly a growing trend, which we very much welcome.

We recognise, as does the hon. Lady, the mutual benefit of attracting overseas students to the UK. That benefit is to the students and certainly to our country. For the students, the UK can offer—as it does at the college in her constituency—high-quality and competitively priced education in a stimulating environment. Those who experience UK education and training tend to become lifelong friends of the UK, with all that that implies for future political, trade and economic benefits in the UK. They also generate significant income for the UK and the wider economy.

One of the aims of the Prime Minister's initiative, launched in 1999, to attract more overseas students, to which the hon. Lady referred, was to make visa and entry arrangements more user-friendly for students. After her experiences, she may think that that has a hollow ring, but that was certainly one of the intentions. We have tried to make the visa application process as simple as possible: we have produced more information for applicants; we have tried to reduce waiting times; and we have ensured that, wherever possible, leave to enter or remain is granted for the full duration of a course.

However, I have to tell the hon. Lady that this is a question of balance. I do not say that to justify the treatment that she has described, but people have to recognise that we genuinely want to minimise inconvenience and delay to genuine students while ensuring that we have the necessary checks in place to identify and deter those people who would otherwise try to use that avenue to circumvent the controls. That could have been an issue in the case that she has raised, with which I shall deal in a moment.

Students are free to take part-time work while studying in the UK, including during sandwich courses and internships. Those who have completed degrees here may be eligible to obtain work permits and to stay on in employment. I shall write to the hon. Lady on her specific question about nurses.

For most of the period since the launch of the Prime Minister's initiative, the initial decisions on all applications for extensions of stay in the UK were generally made within three weeks. Of late, however, some applicants, including students, have had to wait much longer than we would have wished for a decision on their applications for further leave to remain. I assure the hon. Lady that we are doing everything possible to ensure that students can study here without encountering immigration problems.

Many overseas students come to the United Kingdom with a student visa. That is a mandatory requirement in the immigration rules for all visa nationals wanting to come here to study. It does not, however, apply to non-visa nationals. Many come here as visitors and apply to stay on as students.

In 2001–02, more than 370,000 general and settlement applications were made by post and in person. That was a 20 per cent. increase on the previous year and reflects the year-on-year growth that we have experienced. Of those, student applications represent the largest single category. At peak periods, they account for about 40 per cent. of all applications. The IND's target is to complete 70 per cent. of all general and settlement applications on initial consideration and within the three-week period. That target applies to all categories, including students. Because of an exceptionally high intake during the second half of 2001, however, and the implementation of a new database—*[Interruption.]* I hear laughter from a sedentary position, but unless we get the information technology right we will never succeed in dealing with the huge volume of applications in the kind of time scale that we want to achieve and that people expect. Those two factors therefore resulted in an increase from three weeks to eight weeks by the end of that year. That coincided with the peak period for student applications—September and October—with the result that many student applications were affected.

The very high intake of cases has meant that those cases that cannot be decided on initial consideration, because they are not straightforward, have taken up to nine months to consider. That was one of the cases that the hon. Lady cited, and I shall deal with the reasons in a moment.

In connection with the Prime Minister's initiative, a batch scheme was introduced in August 2000 for universities and publicly funded colleges of higher education affiliated to the United Kingdom Council for Overseas Student Affairs. Under that scheme, which has worked very successfully, applications can be submitted in batches by universities and colleges with a promise that they will be processed within two weeks if everything is straightforward. The majority of student applications are straightforward, but a number require further investigation or inquiry before a decision can be made.

Applications are considered on their individual merits. In many cases, inquiries have to be made to establish whether the requirements of the immigration rules have been met, for example. These may be to check whether the student or the sponsor has sufficient evidence of financial support for the duration of the studies. Some applicants wait until the end of their leave to enter in some other category under the immigration rules before applying to remain as students. That has to be checked out. Inquiries need to be made to check whether the applicant is a bona fide student. For example—this was an element in the case quoted by the hon. Lady—a person can enter the UK as a visitor or, in this case, as an au pair. One of the requirements of that leave of entry is that the person will leave at the end of their permitted stay. If the person applies at the end of that period to remain as a student, further inquiries need to be taken into account.

In some cases, the study quoted is at private education institutions. Again, that was a feature of the case cited by the hon. Lady. In fact, an investigation was under way at the particular college at which that person had proposed to study. Some colleges, we believe, are set up simply to be fronts for that kind of application route. As the college was being investigated, the person's application to study there could not proceed until the investigation had been concluded. Visits and reports by the immigration service may also be necessary. There are an increasing number of such cases so, unfortunately, the necessary inquiries mean that some applications take longer to complete than expected. However, every effort is made and will increasingly be made to keep students informed although I accept that that was not a factor in this case.

The hon. Lady mentioned the return of passports, and I agree that it is another important issue. The applicant's passport must be included with the application so that the decision can be endorsed in it. As I am sure she will appreciate, the passport is also needed as evidence of identity. The practice of the IND is to retain the passport until the application has been decided, but if it is needed for urgent travel, arrangements will be made for it to be returned. However, that means that the application will be deemed to have been withdrawn, and that creates a difficulty for some people who want to leave. I accept that the person in the case that the hon. Lady described was not dealt with well. The passport appears to have been mislaid by Becket house before it was refound. That should not happen, and we will have to deal with that point.

The hon. Lady cited a number of issues in which there has been general frustration in dealings with the IND. I accept that there were problems earlier this year in contacting the immigration and nationality enquiry bureau—the INEB—but the situation is now much improved. The bureau had modern, state-of-the-art call centre equipment installed in March this year and many staff have been recruited and are now fully trained. The bureau answers more than 22,000 calls a week, and our aim is that no caller should have to try more than three times to make a successful call and be given the information that they want.

At the moment, the bureau can provide general information but, as we develop the software and the database, it will also be able to say more precisely what stage a particular application has reached. A new computer system called the general casework information database is also being developed and installed. When it is fully operational, it will enable the bureau's agents to give much more detailed information. All those measures will help to continue the improvement that has been started. I accept that we have got nowhere near the position that we want to reach, but we are working very hard.

The hon. Lady mentioned correspondence, and we are instituting a tracking system. My predecessor had no knowledge of the fact that the hon. Lady had written three times, because that information had not penetrated as far as his office. We need a system that will enable us to track the letters that Members have written because Ministers need to know about them.

I am very sorry that the hon. Lady's constituent experienced difficulties. Inevitably, such cases are not always as straightforward as they appear at first sight, and I have explained some of the ways in which that case was not straightforward. I have had the position of the constituent reviewed, particularly in the light of the fresh application that she has made to study at a different college. I am pleased to say that I have instructed my officials to grant her leave to remain in the UK as a student for 12 months in the first instance as I understand that her course will last for that long.

If the hon. Lady, has other cases that she would like me to investigate, I will certainly do so. However, I hope that she will accept that we are engaged in a big task. The volume of cases is enormous and they are sometimes complex and not straightforward. When that is the case, there will be delays. However, we are trying very hard to improve the system overall.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 11 June 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

SCOTLAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Postal Services

1. **Mr. James Gray** (North Wiltshire): If she will make a statement on the reform of postal services in Scotland. [57379]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Scotland Office (Mrs. Anne McGuire): The operation of postal services in Scotland is a matter for the board of Consignia, subject to the conditions determined by the postal regulator, Postcomm.

Mr. Gray: Perhaps I can be the first to welcome the Under-Secretary to her new post among the matriarchy on the Government Front Bench. She represents the town of Stirling, as her constituency name indicates, but she also represents my home town of Dunblane; it is a shame that the constituency name does not show that. I am sure that she will do a fine job in her new post.

Since the Labour party came to power, a total of 135 post offices have closed across Scotland. If the Government continue to do what they have done up until recently—paying pensions directly into people's bank accounts—that rate of closure will continue apace. Before the Under-Secretary says that that is not part of her plans, will she explain why the Ministry of Defence has recently written to all MOD pensioners in Scotland to tell them that their pensions will be paid compulsorily into bank accounts and that they may not draw them from post offices? Does she not fear that that will lead to a further loss of post offices across Scotland?

Mrs. McGuire: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his question. I was worried that when I rose to speak today the House would empty, given that I normally move the Adjournment.

I crave the indulgence of the House for a second to put on record my sincere thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) for the generosity of his comments during the transfer of his portfolio, particularly when he mentioned making room for younger Members. I was mightily impressed by that.

I thank the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) for his comments, which are particularly welcome because of his strong family connections with the ecclesiastical city, not town, as he said, of Dunblane—he will be in trouble when he goes home. I have known the hon. Gentleman for some time, and we attended the same university, but in spite of the fact that I kent his faither, so to speak, I have to say that his question is disingenuous. He talks to us about post office closures, but we were the first party specifically to protect rural post offices until 2006. He comments on the number of closures over the last few months, but that number has fallen, whereas under the Conservative Government some 3,500 post offices closed across the UK. I do not think that the Conservatives have a leg to stand on.

The hon. Gentleman is aware that there are ongoing discussions about the collection of pensions and the move towards direct payment of pensions through post offices. That proposal will enhance the services of post offices and enhance the services given to customers.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I welcome my hon. Friend to her new post.

The burning issue at this time is the universal service, especially in rural areas. While Postcomm's backtracking must be welcomed, I regret to say that I am not convinced that it will be sufficient to ensure that we have a continued universal service delivery right into the heart of rural areas. Will my hon. Friend assure me that if it looks as though that is not to continue, she and those at the sharp end will step in to ensure that we continue to receive the service to which we have all grown used, need and deserve?

Mrs. McGuire: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. I welcome the change from Postcomm and a great deal of credit for that has to go to hon. Members across the House, and in particular my hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley, who met Postcomm and the trade unions.

I share the philosophy of my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown) about the importance of the universal delivery and I was pleased that, for the first time ever, the Government enshrined within legislation that there will be a universal delivery across the UK at an affordable tariff.

Consignia's licence specifically states that it has to honour that universal service delivery. I give my hon. Friend the assurance that my right hon. Friend the Secretary for State and I will ensure that rural communities, and all communities across Scotland, continue to receive a universal service. Rowland Hill would have been proud of us.

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): I, too, congratulate the Minister, and I welcome her to her post on behalf of my party. I also associate myself with her remarks concerning her predecessor.

In respect of the universal service obligation, notwithstanding the welcome reversal by Consignia, is not she aware that great concern was caused in rural communities by the threat of the withdrawal of that service in certain areas? Will she ensure, as far as possible, that the current level of services enjoyed in remote areas is maintained, and at an affordable cost, and that the

Postcomm privatisation proposals do not lead to an inexorable abandonment of those services in those important communities?

Mrs. McGuire: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his generous comments.

Postwatch has identified some of the exclusions that are currently in place. To avoid spreading panic across rural Scotland, let me identify clearly what those exclusions relate to, which is normally relative inaccessibility by road—for example, difficulties with transport; non-existence of daily ferry services; and second home owners requesting a non-delivery. I am sure that many people have holiday homes in the hon. Gentleman's part of the world and that many addresses are often unoccupied. The exclusions relate only to specific circumstances.

The Government are committed to the universal service obligation, which has been written into Consignia's licence and confirmed in legislation this year. We are committed to honouring it and ensuring that individuals and communities throughout the country get the daily delivery wherever possible. I take on board the hon. Gentleman's comment about ensuring that rural communities feel secure in the knowledge that they will continue to get that daily service.

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): As one who shared a Capstan Full Strength office with her father for several years, I join in the expressions of pleasure at my hon. Friend's appointment.

The performance and innovation unit's report published some time ago contained some good ideas on how extra business could be brought to the Post Office. The idea of its acting as a kind of general practitioner, offering advice and services, was particularly good. Will my hon. Friend give an undertaking to do all that she can to promote those ideas, because they could be very valuable but do not seem to have been put into effect so far?

Mrs. McGuire: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind remarks. In the interests of health, I should say that Capstan Full Strength do not do one any good, and my father paid a penalty for smoking them over a long period. I know that he is sitting on a cloud somewhere laughing at that comment.

On the one-stop shop, there have been pilots in Leicestershire and Rutland, which are currently being evaluated. I hope that my hon. Friend agrees that it would have been foolish to push ahead with that development before seeing how it operated. We hope that the results will be out soon and we can start to make progress and ensure that the Post Office offers an enhanced service for both rural and urban communities throughout Scotland.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): I, too, congratulate the new Minister on her elevation, and I hope that she will add to the honourable tradition of Members for Stirling in ministerial office. She talked about rural communities feeling secure about their postal services. Perhaps she has not yet had time to read of the petition signed by 500 residents of Newton Stewart expressing concern about their postal services. Has she made any assessment of the effect of closing post offices in rural communities? Does it accord with the remarks of the Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee that there would be "severe adverse consequences"? Will the Government's half-baked reforms and the consequent suppression of competition continue to centralise postal services in Scotland?

Mrs. McGuire: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his opening comments. I trust that he is talking about Lord Ewing when he refers to predecessors in the Scotland Office. I assure him that I am not seeking to emulate the fate of my immediate predecessor in the constituency.

It is incumbent on Members of Parliament, regardless of their political persuasion, not to scaremonger about what is happening to the rural post office network, which has been protected by the Government up to 2006. We see a lot of crocodile tears from the Opposition. For 18 years, they walked away from rural communities when shops and banks withdrew from them, and it was this Government who piled in with support to protect rural post offices.

Oil and Gas Taxation

2. **Mr. Alex Salmond** (Banff and Buchan): What consultations she had with ministerial colleagues on the Budget changes to North sea oil and gas taxation. [57380]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): I have regular discussions with my ministerial colleagues on a wide range of matters, including fiscal matters, affecting Scottish interests. Budget decisions are of course a matter for the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Salmond: I add my congratulations to the Under-Secretary on reaching her new position, and I also congratulate Ireland on reaching the next stage of the World cup finals.

Is it not true that the Secretary of State was not consulted on tax changes in respect of the North sea, and nor was Pilot, the industry consultation body? Is it not clear that even if a fraction of the 50,000 job losses estimated by the industry are indeed lost, the constituency of every Member in the Chamber will be affected? We now know that the Clair field will offer no fabrication aspect for Scottish yards, and the loss of 800 BP contractor jobs was announced last week. With that in mind, does the Secretary of State accept that oil workers are very anxious about their current job prospects? I know that she is a Labour politician and has to defend the proposals, but she is also—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's question is far too long.

Mr. Salmond: Representations to the Chancellor—

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is time to sit down.

Mrs. Liddell: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will take note of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. The decisions that the Chancellor has taken in relation to North sea fiscal policy should not have come as any great surprise. In 1998, when the oil and gas industry taskforce was being established, the Chancellor undertook a review of the North sea fiscal regime, and pointed out that he was considering petroleum revenue tax and a supplement on corporation tax. When the oil price dropped to $10 a barrel, the Chancellor made it clear that for the duration of the Parliament he would not take any action in respect of the North sea fiscal regime, but would keep the matter under review.

As part of that review, the Treasury was represented on the oil and gas industry taskforce and on Pilot, which I chaired for about two years, by no less a figure than Sir Steve Robson. At that time, very few Treasury officials were ranked higher than him. It was the discussions within Pilot that led us to reach a decision on the North sea fiscal regime, which is designed to help companies that are investing in the North sea.

Predictably, the hon. Gentleman tells only half the story. We have introduced first-year allowances for the North sea of 100 per cent., which means that for those—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call Mr. Connarty.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I was enjoying that answer because it was so comprehensive.

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire): It was better than the question.

Mr. Connarty: Yes, it certainly was.

As secretary of the offshore oil and gas industry all-party group, I should point out to my right hon. Friend that the industry is concerned about the structure of the tax. We do not know whether the 10 per cent. increase will be permanent, or vary if the price of oil falls to the low levels of the previous Parliament. However, in general—

Mr. Speaker: Order. This is a supplementary question, and the Secretary of State will try to answer it.

Mrs. Liddell: This is a complicated issue and I apologise for spending time on it. Naturally, the industry does not like paying additional taxation, but it has a much higher rate of return—some 34.3 per cent., compared with 11.2 per cent.—than all other non-financial companies. The Chancellor made it clear in the Budget statement that he is trying to bring about stability in the North sea fiscal regime. Indeed, the taxation changes are designed to ensure that companies that invest in the North sea pay less tax, and that those that do not do so pay more. As Secretary of State for Scotland, I find that very attractive. I find equally attractive the fact that the money is being used to ensure better health care in Scotland—something that my party has argued for, and delivered, for some time.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): I add my congratulations to the Under-Secretary, and my commiserations to the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes). I was glad that I was able to congratulate him on his forthcoming wedding anniversary in good time. I also welcome the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) to what is possibly one of his last appearances at Question Time before he moves to Holyrood.

The Secretary of State suggested that she was aware that the taxation of oil companies was likely to go up in the Budget. What representations did she make to the Chancellor on behalf of the 18,000 people who might lose their jobs in Scotland because of the effect of the tax changes?

Mrs. Liddell: One of my hon. Friends says from a sedentary position that the Tories just make numbers up, and that is what the hon. Lady is doing and what the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) has just done. The taxation regime is balanced. It includes the 10 per cent. supplementary charge on corporation tax that takes into account the profitability of the UK continental shelf companies. It includes a first-year allowance of 100 per cent., which means that marginal fields will pay less tax, and it also commits to setting a date for the abolition of royalties.

It is a sensible procedure, aimed—I remind the hon. Lady—at securing resources for increased expenditure on health and education in Scotland. That is what the Scottish people want, and it is fair that profitable oil companies should make their contribution to the health and well-being of the people of Scotland in return for the exploration and exploitation of a natural resource.

Mrs. Lait: The 18,000 people who may lose their jobs will not necessarily find that their health improves. Will the right hon. Lady leave behind her previous role as energy Minister and concentrate on her role as Secretary of State for Scotland? In all her answers, she has not made it clear whether she represented the views of Scotland to the Chancellor or, as usual, she was the Cabinet's voice in Scotland. Will she clarify that point?

Mrs. Liddell: I am Scotland's voice in the United Kingdom Cabinet, which has more Scots in it than the Scottish National party has sitting on the Benches. The Budget is in the best interests of Scotland, because Scotland's health record is one of the worst in Europe. We have to improve the health of the people of Scotland as well as improve the economy, and that is the reasoning behind the Chancellor's sensible Budget.

We discussed with the oil industry over three or four years the difficulties that the industry is facing because of the maturity of the UK continental shelf. That is something that the previous Conservative Government never took it into their head to do. We have brought unemployment in Scotland down to its lowest level for a generation. More people are now in employment than have been for 40 years and that is a record of which I am proud and, I believe, the people of Scotland are proud.

Mr. David Stewart (Inverness, East, Nairn and Lochaber): Does my right hon. Friend acknowledge the record profits made by multinational oil corporations such as Shell and BP? Is not the Chancellor right to tax them appropriately? However, does my right hon. Friend share the disappointment felt in the highlands, and in Scotland as a whole, about the loss of the BP Clair platform to Norway? Will she join my campaign to investigate the details of the Norwegian bid?

Mrs. Liddell: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's campaign to secure the Clair jacket, for Nigg in particular. The decision was a commercial one, but I hope that greater concentration will now be put on getting subcontract work from the Clair jacket to ensure continuation of supply employment in Scotland.

My hon. Friend is right about the taxation. I was not surprised to hear the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) advocate from the Opposition Front Bench that taxation should not be increased to provide better health care in Scotland, but I was very surprised to hear the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan do so. His colleagues in the Scottish Parliament—which he is soon to rejoin, we hear—say that they want increased public expenditure in Scotland. He says that he does not want—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The views of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) are nothing to do with the right hon. Lady. She is here to answer for the Executive, and she should do so.

Devolution

3. **Angus Robertson** (Moray): What representations she has made to each Government Department concerning their provision of information on Council of the European Union meetings to the Scottish Parliament and Executive. [57381]

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): The provision of information to the Scottish Parliament is a matter for the Scottish Executive, who are involved in all relevant discussions in relation to European matters.

Angus Robertson: I thank the Secretary of State for her answer. At a time when the Government are stressing the importance of accountability, democracy and subsidiarity in European Union matters, does she agree that Scotland has a democratic deficit in that area, especially when one considers the conclusions of the report by the European Scrutiny Committee that was published this morning? The report states:

> "It is a matter of concern that not all information about EU discussions relevant to the devolved administrations and legislatures has been forwarded to them by UK Departments."

Does the Secretary of State agree that that is not acceptable and that it should change? What will she do about it?

Mrs. Liddell: The Government will respond to the report in due course. However, I attended the meeting this morning of the Joint Ministerial Committee on Europe, with the Deputy First Minister. I have received no representations from the Scottish Executive regarding any unhappiness about the availability of information on European Councils. The hon. Gentleman seeks always to push Scotland to the periphery of Europe. It is my job, and the Government's job, to ensure that Scotland remains in the mainstream in Europe.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

The Advocate-General was asked—

Devolution

26. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What devolution issues have been raised since 30 April under the Scotland Act 1998. [57404]

27. **Annabelle Ewing** (Perth): What devolution issues have been raised in the last month under the Scotland Act 1998. [57405]

28. **Mr. Tam Dalyell** (Linlithgow): What devolution issues have been raised since 30 April under the Scotland Act 1998 relating to human rights. [57406]

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Dr. Lynda Clark): Since 30 April, 33 devolution issue cases have been intimated to me. They have involved a variety of matters, mostly concerning the right to a fair trial under the European convention on human rights.

Miss McIntosh: I congratulate the Minister on retaining her post. As a result, we can continue to hold her to account at these monthly Question Times. My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), the shadow leader of the House, is present, and I am sure that he will support me in asking whether she has made progress with the modernisation plans that would allow an extension of this Question Time. At present, we have the minimal period of five minutes. An extension would help to make the Minister totally accountable to the House.

The Advocate-General: I am delighted that there is still support for further time to question me. That sits rather uneasily with those Opposition Members who feel that there is no role for the Advocate-General. However, the determination of the length of Question Time is a matter for the House, not for me.

Annabelle Ewing: What has been, or is likely to be, the Advocate-General's involvement in the ongoing saga of the Megrahi case? Yesterday, Nelson Mandela, the former President of South Africa, called for the matter to be referred to the Privy Council. Does the Advocate-General have no role in the matter, or is her role secret?

The Advocate-General: My role is not a secret at all. The Scotland Act 1998 makes it plain that I have no role in connection with prosecution matters, which are entirely for the Lord Advocate. As the hon. Lady knows, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has other relationships to deal with. If further legal proceedings were begun, it is possible that a devolution issue might arise. If so, that would be intimated to me in the normal course of events, under the rules of the Scotland Act.

Mr. Dalyell: Given that President Mandela asked that there should be an appeal, will my hon. Friend the Minister use her good offices with the Crown Office to accede to the request from Mr. Eddie McKechnie, Megrahi's lawyer, that a moratorium be placed on the handing over of crucial artefacts? What is the hurry about handing them over, after 13 years? What does the Crown Office have to hide in the matter?

The Advocate-General: The Lord Advocate, and through him the Crown Office, are responsible to the Scottish Parliament and to the courts. There is no role for me in relation to the way in which the Lord Advocate exercises discretion. If my hon. Friend wishes to make representations to the Lord Advocate, that option is open to him.

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West): With regard to devolution issues, have any cases been referred to my hon. and learned Friend that allege delay in criminal proceedings? Will she relate that to possible breaches of the ECHR?

The Advocate-General: I have indeed had many intimations about delay in criminal proceedings as alleged contraventions of the ECHR. The number of such cases runs into the hundreds, about 50 per cent. of which raise those issues. Because of the number of cases intimated to me, for a number of days recently I was involved in a test case, at which I appeared personally to deal with those legal issues. The Appeal Court has given a decision in that case, and the representations that I made were successful. However, a further appeal to the Privy Council is to be mounted, and I shall be dealing with that in due course.

Value for Money

29. **Mr. Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland): What measures she is taking to improve value for money in her Department. [57407]

The Advocate-General for Scotland (Dr. Lynda Clark): As the first Advocate-General for Scotland, I have been keen to ensure the most efficient use of public money, and I think that this has been achieved. My office provides a range of legal services to Government Departments, including litigation, advisory work, preparation of legislation and formal Law Officer opinions, and it does all that with 19 lawyers plus support staff. The hon. Gentleman can be assured that my officials and I give very good value for money.

Mr. Carmichael: Would the Advocate-General care to comment on reports that came to my office recently that she had a full set of session cases transported from Edinburgh to London simply for the purpose of a photo opportunity and that it was then repacked and sent back to Edinburgh? Is that the case and, if so, does she consider that to be value for money?

The Advocate-General: It certainly was not a photo opportunity involving me. I have no knowledge of that. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

The Parliamentary Secretary was asked—

Legal Advice

30. **Ms Meg Munn** (Sheffield, Heeley): What steps the Department is taking to extend legal advice for the socially excluded. [57408]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): Lack of access to reliable legal advice can be a major factor in creating and maintaining social exclusion. Community legal service partnerships are therefore being established in order to plan and co-ordinate local legal services more effectively. The work of the community legal service partnerships is making a real difference to communities across England and Wales, particularly to those living in some of the most deprived areas.

Ms Munn: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer, and welcome the Government's approach. Does she agree that it is vital that legal advice is available to people such as my constituent from Gleadless, who came to my surgery on Saturday, so that she can challenge the loan company which says that she now owes £22,000 on a loan of £7,000 taken out 11 years ago?

Ms Winterton: My hon. Friend is quite right that the spiral of financial difficulties in which people sometimes find themselves could be avoided if they had proper debt counselling at an early stage, particularly to stop them falling into the hands of loan sharks, as her constituent obviously has done. The community legal service in Sheffield has received Government money to improve access to advice and information, particularly aimed at socially excluded communities and individuals. That includes making sure that people know exactly where they can obtain advice about the kind of debt problems that my hon. Friend has highlighted. I hope that that will improve the situation in her area.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Will the hon. Lady send a warm welcome to the Department to her fellow Parliamentary Secretary, the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper)?

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): My hon. Friend may well have done that already.

Mr. Heath: Indeed.

Does the increase in the number of people seeking the help of law centres and citizens advice bureaux suggest that there are still extensive barriers to people who require legal representation? Whatever the criticism—possibly justifiable—of the so-called fat cat lawyers in the City, many high street solicitors are seeking to extend a range of services to clients on modest incomes. Should we not consider how to ensure that the smaller lawyers' firms can continue practising in our smaller towns?

Ms Winterton: I will certainly pass on the hon. Gentleman's welcome to my hon. Friend. He is right that it is important to keep smaller firms involved within the community legal service partnerships, and there have been some good examples of that. In terms of ensuring proper access, we have almost achieved 100 per cent. coverage of legal service partnerships throughout the country, which is way ahead of schedule. That is an important means of ensuring that people have access to legal advice, particularly those who may have been excluded in the past. I certainly agree that it is important to ensure that private sector solicitors are involved in those partnerships with us.

Paul Clark (Gillingham): I note what my hon. Friend said about access to the right information, which is fundamentally important in ensuring that people who seek help receive reliable information. May I draw her attention to the work of the Medway community legal services partnership, which has developed in a number of ways? I draw her attention especially to the document in my hand—the referral handbook—which is useful to us all, not only Members of Parliament, but other bodies who help people seeking advice, such as the person to whom my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) referred. The document has been developed by the Medway CLS to identify the available services and the clientele that they might serve. It shows where legal services are available through the CLS and where the quality mark exists. Will my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary look at the document as an example of best practice?

Ms Winterton: I know that my hon. Friend has been extremely supportive of his local CLS partnership. It is important that Members of Parliament show such support, as it often helps to make the partnerships successful. The booklet to which he refers is an excellent example of good practice by a partnership. I certainly agree that it is important that we ensure that other partnerships are aware of such good practice. One of the ways that my Department is considering assisting that process is by funding innovative projects throughout the country, especially through the partnership innovation bids. My hon. Friend might like to draw the attention of his partnership to that fund.

Data Protection Act

31. **Mr. Graham Brady** (Altrincham and Sale, West): What representations the Lord Chancellor has received on the impact of the Data Protection Act 1998 on hospital chaplaincy. [57409]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Yvette Cooper): Five hon. Members have written on behalf of constituents about the effect of the Data Protection Act 1998 on hospital chaplains. The hospital chaplaincies council of the Church of England will shortly meet officials in my Department.

Mr. Brady: I welcome the Minister to her new position. Does she agree that hospital chaplaincy provides a vital service to many thousands of people who are in severe need of help and support? Does she share my concern that an over-zealous interpretation of the Data Protection Act is standing in the way of the work of hospital chaplains? Will she undertake to consider whether changes to the legislation are necessary in order to allow chaplaincies to carry out their functions properly?

Yvette Cooper: I agree that hospital chaplains can provide a vital service of spiritual support and care to many people in hospitals who want it. It is important that patients who want that support should be able to get it.

The Data Protection Act does not prevent hospitals from passing on information about a patient's religion, but it states that they can do so only with the patient's consent or, if the patient is unable to give that consent, if it is in their vital interest. Consent is an important principle and we need to take it seriously in those circumstances. It is possible for hospitals to seek consent when they collect information, and the hon. Gentleman is right to point out that we need to ensure that the practical issues are properly addressed, so that hospital chaplains can give the care that people so often want. That is why the issue has been raised with the patient information advisory group. I understand that it will be advising the Department of Health on a new code of practice for the NHS on consent and confidentiality. The points that the hon. Gentleman has made on behalf of his constituents will certainly be taken into account.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): May I welcome the Minister to her new responsibilities? I got on extremely well with her predecessor and I trust that we shall be able to maintain that, even with all the necessary opposition that we shall bring to bear on her Department.

Will the hon. Lady tell the House what action she will take in the light of the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Altrincham and Sale, West (Mr. Brady) that Church ministries and their pastors in hospitals are unable to function properly because of the Data Protection Act 1998? Hospital patients often need their advice urgently and emotionally. The measure is an example of the triumph of technicality over compassion. Does the Minister agree that the Act in its present form, and in relation to this case, denies our citizens and constituents their fundamental and human rights, and that that cannot simply be dismissed as over-interpretation of the Act? May we please have clear guidelines, issued by her Department—not just consultation—so that the law will protect people, rather than detract from their quality of life?

Yvette Cooper: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcoming words. I, too, look forward to working with him. To understand what issues he was interested in and might be keen to raise, I inquired what parliamentary questions he had tabled previously. I drew a blank, however, as he has not asked any written parliamentary questions of the Lord Chancellor's Department since 1997, although he has asked many questions of the Foreign Office.

On the hon. Gentleman's question, I take very seriously the points raised, as I have made clear, and the need to ensure that hospital chaplains provide the service that patients want. Equally, however, it is important that we recognise the principle of consent. It is possible for hospitals to collect information and, at the same time, to ask for consent. It is also important to address the practical issues, to make sure that the rules are implemented properly. That is why the Department of Health is drawing up a new code of practice for the NHS, and why the Department of Health's patient empowerment team is working with the multi-faith joint national working group on new guidance for hospital chaplains. We take these issues seriously. It is also important, however, that we recognise and respect the important principles behind the Data Protection Act.

Enduring Powers of Attorney

32. **Andrew Selous** (South-West Bedfordshire): If he will make a statement about the fees for enduring powers of attorney. [57410]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): In its report on the Public Trust Office, the Public Accounts Committee was highly critical of fees paid by some clients subsidising different services used by others, and of the pattern of cost recovery. Fees for Enduring Powers of Attorney Act 1985 cases were changed on 17 April 2002. The new fees mean that EPA clients no longer receive subsidy from users of other services provided by the Public Guardianship Office, and that fees are set to recover costs. Improved remissions guidelines make sure that less well-off EPA clients pay less than before the fees were changed, or pay nothing at all.

Andrew Selous: I am grateful to the Minister for that reply. Will she give an undertaking to the House to publish a yearly total of the number of EPA registrations, to enable us to see whether the recent trebling of the registration fee is acting as a disincentive to vulnerable people?

Ms Winterton: I can reassure the hon. Gentleman that, so far, the number of registrations has not altered since the fees were changed. About 11,000 EPAs were registered last year, and, so far, the figures seem to be similar. I shall investigate whether the figures can be published. I am not sure whether they are published in the annual report, and I shall consider whether we can do that.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): On 3 April this year, in reply to my written question, the Minister made it clear that

> "No date has yet been set for the introduction of changes to the fees charged by the Public Guardianship Office"—[*Official Report*, 3 April 2002; Vol. 382, c. 1036W.]

It has become clear that that reply was not correct. The House therefore deserves an explanation for the misleading reply, and I wait to hear the Minister's explanation.

Ms Winterton: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I became aware of the situation, and he is right that by the time the written answer to which he refers appeared in *Hansard*, it was out of date. I discovered only yesterday what had happened, and I take this opportunity—I spoke to the hon. Gentleman earlier about this—to say that I am extremely sorry for unintentionally misleading the House. I know that my noble and learned Friend Baroness Scotland has acknowledged the error in another place. Although my written answer was formulated in good faith, I hope that hon. Members will accept that I am sorry for the error, and I welcome the opportunity today to correct the matter for the parliamentary record.

Courthouse (Colchester)

33. **Bob Russell** (Colchester): When work will start on a new courthouse in Colchester. [57411]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Yvette Cooper): I understand that work on building the new courthouse in Colchester is planned to start in early 2005.

Bob Russell: Will the Minister confirm that the additional delay in building the new courthouse has been caused by the nonsense of putting all the court services in Essex in the same private finance initiative basket, and by problems elsewhere in Essex?

Yvette Cooper: The magistrates courts committee has to decide about the programme of work and investment in courts in Colchester and the surrounding area. The hon. Gentleman will know that Thurrock borough council has appealed against the MCC decision to close the Grays courthouse. That decision and an appeal against it need to be considered. Ministers have to take account of all the factors raised by both the council and the MCC. However, it is important that the programme of work continues and, as I said, we expect work on the new courthouse to start in 2005.

PRIVY COUNCIL

The President of the Council was asked—

European Union

43. **Sir Teddy Taylor** (Rochford and Southend, East): If he will bring forward proposals for improving the procedures for discussing EU legislation and for considering EU expenditure in the House. [57423]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): The House has already implemented almost all the Modernisation Committee's recommendations of the last Parliament on this issue and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will consider carefully today's report from the European Scrutiny Committee. It and its sister Committee in the other place play an important role in examining EU legislation and expenditure.

Sir Teddy Taylor: Does it not worry the Minister that the European Union, to which we send more than £1 million every hour, has become such an uncontrolled centre of graft and corruption? The most recent examples of that are the awarding of grants for more than twice the number of sheep and goats that actually exist in Italy, and a massive grant to a gentleman from Essex, although not from Southend, to help to provide prostitutes in Hungary with guidance—money that he has spent on buying a new house and two new cars.

In case the Minister thinks that the answer might be the Court of Auditors, does he accept that the court finds those practices just as disgusting as I and most hon. Members do, and has declined to approve the EU's accounts for six years? Is there not a case for someone to supervise expenditure?

Mr. Bradshaw: The whole House will agree that the common agricultural policy needs radical reform. However, if the hon. Gentleman is alleging criminal activity, he should report that to the police. As I said, we in this House and Members of the other place have two effective Committees. I have served on one of them, and they do an excellent job of scrutinising the expenditure and decision making in Brussels that the hon. Gentleman mentions.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): I welcome my hon. Friend to his new post. Does he think that there is further room for exploring how we can subject the decisions of the European Central Bank to greater scrutiny, especially as we hope that those might have more direct relevance to the economy of the United Kingdom in a year's time? Has he received specific advice from Mr. Rupert Murdoch about how we might examine legislation on European matters?

Mr. Bradshaw: In the few days that I have been in my present job, I have not had time to receive such advice. I agree, however, that the European Central Bank has much to learn from the workings of our central bank, which have been extremely successful.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I, too, welcome the Minister to his new position. He was doing a good job in his previous post and I cannot understand why he was moved.

How can the Minister say that there will be fiscal controls over expenditure in the EU, when his former colleague, the Minister for Europe, told me in parliamentary written answers that the Government have conducted no analysis whatever of the total costs or total benefits of this country belonging to the EU, and have no intention of doing so in the future?

Mr. Bradshaw: I cannot speak for my colleague in the Foreign Office, but colleagues of the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) will have an opportunity to scrutinise my right hon. Friend on this very subject when he appears before the House of Lords European Union Select Committee on 9 July.

People's Peers

44. **Paul Flynn** (Newport, West): What assessment he has made of the selection process for people's peers; and what plans he has to amend the forthcoming roadshow. [57424]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The Appointments Commission has brought new transparency to the selection of independent peers. As part of that process of transparency, there was a presentation in a number of cities before the first round of appointments. I am not aware of any plans that the commission may have for a forthcoming roadshow. The whole point of the Appointments Commission is to be an independent body, and Ministers are not involved in the way in which it conducts its business.

Paul Flynn: The reason offered last time for the selection of seven knights and three professors was that if a waitress or a bus conductor had been selected, they would not have had the confidence to address the House of Lords. One in three of the new peers have spoken only once, in their maiden speech. As a former bus conductor married to a former waitress, may I assure the House that people from humble professions are likely to speak more often than the professors and the knights, and possibly to greater effect?

Mr. Cook: I wholly endorse what my hon. Friend says about what he calls humble professions, and I fully agree that the evidence in this Chamber is that the Members from those professions speak at great length and at as much length as any other Member. However, I am not sure that my hon. Friend does justice to those who were appointed. They did, after all, include the chief executive of Centre Point, a former chief executive of Childline and a trustee of Oxfam, and those personalities would not necessarily have been appointed under the previous arrangement. The Government deserve credit for having given up the right of patronage so that independent peers could be appointed, and for ensuring that they are appointed independently of Government.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Will the Leader of the House give an undertaking that he and the Government will not seek to replicate that system of appointment if and when the second Chamber is revised and reformed? Is he aware of the grilling that was given to the Chairman of the Appointments Commission on 24 January by the Public Administration Committee, during which he admitted not only that a number of those appointed as so-called people's peers had never spoken, but that some of them never even turned up?

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Yes!

Mr. Cook: I notice that my hon. Friend supports that point.

On the question of the future after reform, the Appointments Commission will have to be placed on a statutory basis as part of any law reforming the second Chamber, and it will be for the House to resolve, in the course of that, what basis it wants the Commission to have. I say to the House, however, that Members appointed under this system have played a full part in debates on immigration, child poverty and equal opportunity in public services such as education. Their contribution to the House is as good as the average contribution of the Cross Benchers in the second Chamber.

Andrew Mackinlay: Will the Leader of the House, when he leaves the Chamber, ask his assistants to dig out the *Hansard* record of the first Prime Minister's Question Time after the general election? He will see there that I drew the Prime Minister's attention to the fact that Sir Herman Ouseley was part of the selection process for the chairman of that wonderful, independent and transparent selection panel, but he was also an applicant, and by enormous coincidence he was selected out of the 3,000 people who applied to be a people's peer.

The House, the press and everyone else, including, I suspect, the Prime Minister, would be acutely embarrassed by a wholly irregular, wholly non-transparent and, I dare say, rather corrupt system of selecting Members of Parliament. No one should come here and make the nonsensical suggestion that the selection process was a good thing; it was rotten to the core, and we ought to be prepared to say in this House that we will never repeat that rotten scenario.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend was never one to mince his words, and he has spoken with the candour that earned him a place in this Chamber. He expresses a view for which I have much sympathy—we require root and branch reform of the second Chamber. The Government have acted to make sure that Parliament is in the driving seat and can decide the route of that reform.

I point out to my hon. Friend that Sir Herman Ouseley was very active in race relations, he has strong expertise and he is part of the process by which we have ensured that, in our appointments to the House of Lords, there is a higher proportion of ethnic minorities than we have ever yet secured in this, the first Chamber of Parliament. Sir Herman Ouseley has certainly earned his place by his contribution to race relations.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Is it not a fact that the scheme was sold to the country on the basis that ordinary people from everyday walks of life would be elevated, independently, to the upper House? Is it not also a fact that the sort of people who have been put there as people's peers under the scheme are simply those who would normally be put there under the usual category of Labour party cronies?

Mr. Cook: I have no evidence that the chief executive of Centre Point or the former chief executive of Childline are, as the hon. Gentleman puts it, Labour cronies. They earned their appointment by their contribution to British society and to the voluntary service; I should have thought that he would respect that.

The House has to make up its mind. If we want an independent process of appointment, we cannot then invite the Government to be responsible for those who are appointed. We decided that an Appointments Commission should handle the matter independently. It has done so and I have no grounds for criticising it, but there is no point in blaming the Government for what emerges from an independent process.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): May I make a constructive suggestion? In view of the newspaper stories, accurate or otherwise, that Mick Jagger may be knighted, might it be possible to make Mr. Jagger one of the people's peers—if only for his outstanding performances, which are an encouragement to all of us of a certain age?

Mr. Cook: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for his constructive suggestion, which I suspect has done nothing to dampen speculation—for which there is, as far as I am aware, no basis—that Mick Jagger is about to be knighted and may be put in the House of Lords.

Electronic Equipment (Standing Committees)

45. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): What proposals he will make to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons on the matter of the use of electronic equipment in Standing Committees of the House. [57425]

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The Modernisation Committee currently has a heavy programme, but I am aware of concerns about the use of electronic equipment in Standing Committees and will keep them in mind for the future, while bearing in mind also the clearly expressed views of the Chairmen's Panel.

Mr. Jack: I am grateful to the Leader of the House for bearing the matter in mind for future work by the Modernisation Committee. Currently, the rules are unclear about what electronic equipment may or may not be brought into a Standing Committee. On the other hand, Ministers mention websites and refer hon. Members to them, even though the rules mean that there is no way that we can use modern electronic equipment to communicate with the outside world from a Committee Room. I urge the right hon. Gentleman to sort the matter out. The House has invested heavily in information technology, and we should be able to use portable computers in Committee to help us to hold the Executive to account.

Mr. Cook: I understand the right hon. Gentleman's concern. He has raised the issue before during oral questions, and it is one that the Modernisation Committee must address when it has time. However, I put it to him that there is not only one simple conclusion or one simple set of arguments. The members of the Chairmen's Panel have considered the issue on several occasions and they are reluctant to admit portable laptops and other electronic equipment to Committee proceedings, for the simple reason that once they have been introduced it is not possible to be sure that they are being used to further an interest in those proceedings, rather than an interest in other things going on in the world, such as English football and the World cup.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): I hesitate to mention the word e-mail because I know that it is not popular these days, but should we not try to emulate bodies such as the National Assembly for Wales—

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): No.

Kevin Brennan: In the Assembly and the other new devolved bodies, that sort of technology is freely available to Members in meetings, so that they can check statistics and facts and communicate with the outside world. Incidentally, both the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) and I attended the Standing Committee on the Finance Bill this morning; no one there was seeking England football team results, but a number of text messages relating to the Ireland football team were passed around.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend's last sentence confirms the point that I made earlier. I am all in favour of our using e-mail when it can speed up a process, and I hope that the forthcoming report of the Procedure Committee will open the way to our using e-mail in the tabling of questions. That will enable those hon. Members who wish to use modern communications to do so, and leave the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) and others who do not wish to do so entirely free to use a pencil and yellow paper.

Oral Parliamentary Questions

46. **Mr. Mark Lazarowicz** (Edinburgh, North and Leith): If he will bring forward proposals to improve the effectiveness of the system of oral parliamentary questions. [57426]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): The Procedure Committee is currently undertaking an inquiry into parliamentary questions. I am sure that the House looks forward with interest to its recommendations. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House has already made it clear to that Committee that he would like to make oral questions more topical.

Mr. Lazarowicz: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that the more the House does to make Question Time a more effective way of scrutinising Government, the better for democracy and the reputation of the House? Does he also agree that one of the problems with the system of oral questions is that the notice requirement makes it difficult to raise topical issues, and it is difficult to deal with issues in depth? May I invite him and our right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to make representations to that effect to the Modernisation Committee, so that it can make proposals for change as soon as possible?

Mr. Bradshaw: My hon. Friend is right; there is a widespread feeling in the House that we could make oral questions a lot more topical and relevant. A number of useful and interesting ideas are being discussed, as he said, including shortening the tabling period; electronic tabling, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said; adopting topical questions, as has been done in the House of Lords; and having fewer questions, so that those which we discuss can be discussed in much greater depth.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): As the Minister indicated, the Procedure Committee, which I have the honour of chairing, is likely to produce a report on parliamentary questions in the next fortnight, and some of its recommendations will be constructive, radical and almost revolutionary. Will the Minister, following discussion with his right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, assure the House and me that the report will be debated at an early date, perhaps with a report of the Modernisation Committee, which is also relatively imminent?

Mr. Bradshaw: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his excellent chairmanship of the Procedure Committee, to whose recommendations we very much look forward. I am glad to hear that they may be radical and revolutionary—not always labels with which the hon. Gentleman likes to be associated. I am sure that the whole House would like his Committee's recommendations to be debated as soon as possible.

Fisher Foods

3.31 pm

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 24, for the purpose of discussing a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely,

> the announcement yesterday that Fisher Foods was closing immediately.

Three hundred and fifty-one redundancies will take place at once, and there will be a knock-on effect because a cold store next door to the factory will lose 84 employees, and it has been estimated that, for every job lost in the plant, four other jobs will be affected. That will have a profound impact on contractors and hauliers and, indeed, the agricultural sector in my constituency and that of my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard). There may be as many as 1,500 job losses, which would double unemployment in our constituencies.

The Albert Fisher Group, the parent company, went into receivership a fortnight ago, and KPMG allowed just two weeks—an incredibly short time—for a buyer to be found for the business. We have a loyal group of staff, some of them third-generation employees, who are gutted because they have been treated with contempt by a heartless and arrogant receiver.

The company started business in 1965, and is a key, flagship local employer. It processes 84,000 tonnes of product; indeed, one in four packs of vegetables, including peas, rice, potatoes, carrots and beans, sold in our supermarkets are processed and manufactured by Fisher Foods. Since Albert Fisher took over the business from AGA in 1996, £30 million has been invested in a new packing plant and equipment. The infrastructure is superb, unique and among the best in Europe. Last year, £3.2 million was invested in a new pea-packing line. It would be a tragedy if that state-of-the-art business was closed and, even at this late stage, I hope that there is a chance of a management buy-out. I shall certainly ask to see the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to discuss with her any help that her Department can give by providing advice and expertise on MBOs.

There is a particular problem with peas. The firm's contracts with local growers for 24,000 tonnes of peas on 15,000 acres will be cancelled. The UK now has capacity for processing only 4,000 tonnes of peas, so 20,000 tonnes of peas will end up in the ground, which is another disaster. The contractors will not be paid on completion of their contract and will not be able to pay the farmers from whom they have rented land, which will have a profound impact on agriculture in my constituency and surrounding constituencies.

The problem is both immediate and urgent—obviously, it is a bleak, grim and depressing day for west Norfolk—and I very much hope that you will allow an emergency debate on it, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I have listened carefully to what the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) said and I must give my decision without stating any reasons. I am afraid that I do not consider that the matter that he raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 24, and I cannot, therefore, submit the application to the House.

Points of Order

3.35 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You are the guardian of this House and its Members. In that capacity, you must surely be aware of the distressing stories and rumours that are circulating about a rather sinister form of information that may well be held by Departments on Members of this House. In light of this matter, can you advise me as to what action you may be able to take in your role as guardian of Members of this House with regard to information on hon. Members being held in Departments and possibly being used in some as yet unspecified way by Ministers and Departments in the context of Members of Parliament doing their job in questioning them and holding them to account? May we please have your guidance on this very worrying matter?

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware that these are not just rumours. As a result of the revelations secured by my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell), I have the actual Department for Work and Pensions document that is involved. It seems to be in direct conflict with your statement of 28 November last year and contrasts with the assurances given to me by a Minister in Westminster Hall on 21 March. Will you consider that matter in particular?

It seems that secret dossiers are being held on Members of this House and the other place, and especially on those Members who are considered to be "not friendly". Presumably, that will apply to some troublemakers on the Government Benches as well as on the Opposition Benches. Is it not in direct conflict with your advice and the code of ministerial conduct that civil servants—not special advisers or political advisers, but civil servants—have been asked to prepare the dossiers? Is it not totally inappropriate that all hon. Members are not being treated equally as true representatives of our electorate and that civil servants are discriminating between different Members?

Mr. Andrew MacKay (Bracknell): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will have read the article in this morning's edition of *The Independent*, to which the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) has also referred. One of the serious allegations is that not only are files being kept, but Ministers are giving different answers to different Members. I hope that you would deplore such a practice, and confirm that any written answer should be a correct factual answer and should not be different for different hon. Members in different parts of the House.

Mr. Speaker: I shall reply to the shadow Leader of the House. The right hon. Gentleman has put his concerns on record. I have to inform him that the Chair has no responsibility on these matters, but, of course, I expect Ministers to give proper replies to all hon. Members.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. When hon. Members table a question, we have to abide by the rules of order governing the form and content of questions. We are not allowed to present an argument when tabling a question, and the

[Mr. Desmond Swayne]

question must be devoid of spin. What confidence can hon. Members have that the answers that they get will be equally devoid of spin? Is it not time that we had rules of order on the form and content of ministerial replies?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for me; Ministers are responsible for their replies.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, of which I have given you notice. You will, of course, be aware of the provisions of the resolution of the House made in the 1996–97 Session, which, among other things, states:

> "it is of paramount importance that ministers give accurate and truthful information to Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity."

I find myself in a difficult situation, because I know that when she was Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), whom I see in her place—I have discussed this matter with her—completely inadvertently and entirely unintentionally gave the House inaccurate information in the Adjournment debate on the Throckmorton asylum centre that you granted me on 23 May. She said:

> "At peak capacity in 1976, 1,500 people were based there, so there is evidence to show that that number of people"—

that is, the number of asylum seekers—

> "can be absorbed into the local area and accommodated there."

She went on to say:

> "We are only expecting 1,000 people if it is a site of 750 people plus the 250 in local jobs."—[*Official Report*, 23 May 2002; Vol. 386, c. 498.]

That information took me by surprise, but I made researches during the recess. I wrote to the hon. Lady on 28 May—I wish that she were still a Minister, because she was a very fine one. In the letter, I said:

> "I have now spoken to Group Captain Richard Hampton who was the Commander of the RAF unit at the airfield until 6 months before its final closure. He was head of the Aircraft Department and worked with the Royal Radar Establishment and has an intimate knowledge of what happened at the airfield.
>
> In fact, contrary to what you said in the debate, there were only some 500 people working on the airfield and only a dozen or so of them lived there overnight because of the unsuitability of the area for residential accommodation.
>
> Most of the people who worked at the airfield lived on the Abbey Estate in Pershore, which was built specifically to accommodate RAF airfield personnel and was transferred to the local council for housing after the RAF left the airfield in 1976."

I concluded:

> "The important point about this is that to put 750 asylum seekers and 200–300 staff on the airfield would represent a doubling of the peak activity of the airfield in 1976."

The curious difficulty that arises is that the Minister who, entirely unintentionally, gave the House that information is no longer a Minister, so she is not in a position to correct the record herself. What advice would you give me, Mr. Speaker, in these unusual circumstances?

Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It is obviously a matter of great regret to me that one of the last things that I said from the Front Bench was inaccurate, as the hon. Gentleman says, and I apologise to the House for that. At the end of the Adjournment debate, when I stated what I thought was a fact, the looks of astonishment on the faces around me gave me some clue that I might not be on safe ground. I subsequently had my office researchers begin to check whether my statement was accurate, but unfortunately an event that I had not anticipated supervened to prevent me from putting the record straight from the Front Bench. I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has been able to do so, and I pass on my regrets to the House for misleading it.

Mr. Speaker: It looks as though the record has been put straight. If I let this matter go on any longer, it will take longer than the Adjournment debate.

Mr. Luff: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I express my gratitude to the hon. Lady for her statement?

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I recall that there was a time, perhaps long ago, when, whichever party was in power, there was a custom—not a rule, but a custom—regarding Members asking written questions. If there was any difficulty about answering them, and the civil servants had to puzzle out why they were being asked, the Member concerned would ring the Minister's private office to explain the background. That saved a great deal of civil service time and led to better answers.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Father of the House.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I want to return to your earlier ruling in response to my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House that it is not a matter for the Chair that the Government keep secret records on Members of Parliament. If it is not a matter for the Chair, what advice can you give to Members about how they can get access to that secret information that the Government keep on us and are using against us?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman should go to the Minister concerned.

Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill (Programme) (No. 3)

Mr. Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin).

3.44 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I beg to move,

That the Order of 24th April (Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill (Programme)) (as amended by the Order of 9th May (Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill (Programme) (No. 2))) be varied as follows—

Consideration and Third Reading

(1) Paragraphs (5) to (7) of the Order of 24th April shall be omitted.

(2) Proceedings on consideration and Third Reading shall be concluded in two days.

(3) The proceedings on consideration shall be taken on each of the days as shown in the first column in the following Table and shall be taken in the order shown and each part of the proceedings shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the time specified in the second column.

TABLE

Proceedings	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
First day	
New Clauses and new Schedules relating to accommodation centres; amendments relating to Clauses 14 to 36.	7.00 p.m.
New Clauses and new Schedules relating to appeals; amendments relating to Clause 65, Schedule 3, Clauses 66 to 84, Schedule 4, Clauses 85 to 96 and Schedules 5 and 6.	10.00 p.m.
Second day	
Remaining new Clauses and new Schedules; amendments relating to Clauses 1 and 2, Schedule 1, Clauses 3 to 13, Schedule 2 and Clauses 37 to 64.	7.00 p.m.
Amendments relating to Clauses 97 to 132, Schedule 7 and Clauses 133 to 135; remaining proceedings.	9.00 p.m.

(4) The proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at Ten o'clock on the second day.

(5) Sessional Order B (programming committees) made on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.

Before I come to the programme motion, I put on record my appreciation of the way in which my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) led for the Government in the Committee that considered the Bill. I greatly appreciate what she did throughout the past year and thank her for her tremendous support.

We have a two-day debate before us and I hope that we shall take as little time as possible over the programme motion so that we can debate the issues that the timetable tackles. I hope that I can help to achieve that by setting an example. I want to draw some matters to the attention of those who are not familiar with what happened to the timings for this important and complicated measure.

On Second Reading, the Opposition appealed for extra time in Committee, and I said that I was willing to consider the matter with the Whips. I did that, and because of representations from Opposition Members in Committee that deferred three sessions of the 32 and a half hours allocated for our proceedings, we agreed that there should be an extra day. That was welcomed by hon. Members of all parties. Indeed, the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) said:

> "I am grateful for the Minister's explanation and for the generous time available to scrutinise the Bill. The official Opposition have no objection and concur with the Government's proposal."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E,* 30 April 2002; c. 105.]

I was grateful for that comment because it clarified that the additional day allowed the Committee to consider many, if not all the major issues that were before us at the time.

On Second Reading, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey said in her summing up that we would table further amendments to deal with what is known as benefit shopping and the outcome of the Roth judgment. Everyone knew that further amendments had to be considered in the light of that. Two weeks ago, I said that there would be a further substantive amendment on the appeals process. Today, I am moving a programme motion that provides, not for the original one day that was allocated for Report and Third Reading, but for the two days that I personally requested so that the additional amendments could be properly scrutinised.

With the additional day in Committee, the two extra days for Report and Third Reading are proper and adequate. The timetable motion shares the time available between consideration of accommodation centres and of appeals in a way that enables hon. Members to have their voices heard and their anxieties raised and considered.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): When did Government policy on appeals change? Why did they table at the last minute their substantive amendment, which removes significant appeal rights from asylum seekers, but not from anyone else?

Mr. Blunkett: The hon. Gentleman, who was in his place for a large part of the Second Reading debate, will recall that I indicated that the Government would present the results of their further consideration of the appeals process to hon. Members. I regret that, through legal advice, I was unable to table the substantive amendment before the conclusion of our proceedings in Committee. Those proceedings were adjusted at the hon. Gentleman's specific request and I am therefore sure that he will understand that I have tried to deal with concerns by extending the debate on Report and Third Reading from one to two days and ensuring that the changes were tabled with sufficient notice for Opposition Members to understand and consider the proposals. I have tried to avoid detrimental consequences.

In the light of the information that I have given and the consideration that has been offered to the Opposition through sharing time for the different elements of the debate today and tomorrow, I simply move that we approve the timetable motion and agree to consider the issues as quickly as possible.

3.49 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I beg to move, as an amendment to the proposed motion, in line 3, leave out from 'be' to end and add

'supplemented as follows—

Re-committal

(1) The Bill shall be re-committed to a Standing Committee.

(2) The proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on 4th July.'

The Home Secretary is, of course, right that the new clauses and amendments that the Government have tabled in the last 24 hours or so were widely signalled. The fact is, however, that they are also of great importance, and they are numerous—I believe that there are about 90 on the amendment paper.

It is no surprise to any of us that the Home Secretary has also been ingenious in the construction of the new clauses—in particular, new clauses 14 and 15. In them, he has yoked together two parallel sets of propositions. We strongly agree with one, but are in deep disagreement with the other, as I suspect he surmises. He has, by these means, presented us with the most interesting—and, from his point of view, delicious—opportunity to choose between voting for the Government to achieve what we have to achieve to make sense of what we have been saying for the last eight months, and voting against them to defeat measures that we find repulsive.

We cannot choose to do what we seek to do, which is to propose and agree with those parts with which we agree, and to disagree with and dispose of those parts with which we disagree. The parliamentary process is designed to enable people to take the positions that they actually wish to take, rather than those that the ingenuity of the Government—and their draftsmen—force upon them. The point of the Standing Committee is to tease out these differences in a slightly more dispassionate atmosphere, and to provide opportunities for the Government and the Opposition to put forward different formulations.

If necessary, if the Bill is not re-committed to Committee, we could ask our noble Friends in the other place to do that work for us. Indeed, Ministers might argue that, as there is no earthly chance of our winning a vote in Committee in this place, we might as well get on with the job and allow the other place—where there is a chance of the Government being overturned and of the amendments being amended—to do its work. On that thesis—although I am sure that it is not one with which you would have any sympathy, Mr. Speaker—we could dispense with the Standing Committee in this House altogether and, while we were at it, more or less dispense with the workings of this House between one election and the next, and leave it to the other place, where there is some possibility of the Government being defeated, to handle all legislation.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): Is the hon. Gentleman seriously proposing that?

Mr. Letwin: No, I am not.

I cannot accept the proposition that the mere fact that we are likely to be defeated in Committee means that we should not even discuss these issues there. We have not had the chance to do so, because as the spokesman for the Liberal Democrats has made all too plain, these new clauses and amendments were simply not before us when the Committee was sitting.

Simon Hughes: And they change Government policy.

Mr. Letwin: I do not know what was Government policy but I know that the parliamentary draftsman had not the foggiest clue about how to draft such new clauses at that stage. Indeed, looking at the drafting, I am not sure that he had a clear idea of what to do when he did draft them, but we shall come to that anon.

These are immensely important matters that will affect the lives and livelihoods of living individuals. It is right that the Opposition parties should have a chance to agree, disagree and vote on the parts of these clauses that we respectively agree and disagree with. It is wrong that we should be forced into a straitjacket. The only proper course of action, therefore, is to take these particular clauses—I ask no more than that—back to a Committee of the House to reconsider them, to tease out the implications and try to come up with a differentiation between the parts with which we agree and those with which we do not. Should that fail, we shall, alas, be setting ourselves up for yet another encounter between this House and another place, which I, for one, would regret.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Will my hon. Friend reflect on this point? The nature of what is before us is so serious for those who are affected that, in a sense, the more that the House agrees, the more important it is for those areas on which there is disagreement to be considered with great care. We are to discuss the freedom of people and their lives in a way that is rarely used in the House, but would not it have been better for the Government to have shown themselves to be generous in such a matter to ensure that those who are affected have a respect for the law of Britain, even if that law, in the end, excludes them?

Mr. Letwin: I am bound, as so often, to agree with my right hon. Friend. The fact is that the new clauses, in particular new clauses 14 and 15, contain provisions that will not only deeply affect the lives and the sense of fair play of certain individuals, but that are at the very least highly tendentious in respect of their compatibility with the Human Rights Act 1998.

It is not at all clear that the Law Lords in the other place will take the view that the provisions, or some of them, are compatible with the Human Rights Act. Indeed, equivalent warnings that we gave on a particular aspect of the Proceeds of Crime Bill have proved to be justified, which is another reason, another great cause, to debate these matters properly—in detail in Committee.

3.56 pm

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I rise to speak in favour of the amendment. As the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) and his hon. Friends know, we came to the view independently that the process of the Bill requires us to return to consideration in Committee if we are to do the job properly. That is why my hon. Friends and I put our names to the amendment.

I follow the Home Secretary's example, first, in paying tribute to the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), who did an exceptionally good job at the Home Office. She was always courteous and always competent, and she always tried to give information. We did not always agree, but that was not to be expected. I must say that we were surprised that she was not kept in office, and I hope that it is not long before she returns.

Secondly, I congratulate the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration, the new Minister of State; we look forward to working with her in her important responsibility. Again, we may not always agree, but we hope to disagree honestly and straightforwardly, and we shall seek to do the best for our fellow citizens and for the country.

Mr. Letwin: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will allow me to echo his comments and add the hope that the brief sojourn on the Back Benches experienced by a current Home Office Minister is parallelled in the example of the hon. Member for Wallasey?

Simon Hughes: Unity for a moment, before we disagree.

The Home Secretary was right, of course, to say that there have been lots of debates between the parties about the timetable for this significant Bill, and there is no dissent from the fact that it is hugely important. The Bill reflects an issue that is being considered in probably every European Union country. It is on the agenda for next week's Seville summit and it impacts on the European convention on human rights and other international conventions such as the refugee convention, the convention on the rights of the child.

Everybody understood that we needed to do the job well, and the Home Secretary and his colleagues know that, at the outset, we sought more time in Committee. There was negotiation, but the period was not as long as we would have wished. We went through proceedings in Committee entirely properly, and the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, the hon. Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton), will agree, I hope, that there was no time wasting on any side.

We did our job competently, we tried to get through as much business as possible and, including the additional time that Ministers and Whips negotiated and the change to the order of consideration that accommodated the Home Secretary's quite proper wish to introduce the changes to appeals that he had flagged up and which were considered last, we had an extra day in Committee.

I hope that these figures are accurate; I did the tally this morning. At the conclusion of the Committee stage, 17 clauses, three schedules, 13 new clauses and 53 amendments had not been debated. More importantly, and hence the reason for the amendment to return the Bill to Committee, the Order Paper contains 160 non-Government amendments, 35 Government amendments and two Government new clauses for consideration today and 49 Government amendments, six Government new clauses and two Government new schedules for consideration tomorrow.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): As Parliamentary Private Secretary, I sat through the whole of the Committee. Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that we made considerably better progress when the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) was present than when he was there? Will he also confirm that if we added up the number of speeches made, he spoke more than everybody else in the Opposition put together?

Simon Hughes: I am not going to get involved in that debate. Some of the voices that were expected to come from the Labour party in support of immigrants and asylum seekers were rarely heard.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Including that of the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes).

Simon Hughes: Certainly including the hon. Gentleman's. It was left significantly to the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins)—to whom I pay tribute—and his colleagues, and to me and my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam, to put the case that, until this Government took office, Labour Members would regularly have put. That was a great disappointment to me and a greater disappointment to many outside who thought better of the Labour party and are increasingly greatly disappointed.

Mr. Gummer: Will the hon. Gentleman reflect on which previous Labour Government or Labour party would have allowed these debates to be held with so little dissent on the issues for which the Labour party historically had great concern?

Simon Hughes: The House will draw its own conclusion. There are very honourable exceptions on the Labour Benches, and there is still hope outside that this House will not go down the road that the Labour party, in some of the proposals, is suggesting. Paradoxically, as the hon. Member for West Dorset said, it may be left to the House of Lords to prevent the worse excesses of the Labour Government. We will do our bit today and tomorrow, and we will not waste time. We will force votes where necessary, but if we do not win the day this week we hope sincerely that we will win the day in the House of Lords in a few weeks' time.

Mr. Levitt: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Simon Hughes: No, I will not. The hon. Gentleman and his colleagues cannot have it both ways. They cannot complain that time is being taken up, yet seek to intervene to make partisan points.

The most significant reason for sending the Bill back to Committee is, as the Home Secretary accepted implicitly in what he said to me earlier, the fact that major matters appeared on the Order Paper last week—the last opportunity for tabling new clauses and amendments. Those matters include major amendments that, for example, change the rules for appeals and the penalties for people involved in immigration.

Constitutionally, it has not been possible for my party, the Conservative party or any other party to table amendments to new clauses and new schedules—we have not had time. As the hon. Member for West Dorset said, variations of new clauses, such as new clauses 14 and 15, cannot be debated. Parliament is therefore unable to do the job on Report that it ought to do.

[Simon Hughes]

This is a matter of huge concern outside the House and involves important questions of civil liberties. Given that we had no Special Standing Committee and took no evidence before having a guillotined Committee stage, it is a pity that the Government cannot see the merit in returning to Committee and doing the job properly. For every day that we do not do our job properly, others may have to pick up the pieces. When the lives and liberties of some of the most needy in the world are at stake, I would have hoped that we could do better.

4.5 pm

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): I shall be brief, as many of us are keen to get on to the main debate. I support the comments of the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes). The number of significant Government amendments that have been tabled at the 11th hour is astonishing. The proposed programme will give us no proper opportunity for parliamentary scrutiny of matters such as the effective removal of the right of appeal for many asylum seekers.

The late tabling of Government amendments will also mean that we will have no opportunity to debate some extremely important constitutional matters raised by the Scottish National party-Plaid Cymru group concerning the scope of matters devolved to the Scots Parliament. The Scotland Act 1998 devolved children's education to the Scots Parliament, but the restriction of discussion will result in Westminster clawing back devolved powers without any proper debate in the House. I understand that the issue was also not debated in Committee. That is surely unacceptable in this so-called mother of democracies.

The proposed programme will also mean, in the light of the late tabling of Government amendments, that we cannot discuss the important constitutional matter of the new oath of loyalty to the United Kingdom. I raised on Second Reading the constitutional question of how a new applicant seeking to reside in Scotland could be required to pledge an oath of loyalty to the United Kingdom, when the official Opposition in the Scots Parliament would not be prepared to take such an oath. The constitutional implications have not been discussed in the House, and the programme will probably mean that they will not be ventilated at all. The people of Scotland will find that very curious indeed.

For those reasons, if the amendment is pressed to a vote, the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru will support it.

4.8 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury): The first couple of amendments that we will consider in the main discussion relate to accommodation centres. Currently, they affect only Opposition Members, because no centre is proposed in a Labour-held constituency. I have a duty both to represent the concerns of my constituents about accommodation centres and to provide leadership for them on the question. My constituents, along with those of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), have sought to channel their concerns into petitions to Parliament and proper use of the democratic process, which is why I have been very keen on a public inquiry into the proposals for a centre in my constituency.

I am glad to say that, in the nearly 20 years for which I have represented Banbury, there has not been a single vote cast for a single National Front or British National party candidate at any local or national election. *[Interruption.]* I cannot hear the cheap jibe that the Home Secretary is making. This is an important point and I would have hoped that the Labour party would wish, as strongly as we do, not to see any support given to the tendencies that have been represented by the National Front and the BNP in this country. *[Interruption.]* If the Home Secretary wishes to intervene, I will gladly give way. Apparently, he does not. If the Home Secretary and the Government rush through legislation such as this, allowing just three hours in which to debate accommodation centres, three new clauses and some 30 amendments—the equivalent of about three minutes per amendment on average—it will be much harder for me to look my constituents in the eye and say, "These matters can be properly and fairly debated and resolved in the House of Commons."

Using a huge majority to drive through this legislation at such speed and with minimal scrutiny does little for those who wish to ensure that Parliament is seen as the forum in which such matters are resolved. I can only hope that the other place will take note of how little time we have been given properly to debate and decide certain matters before us today, and that it will make use of its ability to exercise proper scrutiny.

4.11 pm

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): From a sedentary position, the Home Secretary made a jibe that suggested that the people of Suffolk, Coastal need not worry about the Bill. However, given that it experiences considerable pressure through the arrival of asylum seekers, and given that Felixstowe is one of the largest ports in Britain, we should—like those who live in other constituencies—be concerned about the Bill. Of course, he made the jibe not because he knows about the constituency, but because it was suggested—yet again by a Conservative Member, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal—that the Bill deals with matters of great concern to people's lives and liberty.

However seriously we regard these issues, and however great our concern about the difficulties that the arrival of large numbers of asylum seekers can cause our constituents, it is important that asylum seekers are treated properly by a nation that has a reputation for always doing so. Although I have always taken what might be described as a liberal view, I feel very strongly that, in dealing with serious issues that affect our constituents, we must adopt measures that are in common with those in the rest of Europe. I beg the Home Secretary not to take these issues lightly and grin and giggle; they matter to individual people, whom we care about.

Mr. Blunkett: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman, who often gave way in similar circumstances when we were in opposition. I made a sedentary remark that related to his own intervention on the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes)—which bordered on an accusation that Labour Members were in dereliction of their duty to defend asylum seekers—and in doing so I referred to pressures. I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to the comments of the leader of his own party in *The Sunday Times* of 21 April. In referring to his vision of hell, he said:

> "Brave new world, local council estate, acres of concrete, women raped regularly, single mothers, asylum seekers."

We on the Labour Benches need no lectures on whom we should represent and how we should speak.

Mr. Gummer: This is neither the time nor the place to argue about such issues in full, but I should point out that in 20 or more years in this House I do not remember ever regarding asylum seekers and immigration as subjects about which it is suitable to giggle—whether from a sedentary position or otherwise.

4.13 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): In the light of the Home Secretary's regrettable intervention, I want to add one brief comment. I was very grateful for his letter, in which he praised me for the anti-racist nature of the campaign that I fought against the establishment of an asylum accommodation centre in Throckmorton. Indeed, my campaign was based entirely on an anti-racist premise. I want also to reinforce the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry): proper time in which to discuss these matters would help us to continue the debate in an anti-racist way.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 188, Noes 330.

Division No. 259] **[4.14 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Dr. Julian Lewis.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew

Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim

Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*

Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin

Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N

Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Fraser Kemp and
Mr. Ian Pearson.

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

Mr. Speaker: I call on Mr. Blunkett to move new clause 1.

New Clause 1

ACCOMMODATION CENTRES: DECISIONS AND APPEALS

'Where an asylum seeker is resident in an accommodation centre under this Part, an initial decision on his claim shall be made at the accommodation centre by the Secretary of State, and any appeal to an adjudicator shall be made by the adjudicator at the accommodation centre.'.—*[Mr. Letwin.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

4.29 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I should love to hear the arguments that the Home Secretary would make for my new clause, but I fear that he will not have that pleasure.

I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 164, in clause 15, page 9, line 5, after "accommodation", insert—

'for no more than six months (subject to the provisions in subsection ( ) below)'.

No. 2, in page 9, line 6, after "centre", insert—

'for a maximum period of 10 weeks'.

No. 31, in page 9, line 10, at end insert—

'( ) A person may only be accommodated in an accommodation centre for a maximum total of six months, except in exceptional circumstances when the Secretary of State may arrange for an extension of at most a further three months in total.'.

Mr. Letwin: As the Home Secretary knows, the Conservative party has welcomed the idea of accommodation centres, not least because the Conservative party originally made the suggestion. Indeed, it was my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) who earned such opprobrium from Labour Members for making that suggestion. She taught us the need to think hard about how the accommodation centres should be constructed.

We are thus in agreement with the Government on the fundamental principle that there should be accommodation centres as a way of beginning to bring again some order to the chaos of our asylum system. However, the world is unfortunately a more complicated place than administrators would like it to be. It is not the case that adopting the right idea in general will deliver the right results in general. If the right idea is adopted but the details are wrong, the results will be wrong. Alas, the accommodation centres as proposed by the Government—so far—are not structured in a way that leads us to believe they will achieve the admirable results that both the Home Secretary and I want to see: the rapid processing of claims by asylum seekers so that those who are refugees, who

[Mr. Letwin]

have in many cases fled from appalling persecution, quickly find a home in this country, and those who are misusing the asylum system as a way around the immigration rules are speedily dispatched from this country.

In order to achieve those admirable results, the accommodation centres need to be structured in a way that gives real hope that the processing can be quick. That is why I am moving new clause 1, tabled in my name and those of my hon. Friends, and especially amendment No. 2, also tabled in our names. I hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you will be willing to allow us to vote separately on the new clause and amendment No. 2, as each is, in our view, of sufficient importance to deserve a separate vote.

New clause 1 has a simple purpose: to ensure that both the initial decision and the adjudication of any appeal are made in the accommodation centre itself. In a moment, the Home Secretary may—I hope that he will—explain to the House why, to date, the Home Office has resisted that suggestion. Perhaps there is some reason—some rational grounds—for that resistance, but I have to say that we have not yet heard those rational grounds.

I know that it is unfamiliar for those who are, in effect, judges to be told where to sit. I know that the Home Secretary—like previous Home Secretaries—has sometimes had some difficulty in dealing with the judiciary and with the Lord Chancellor's Department, and indeed with adjudicators, but I maintain my faith that if the Home Secretary and the Home Office work hard enough the adjudicators could be persuaded that it would be appropriate for them to sit in the accommodation centres.

Why would that be an advantage? At present we face an enormous paper chase. The Home Secretary will be much more vividly aware than I, considering the matter from a distance, can possibly be of the colossal amount of bureaucratic effort currently going into sending pieces of paper around the countryside in order that appeals can be heard at places that are often extremely distant from where the decisions were originally made and where the asylum seekers in question are resident. If the accommodation centre is to have its purpose fulfilled, it needs to be a place where that paper chase does not occur. Only if the adjudicator is on site will the paper chase be abolished.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Is not the answer to the problem posed by the hon. Gentleman more efficient administration at the Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department? In other words, if the paper chase that he describes is dealt with, it does not really matter where the adjudicators sit—the administrative problems would be solved.

Mr. Letwin: In principle, the hon. Gentleman is right, but the problem is that human beings are involved and they tend to behave in ways that we are all familiar with in our own case.

Let me try to illustrate for the hon. Gentleman the two pictures that I have in my mind. One—we shall come to the other as we proceed through the amendments and new clauses today—is of a smallish place in which asylum seekers largely from one location, and, I hope, in many cases, entirely from one location, are grouped. For example, let us consider a small centre, probably in a city, inhabited by asylum seekers from Somalia. It is occupied by decision makers equipped with an independent country risk assessment in which they can have real faith. They get to know about the intricacies of Somalia. No Member of the House could be expected to know much about Somalia unless they had visited it, read about it, and talked to people who really understand its current politics, tribal make-up and so forth. Similarly, decision makers cannot be expected to know those things unless they are dealing with those matters. An adjudicator on site, next door, who also understands the circumstances of that country, can make a judgment quickly about whether the applicant, given the information presented, is likely to be a refugee.

Those are genuinely difficult human decisions to make. If they are made on the basis of remote location and paper, no matter how hard the bureaucrats in the Home Office, the Lord Chancellor's Department and the court service work—I understand that they will strive hard—it is extraordinarily difficult for someone dealing with a range of different places and cases at a remote location to avoid sending back some of the papers for further verification and inquiry. Paper moves back and forth because human beings find it difficult to operate under circumstances in which they are dealing with a wide array of matters and are widely dispersed. We will not process these claims in a rational amount of time until we acknowledge that.

I do not have to speculate about whether I or the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) is in the right, as the Home Office has admitted that I am. It says that it will take about six months to process claims in the accommodation centres. That is why we wish to press amendment No. 2, which limits the processing to 10 weeks. I do not accept that 10 weeks is a proper time—it seems well beyond the proper time—but I think that it is a proper limit, because there will be exceptional cases that have to take longer than the main run. I think that I am right to say—my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald will correct me if I am wrong—that when she first put forward the idea of accommodation centres, she expressed the hope that claims might be processed in six weeks. I share that hope.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): You are living in fairyland.

Mr. Letwin: The Home Secretary—this is an interesting remark—says from a sedentary position, and I am sure that he does so sincerely, that we are living in fairyland if we hope for that. I fear, however, that that remark tells us everything we need to know about what has happened. The Home Secretary and his Ministers have been captured by a corporate culture within the bureaucracy, which has come to believe that 18 months is the norm, six months is a heroic achievement, and six weeks is fairyland. While that culture obtains, we will never have an orderly and effective asylum system in this country.

Mr. Blunkett: I do believe that six weeks, as the limit not the norm, is fairyland. In 1997, the then Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, inherited a time span of 20 months from entry into the country to final conclusion of appeal. That was under a

Government in which the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) served as a Home Office Minister. With respect to the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin)—with whom I have a lot of sympathy on his first proposition, to which I shall refer later—reducing the period from 20 months to six weeks is fairyland.

Mr. Letwin: I want to make three responses to the Home Secretary's remarks. First, I do not think that the proper limit can be six weeks—amendment No. 2 suggests a limit of 10 weeks, as I accept that there will be exceptional cases. Indeed, if the Home Secretary were to propose a mechanism for extreme exceptional circumstance, to be subject to a further extension, we would consider it. To establish a norm of six weeks, we need a general limit that is slightly longer. Were the Home Secretary to imagine that six weeks will be the norm in practice without setting a limit and by merely expressing a hope that everything will be achieved in six months, he will indeed be living in fairyland, because it will not happen.

Secondly, if the system is operated in its current form, three years from now I will have the great electoral advantage of being able to explain that the Home Secretary has failed to address the chaos of the system because he has not dealt with many applicants. If there are 3,000 people and a six-month processing period, it does not take more than simple arithmetic to demonstrate that the system will deal with only 6,000 applicants out of, perhaps, 100,000, including dependants. A six-month processing period will not solve the problem. The Home Secretary has as much incentive as I do—perhaps even more—to find a way to turn six weeks as a norm into something that is far from fairyland. I accept that six weeks would not be the absolute limit, but unless he turns it into a norm, we will not bring order out of chaos.

Thirdly, it is no part of my purpose to claim that previous systems or Governments were perfect. The right hon. Gentleman's predecessor was not and the same is true of him so far. We all share the blame for the fact that the system is in chaos. We need to discuss how to put it right. However, if it is still in chaos in three years' time, it will not be possible for the right hon. Gentleman to claim that it is someone else's responsibility. I think he recognises that it will be his responsibility. I assure him that he will not fulfil that responsibility with a six-month processing period. I am delighted to hear that he might be sympathetic to the idea of having adjudicators on site because that is the single biggest step, although not the only one, that he could take towards achieving something like a six-week processing period. If we could reach agreement on that, it would be a major step forward.

I do not want to tarry much further because there is no point spinning out speeches once the point is made. However, one other matter is relevant. We propose that the centres are short-term items, through which people pass at great speed. They should be on a small scale and situated in the centre of cities. That model would avoid the problems created if they are structured as envisaged in the Bill. Our proposal would not require the measures that the Home Secretary is taking, which have proved so difficult for him to defend to his party. It is to the advantage of the Labour party itself that he should seek a model that conforms to our image of the centres. That is the way to avoid the problems. No one would worry about where a few children in a small centre were educated for six weeks. It is because human beings are to be in vast camps for six months that all the problems arise.

I use the term "vast camps" advisedly. It is not that I think the Home Secretary intends to create inhumane places. I am sure he will try be as nice as possible when he structures the centres, but he must think about how they will look and feel. Let him reflect on what happened at Yarl's Wood and on the security costs of vast accommodation centres when claims take months to process. Those are real and practical considerations. Let us have in our minds a different model of small, quick, specialised, one-stop shops, because on that basis we can make real progress.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Although the debate will be relatively short, it is important because it deals with the sort of accommodation centres that we should have. There are grounds for consensus if the Government can be persuaded to move closer to the position advocated by the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats. It is interesting that all parties agree that it is worth trialling accommodation centres. The idea has been put forward, in different guises, by different people. Everybody agrees that we are talking only about trialling them; they are not meant suddenly to take all asylum seekers, because most of them will be dispersed through the current system.

This debate is about how big the centres will be and how long people will stay in them. It is about what will happen when people arrive at the centres and, in particular, whether adjudication should occur on-site. I take the view, and previous speeches by the Home Secretary are as good a basis for it as any, that people should spend no longer than six months in an accommodation centre. I think the Home Secretary used the phrase "God forbid" about the idea that anybody should be in a centre for more than six months. We want to tie him down to that objective, and we think that amendment No. 31 is a reasonable means of doing so. It provides that the six-month limit would apply other than in exceptional circumstances, when the Home Secretary would be able to grant a three-month extension.

4.45 pm

We tried to respond to the debates in Committee, in which the Government understandably said they did not want legal action to be taken simply because a person's stay in a centre slipped over the limit by a day or a week. We hope that the second stage of looking after people and determining their needs could be achieved in six months in normal cases and in nine months in exceptional ones. After all, it is contemplated that there will be only a handful of places. According to the Government, if 3,000 asylum seekers are to be accommodated, there will be only three or four centres, and if the centres were of the size suggested by Opposition Members, there would be at most 12 of them. I hope, therefore, that the House will be sympathetic to the idea of a maximum stay in a centre of six months, even with a three-month extension in exceptional cases.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): There is a lot in what the hon. Gentleman is saying. Does he accept that there is an interesting parallel in criminal law with custody time

[Mr. Humfrey Malins]

limits? Those are absolutely fixed and rigidly adhered to, but they can be extended in particular cases by special permission from the judge.

Simon Hughes: Not only that, but along with some of my Scottish colleagues behind me, I am aware also that Scotland has a much more rigorous tradition of fixed time limits, and cases must be dealt with within 110 days.

Where there is a will, there is a way. People will go into a reception centre for a week or two when they first arrive, and then there will be a second phase of assessment. Again, we must not forget that the centres are to be trialled, so this is a matter of preparing for them. If we build into the process enough staff and facilities, surely it will be possible to deal with cases within a certain time. We are starting from scratch; we do not have to plan around any historical difficulties. I hope, therefore, that amendments Nos. 164 and 31 will find favour with the House.

We dissent from the Conservatives' view that the process can be completed in 10 weeks. That is near to being impossible, and I would rather start by setting a possible target. The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), who has legal experience, and others have made perfectly practical points. We have to be realistic because we are trying to find a working model, and I do not think that 10 weeks will be long enough. Whether or not the adjudication is done on-site, it is unlikely to be possible to do paperwork and translation, to check facts and to get evidence in one place. I flag up the fact, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that when the time comes we will seek to persuade you to allow us to vote on amendment No. 164 or amendment No. 31, according to the convenience of the House.

I turn now to new clause 1. I listened to the debate in Committee, and I listened to the hon. Member for West Dorset today. I have been persuaded that it would be possible, on a trial basis, to bring the adjudicator to the asylum seekers rather than take the asylum seekers to the adjudicator. I say that because a maximum of 12 and a minimum of four places around the country would be involved, because there would be a regular flow of casework and decisions, and because there will inevitably be a regular flow of people who want to exercise their right of appeal from the initial decision, which may be no, and go to adjudication, which might result in a yes.

Although I am sure that most hon. Members remember this, I remind the House that a significant number of cases succeed on appeal. If 20 per cent. succeed in round one, the initial decision, one in five cases—a further fifth—succeed on appeal. If one is going to win in round two, it is important that round two happens soon after round one so that one does not have to endure the trauma of thinking that one's case has failed. It is also important that someone who is not a civil servant or a member of the Government or the Executive should make the decision, which will hold for a long time. An independent adjudicator, who is nothing to do with the Executive and who is seen to be independent, should come. So long as the process is clearly arranged so that the people whose cases are to be determined understand that the people who are to adjudicate are independent and not part of the decision-making process, and so long as the tribunal or court, as one might call it, comes to the place where the people whose cases are to be determined are, it is worth trying.

There are many points on which we might disagree more fundamentally, but I hope that the House agrees that the proposal is worth trying. I hope, too, that the Home Secretary will agree that a six-month maximum, with an extra three-month period if that is really needed, comprise a reasonable middle way that can be adopted for the first accommodation centres. In that way, we might get a principle on which we all agree working in practice.

I end with a warning: if we take the wrong road, if we create accommodation centres that are far too big, if we put them in the wrong place, if we do not provide facilities in them, the centres will not succeed. They will be unpopular, unsuccessful and inhumane. We have a duty to try to get the system right. Not all the wisdom is found on the Government Benches or in Government offices; it lies in the experience of those throughout the country who know what they are talking about and who want to share it so that the House can reach the right decisions.

Mr. Blunkett: I will attempt to be brief, but I want—and I think the House expects it of me—to use this initial debate to set out our position in the general debate on accommodation centres, so that hon. Members know where the Government stand and what we will ask them to vote on at 7 o'clock.

First, let me say in response to the opening remarks made by the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) that there is not as much distance between us as might first appear. I accept that there should be a presumption that adjudicators should be on site, rather than that those on site should go to the adjudicators. I am prepared to consider how the House of Lords think such a provision might be phrased on the face of the Bill, and to talk to the Lord Chancellor and the chief adjudicator about the best way to organise it.

The arguments that the hon. Gentleman put today and that have been rehearsed previously lead us to a desire to ensure that we do not have to take asylum seekers out of a centre when it is not necessary to do so. One of the clear justifications for having accommodation centres and trialling them is the ability to create a fast-track, simple, administratively manageable process that cuts through the sheer mind-blowing bureaucracy that has bedevilled the immigration and nationality directorate since its inception. If we can do that, the morale of those working in the service at every level, including the adjudicators, will be improved. Furthermore, those who want their case to be dealt with speedily and expeditiously, and Members of Parliament who have to deal with enormous case loads because they have substantial dispersal centres in their constituency—I am one of those Members—would experience great relief. It is therefore in everyone's best interests to get the system right.

The first thing to do may well be to pick up the suggestion that one centre trials the programme, but I accept that, given scepticism about the process of dealing with nationality and asylum, Members want a provision to be included in the Bill. I hope that that helps the House and assists the main Opposition on what they feel they need to press to a vote, given the time pressures of debate for three quarters of an hour, followed by a vote.

Mr. Vaz: I, too, am persuaded by the comments of the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey

(Simon Hughes). It is not a matter of where the adjudicators sit; what matters is the quality of justice and the administrative support that is given. The Home Secretary may recall that when visitor appeals were first introduced, Labour Members suggested that adjudicators should travel to Mumbai and New Delhi to deal with those cases much more swiftly. I welcome what he has said and hope that we can pursue the matter.

Mr. Blunkett: I am not giving way on the amendment as tabled because there will be cases in which it is appropriate for someone to be transported to another place for adjudication if that makes the process easier.

That brings me to the substantive issue on which so much else rests. If I am right, the disquiet of people who are concerned about families in particular and the nature of services, including education, to be provided on the premises is based primarily on the length of time that people are likely to be in an accommodation centre. That has to be the case, I suggest to the House and colleagues whose views I respect and understand, because there are many disruptions to the lives of children and families as they go through the existing process, including dispersal.

It is worth rehearsing the argument that the dispersal system was put in place because enormous pressures on London and the south-east resulted in great difficulty in providing services and disruption to social cohesion and community well-being. My predecessor therefore established a dispersal system which has been gradually improved, but still leaves a great deal to be desired. There were pressures in certain parts of the country, often in areas with the highest proportion of empty accommodation and where services were more readily available—for instance, there were places in schools which had not been taken up locally—so we ended up with major clusters of dispersal.

It is worth reminding ourselves that we are talking about asylum seekers who are seeking leave to remain or refugee status, not immigration per se. The way in which articles are written, interviews undertaken and speeches made—I exonerate entirely Front Benchers from the two main parties and, indeed, my colleagues—shows that some people, either by misunderstanding or mischief, have mixed the concept of immigration and the social, economic and cultural value that immigrants bring to our community, with the issue of dealing with those who enter the country on the premise that they risk life and limb if they remain at home or, in other words, are seeking refugee status.

I make that point because we are debating how long someone should be in an accommodation centre on a trial basis before going through the whole process if they press their claim to final appeal; there is layer on layer of appeals, as we debated on Second Reading and have discussed elsewhere.

Simon Hughes: As the Home Secretary knows, I share his view on that. I also share his view that there has been witting or unwitting confusion by commentators, which is unhelpful. May I repeat a practical suggestion that I made in Committee? When we have dealt with the Bill in the House, we should try to separate the provisions on asylum from those on immigration, as different rights and processes are involved. This major Bill would be much clearer if one part dealt with one issue and another dealt with the other.

5 pm

Mr. Blunkett: I understand what the hon. Gentleman says. I think that it was important to include the issues in the same Bill, just as I put the proposition that it was crucial that they were dealt with in the same White Paper. That is the case for reasons that most people accepted on 7 February as being part of an attempt to achieve a coherent nationality, immigration and asylum policy, instead of merely an asylum policy, which is what people have often accused Governments of different persuasions of having.

We are all desperately trying to move towards such a policy. Those who attempt to inflame the debate outside—some of them know better and should be devoting their charitable work to children and families who are at risk in sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere—do not do anyone a service when they denigrate the efforts of some of us to put on to this country's agenda a positive migration policy that welcomes people from throughout the world.

That involves welcoming people who are making a contribution to our communities, doubling the number who can receive work permits, establishing new migration routes and ensuring with the UN that we can provide gateways for refugees so that they can apply for asylum from outside the country instead of having to seek entry clandestinely in order to make an asylum claim.

If we can have a debate of the sort that we had on Second Reading and in Committee, between people with a genuine intention to see off racism and prejudice and put in place a trusted system that builds confidence in our communities and deals with those who flee from persecution, we will be doing everyone a favour.

It is in that spirit that I want to address the issue of time limits. I have already made it clear that we do not believe that a 10-week provision is feasible. I believe that a six-week provision is fairyland. The shadow Home Secretary was right to say that the history of the issue under discussion is bedevilled by good intentions that are followed by complete failure. Having praised the enormous efforts of the immigration staff and people working for the support service for having reduced from 20 months to the current average of 11 months the process of taking people from induction to final appeal, it is unusual for a Home Secretary to say that there is so much further to go that it is breathtaking that people have put up with the system for so long.

It is true that that process is better than those in other European countries. Our removal record is better, but it is still abysmal. Everyone who has ever dealt with a constituency case on asylum—for reasons that I have given, two thirds of my constituency cases relate to asylum in one form or another—knows that we have to get to grips with the matter once and for all. I have responsibility for policy and my officials have responsibility for administration and competent delivery. However, in the end, I accept that, as the shadow Home Secretary rightly said, I will carry the can if I am still in the job. Indeed, I suppose that I will also carry the can if I am put out of the job, so one way or the other, I will carry it.

Let me explain what I hope we will be able to do. If we can achieve adjudication on site after immediate induction, we will be seeking to break the current cycle in which people come into the country, make themselves available and are usually put into temporary

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accommodation, where, regrettably, they usually live for some time while dispersal arrangements are made. It is unusual, but not impossible, for the children of families who are seeking asylum to be found an educational place, but it is difficult to envisage that happening in the first week or two. I remember my hon. Friend the Member for Hackney, North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) saying on Second Reading that the process takes time, so the issue is about time. Other hon. Members, including the two previous speakers, have pointed out that we are talking not about the principle of trialling accommodation centres, but about how long people will stay inside them.

Under the current system, when people are dispersed, the relevant authorities find them the services that they need. They find accommodation, often by working with the voluntary sector, and a GP, and also a school if they have children. It therefore takes time to complete the second round of assessment following the dispersal, having already utilised temporary accommodation. If we could cut that out, and move people from induction straight into accommodation, we would be able to provide those services almost immediately, providing an initial assessment of people's needs, including, in the case of those with children, the needs of the child.

I guarantee that we will consider how best to ensure that children's educational needs, having been assessed when they first enter, can be renewed at a certain point in their stay in the accommodation centre, which most hon. Members believe should be as short as possible and should not be more than six months, as the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey said. There will, of course, be exceptions. People extend the appeals process in all sorts of ingenious ways, helped by ingenious lawyers. That is their right. They try to extend the process for as long as possible, having not succeeded initially.

Let me pause for a moment to give a picture of the length of time for which people will be in accommodation centres. Over the past two months, we have got the initial decision down to less than eight weeks for 70 per cent. of applicants. That is still not good enough; it is still not reaching the target for a year, but it is getting there very rapidly. Given that I have been quite robust about the nature of bureaucracy in the system, I pay tribute to those in the immigration and nationality directorate who have worked really hard to make that possible.

We know that by granting either exceptional leave or refugee status we can get a quarter of those who initially apply through the system very quickly indeed. We are therefore left with those who go into the adjudication system and beyond. I believe that within the six-month period we should be able to, and in fact must, get through the adjudication system and at least the early part of the new revised second appeal procedure, which was discussed in Committee and will undoubtedly be debated in another place at great length if we do not get to it tonight.

We are therefore talking about the small number who reach the six-month point. I am prepared to provide for that in the Bill where it occurs in relation to families. It is not a major problem for singles, who are often single young men. Occupying them, however, is a problem. Anyone who walks about the centre of Sheffield, Birmingham or townships around the country this summer will soon find that out. Young men from Kosovo, Romania or Poland—you name it—will be hanging about. I would rather that they were occupied properly. There is still much to be done on providing and facilitating volunteering. I should like them to be occupied meaningfully in accommodation centres. All those who go in will have a language facility for their own mother tongue and the ability to start learning English, which, if they do not stay, will be of help to them when they return.

Ultimately, of course, the majority do not stay, so here is the nub of the question. What favour will we have done to families and children, when we come to remove them, if we have put their integration into neighbourhood schools at the top of the agenda? It is virtually impossible to drag a family away from a neighbourhood school.

On removal policies, I inherited the most enormous target that hon. Members on both sides of the House pleaded with me not to fulfil—when it happened to affect people in their own constituencies. Local papers run local campaigns to stop people being removed. But if the Government do not have a removal policy, we have no borders and no asylum or immigration policy. We might as well just say, "Invite everyone in." That is pretty near to what one or two people have written—until, of course, those whom they represent lose their jobs or are unable to maintain the minimum wage because they are undercut by the flow of people.

On a lighter note, the blessed name of Nicholas Ridley comes to mind. When he was Secretary of State for Transport, he devised the most brilliant solution for traffic jams: he suggested doing away with traffic lights. Market forces would have come into play, and no one would have been able to get the car out of the drive, let alone down the road. People would have had to leave their cars at home, and traffic jams would have been a thing of the past. The same circumstances would apply to mass immigration to Britain if we had no border controls and no semblance of an asylum policy. The real world tells me that we must take cognisance of what happens in practice when we try to effect our end-to-end policy, including removals.

In the House of Lords, I hope that we can include the educational interests of the child in the Bill so that the children of families who have been in an accommodation centre for six months can be assessed by the education service before the time has elapsed. Unless the family wishes to stay, it will be presumed that they will move out of the centre. I pick up the Liberal Democrat suggestion that there will be a maximum of a further 12 weeks for people to remain. It is right to provide for that, not least because it puts the onus on the immigration service to get its act together and ensure that people's cases are heard.

Given that the majority do not qualify for refugee status, it would help us to be able to remove them to removal centres, which also detain. An article in a newspaper this morning wrongly used the term "detention centre" for accommodation centres. It would be helpful if those who did not qualify for refugee status could be put in a removal centre and removed.

We are establishing new economic migration gateways and offering people alternative routes into the country. I therefore hope that vast numbers of people will not claim asylum when they are not at risk of life and limb but try to come here legitimately and openly as economic migrants. Agreement across Europe, which I shall endeavour to kickstart properly on Thursday in Luxembourg, will facilitate that. We will thus lessen the pressure on the system, including dispersal, which will continue for some years if the trial centres are a success. We must get dispersal right. We must provide support for schools, housing and GP practices that have to take the challenge of large numbers. I am deeply grateful to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for being present.

I understand why hon. Members say that we should not put accommodation centres outside urban areas, but we cannot have an asylum and immigration policy that provides that only deprived, inner-city areas take those who are transient because they are seeking the right to remain in the country. We cannot have that; it is not right in principle or morally or for race and community relations.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): Why does every organisation across the political spectrum, except the Government, oppose large accommodation units in rural areas?

Mr. Blunkett: I am not sure that that applies to everyone of every political persuasion. It does not apply to people in my constituency. They already welcome transient people and will do that for the foreseeable future, through, for example, 130 units of accommodation, usually for approximately 250 people, but without facilities such as on-site language provision in the mother tongue or adult education. The children are found places in schools that are not oversubscribed. In my city, that applies to schools that are not in the south-west of Sheffield; schools in that area are massively oversubscribed because they have the best educational outcomes.

5.15 pm

Of course, when people find that they are under pressure in an area, as happens in many parts of London, they go private in large numbers. I am not just talking about Kensington and Chelsea, where more than 50 per cent. of residents send their children to private schools. In Hackney, one of the most deprived boroughs in the country, 16 per cent. of residents send their children to private school at secondary level. So, there are opt-out facilities for some, but not for others.

I am not advocating that all accommodation centres should be in rural areas. I am simply saying that there should not be a presumption, such as the one put forward earlier. I am not seeking to pick on the shadow Home Secretary—as hon. Members know, I like him, and we are getting on far too well for that—but he did mention that it would be a good idea if the accommodation centres were in urban areas. I am merely saying, for balance, that there is a case for having a rational distribution.

I also accept the rational approaches that have been made to us by the Refugee Council, for which I have the most enormous respect, regarding experimentation with smaller centres. I only have so many resources, I have to achieve economies of scale, and I have the ability to put the centres in place and to see whether they work, but I am not dogmatic about their size or their location. We are also about to embark on evaluating the private and voluntary sector proposals. If people can come forward with alternative sites, I ask them please to do so. I do not think that we have handled the detailed consultation and the initial proposals as well as we might have done, and I think that my hon. Friends who have also been dealing with this matter accept that as well.

So, here we are this afternoon, with all the hype outside, and with general agreement that we should have a trial, and that the people in accommodation centres should be there as briefly as possible. There is also general agreement that it is not evil or discriminatory to educate children in an accommodation centre, where they will receive mother tongue and English support as well as a broader education, inspected by Ofsted and supported by the local education authority, without placing an undue burden on local schools, and that they should be there for as short a time as possible—with a maximum of six months for families in terms of their educational interests being assessed. That seems to be a reasonable compromise, and I am prepared for us to encapsulate it in an appropriate amendment in the House of Lords.

Mr. Iain Coleman (Hammersmith and Fulham): May I push my right hon. Friend a little on that point? I do not think that anyone on this side of the Chamber who has major concerns regarding the proposal to take children out of mainstream education is saying that that proposal is intrinsically evil. Bearing in mind the number of children involved, which would, as I understand it, be between 100 and 120 in any one accommodation centre, I think that my right hon. Friend is being slightly disingenuous—unwittingly, I am sure—when he says that those children could place a huge burden on local schools. In my local education authority area, more than 10 per cent. of primary school children and more than 8 per cent. of secondary school children are asylum seekers or refugees. The people who run the local education authority—the people at the coal face—have expressed sincerely and genuinely their belief that they are not being overburdened. So, how could such a tiny number of children—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman's intervention is now growing into a speech.

Mr. Blunkett: I shall return to my initial distinction. The facts that are put to Members need to be investigated. I am happy to do so in terms of determining whether we are talking about those who are in transit as seekers of the right to remain as refugees, or those who are seeking asylum, plus those who have gained refugee status, plus those who have come in through other migration routes. I accept that that can often be a major plus to a locality and to a school—I have said so already.

The issue is which school or schools close to an accommodation centre could take 120 children, bearing it in mind that we have accepted that, with few exceptions, people are in principle in favour of trialling the accommodation centres.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Blunkett: Let me finish. I received some acclaim from my hon. Friends behind me for which I am eternally grateful, as the Home Secretary does not often get it, when

[Mr. Blunkett]

I said that the centres should not simply be in the most deprived areas of the country. However, places available and deprivation regrettably go together, because parental preference often leads, from those who are on the edge—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I have allowed the Home Secretary a certain discretion, but he is gently wandering over amendments that we have yet to discuss. I would be grateful, as would the House, if he confined his remarks to the amendments that we are dealing with.

Mr. Blunkett: I stand corrected, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I think I have made the point.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): A moment ago, my right hon. Friend said that people are in favour in principle of accommodation centres. Can he give me the name of any organisation or group of people that is in favour of centres that accommodate 750 people?

Mr. Blunkett: People's contributions to the debate have varied. In fact, the organisations that made representations often made different ones. When the Immigration Advisory Service and Refugee Action responded to the White Paper, they were quite willing, so long as there was no lengthy stay in accommodation centres, for them to have different volumes. The Refugee Council did not like the idea of 750 places. I have agreed that we shall experiment with a smaller centre, and we shall work with the Refugee Council on achieving that.

There is an argument about size as well as duration of stay and what should go on in the centres, but the case that I am making is that those matters can be resolved through trialling and a bit of give and take. Broader services, including education, provided on the premises, so long as too long a stay is not involved, can be a plus, not a minus, for those who would otherwise be in transit from one place to another as they pursue their claim, as they are supported through the National Asylum Support Service system and as they eventually reach the point when integration becomes a reality for some and we need to support them better, but also when for the majority—more than 50 per cent.—removal has to be the final conclusion.

In that spirit—within the overall context of the White Paper, with a drive for new routes for immigration and with a welcome for the diversity and the culture that it brings in respect of entirely new views here and, I hope, across Europe on the value of inward migration and an understanding of the worldwide movement that is taking place—I ask the House to reject the amendments and to accept the assurances that I am giving after listening and responding to Members on both sides who have put a rational case.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): I support my hon. Friends on the Front Bench, particularly on amendment No. 2. The Home Secretary must know that not a single organisation concerned with the welfare of asylum seekers supports the combination of an accommodation centre for up to 750 people and a remote rural location, and he will recall that on 3 May a number of organisations ranging from the Refugee Council to Amnesty International wrote to him to express their concern about that combination.

Sir Michael Spicer: To add to that list, the Transport and General Workers Union has come out today in support of that position.

Tony Baldry: Yes. We probably all heard Bill Morris on the "Today" programme saying that the policy—the combination of scale and location—was fundamentally flawed. The Government's White Paper, published in February, said that asylum accommodation centres would be judged on other things, including reduced decision times and tighter management of the interview and decision-making process.

The Home Secretary said this afternoon that he was content that people should stay up to six months in accommodation centres. We know from answers given in Committee that up to 80 per cent. of asylum seekers are single young men. We are told that accommodation centres will contain up to 750 people. If the accommodation centres reflect the asylum-seeking population as a whole, at any one time up to 600 single young men will be in such centres; the impression is given that they will be there for six months.

I would like to invite every hon. Member of this House to come and visit the site chosen for the accommodation centre in my constituency. The Home Secretary was candid enough to say that he thought that the consultation up to now had not been as good as it might have been. I say to him that there has not been any consultation up to now. There has been minimal consultation between the Government office for the south-east and the local planning authority on simple planning grounds, but there has not been any consultation with local people.

It is a pity that no Minister has come to visit the proposed site. I wish I could say that the most exciting thing that can happen in the neighbourhood is seeing the traffic lights change. The only problem is that there are no traffic lights. The proposed site is between two villages. There is a pub in one of them, and a village shop in one of them. The nearest town is five miles away. There is no cinema in the town, and no college of further education. Facilities are fairly limited. What will these young men do for up to six months in that centre? They are going to get bored out of their minds. The Home Secretary made some comments earlier about people getting bored in the summer; six months is a very long time.

We were told in Committee that only 8 per cent. of applications actually succeed. That means that a large majority of applications to remain as refugees under the UN convention fail. If people are to remain in remote rural accommodation for up to six months, I predict that a number will just drift away to where communities of their own nationalities live. That will not be to the benefit of the Home Secretary, who wishes to see these accommodation centres succeed.

If we are to have accommodation centres, we require a much greater sense of applications being dealt with as expeditiously as possible. If the impression is simply given that large numbers of people are to be housed in remote locations for up to six months, asylum seekers will find that incredibly frustrating. There is a likelihood that we will start to see a significant number of those asylum seekers, particularly those who predict that their claims may fail, simply fading away because they know that their chances of being deported, even if they are discovered, are fairly remote.

The Home Secretary is determined to have these large accommodation centres in remote rural locations, and no hon. Member need doubt the remoteness of the locations selected. We all know why that is; as he acknowledged this afternoon, the Home Secretary was tight for funds and had to make a deal with the Treasury. The only way in which he could do that was by using existing MOD or other Government land, some way away from London and the south-east. If he wants this to succeed, there needs to be a much greater sense that applications will be dealt with expeditiously, as opposed to the impression of drift that he gave this afternoon.

The idea of 750 people, 600 of whom are single young men, being bored and frustrated in remote rural locations for up to six months suggests that this is a trial destined for failure.

5.30 pm

Simon Hughes: This has been an extremely constructive and conciliatory debate on a controversial subject, and I am grateful to the Home Secretary for that, as he calls the shots by virtue of his office. Let me say to him mischievously that he may have led us into trespassing on the next group of amendments, and indeed the two groups following that, but I understand the reasons: clearly, what he said on the issue of size will determine the views that we take on other matters. I hope that he will offer a similar response when we discuss location, for example.

If I interpret the Home Secretary correctly, he has accepted the Conservative proposal on the siting of the adjudication process, which is welcome, as well as accepting in principle, if not in the absolute detail of the wording, the Liberal Democrat proposal for a six-month provision with a three-month extra opportunity in suitable cases. I understand that that is in relation to families only. I appreciate that that is a priority, and it deals with the issue of children. The Home Secretary and I are more closely associated with each other in our ideas on that than we are with some others of our colleagues in our respective parties.

There remains a big issue in relation to single male asylum seekers. I have experience in my constituency of a centre in which 750 of them were housed for a long time, and I do not think that an indefinite period is an adequate outcome for any centre. I hope that we will discuss that constructively again, and I will be happy to take part in any such discussions. We welcome the Home Secretary's openness to consultation, and we will not press amendments Nos. 164 or 31 to a vote.

Mr. Letwin: I join the hon. Gentleman in thanking the Home Secretary for making significant constructive moves towards achieving consensus. I accept entirely that it will be better to see what the Government can come up with in the House of Lords on the question of adjudicators than to press the motion to a vote. I hope, however, that we will have an opportunity—at 7 o'clock, I think—to vote on amendment No. 2, because I persist in believing that the six-month period, although it might seem rational to those immured in the current culture, is likely to generate all sorts of problems. I want to insist on the 10-week limit.

It is no part of my intention to suggest that the centres should all be located in areas of deprivation. In fact, there is a strong case for their not being located there, for just the same reason as there is a strong case for their not being located in remote rural areas. In each case there are particular difficulties, for both the inhabitants and the local populace. That is why we should try to use the 80 per cent. or so of the country, by habitation, that is neither very deprived nor very remote and rural.

I persist in believing, with the Refugee Council, Amnesty International and others, that city and suburban sites would be better. What really distresses me is that the Home Secretary is not even talking about trialling that proposition. A small number of trials in this domain will not satisfy the urgent requirement for order in a chaotic system, but if we are to have trials—as opposed to a fully fledged, fully working system—they should at least encompass all possibilities, so that we can revisit the argument two or three years from now on the basis of full information. I hope that the Home Secretary will make a concession on that point in due course, but in the meantime I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 3

VISITING COMMITTEE

'(1) The Secretary of State must appoint a committee (to be known as the Visiting Committee) for each accommodation centre.

(2) The Secretary of State shall prescribe the functions of the Visiting Committee by making regulations under this Part.

(3) Those regulations must include provision—

(a) as to the making of visits to the centre by members of the Visiting Committee;

(b) for the hearing of complaints made by persons detained by the Visiting Committee to the Secretary of State;

(c) requiring the making of reports by the Visiting Committee to the Secretary of State;

(d) that every member of the Visiting Committee for an accommodation centre may at any time enter the centre and have free access to every part of it and to every person residing there.

(4) Accommodation centres created under this Part may also be inspected by HM Inspectorate of Prisons and Social Services Inspectorate, whenever they think it appropriate.'.—*[Mr. Malins.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Malins: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 30, in clause 14, page 9, line 2, at end insert—

'( ) For a period of no less than ten years from the commencement of this Act all such accommodation centres shall be publicly owned and their management and employees directly employed by the Home Office or relevant local authority.'.

No. 3, in clause 26, page 12, line 36, leave out—

'The Secretary of State may'

and insert—

'It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to'.

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

No. 40, in page 12, line 36, leave out "may" and insert "shall".

No. 166, in page 13, line 6, at end insert—

'( ) independent legal advice and representation'.

No. 167, in page 13, line 7, leave out paragraphs (i) and (j).

No. 4, in page 13, line 11, at end insert—

'(k) such legal representation and advice as is reasonably required by an asylum applicant in connection with an application for asylum or any appeal resulting therefrom'.

No. 168, in page 13, line 11, at end insert—

'(1A) The Secretary of State may arrange for the following to be provided to a resident of an accommodation centre—

(a) anything which the Secretary of State thinks ought to be provided for the purpose of providing a resident with proper occupation and for the purpose of maintaining good order,

(b) anything which the Secretary of State thinks ought to be provided for a person because of his exceptional circumstances.'.

No. 42, in page 13, line 15, leave out paragraph (b).

No. 43, in clause 27, page 13, line 28, at end insert—

'which shall not be more than 15 hours per day'.

No. 133, in page 13, line 34, leave out "any dependant" and insert "a spouse".

No. 136, in page 13, line 35, leave out—

'and any dependant of his'.

No. 137, in page 13, line 39, leave out—

'resident and any dependant of his'

and insert "dependant".

No. 138, in page 13, line 40, leave out—

'resident and any dependant of his'

and insert "dependant".

No. 44, in page 14, line 1, leave out subsection (7).

No. 131, in page 14, line 10, at end insert—

'(10) a resident who is required to leave the centre under subsections (4) or (5) may appeal to an adjudicator under Part 5 of this Act.'.

Mr. Malins: We move on to a group of amendments relating to the operation of, and conditions and facilities—other than education—at, accommodation centres. I feel sure that new clause 3 will find favour on both sides of the House, for two reasons. First, it would not cost the Government any money; and, secondly, although I cannot be sure, I think that it was my idea.

The House will be interested to know that not one of the amendments that we tabled in Committee was accepted by the Government, save for the triumph achieved by my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson)—she is in her place—who discovered that a particular clause referred to a seventh subsection of the previous clause, even though it had only six subsections. In that regard, she achieved a notable scalp.

Amendment No. 3 would impose a duty on the Government to provide services at accommodation centres, amendment No. 4 would impose a duty on them to provide legal advice, and amendment No. 133 and subsequent amendments deal with dependants. I hope that they and new clause 3 will find favour with the Government.

The establishment of visiting committees is surely a non-controversial issue. Over the years, many of us have been struck by the high quality of the various visiting bodies and committees involved with prisons. I discovered as much in my career as a lawyer, and on my more recent travels as a member of the Home Affairs Committee I have seen the excellent work that visiting committees undertake at prisons. They talk to inmates, hear grievances and make positive suggestions; they are an important safety valve.

Of course, such committees operate in the asylum world to equally good effect. Two months ago, I visited Oakington, as several hon. Members have doubtless done. It is a very well run and orderly establishment; indeed, it struck me in many ways as a contented establishment, in terms both of its staff and of those who stay there. One reason for that is the presence of an active visiting committee. I met Penny Lambert, the chairman of the visiting committee, and several of her colleagues. They are very involved with Oakington. They have made several helpful suggestions to the staff about how life there could be improved, and they have heard from residents at Oakington. They have contributed a great deal to making it a better place, simply through their presence and sympathy, and the safety valve that they offer. I know that there is a difference between a detention centre such as Oakington and an accommodation centre, but I see no reason why something that works well for Oakington could not be set up for the accommodation centres.

We are broadly supportive of the accommodation centre concept. We understand from the Bill that the Government propose to put several important facilities and services in the centres, and we think that that is right. In one or two respects, the Government perhaps do not go far enough. In our opinion, the Government should be delighted to accept new clause 3, which sets up a visiting committee for each accommodation centre, because it has no implications for the Treasury. Nobody has to ask the Treasury for money, because our communities contain well motivated, good people with an interest in various institutions—asylum institutions, prisons and the like—who would be only too keen to start up visiting committees. The longer people will stay at the accommodation centres, the more compelling becomes the argument for the visiting committees, although people stay only briefly at Oakington and the visiting committee works well there. I am sure that the Government will not oppose new clause 3.

The hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) was the Minister in Committee, and I pay personal tribute to her for her kindness throughout our debates and for her dedication and commitment. She is a loss to the Government, although we welcome her replacement, the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Beverley Hughes), to the high post that she has achieved. The hon. Lady and I have had happy dealings before on the Home Affairs Committee. I hope that the atmosphere prevalent in Committee will be replicated today, and it is on that basis that I invite the House to support new clause 3.

Amendment No. 3 was discussed in Committee. It relates to the services that the Home Secretary is to provide at accommodation centres. In Committee, many of us were slightly alarmed that the first line of clause 26, as it is now, provides that the Secretary of State

> "may arrange for the following to be provided to a resident of an accommodation centre".

The amendment would change those words to read:

> "It shall be the duty of the Secretary of State to arrange".

We had a long debate on the issue in Committee. However well intentioned this Home Secretary and Government are, the fact is that the Bill would allow them to choose not to provide the services in question. If the Home Secretary is determined to provide various services, we see no reason why he should not have the duty to do so imposed on him. After all, the facilities, assistance and services provided for in clause 26 will be vital to the well-being of the asylum seekers during their stay. The people who will stay at the accommodation centres may have had terrible journeys and a grim time. They are vulnerable people, and some of them are shattered. Often they need a lot of care and attention when they go to the centres, and many are very young.

I see no reason why the Government should not accept that they have a duty to provide the various services needed at accommodation centres. If the Government insist that the clause should use only the word "may", I believe that that will be because they want to reserve the right not to provide the services if they do not want to. I therefore hope that the amendment will be accepted.

5.45 pm

Amendment No. 4 deals with legal advice, another matter debated in Standing Committee. Many of us believe, along with respected non-governmental organisations in the field, that it is essential that top-class legal advice be provided, on the spot and from the very beginning. One reason why Oakington works well is that great numbers of lawyers from various bodies are available there. For example, the Immigration Advisory Service alone has 54 caseworkers on site. When asylum seekers arrive at Oakington, they are provided, within minutes, with the best skilled legal advice possible. They do not have to travel 20 or 30 miles to a nearby town to find a solicitor, because the legal advice that they need is on hand.

So far, the Government have stubbornly refused to include legal services among the facilities that they must provide at accommodation centres. They say, "Of course we will provide legal services there", but why does that requirement not appear in the Bill? Early legal advice is vital, and makes for efficiency.

The Standing Committee was told by the former Minister, the hon. Member for Wallasey, that there was

> "no doubt whatever that legal services will be freely available in accommodation centres as required."

If so, why does the Bill not make that a requirement? The hon. Lady also said:

> "In the trials, we would certainly want to develop co-located services or access to services".—[*Official Report, Standing Committee E*, 9 May 2002; c. 171.]

Those phrases bear consideration. I assume that the rather weak phrase

> "we would certainly want to develop"

is another way of saying, "We are going to do it." In addition, I have always been confused by the word "co-located". Does it mean "on the site"? I hope so, but if it means "next door", or "down the road", the Government should say so. However, I do not know what the development of co-located services or of access to services will mean in practice.

Moreover, the phrase "access to services" is meaningless if people at accommodation centres are told that the nearest legal services to which they have access are a number of miles away, and that they can make their own way there if they want to. The Government's response on the issue was not very satisfactory.

The Minister who dealt with this matter in Standing Committee did not want the requirement to provide access to legal services to be included in the Bill because, as she told the Committee, the vast majority of legal services are funded not by the Home Office but by the Legal Services Commission, which already has adequate powers. That makes me scratch my head, as I am not sure what it means in practice. I think that she meant that the Legal Services Commission has some money and some powers, and that it is for the commission to decide whether to make legal advice available in the centres. That is not at all satisfactory.

The Minister also referred to another aspect that is very troubling. I only spotted these words again this morning, at an appallingly early hour, when I was looking at today's amendments. The hon. Lady referred to moves to shift funding of NGOs from the Home Office to the Lord Chancellor's Department to ensure that there was no perceived conflict of interest about the Home Office running a system and funding advice to people in it. However, there has been no perceived conflict of interest for many years with the principal organisation providing legal advice and assistance—the Immigration Advisory Service—which has been funded by the Home Office since its inception. I pay tribute to the previous Conservative Government for the level of funding that they provided to the IAS. I also pay sincere tribute to this Government for the level of funding that they have provided to the Immigration Advisory Service. How else could the IAS have its lawyers all around the country in different bases and at Oakington, were it not for Government funding?

During the time that I spent as chairman of the trustees of the Immigration Advisory Service, not once did the then Government ever seek to influence the service in one way or another. Conservative and Labour Governments have always given the IAS the grant and said, "Get on with the job." We have the best system in Europe when it comes to Governments who make immigration and asylum laws and also fund organisations to act against them, without interference. I pay tribute to them for that.

The Government need not trouble themselves about a perceived conflict of interest, but they should trouble themselves about there being a duty on them to provide legal advice on site. I am aided in my argument by all the respective NGOs. The Law Society also believes that asylum seekers should have access to good quality legal advice and representation at all stages of the system. Good quality independent legal advice at the earliest stage saves time and expense. Frontloading the services results in minimising delay and costs.

[Mr. Malins]

The Law Society has carefully considered the Government's comment that access to legal advice and representation is not included in the list of facilities to be provided at accommodation centres, as such services are largely funded by the Legal Services Commission. However, the Law Society says that access to legal advice and representation is of such fundamental importance to the applicant and for the proper and efficient running of the asylum system that it should be included in the Bill.

If the Government remain concerned about funding issues, legal services could be included in the Bill, in the same way as facilities for health and religious observance are provided for in clause 26(1)(g) and (h)—that is, by referring to facilities relating to or facilities for legal services. That would ensure that the Bill provides for access to legal services while still dealing with the Government's concerns about funding, whether those concerns are real or not. I hope that the Government will think again about this important issue.

This part of the Bill relates to the conditions of residents at accommodation centres. A glance at clause 27 reveals that it remains similar, if not identical, to the one that caused all Opposition Members some concern in Committee. Amendments Nos. 133, 136, 137 and 138 would remove, from time to time, the word "dependant" from clause 27. This is the mischief about which I am complaining. Clause 27(4) states:

> "If a resident of an accommodation centre breaches a condition imposed under this section, the Secretary of State may—
>
> (a) require the resident and any dependant of his to leave the centre".

It was hard in Committee to make the Government clarify exactly what conditions could be broken that would give rise to the draconian step of requiring a resident to leave the centre, but many of us felt distinctly uneasy at the prospect of not only the offender but everybody linked to that person, such as a spouse or dependant—who may not have behaved remotely badly—being required to leave the centre.

Subsection (5) states that if a dependant of a resident breaches a condition, the Secretary of State may require the resident and any dependant to leave the centre or authorise the manager of the centre to require the resident and any dependant to leave the centre. Therefore, if someone who is dependent on someone else breaks a condition of residence, not only is the dependant chucked out but so is the resident because of the sins or faults of another.

We need reassurance that someone will not be thrown out of an accommodation centre for breaking a minor condition. The only parallel that I can think of is in bail hostels, where minor infringements are often overlooked. I hope that the Minister can reassure us on that point. I should also like some understanding from the Government about our unease at the prospect that people will, in effect, be treated harshly because of the sins of others. This issue needs a sensitive touch—a light touch—and a realistic approach.

I have outlined my amendments in this group. I commend them strongly, with some hope that the Government will accept them. There cannot be a reason for not accepting the appointment of a visiting committee. There are awfully good reasons, at this stage of the Bill's progress, for the Government to accept this proposal and agree that it is their duty to provide various services and to have the provision of legal advice inserted in the Bill.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): I shall speak briefly to the amendments in this group that outline some of the Liberal Democrats' remaining concerns about accommodation centres. I am conscious that important groups of amendments remain to be debated, so I will not detain the House for long.

Liberal Democrat Members support new clause 3. We believe that a visiting committee would be a helpful addition for the accountability of the new accommodation centres. In amendment No. 30 we express our view that, for the first 10 years at least, there should be a commitment on the part of the Government that the accommodation centres remain in public ownership. We went through this in Committee, where the then Minister, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) was open about the fact that the Government were considering a number of options.

6 pm

In principle, we have general concerns about the use of the private sector for prisons and facilities that deprive an individual of liberty. As the new accommodation centres will receive a great deal of public scrutiny, it is important that there are clear lines of accountability from the centre to Ministers. Obviously, one hopes that nothing will go wrong in any of the centres, but if it does, people will not be satisfied if it is suggested that the fault lay with a particular contracting company. The amendment relates to the establishment of clear lines of accountability and in our view that means retaining the centres in public ownership—at least initially.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): The hon. Gentleman mentioned, as an aside, that he had concerns about the use of the private sector for prisons and the like. Perhaps he is not aware that his colleagues in the Scots Parliament who sit in coalition with Labour are pursuing a private prison route.

Mr. Allan: I certainly am aware of that. In the wonderful federation that is my party, the Scottish party makes its own decisions which reflect its political circumstances. I know that the Minister for Justice has been faced with some difficult decisions as regards prison accommodation in Scotland.

Amendments Nos. 40, 166, 167 and 168 attempt to tease out how the facilities will be provided. We want to consider two forms specifically. The first is what must be provided—like the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) we have included legal advice. We, too, feel strongly that access to good legal advice speeds up the asylum determination process and is not something that the Government, or anyone, should fear—it can facilitate the process and ensure that there are fewer legal errors that could lead to an appeal. The amendment would distinguish between facilities that "shall" or "may" be provided.

Amendment No. 42 relates to our concern about how cash is given to asylum seekers. We understand that the Secretary of State will make regulations governing the handling of cash. It is important for an individual's dignity that they have some cash and some purchasing power—whether the amount is large or small. That is significant even when the basics of life are provided.

We are concerned that currently there is dual provision. The Secretary of State may by regulation determine the amount of cash given to an individual, but the accommodation centre manager may also have that power. The amendment would limit that power to the Secretary of State alone.

Amendment No. 43 would establish the extent to which the powers to require an individual physically to be present at the accommodation centre might be widened to create, in effect, a form of detention. The amendment would limit to 15 the number of hours that an individual was required to be present. We seek an assurance from the Minister that there is no intention that people should remain in the centre for 24 hours, for example—that would clearly move us into the realm of detention.

Amendment No. 44 revisits a subject that we considered in Committee, but about which we are still uncomfortable—the relationship between behaviour in an accommodation centre and the actual asylum claim, which can be a matter of life or death for an individual. We understand that the Government may require an individual to be present in an accommodation centre as part of the terms of their immigration status—they would be allowed into the country on condition that they resided at the centre.

Under clause 27, the Government would take powers, in effect, to evict an individual from an accommodation centre because of their behaviour, and such eviction—as we heard from the hon. Member for Woking—would also apply to their dependants. There is a lack of clarity in the provision, in that a condition of immigration law may require a person to remain at the centre, yet their behaviour might lead to their removal. That could give rise to conflict, especially if the individual was pursuing an asylum claim, as they might find that they were in breach of their immigration conditions, thus prejudicing their claim. If an individual has done something wrong, sanctions need to be taken, but if those sanctions force an individual to breach their immigration conditions because they are required to leave the accommodation specified under those conditions, that is a matter for concern.

I shall not speak further at this stage, save to point out that there are some important amendments in a later group.

Sir Michael Spicer: As we have already heard, no one likes the Bill's provisions for accommodation centres—neither the Refugee Council, nor the Transport and General Workers Union. The Government seem to be the only people who are pressing them.

One of the reasons for that dislike is the cavalier way in which the Government are discussing the resources required and the provision of facilities. Amendment No. 3 is much more important than meets the eye because it would put a duty on the Government to be much more specific.

There have been several examples of the Government's cavalier approach to the assessment of facilities at a proposed accommodation unit adjoining my constituency. I recently asked the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he had made of the additional funding required for health services if a centre was built in that part of south Worcestershire. The answer was:

> "As yet, no assessment has been made in respect of any additional health or social care needs."—[*Official Report*, 24 April 2002; Vol. 384, c. 356W.]

Such vagueness about the provision of facilities is serious and it goes right across the board—deep into the Home Office.

Earlier today, the former Under-Secretary at the Home Office, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), made a dignified apology about misinformation on figures that she had given the House. We are not dealing with size at present but it is obviously relevant to the provision of facilities; it is certainly relevant to information.

On this occasion, I do not blame the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, who was incompletely briefed on the matter. However, I am seriously worried about the poor information from the Home Office on the provision of facilities. That is why it is so important that the Government accept amendment No. 3.

The planning inquiry constitutes a specific reason for the Government to be less muddled about the facts and information they give about the provision of facilities and services in respect of their proposals. I understand that there will be a proper planning system, so if the Government continue to be muddled and misinformed when they provide information to the planning inspectors, it will be serious for two reasons. First, the result could be a judicial review—but that is for the Government to worry about. Secondly, however, the acceptability of the planning system could be undermined.

If people think that the planning arrangements are a fix, with the Government providing false information about the facilities and the local requirements for the fulfilment of the policy, that could have a serious effect on the credibility of the planning procedure. Above all, the process must be fair. I tell my constituents not only that the planning procedure is a good thing but that it will make a fair judgment as to whether the proposals are right.

If the Government continue to give false, bad or muddled information about facilities, the results for the planning procedure could be serious, so I hope that they will consider amendment No. 3 carefully. It imposes a duty on them to provide proper, clear information about facilities.

Tony Baldry: I shall be brief. No one could argue with the proposals for visiting committees, but such committees would, in essence, be concerned with the welfare of asylum seekers. As the accommodation centres will be sited in remote, rural areas, will the Government consider setting up liaison committees?

When I was first elected, there was a big United States Air Force base in my constituency where about 750 young men were stationed. Even with 750 disciplined service men, it was necessary to set up an ad hoc liaison committee, organised and operated by the district council, which provided the secretariat. Representatives of the parish council could hold regular meetings with the personnel who ran the base.

It would be extremely helpful if Ministers suggested to local communities that they were prepared to establish similar committees, where representatives of the parishes

[Tony Baldry]

surrounding the accommodation centres could hold regular meetings with the management of the centres to raise matters of concern to the local community. Local people could then have confidence that their concerns would be addressed in a timely, proper and systematic way. That would ensure that they were not frustrated and that they could express concerns and grievances. *[Interruption.]* I hope that Ministers will be kind enough to give the House their attention because if they want these experiments to work, they must be aware of the concerns of communities about the siting of accommodation centres.

Such concerns must be addressed, but given that none of the centres will be sited in the constituencies of Labour Members, no Labour Member will be able to express those concerns in the Division Lobby. As no Minister has taken the trouble to visit one of the sites or visit or talk to representatives of local communities, the least that they could do is give the House their attention for the very short period that the Government have deigned to give Members to discuss their concerns this evening.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tony Baldry: I will in a moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) raised the issue of resources, and was echoed by my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire (Sir Michael Spicer). I reinforce what my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire said, and I want to ask a further question. The Bill makes it clear, in many instances, that if people misbehave in accommodation centres they will be expelled. What will happen to them? Where will they go? Moreover, what local police resources will be used in relation to such people? If someone decides not to return to the Bicester accommodation centre, will Thames Valley police be notified? If they are notified, will they be expected to find and apprehend those individuals? If so, what assessment, if any, has the Home Office made—after all, the matter is one for that Department—of the effect on the resources of Thames Valley police?

My information is that, as yet, not only has the Home Office not consulted other Departments or organisations such as the health service or education or social services in Oxfordshire, but there has been little if any consultation with Thames Valley police on the likely impact that the accommodation centre will have on their resources.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tony Baldry: I will in a moment. If Ministers cannot even liaise with and consult organisations within their own Department, what hope is there for a sensible assessment of the demands on other areas of Government activity?

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Tony Baldry: I should give way to the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) first.

Mr. Dawson: I am most grateful. Does the hon. Gentleman realise how tedious it is to hear the nimby argument paraded over and over again? His party is supposed to support accommodation centres. I, with great qualms, support them. I would support the principle of accommodation centres coming to my constituency, and he should do so in relation to his.

Tony Baldry: My constituents—and other constituents—find it deeply patronising that their concerns are described as nimbyist or, as some have described them, racist. They find that deeply offensive, as they are raising serious concerns. More than 10,000 of my constituents have petitioned the House sensibly and rationally to ask for a public inquiry into this matter. Why do they want that at the end of the planning process? They want it so that their concerns can be rationally and sensibly examined by an independent inspector. That is all that they ask for, sensibly and reasonably.

The argument made by the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre would be much stronger if he could find a single organisation concerned with refugees and asylum seekers that supports his argument. But every organisation from Amnesty International to the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux to the British Medical Association to the British Red Cross to the Refugee Council opposes the combination of size and location.

6.15 pm

Mr. Dawson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tony Baldry: Not again. If the hon. Gentleman cannot get his mind around the policy concerns of such organisations, he is clearly not bothering to read the post that he receives each morning.

The House needs to discuss other important groups of amendments. Ministers need to pay attention to how to meet the concerns of local residents. In addition to visiting committees, therefore, I hope that they will also consider the establishment of liaison committees and listen carefully to what has been said about the provision of services. When consultation takes place with local authorities, and if there is a public inquiry, can we have full, coherent and candid answers about what demands accommodation centres will place on local providers of local services?

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): I hope that hon. Members will forgive me for trying to be as brief as possible, as I know that there is a desire to move on to other groups of amendments.

With regard to new clause 3, I hope that it will provide reassurance if I say that we have already been thinking about the type of committee envisaged. With regard to the remarks made by the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) about a possible liaison committee, we can take into account all sorts of models, and that type of committee is not necessarily ruled out. Clearly, it is important for the public and asylum seekers to have confidence in the policies and the way in which we carry them out. An independent body of the type envisaged by the new clause is one approach. I hope that that will provide reassurance, and that new clause 3 will not be pressed to a vote.

With regard to amendment No. 30, we do not believe that it is sensible to rule out the option of contracting out the running of accommodation centres. Successful examples of such contracts exist, and contracting out is a familiar method of running some National Asylum Support Service accommodation and removal centres.

Annabelle Ewing: The Minister mentioned that there were examples of successful contracting out. Can she list them?

Ms Winterton: I am prepared to write to the hon. Lady with other examples.

The important thing is public accountability, on which the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) is right to focus. We want to ensure that the public and asylum seekers have confidence in the system. We also believe that the private running of an accommodation centre—to standards set by the Home Office—can deliver what we want; it can deliver public accountability. Whichever method is adopted, we want appropriate partnerships and liaison to be established with a range of bodies such as local, health and education authorities, charities and non-governmental organisations. They all have a role to play in that ongoing process. The whole point of a trial is to identify what works best. We therefore want the flexibility to do that within the trial period.

We cannot accept the Conservative amendment No. 3, which would place a duty on us to provide all the facilities listed in clause 26 to residents of accommodation centres. That also applies to the similar Liberal Democrat amendments Nos. 40, 167 and 168. If we are to have a genuine trial, we should not have a fixed concept about what might work. We have already said that we are prepared to consider a different configuration of accommodation centres in response to concerns about 750 beds. A smaller centre may affect the types of services that it is practical or necessary for the Home Office to provide. We believe that it is prudent to be prepared for all eventualities. We would not want the Bill to place an obligation on the Home Office to arrange to provide something that it would not always necessarily be sensible for us to provide. I hope that hon. Members accept that that is why we do not want to be constrained by the amendments.

Amendments Nos. 4 and 166, taken with amendments Nos. 3 and 40, would place a duty on us to provide legal advice and representation to accommodation centre residents. As hon. Members said, we had a substantial debate on that in Committee and explained why it is unnecessary to take the power to provide legal advice to accommodation centre residents. Powers already exist in the Access to Justice Act 1999 to provide legal help via the Community Legal Service. They place a requirement on the Legal Services Commission to meet local needs. Powers in clause 93 enable the Home Office to fund organisations that provide advice to asylum appellants.

A duty to provide legal advice and representation to accommodation centre residents is a different matter. Let me re-emphasise that we are committed to providing access to free, independent, quality legal advice to residents of accommodation centres. That advice will be provided and funded by the Legal Services Commission through on-site provision, local supply or a combination of the two. The precise arrangements, however, will depend on the location of each accommodation centre, but all centres will provide facilities for use by solicitors and advice agencies. It would be distinctly odd to place a duty on the Secretary of State to provide legal advice to those in accommodation centres when other immigration legislation contains no equivalent duty for the generality of asylum seekers, even those who are detained at Oakington, for example.

Mr. Vaz: There is obviously a difference between a power and a duty. Is my hon. Friend saying that she is satisfied that current legislation means that appropriate legal advice will be provided at each centre?

Ms Winterton: Yes, I am, and I hope that my comments have reassured hon. Members.

Amendment No. 42 would delete subsection (2)(b) of clause 26, which enables us to make regulations requiring the manager of an accommodation centre to determine the amount of money to be provided to an accommodation centre resident. Hon. Members expressed their fears about that in Committee. I hope that I reassure them when I say that their fears are unfounded. If we contract out the operation of accommodation centres, there will be no question of a private sector manager making arbitrary decisions on the amount of cash paid to asylum seekers. Equally, there will be no question of a civil servant manager or a manager from the not-for-profit sector making arbitrary decisions. Clause 26(2)(b) enables a centre manager only to determine the amount of money in accordance with the regulations. The regulations will provide the safeguard because we will ensure that they do not give the centre manager the discretion to make arbitrary decisions.

We also believe that amendment No. 43 is unnecessary. As we explained in Committee, administrative law requires the Secretary of State and the centre manager to act reasonably. That is implicit and enforceable. They will be able to impose residence conditions only in accordance with regulations subject to the draft affirmative procedure. On the length of time that people are required to be present in the accommodation centre in any 24-hour period, we said in Committee that we envisaged the 12 hours specified in the Opposition amendment tabled then to be at the upper end of the scale.

As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said, the atmosphere in the centres is the key. We will provide a range of activities to enable asylum seekers to spend their time in the centres productively. There will be incentives to remain on site as well as requirements to be there. If we get it right, we hope that asylum seekers will recognise that what we are asking of them and what we are offering them is in their best interests.

We also cannot accept amendments Nos. 133, 136 and 137. The whole asylum support regime is structured to enable us to treat asylum seekers and their dependants as a group. That is what the National Asylum Support Service currently does. Again, it would be distinctly odd for us to take a different approach in accommodation centres. I understand that hon. Members might think it unfair to evict the dependants of an asylum seeker from an accommodation centre because of a breach of conditions committed by the principal applicant, or vice versa. However, that is what happens under the Asylum Support Regulations 2000.

The consequences of a breach of conditions for the family as a whole will be made clear to asylum seekers at the outset and they will be briefed about their

[Ms Winterton]

obligations. We do not think it unreasonable that the actions of one member of a family should have consequences for the rest of the group. That is what happens already and it would be odd if the regulations on accommodation centres were different.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): On that point, will the hon. Lady give an assurance that a light touch will be used? It is possible that an asylum seeker will be in a remote rural location far from the accommodation centre and physically unable to return to it because of a lack of public transport, which would be no fault of theirs. Will sympathetic discretion be used such circumstances?

Ms Winterton: Of course discretion will be used in all such circumstances. Such decisions would not be taken lightly.

I hope that hon. Members agree that amendment No. 131 is unnecessary. I understand entirely the concern to ensure that asylum seekers have a right of appeal against any decision to withdraw support by requiring someone to leave a centre. We agree with that. As we explained in Committee, a right of appeal already exists by virtue of clause 45, which inserts new section 103 into the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. It gives a right of appeal to the asylum support adjudicator against any decision to stop providing support under clause 15 or section 95 of the 1999 Act, or both.

Mr. Malins: I am grateful to the Minister for her kind response on visiting committees. That is most encouraging. I shall not seek to press my other amendments to a Division. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

New Clause 8

COMPENSATION FOR DEPRECIATION OF PROPERTY VALUE

'Compensation shall be paid to owners and landlords of dwelling houses for any depreciation in the value of such property caused by the establishment under section 14 of accommodation centres, in accordance with the provisions of Part 1 of the Land Compensation Act 1973.'.—*[Tony Baldry.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Tony Baldry: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 28, in clause 14, page 8, line 42, after "persons", insert—

'in locations suitable to the cultural and other needs of those to be accommodated.'.

No. 6, in page 9, line 2, at end insert—

'(3) No accommodation centre established under this section shall hold more than 200 persons.'.

No. 1, in page 9, line 2, at end insert—

'(4) An accommodation centre shall only be established after the Secretary of State is satisfied that the proposed location is suitable to the needs of the persons to be accommodated therein'.

No. 29, in page 9, line 2, at end insert—

'( ) Each accommodation centre shall hold a maximum of 250 people at any one time, except where expressly agreed between the Secretary of State and the relevant local authority.'.

Tony Baldry: I hope to have the support of my hon. Friends so that I can press the new clause to a Division. I also hope that it will be possible to have a separate vote on amendments Nos. 6 and 1. I know that my hon. Friends on the Front Bench would welcome that.

I note that amendment No. 6 was tabled by the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), who intervened on me earlier to accuse my constituents of being nimbyist. The amendment stipulates that no accommodation centre should hold more than 200 persons. I hope that when we vote on it, the hon. Gentleman will have the courage to support his decision to table it.

On Second Reading and in Committee, Ministers made it clear on numerous occasions that accommodation centres are an experiment. Indeed, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) said:

> "As we have no experience of running such centres, we have no hard and fast view about different scales.
>
> Ahead of a trial, I have no idea about the answers. The Bill will give us the power to trial . . . The trial will allow us to find out what works, and we can proceed from that point."—*[Official Report, Standing Committee E,* 7 May 2002; c. 74–75.]

That was a fair acknowledgement by the Minister conducting the Bill through Committee that the Government are engaged in an experiment. There is no precedent for such an experiment in this country; indeed, there is no precedent anywhere in Europe. Although there are accommodation centres for asylum seekers elsewhere in Europe, none has anything like as many as 750 people living in it at any one time, as Ministers acknowledged in Committee.

6.30 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I have been listening at length to the hon. Gentleman's speeches, and they all come down to one point. He seems to think that urban areas, where services and facilities are already under pressure, and boroughs such as mine, which has more than 5,000 refugees, rather than the 750 that he is talking about, should continue to bear all the costs and pressures of the asylum system. As an MP representing an urban constituency, I think that his whole approach is one of nimbyism.

Tony Baldry: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman was in his place when an earlier intervention on that point was made. If that is his reaction to my remarks, he clearly has not been listening to them. Furthermore, such interventions display considerable intolerance on the part of Labour Members. My first contribution to these proceedings lasted no longer than six minutes, but the hon. Gentleman seeks to give the impression that Conservative Members have been speaking at great length. I speak as a Member of Parliament who faces the prospect of an accommodation centre being sited in his constituency, and I believe that all my comments have been sensible and proportionate.

If the hon. Gentleman thinks that being concerned about a liaison committee or interested in the centre's impact on the resources of the local police and health service signifies nimbyism, he is not serving his own community very well. If he and his colleagues had been reading their post, they would know that every organisation from Amnesty International to the British Red Cross is opposed to the proposals. The comments made by the general secretary of the TGWU on the "Today" programme this morning, in which he said that the proposal is fundamentally flawed, clearly fell on deaf ears.

I am conscious that there is not much time for this debate, so I hope that I can continue without further such interventions from Labour Members, who seem to feel that any sensible, constructive opposition or comment on the Bill can simply be dismissed as nimbyism. The experiment by the Government is having an impact on my constituents. That impact is not hypothetical or possible; it is immediate. In the days following the Government's announcement that the outskirts of Bicester may be the site of an accommodation centre for asylum seekers, I was visited in my surgery by constituents who had seen the sale of their home fall through.

Jeremy Corbyn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tony Baldry: No, there is very little time and I want to make several comments.

These were people coming up to the exchange of contracts who now found their property unsaleable. [HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] Because the prospective purchasers had withdrawn. That situation is not hypothetical, but real.

Mr. Luff: Labour Members are demonstrating rather appalling intolerance and an ignorance of reality. As my hon. Friend knows, in my constituency, where there is a foot and mouth disease burial site 300 yd from the proposed site of an accommodation centre for asylum centres, every one of the small number of houses affected is completely unsaleable. They are all on the market and there are no takers for any of them. Some of those people desperately need to get on with their lives, and they cannot do so because of the Government. Would not it be right for the Government to buy those properties and then sell them when the market recovers?

Tony Baldry: Yes.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tony Baldry: No. I want to make my speech.

The state has decided, for whatever reason, that it wants to take action because it believes that there will be a greater good for the state as a whole, but in doing so it is having a direct impact on the lives of individuals and on the value of their property. In those circumstances, it must be right, in natural justice and in equity, for the state to compensate those individuals.

When the M40 was built through my constituency, those affected by motorway noise were granted compensation. When, as a consequence of the change of flight paths from USAF Upper Heyford, aircraft noise increased substantially over a number of villages in my constituency, and it could be demonstrated that the value of people's properties had fallen as a consequence, the Ministry of Defence gave an ex gratia payment based on the change in the value of the property. There was a clear recognition that, in the interests of national security and of the state, it was sensible to change the flight paths, but as a consequence of that action by the state, a number of individuals suffered and it was right and proper that the state compensated them.

That depreciation in property value was not fictional, notional or imagined; any loss had to be determined and quantified by professional chartered surveyors acting on behalf of the claimants and by surveyors acting for the MOD. However, when a loss could be shown and agreed, compensation was made. I am not going as far as that in my new clause. The Land Compensation Act 1973 does not go so far as to say that there should be total compensation for any depreciation in the value of a property; it says that if the state decides to carry out certain works, householders should be compensated for the impact of those works on their property.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I offer what I hope will be comfort to the hon. Gentleman's constituents. He is rightly concerned with their anxiety that the value of their property will plummet if 750 asylum seekers are sited nearby. May I reassure them? London and the south-east, which carries by far the largest number of asylum seekers and refugees in the country, is an area in which property prices have risen to astronomical heights, and they continue to rise. It could well be that the siting of an accommodation centre on the outskirts of Bicester will be followed by a property boom.

Tony Baldry: Such a fatuous comment will be met by my constituents with the reaction that it deserves. I extend to the hon. Lady a genuine invitation to my next constituency surgery so that she can put that point to them. I hope that she will have the courage to do so. It is easy to make cheap points in the House of Commons, but it will be different when she has to look families in the face and tell them that property prices in her constituency are going up, so the house sale for which they had been hoping for months and which has just fallen through is just tough luck. I hope that she will come to my constituency—she will be very welcome.

Glenda Jackson: I am grateful, and I shall of course accept the hon. Gentleman's kind invitation—if he will accept an invitation from me to visit one of my advice surgeries and meet some of my constituents who are unable to find not only somewhere to buy, but somewhere to rent in this city, because property prices continue to rise.

Tony Baldry: Of course I am happy—*[Interruption.]* Of course I am happy to come to the hon Lady's constituency—indeed, I visited it on several occasions when I was a Minister for housing. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman, but let me remind the House that we are dealing with a serious matter that should be debated in an orderly manner.

Tony Baldry: The hon. Lady's second point was something of a non sequitur, but as she has mentioned it, I shall ask her and the Minister a question arising from a point that was not made clear during the consultation with

[Tony Baldry]

local authorities. About 10 per cent. of asylum seekers have valid claims; therefore, on a six-month basis, about 75 individuals or families from a centre will be found to have a claim to remain in the UK. Is it the Government's intention that the local authority in which the centre is sited will have responsibility to accommodate those people? So far, the Government have given no explanation of such matters to local authorities or local people.

To return to my central point, if there is no loss, there cannot be compensation. Compensation is possible only if there is a demonstrable statutory loss. I see no reason why the Government should resist the amendment, which is on all fours with existing legislation and precedents relating to compensation. It would be extremely perverse if compensation were possible in relation to every other Government activity, but, simply because accommodation centres are an experiment or trial, the Government were unwilling to grant compensation to householders who suffer real, not hypothetical, loss.

The fact that the centres are to be established as a trial or experiment is all the more reason why there should be written into the Bill a statutory system whereby people may be granted compensation. I hope that the Minister will make it clear that the Government acknowledge that where the state intervenes for the benefit of the state but individuals lose as a consequence, it is right in natural justice and equity that those individuals are compensated.

Mr. Dawson: That was the most appalling speech that I have heard in my five years as a Member of Parliament. The hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) asked whether I would go through the Lobby in support of amendment No. 6. I assure him that specially trained and built for speed and strength wild horses could not drag me through the Lobby to support the Tories against the Labour Government. Monkeys, if they sit at typewriters long enough, might eventually come up with a work—

Mr. Luff: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When an hon. Member has put his name to an amendment, is he not under some obligation to vote in accordance with that fact?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair.

6.45 pm

Mr. Dawson: I am happy to answer that point. The hon. Member for Banbury destroyed the argument by the way in which he introduced it into his speech.

Although I have some sympathy with the proposal that accommodation centres should be as small as is feasible, and a great deal of sympathy with the notion that people should remain in them for as short a time as possible, it is vital that the House recognises the position described by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson), wherein certain communities are under enormous pressure. There is therefore a great responsibility on every Member of Parliament to acknowledge that asylum seekers and people who want to come to this country should be made welcome. They are people of skill, intelligence and resilience whom we should welcome into our communities.

Rather than stand here and, as has already been done many times this afternoon, spout reasons why accommodation centres should not be established in various parts of the country, I say that they should be established throughout the country. I would welcome an accommodation centre in my constituency, and I think that my constituents would welcome it too.

Mr. Malins: I rise to speak to amendments Nos. 6 and 1. I judge that my hon. Friends the Members for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), for West Worcestershire (Sir Michael Spicer) and for Banbury (Tony Baldry), who have been in their places for the whole debate, have throughout spoken on behalf of their constituents with great realism, sense, sensitivity and humanity. I am proud to be associated with each of them, with what they have said and with their approach to the problems.

The hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) made accusations against my hon. Friends' attitudes to the size and location of accommodation centres. How wrong he is to do so. What does he say to the 10 respected organisations—international names; I will not run through them, but he knows who they are—that wrote to the Home Secretary on 3 May outlining concerns identical to those expressed by my hon. Friends? Does he say that those organisations are wrong? With all their experience, they wrote:

> "we are greatly concerned at both the locations of the eight potential sites for Accommodation Centres to house asylum seekers and the proposal that the four confirmed sites should house up to 750 people each."

Jeremy Corbyn: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Dawson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Malins: I will give way to the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn), because I know that he has been desperate to intervene.

Jeremy Corbyn: Is the hon. Gentleman not being a little disingenuous and deliberately confusing the issue of organisations that have legitimate concerns, shared by many of us, about the way in which asylum seekers are treated with the attitude taken by his hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), which is basically one of total opposition to the presence of any asylum seekers anywhere near any of his constituents?

Mr. Malins: My hon. Friend's attitude is nothing of the sort. He has advanced good, sound arguments. If the hon. Member for Islington, North is saying that he has legitimate concerns about size and location, let us see whether he follows us into the Lobby in a few minutes' time. Despite his comments, I doubt that he will be able to do so.

Mr. Luff: May I make it absolutely clear that my constituents would welcome the opportunity to share with the rest of the country the burden of asylum seekers? The problem is the manner in which the Government propose to do it. The diocese of Worcester, whose bishops are no supporters of the Conservative party, has said that it opposes the Government's proposals because the Churches cannot make their distinctive contribution to making people welcome because of the concentration of numbers. We could more effectively make smaller groups of asylum seekers welcome in Worcester.

Mr. Malins: My hon. Friend makes his point well. I shall be grateful for an opportunity to divide the House on amendment No. 6, when the time comes. That amendment relates entirely to accommodation centres not holding more than 200 persons.

I need not go through the arguments. One of the tragedies of this place—frankly, it is a disgrace—is that at ten minutes to 7 tonight there will not be a chance for us to get on to vital debates on other matters. That saddens me—*[Interruption.]* The Home Secretary may say that from a sedentary position, but dozens of Labour and Conservative Back Benchers want to speak on those important issues. Suffice it to say that in Committee I inferred from the words of a number of Labour Back Benchers that they had great sympathy for my proposal that no accommodation centre should hold more than 200 or 250 people. I am looking at the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard).

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): Do not put words in my mouth.

Mr. Malins: I remember what the hon. Gentleman said in Committee, and I look forward to his joining us in the Lobby shortly.

Mr. Gerrard: I wish to move an amendment, in a group of amendments that we will not reach, which would make significant changes to the Bill. If we had spent less time on futile debate, we would have reached it.

Mr. Malins: I am sorry that we will not reach those amendments because the hon. Gentleman has a seriously good reputation in the field of asylum and refugees.

Amendment No. 1 proposes that an accommodation centre should

> "only be established after the Secretary of State is satisfied that the proposed location is suitable to the needs of the persons to be accommodated therein".

I shall say little else, except to repeat the words of respected non-governmental organisations, which said in their letter of 3 May that situating centres

> "away from urban areas is likely to lead to isolation and potential institutionalisation."

They went on to say:

> "There are . . . financial and social benefits from siting smaller Accommodation Centres in urban areas rather than as proposed."

They also said that

> "smaller Centres in urban areas . . . are likely to blend more easily into the existing environment with consequent reduced tension among the resident population".

It is vital that the Home Secretary listens not just to experts outside the House but to the members of the Opposition who are urging him to establish small centres in suitable areas and, equally importantly, many Labour supporters who, if they had a chance, would vote with us tonight.

Mr. Allan: I shall briefly introduce amendments Nos. 28 and 29, which were tabled by my hon. Friends and me and echo the concerns of the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins). We take seriously the concerns of people outside the House, who believe that smaller accommodation centres in appropriate locations would be more fitting—*[Interruption.]* The Home Secretary is right to say "Sheffield, Hallam" from a sedentary position; a good accommodation centre was set up during the Kosovan airlift at Folkwood school in a suburb of my constituency, allowing individuals access to the facilities of the city. The arrangement worked well, and local people felt so too.

We are trying to be constructive. Appropriate accommodation centres can work, but we do not want the Government to go ahead with larger centres in inappropriate locations, only for Opposition Members to return to the House in two or three years' time to say "Told you so". I would rather not go through that painful experience; the centres should be sited appropriately from the outset. I hope that we will be able to have a separate vote on amendment No. 28, which refers to the appropriateness of the location. I, too, regret the fact that we have not had time to debate more groups of amendments.

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): We all accept that, as Members of Parliament, we are obliged to represent the views of our constituents in the House, but it is a great pity that the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) spoke three times at length on the same issue—he does not want an accommodation centre in his constituency—which regrettably means that we have not reached the next group of amendments on which many Members wished to speak.

Mr. Malins: Does the Minister accept that it is not three modest contributions from my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) that have cost us the later debates but the Government's insistence, day after day, on driving matters through the House without giving us a proper chance to debate them?

Beverley Hughes: I do not accept that for a moment. Opposition Members spent an hour debating the format of our proceedings and on three occasions the hon. Member for Banbury put his point of view.

Annabelle Ewing: Will the Minister give way?

Beverley Hughes: No, I shall make progress.

The hon. Gentleman repeated the same points over and over, at the expense not of Ministers but of other Members.

I must tell the hon. Member for Banbury that new clause 8 is unacceptable not only because it cuts across part 1 of the Land Compensation Act 1973 and is unworkable but because it challenges some of the most fundamental principles of planning law. Part 1 requires compensation to be paid where physical factors arising from the use of public works cause depreciation in land value. Those factors are noise, vibration, smell, fumes, smoke, artificial lighting and so on. I do not believe, and I do not think that anyone could possibly believe, that any of those factors will arise from the building of accommodation centres anywhere.

[Beverley Hughes]

Part 1 is a remedy for people who suffer nuisance from a public development but cannot pursue a claim in the courts, as promoters of a scheme have statutory immunity from prosecution. To give compensation for depreciation caused by the mere existence of a normal development would cut across the principles of planning law. We therefore do not accept the intention behind the new clause, and even if we did, we would have to rewrite part 1 to deliver it.

On the hon. Gentleman's points about consultation and involvement, my predecessor Lord Rooker agreed to visit sites before changes in ministerial responsibility were made.

Tony Baldry: That is news to me.

Beverley Hughes: It may be news to the Opposition, but it is true. I have made arrangements through my private office to implement my noble Friend's decision, and shall go to the hon. Gentleman's constituency in the next two or three weeks and talk to people there and in other locations.

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend is very brave.

Beverley Hughes: If I can face up to the Prison Officers Association, I can certainly face up to the hon. Member for Banbury and his constituents.

Amendments Nos. 1 and 28 are a Trojan horse for the Opposition's argument that all accommodation centres should be in urban areas. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has already made it clear that we do not accept that premise. The National Asylum Support Service currently disperses asylum seekers to cluster areas. The top 10 locations—those receiving the highest numbers of asylum seekers—are Glasgow, Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle, Sheffield, Bradford, Nottingham, Leeds and Wolverhampton. We are not prepared to accept the premise that places with the most experience of accepting asylum seekers should continue to be the only ones that do so. Having said that, this is a trial and if the accommodation centres work as we expect, we will be willing to explore a variety of locations; indeed, we will want to do so.

The other amendments deal with size. We have partly covered that issue and my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary said on Second Reading that we would proceed with a smaller accommodation centre. In terms of including a limit in the Bill—

It being Seven o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to Order [this day] put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

The House divided: Ayes 142, Noes 408.

Division No. 260] **[7 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dr. Julian Lewis and
Mr. Desmond Swayne.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry

Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blair, Rt Hon Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles
(Norwich S)
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
(Copeland)
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie
(Welwyn Hatfield)
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester* [illegible]
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill

Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. Phil Woolas.

Question accordingly negatived.

MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *then proceeded to put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Clause 14

ESTABLISHMENT OF CENTRES

Amendment proposed: No. 28, in page 8, line 42, after "persons", insert—

'in locations suitable to the cultural and other needs of those to be accommodated.'.—*[Simon Hughes.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 194, Noes 345.

Division No. 261] **[7.14 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, Oliver
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*

Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Bob Russell and
Mrs. Annette L. Brooke.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Ha[illegible], Da[illegible]d
H[illegible] Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, To[illegible] *Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg

Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*

Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. Phil Woolas.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed: No. 6, in page 9, line 2, at end insert—

'(3) No accommodation centre established under this section shall hold more than 200 persons.'.—*[Mr. Malins.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 189, Noes 338.

Division No. 262] **[7.27 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James

Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory

Baron, John
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles

Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mercer, Patrick
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Price, Adam
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, Rt Hon Mrs Gillian
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo

Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Wishart, Pete
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dr. Julian Lewis and
Mr. Laurence Robertson.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James

Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. Phil Woolas.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 15

SUPPORT FOR DESTITUTE ASYLUM-SEEKER

Amendment proposed: No. 2, in page 9, line 6, after 'centre', insert—

'for a maximum period of 10 weeks'.—*[Mr. Letwin.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 126, Noes 401.

Division No. 263] **[7.40 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John
Beggs, Roy
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Curry, Rt Hon David
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Francois, Mark
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Horam, John
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark
Randall, John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dr. Julian Lewis and
Mr. Laurence Robertson.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris

Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Oaten, Mark
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel

Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul
Tynan, Bill
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 16

ASYLUM-SEEKER: DEFINITION

Amendment made: No. 214, in page 9, line 30, at end insert—

'( ) he is in the United Kingdom,'.—*[Beverley Hughes.]*

Clause 17

DESTITUTION: DEFINITION

Amendments made: No. 252, in page 10, line 6, at end insert "both".

No. 253, in page 10, line 10, at end insert "both".—*[Beverley Hughes.]*

Clause 21

PERSON SUBJECT TO UNITED KINGDOM ENTRANCE CONTROL

Amendment made: No. 256, in page 11, line 30, leave out from "centre" to "he" in line 32 and insert—

'by virtue of section 23 or 27'.—*[Beverley Hughes.]*

Clause 31

EDUCATION: GENERAL

Amendments made: No. 259, in page 16, line 38, after "school", insert—

'(for which purpose a reference to the appropriate authority shall be taken as a reference to the person (or persons) responsible for the provision of education at the accommodation centre)'.

No. 260, in page 16, line 38, after "school,", insert—

'( ) section 329A of the Education Act 1996 (c.56) (review or assessment of educational needs at request of responsible body) shall have effect as if—

(i) an accommodation centre were a relevant school for the purposes of that section,

(ii) a child for whom education is provided at an accommodation centre under section 26(1)(f) were a registered pupil at the centre, and

(iii) a reference in section 329A to the responsible person in relation to an accommodation centre were a reference to any person providing education at the centre under section 26(1)(f),'.—*[Beverley Hughes.]*

Clause 33

"PRESCRIBED": ORDERS AND REGULATIONS

Amendments made: No. 215, in page 17, line 41, at end insert—

'( ) include consequential, transitional or incidental provision.'.

No. 257, in page 18, line 9, leave out "and".

No. 258, in page 18, line 10, at end insert—

', and

( ) section 35.'.—*[Beverley Hughes.]*

Mr. Gerrard: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. You will be aware that we were unable to reach the amendments in my name, starting with amendment No. 83, before 7 o'clock. Although Members of this House might understand why that happened, it will be difficult for people outside this place to understand why we have failed to debate what is perhaps the issue of most interest to those looking at the Bill. Is it possible for you to try to avoid this in future, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I appreciate that you do not control the timetable motion, but when it is obvious that there are matters of interest to be debated, could you discuss the matter with the parties involved so that we can reach important amendments?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There is not a role for the Chair in this regard. These matters are decided either through the usual channels or by a motion before the House that is discussed and agreed, as happened this afternoon. While I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman, who was not able to bring his amendments before the House, I am afraid that it was out of my hands.

New Clause 14

APPEAL FROM WITHIN UNITED KINGDOM: UNFOUNDED HUMAN RIGHTS OR ASYLUM CLAIM

'(1) This section applies to an appeal under section 66(1) against an immigration decision on an application which is made wholly or partly on either or both of the grounds specified in section 77(4)(a) and (b).

(2) A person who is in the United Kingdom may not bring an appeal to which this section applies in reliance on section 77(4) if the Secretary of State certifies that the application mentioned in subsection (1) above is clearly unfounded in so far as made on the grounds specified in section 77(4)(a) or (b) (or both).

(3) A person who is in the United Kingdom may not bring an appeal to which this section applies in reliance on section 77(4) if the Secretary of State certifies that—

(a) it is proposed to remove the person to a country of which he is not a national or citizen, and

(b) there is no reason to believe that the person's rights under the Human Rights Convention will be breached in that country.

(4) In determining whether a person in relation to whom a certificate has been issued under subsection (3) may be removed from the United Kingdom, the country specified in the certificate is to be regarded as—

(a) a place where a person's life and liberty is not threatened by reason of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, and

(b) a place from which a person will not be sent to another country otherwise than in accordance with the Refugee Convention.

(5) Where a person in relation to whom a certificate is issued under this section subsequently brings an appeal under section 66(1) while outside the United Kingdom, the appeal shall be considered as if he had not been removed from the United Kingdom.'.—*[Mr. Blunkett.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Blunkett: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government new clause 15—*Appeal from within United Kingdom: unfounded human rights or asylum claim: transitional provision.*

Government amendments Nos. 224 to 227.

Amendment No. 13, in clause 80, page 44, line 19, leave out Clause 80.

Government amendment No. 228.

Amendment No. 7, in page 44, line 21, leave out—

'the Secretary of State or an immigration officer'

and insert "an adjudicator".

Amendment No. 14, in page 44, line 21, leave out—

'Secretary of State or an immigration officer'

and insert—

'adjudicator or an Immigration Appeal Tribunal'.

Amendment No. 8, in page 44, line 26, leave out—

'the Secretary of State or the immigration officer'

and insert "an adjudicator".

Amendment No. 15, in page 44, line 26, leave out—

'Secretary of State or the immigration officer'

and insert—

'adjudicator or the Immigration Appeal Tribunal'.

Government amendment No. 229.

Amendment No. 9, in page 44, line 29, leave out—

'the Secretary of State or the immigration officer'

and insert "an adjudicator".

Amendment No. 16, in page 44, line 29, leave out—

'Secretary of State or the immigration officer'

and insert—

'the adjudicator or the Immigration Appeal Tribunal'.

Government amendments Nos. 230 and 231.

Amendment No. 155, in page 44, line 32, leave out—

'the Secretary of State or an immigration officer'

and insert "an adjudicator".

Amendment No. 170, in page 44, line 34, leave out "or matter".

Amendment No. 171, in page 44, line 37, leave out "should" and insert "could reasonably".

Amendment No. 172, in page 44, line 40, leave out—

'would have been permitted or required to raise'

and insert "could reasonably have raised".

Amendment No. 173, in page 44, line 43, leave out "or matter".

Amendment No. 156, in page 44, line 44, leave out—

'the Secretary of State or an immigration officer'

and insert "an adjudicator".

Amendment No. 174, in page 45, line 1, leave out "or matter".

Government amendment No. 232.

Amendment No. 175, in page 45, line 3, leave out "or matter".

Amendment No. 157, in page 45, line 4, leave out—

'the Secretary of State or an immigration officer'

and insert "an adjudicator".

Amendment No. 176, in page 45, line 5, leave out "should" and insert "could reasonably".

Amendment No. 177, in page 45, line 5, leave out "or matter".

Amendment No. 178, in page 45, line 7, leave out from "section" to end of line 8.

Amendment No. 158, in page 45, line 9, leave out—

'the Secretary of State or an immigration officer'

and insert "adjudicator".

Amendment No. 179, in page 45, line 10, leave out "or matter".

Amendment No. 159, in page 45, line 12, leave out—

'the Secretary of State or an immigration officer'

and insert "adjudicator".

Amendment No. 180, in page 45, line 15, leave out "or matter".

Amendment No. 181, in page 45, line 18, leave out subsection (6).

Government amendments Nos. 233 to 236, 245, 246, 244, 247, 242 and 243.

Mr. Blunkett: We should pause for a moment to determine what it is we are trying to achieve, not only with the changes in the Bill, but in terms of the appeals system. We are trying to ensure, first, that those who have a legitimate claim that their life, liberty and well-being are being threatened are able to make such a claim in this country and have that considered, as we said earlier this evening, speedily and fairly.

At the moment, the volume of claims in this country by those who are subsequently not allowed to remain—because, through the adjudication and appeals system, their claim is turned down—is so substantial that it clogs up the legitimate system for dealing with first decisions and appeals, which, frankly, is grinding to a standstill.

[Mr. Blunkett]

The amount of resource that has been allocated to the system, including support, and the prolonged nature of the way in which the appeals system works means that there is a danger that those who have a legitimate right to be here under the asylum system, as opposed to another form of migration policy, are in danger of being overlooked. We need to concentrate on the objective, which is, rightly, to provide for those who are genuinely at risk.

There is all-party support for this. On Second Reading, the shadow Home Secretary put it very well, when he said that he shared the objective of ensuring

> "the rapid, effective admission of refugees fleeing dreadful persecution and the equally rapid and effective removal of those seeking to use this as opposed to other, legitimate means to enter the country, getting round rather than facing the immigration rules."

I agree with that, as I think most people would. We need a system that works on that basis.

Lynne Jones: My right hon. Friend is correct to say that there is agreement on the objective, but he referred to the prolonged nature of the appeals system. In order to deal with that prolonged nature, surely it is necessary to have a robust analysis of the reasons for it. Has that been done?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, it has. Many of the issues relating to the length of the procedure were outlined in the White Paper on 7 February, which is why we proposed an end-to-end review, starting with the question of induction and reporting, through to the existing dispersal of the new accommodation centres and to the removal provision, as well as a reassessment of the whole appeals process.

On Second Reading, I said that we were not satisfied that we had yet made sufficient progress in relation to the nature of appeals. The multiple opportunities for judicial review that exist—I remember spelling them out on Second Reading—lead to layer upon layer of delay. It is a question not only of the application of the resource that should be going into an assessment of the appeals that are made by those who have escaped from death and torture; there is also a diversion of expertise because it is not simply the resource that has to be applied.

We are doubling the number of people going through the adjudication system and we have massively increased the number of adjudicators in the last year alone. We have increased the staff of the immigration and nationality directorate by about 4,500 over the last two years and we are dealing with the largest number of new applicants currently in Europe, including Germany.

8 pm

It is not that we should not be taking, processing or granting the right to be here for those who have a legitimate claim. It is right for us to take a substantial number of those entering Europe, but we must be able to deal with claims fairly and properly. The shadow Home Secretary had a good point on Second Reading when he related this to Europewide objectives. He said:

> "It would be practical and useful to have a general agreement across Europe that when asylum applicants come from a safe country . . . they should return to the safe country from which they started their travels to have their application processed there."—[*Official Report*, 24 April 2002; Vol. 384, c. 359–64.].

On Thursday in Luxembourg, at the Justice and Home Affairs Council, and at the Seville Council the week after, we will promote the idea of rapid improvement and change so that we can get a grip Europewide, collaboratively rather than competitively, on what needs to be done. We need to deal with asylum shopping, which is causing real difficulty, and on which we appear to be the last stop.

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Under the Home Secretary's criteria, do safe countries include all the applicant countries to the European Union?

Mr. Blunkett: No, there is no list at present, because we need to be clear that anyone who is to be returned under the category of a clearly unfounded claim would not have been at risk in any of the countries that they passed through to get here. We are talking about two categories: clearly unfounded, when people produce no evidence of having been at risk or that the country from which they came was unsafe for them; and the category of those who—there has been considerable debate about this in this country for some time—have not made a claim in any of the countries through which they have passed, where their asylum claim would have been quite legitimate and would have been heard in the same way, although not under precisely the same rules and processes, as in this country.

It is crucial that we are able to deal with those two categories sensibly and sensitively. We need to ensure that people whose claim is certified as clearly unfounded or those who have come through European countries where they would not have been at risk but where they failed to make a claim—so it could be presumed that they were heading for Britain for reasons other than that their life and well-being were at risk—are not returned through the undue use of Executive power. That is why it will be open to them to make an appeal against that certification under judicial review. Obviously, judicial review will establish a set of criteria in relation to the countries in Europe through which such people have passed, to determine whether those countries can be regarded as safe under the terms of the European convention on human rights and whether it is therefore appropriate to return people to them.

If, when we get these changes into statute, certain countries have been allowed into the European Union and have been seen to be providing all the necessary safeguards, it will be ridiculous if the regulations continue to debar us from doing an automatic return to them. Because it would be wrong to have a white list, safe countries must be determined on the evidence provided and in a way that ensures that safeguards are in place.

There is a wider issue—obviously, the Opposition will raise this, and I would have to be very silly not to pick it up, because there is a clear theme running here—concerning whether the assessment of countries is sufficiently clear or rapid. If it is not—which we do not accept—we need an advisory committee to assist us. Such a committee would have to be open and transparent and prepared to have consultations with the Government and the two main Opposition parties on its make-up. It would have to help us with the process without removing the existing formulations, which draw down all the known available evidence. It is important to put that on the table immediately, because no one should get the impression that we are going to put people at risk.

Simon Hughes: The Home Secretary has anticipated that we strongly oppose the new clauses and will seek to divide the House on them later. I do not understand how the Labour party has completely changed its policy over the past few years. In the run-up to the 1997 election, the Home Secretary's predecessor said that removing people before they appeal undermines justice. What has changed? His own figures—validly applauded by himself—show that the rate of making decisions is getting faster, appeals are being held in record numbers and the removal rate of failed applicants has increased. If the system is improving, which we welcome, why is there suddenly a need to do things that many people in the House and elsewhere find thoroughly obnoxious and morally reprehensible?

Mr. Blunkett: It would be obnoxious and reprehensible if we were to return people to regimes that put them at risk or if we did not give them a clear opportunity to make a claim in a legitimate European country, because they wanted to come to Britain. We have to ask why people want to come to Britain. Is it to escape death or torture or because of particular benefits to be found here; or should they be claiming through the new economic migration routes, because they want to work here? Given the number of people who fail to make a valid claim right through the appeals process, there are clearly many who want to work here and are not coming to escape death or torture. That is a simple fact.

The electorate do not fully understand why people who have crowded through the rest of Europe have not chosen to exercise a claim there, even though their reason for being there was escape. Asylum is not a matter of whether people would rather be here. It is fair dos if people really want to be here because they have learned our language over the internet or have friends or family here. Those people should apply through the other routes, many of which we are just opening up in new ways. That is a different matter from facing death or torture.

We need sensible ways of dealing with the matter, especially if we are to open new routes through the United Nations, so that people can claim out of country rather than clandestinely making it through the tunnel or on the ferries or coming through airports with false documentation, which is what many do. Many others make an in-country claim after having been here for a substantial time, sometimes on human rights grounds, having made no such claim at the time of arrival but having decided that it will help them stay. We all know that to be true, because we all see it all the time in our constituency surgeries.

The answer to the hon. Gentleman's direct question is that unfounded claims massively clog up our ability to use the extra staff and resources that we have provided fairly and properly, thereby negating the investment that we have put in. People out there think that we are crackers, and if they think that, they will not warm to the other things that we are saying about tackling prejudice and racism. We need to build trust in the system, so that people welcome warmly those whom they know to have been facing death or persecution.

I am trying to develop a system that does not involve a white list, but which has some common sense built in and which includes proper safeguards for those who genuinely face persecution. That is why there is the right to review and to challenge the decision taken on whether a person's life and liberty is threatened by reason of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, and whether certification should therefore have been made. If those points prove true and the life or well-being of the person concerned is threatened because of that, they would not of course be returned, and their appeal would be heard in this country. The same is true of all who present some founded claim the moment that they arrive, or who have some legitimate proof that they were at threat or that their country of origin had presented a threat in recent times.

I accept that we were fairly slow on the uptake in respect of Zimbabwe, but we did not put people's lives at risk. We halted the returns and listened to what was being said, including by my own party and the Opposition parties. I mention my party because I was touched by the deep concern expressed earlier today by members of the Conservative party for my well-being within my own ranks. It was clear that I had their support in taking into account Labour party views, and that certainly made me feel much better.

The second criterion is that we will not send someone back to a place from which they will be sent to another country, other than in accordance with the refugee convention. In other words, we will not return people in circumstances in which they will not enjoy the protection of the 1951 convention. Those safeguards are built in; we are simply trying to turn away people who have no right to be here, and to send them back even in cases where we will grant them an out-of-country appeal.

Simon Hughes *rose—*

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus) *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: To varying degrees, the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark and Finland have policies that allow out-of-country appeals to be heard. They are not countries that anyone would describe as illiberal, albeit that the changes are being introduced in Denmark are draconian. However, I am talking about the situation before the recent parliamentary debate and the legislation that was passed by the Danish Assembly.

Simon Hughes: The Home Secretary knows that we support the introduction of resettlement programmes and other routes into the country for people who are genuine economic migrants. We welcome that initiative and have said as much publicly and privately. However, does he accept the view of British courts that out-of-country appeals are in many cases almost valueless? The reality is that many people do not appeal, and in effect the system is making it impossible for many to do so. The system appears intentionally to be driving down appeals. The Home Secretary and I seemed to agree in an earlier debate that between 40 and 50 per cent. of all claims in the past 10 years were accepted under one heading or another. It is surely wrong, therefore, for significant numbers—at least one in five—to be forced out of the country before their cases, which might eventually be accepted, can be determined here.

Mr. Blunkett: That would be true if they were at risk in the country to which they return, but I am desperately

[Mr. Blunkett]

keen to ensure that they are not so at risk. If they have a personal reason for wanting to pursue the appeal, we should facilitate their doing so. It is a lot easier to do so now than it was even five years ago, thanks to the internet and other communication methods, as well as to more traditional ways. Incidentally, it is not uncommon for paper appeals to be heard in circumstances where a person cannot attend an appeal in this country or in other European countries. Lawyers are familiar with such situations.

A person may well not appeal in a country that operates an out-of-country appeal because they recognise that they have no ground for an appeal and that it will prove unsuccessful. So long as legal support, asylum support and accommodation is available, and so long as another appeal is available somewhere along the line, people are inclined to use it. Indeed, the fact is that many lawyers are inclined to encourage them to do so. That is why our process is so prolonged. As I have said, that distracts from those who have a legitimate right to have their appeal thoroughly aired.

8.15 pm

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) and I had not a disagreement but a useful exchange on Second Reading about the percentage who stay. I agreed that if we added in the cases of exceptional and indefinite leave to remain, his figures were correct, so we eventually concluded that we were both right. Indeed, I remember the exchange well. However, the trouble is that exceptional leave had to be used in cases where everyone accepted that the country in question was not safe to return to. In Afghanistan—I mention it purely as an example—a great deal of heartache and human and military resources, have been expended to re-establish safety and civilisation and to put Afghans back in charge of their country. However, what is to say that such people will still not attempt to come to this country? Some 9,600 have done so in the past year. Exceptional leave to remain was granted, even if the claim was not accepted, because we did not wish to return people.

Of course, the point is rapidly coming where we can encourage and support people in returning to Afghanistan—with the help, I hope, of the rest of Europe. We can then ask whether it is legitimate to suggest that they remain at risk from the Taliban, given that the Taliban no longer run the country. Such simple questions must be asked and answered, so that people who are genuinely fleeing persecution can be helped. I do not want to over-egg the point, and I know that many hon. Members will want to intervene, not least to clarify certain matters. However, in terms of returning people to European countries from whence they came, proper certification, judicial review and establishing which countries can legitimately be regarded as safe constitute a reasonable set of presumptions through which to get the matter right.

Mr. Weir: I understand the Secretary of State's argument, but his concentrating on countries rather than individual cases gives me cause for concern. A particular country could be safe by and large, but it might not be so for certain individuals. A current example is India. By and large, someone returning to India may be relatively safe, but that is not necessarily true if they originate from Kashmir, for example. In concentrating on the country rather than the individual, the danger is that injustice might be done.

Mr. Blunkett: If a person can provide any evidence whatsoever that clearly shows a founded fear—within the terms that I have described, and with which we are all familiar—their claim would still be heard. They would not simply be returned. However, India is not a good example. We are discussing not countries that are threatening each other with military conflict, but people who are persecuted and threatened with death or torture by a particular state or—under the wider definition of the 1951 convention—other organised groups that put them at risk.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): I appreciate that a person could make an appeal from overseas that deals with the merits of the case, but I am concerned about judicial oversight of the process of certification. Many people find judicial review an expensive, alien and complicated process, to which they do not necessarily have easy access. Is there not a way to ensure some oversight of the certification process? I have a lot of confidence in the Secretary of State, but not in every possible holder of that office. I am concerned that the certification process could be misused in such a way that someone who is genuinely in fear of persecution might not have their right to asylum protected.

Mr. Blunkett: Given the long-standing and deep interest that my hon. Friend has in those issues and her knowledge of them, I take seriously what she says. We would all wish to ensure that the initial decision—the certification—is carried out by professionals trained for the job, and that the possibility of review is readily available. I envisage that on issues relating to the nature of the risk in a particular country, we will wish to facilitate a rapid testing of the initial decision. We will also wish to be able to test the situation further, following any changes in that country. We are keen to establish a pattern that will be checked by the judiciary on certification to provide us with a base on which to make common-sense decisions. People will then know that the system is fair and credible.

The same is true of returning people to other European countries. In the end, a sensible bilateral agreement with those countries, as part of a longer-term revision of the Dublin agreement, must be the way forward. I will take every step possible, after next Sunday's concluding election in France, to do that. The interim Interior Minister has shown a willingness to achieve that aim and our position will be strengthened by the vote tonight. The interim Minister accepts entirely the rule of law and has written to me to indicate that he accepts the spirit of the new clauses and the way we are proceeding. Some tough negotiations will be necessary, but to have the ability to return people to France—we have been able to return almost 6,000 people who came for other purposes but did not claim asylum—makes sense.

We return almost 6,000 people a year, as I have said before—including during the question and answer session on the White Paper—but we do not return those who mention the words "asylum claim" when they hit our turf, even though they might have just come from France or

Belgium and did not claim asylum there. We are trying to get the position right in the way that the Danes and the Germans have managed to get it right. Other countries are also keen to achieve that. The problem needs to be seen in the context of bilateral and multilateral agreements across Europe, with us taking a lead rationally and sensibly, instead of clamping down unacceptably as Denmark has, which has led to great disquiet and social uncohesion—if there is such a word.

Lynne Jones: Will one of the proposals that my right hon. Friend puts to the new French Government be an agreement that UK immigration officers should visit places such as Sangatte and interview those people who are attempting to reach this country as asylum seekers, so that their claims can be assessed there?

Mr. Blunkett: As part of bilateral and multilateral Europewide agreements, I would not rule out the use of our immigration officers and support staff working on other national territories, but I do not wish to be tempted into discussing what might be agreed for Sangatte, because that might start some hares running that I could do without. I have not even started negotiating on Sangatte, despite the Catholic weekly magazine and the interview with the interim Social Affairs Minister that led the Leader of the Opposition to write an intemperate article in the *Daily Mail* that presumed I had already given all my cards away. In fact, I am trying my best to strengthen my hand tonight with a few aces and I hope that the Opposition parties will assist me in doing so.

In the end, we want Sangatte closed under proper procedures that do not result in people on the streets of Calais and surrounding areas. We do not want people trying to get here in, on or under trains, or by other routes across the channel. We want people to come here fairly, under Europewide agreements that allow us to assess and return them if that is the sensible approach. That is what I will suggest on Thursday in Luxembourg, and in that spirit I ask the House to support the new clauses and the associated amendments.

Mr. Letwin: I welcome what has been a slow but steady acclimatisation on the part of the Home Secretary to the merits of the argument that we began making about eight months ago—that the resuscitation of the bilateral agreement and, as far as possible, multilateral agreements that work is key to resolving the chaos of the asylum system. He has even moved a little further today than in the past few weeks, and that is very welcome. We want to strengthen his hand, and he is right to say that some parts of new clauses 14 and 15—the meat before us tonight—will have that effect, or at least seek to achieve it.

New clause 14(3) and (4) have that intention and are welcome. New clause 15(2), (4) and (5) also seek to achieve that effect. If I have understood the articulation of those subsections correctly, they relate precisely to the case in which a person comes to the UK having most immediately been in a country other than their country of origin. In the example of France, the provisions would allow the Home Secretary, if he is equipped with the appropriate bilateral or multilateral agreement, to remove the person back to that safe country without the possibility of appeal. That is clearly an appropriate legislative underpinning for the resuscitation of the 24-hour rule that obtained in the bilateral agreement while it was in force, and we support it [illegible] a necessary consequence of our long-term argument in favour of the resumption of such an agreement. On that point, we are not one iota apart from the Home Secretary

As I mentioned when we debated the initial question of the recommittal of the new clause to Committee, the problem that we face is that the Home Secretary has ingeniously allied the subsections that I just mentioned to other subsections—new clause 14(2) and new clause 15(1) and (3). Those subsections are about something different. They have the intention that the Home Secretary—which in this case means a rather junior official acting on behalf of the Home Secretary—should be able to make the judgment that a particular application is "unfounded". It is extraordinarily difficult to know how the official in question will make the decision that a claim is unfounded. By its very character, the decision is difficult to make.

In his remarks on this group, the Home Secretary mentioned frequently the example of a case in which the person presents no evidence at all. In such a case, I accept that it is relatively easy to decide that a claim is unfounded. When people who wander in and claim asylum are asked for evidence that they are subject to persecution and are unable to say anything at all, in any language, that might suggest that they have ever been or would ever be subject to persecution, I am bound by logic to accept that their claims would be, in any ordinary sense, unfounded.

8.30 pm

However, the number of such claims is, of course, minimal. Most of the people whom we are discussing in connection with the subsections will have said something in defence of their claims. They may not have said very much, or been very articulate, and they may have spoken about countries that, on the whole, are not very dangerous. Yet they undoubtedly will have said something, and the subsections to which I referred will call on junior officials to make the judgment that their claims are utterly unfounded, when such judgments might otherwise have fallen to an adjudicator on appeal.

The Home Secretary sought to counter what he suspected would be one limb of my argument when he spoke about the advisory committee that he wants to establish. That committee will decide whether the country in question might be dangerous.

I welcome the Home Secretary's idea of an advisory committee, although it does not go far enough. I do not accept that the present system of country risk assessment is merely in need of oversight by an advisory committee. That oversight is welcome, but the present system of country assessment is woefully and intrinsically deficient. I do not believe it likely that any Government agency will ever be able to conduct country risk assessments with the speed and confidence necessary to allow a junior official to decide that a claim is wholly unfounded, and to do so with the conviction required to sustain judicial review, among other things.

If the Home Secretary wants new clause 14(2) or new clause 15(1) and (3) to have any chance of sustaining themselves under judicial review, he will need to move to genuinely independent country risk assessment, at the very least. Even with that, there is a real question about

[Mr. Letwin]

whether it is proper for a junior official to decide whether a claim is unfounded, and to force the person involved back to the country from which he or she came—if, indeed, that is possible. That person would then have to conduct an appeal from that country. If the junior official makes an error, I have the gravest reservations about whether the case could be brought to a just conclusion.

The Opposition face a great difficulty, therefore. We want to back the Home Secretary in some subsections of the new clauses. Those provisions are necessary and safe, and there is no question that returning a person to France, Denmark or any EU country, for example, is anything but a perfectly legitimate act for the British state. It runs no risk of compromising that person's life or liberty. However, by the same token, we want to resist new clause 14(2) and new clause 15(1) and (3). The Home Secretary has so designed the new clauses as to ensure that we cannot achieve both desires simultaneously.

I suspect that the matter will be pressed to a Division by Liberal Democrat Members. If so, we will vote with the Government and against the Liberal Democrats, although we will have to hold our noses over the subsections of which we disapprove. We will seek to engage the interest of our noble Friends in another place to disentangle new clause 14(2) and new clause 15(1) and (3) from those other provisions with which we agree.

I fear that that will lead, yet again, to debate and discussion taking place between Members of the two Houses. That is not, I think, one of the Home Secretary's favourite occupations, but I see no other way to make progress. I am determined that we should give the Home Secretary the support that he deserves in regard to those provisions that are right and which make it possible to imagine that bilateral agreements will come back into play. However, I intend to preserve our determination to avoid, if we can, compromising improperly the safety of individuals through those subsections that pose a threat to their safety.

Mr. Gerrard: I shall make a brief contribution to the debate. I understand the concerns expressed by my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary about the way in which the process is sometimes dragged out deliberately by advisers and lawyers who know from the start that victory in a case is unlikely. Those of us who deal with asylum cases will be familiar with those instances in which atrocious advice is deliberately given with no other aim than to drag the process out. We all see such cases, and I understand my right hon. Friend's concern about them.

A proposal similar to the one in the new clause was contained in the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996. I remember the debates on that legislation, in which we discussed proposals from the then Home Secretary that would have allowed people with manifestly unfounded cases to be sent back to the countries from which they had arrived. The proposals then allowed those people to mount appeals from those countries.

In the 1996 debates, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was the shadow Home Secretary. His view as to whether the proposed course of action was right was rather different then. Some of the concerns raised about the proposals in the 1996 Act are being raised again about the provisions in the new clauses.

We can tell people removed to a third country that they have a right of appeal from that country, but we cannot guarantee that that person will be allowed to stay in that third country until an appeal is heard. It is quite possible that they will be sent on somewhere else, or back to where they came from. We have no control over such people once they have been removed from the UK.

Experience with other appeals, such as family visit appeals, that are held on paper as opposed to being held in person, shows that adjudicators trying to judge the credibility of a person's story are more likely to respond positively when they can hear that person speak. That can be of critical importance when adjudicators come to decide whether an appeal should be allowed.

I should like some clarification because, from my reading of the new clause, it seems to deal only with removals to a safe third country as it refers to a country of which a person

"is not a national or citizen".

Mr. Letwin: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will receive the clarification that he seeks. I did not read the new clause that way, as he will have noticed. So far as I can see, subsection (2) applies specifically to the opposite case: to someone who is not being returned to a country of which that person is not a national—not another safe country—but to the country of which that person is or may be a national—an unsafe country, potentially.

Mr. Gerrard: That is an important point, and I want to be clear about it. Subsection (3) is quite clear, but some of the briefings and reports sent to us by outside organisations suggest that someone could be summarily removed back to their country of origin. I would be seriously concerned if that were the impact of subsection (2).

Much of the debate so far has focused on sending people back to France, Germany or Denmark, where they might have been able to claim asylum but did not, as opposed to sending them back directly to their country of origin. That is an important issue, and I would like the meaning of subsection (2) to be made absolutely clear. Does it mean that people can be summarily returned to their country of origin? If that is a possibility, it puts a very different perspective on the new clause.

We have already referred to who will make the decisions on certification and how those might be challenged. If decisions on certification are to be made by a caseworker at a port of entry, perhaps very quickly, and even though, on paper, a judicial review might be possible, it might be difficult for someone to take that route if they have been unable to obtain easy access to legal advice, as mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart).

Oakington has been described as a place that would be used for cases that appeared to be unfounded. A pattern seems to be emerging that the people sent to Oakington are from certain countries of origin. One wonders whether that is the criterion, rather than what the individual said when arriving at the port of entry. We will get close, if we are not careful, to a white list in another form if countries of origin become one of the main deciding factors in whether a case is manifestly unfounded.

One of my greatest concerns is that this could be a critical decision affecting the individual, particularly if it involves summary return to the country of origin. It is essential, therefore, to get the initial decision right. Comments made by the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) rang some bells. It is easy to talk as if there are only two classes of asylum claimants—those who will be given asylum because their cases are evidently well founded, and those, at the other extreme, whose cases do not have a shred of credibility. The reality, however, is that among the many thousands of people who claim asylum each year is a whole spectrum of cases, from one extreme to the other. We are trying to draw lines in that spectrum. Inevitably, with regard to which cases are certified and which are not, people will be bunched around that line. There will be very fine divisions between claims being certified or not. It concerns me that very small differences between individuals might lead them to be dealt with in significantly different ways in respect of whether they have a right of appeal.

Mr. Patrick Hall (Bedford): My hon. Friend is making some useful points about the principles of out-of-country appeals. Does he share my concerns about the practicalities of a person who is removed from the country without having completed or begun an appeal here doing so from another country? What are the resource implications? What support would there be? Would it be through a British overseas post, which, as we know from dealing with ordinary matters are already under pressure, or would it be down to the individual to write, presumably in English, to the authorities in this country? Has my hon. Friend given some thought to the practicalities, never mind the principles, of the issue?

8.45 pm

Mr. Gerrard: That is an important point. Nothing in the Bill gives us an answer to that question. Let us assume that a person could act in various ways—they could pursue their appeal by writing, using the internet or visiting a British post overseas. That, of course, gives rise to other practical questions. How does that person obtain representation at their appeal? It would probably not be much good for them to try to use a lawyer in another country who was not familiar with British law, but how would they make contact with a lawyer in this country? How would they brief the lawyer, and where would they find the resources to conduct an appeal?

Such situations are different from other appeals conducted from overseas. For example, in family visitor appeals there will inevitably be sponsors in the UK who can help with some of the problems of finding representation in this country.

Mr. Letwin: Is there not another and more fundamental difference? If a person is sent back to the country of origin—if that is indeed the purport of subsection (2) of new clause 14—will it not immediately be evident either that the decision that the claim was unfounded was true and that the person has no basis for appeal because they are happily situated back in their own country, or, unhappily for economic reasons only; or that the claim was not unfounded and the person is in the most dire straits? In that case, how on earth can they conduct an appeal if they are being chopped up by some appalling regime to which they have been sent back by mistake? I cannot see—can the hon. Gentleman?—how an in-country appeal can resolve any problem that might arise under subsection (2).

Mr. Gerrard: The hon. Gentleman is right. If a mistake is made, it is difficult to see how the consequences can be other than extremely serious for the person returned on the basis of an unfounded claim.

Mr. Blunkett: We must not misunderstand each other. My hon. Friend has been putting his case extremely carefully and credibly, but we must not misunderstand what the shadow Home Secretary has just said. I spelled out the unacceptable risks, on which we are all agreed, and we are not intent on sending people back to countries that would chop someone up, in the words of the hon. Gentleman—or anything like it. We know of no country that has it in for one person alone, as regards taking away their rights and exposing them to the danger of death or torture as individuals, as opposed to the groups to which they belong, the religion they hold, the politics they espouse or any of the other things that I read out. I was specific about that because it is in those terms that we are talking about returning people.

Mr. Gerrard: I completely accept my right hon. Friend's point, but I question whether the proposed system will deliver what he says and whether there might not be a risk of serious problems for some individuals whose claim has been certified as unfounded.

Fiona Mactaggart: It may help my hon. Friend if I give an example of a case where such risks might occur in a country that is usually safe for most people. In parts of some countries, female genital mutilation is practised on young women and there is no adequate protection for them. That happens in countries to which we might consider returning people. I am not clear that the procedures would offer adequate protection that such practices could never happen.

Mr. Gerrard: My hon. Friend makes an extremely valid point. Such issues have always given rise to difficulty—whether only part of a country is safe and whether the person being returned actually ends up in the part of the country that is supposed to be safe.

My final point relates to new clause 15. My understanding is that it would apply to cases that were already in the system. An appeal might already be in progress under the existing system, but under the new clause the process could be stopped before the appeal was heard, the case could be certified as unfounded and the person could be removed. Retrospective legislation of any sort always concerns me. If that is the effect of new clause 15, I would be extremely worried.

Simon Hughes: I indicated earlier that my hon. Friends and I would divide the House at the end of this debate on the two Government new clauses. It might be helpful to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, if I also indicate that we will seek to divide the House on our amendment No. 13. Of the many amendments in this group that Mr. Speaker has selected, it addresses one of the other issues that, in our view, goes most to the heart of what is wrong with many of these sets of proposals.

[Simon Hughes]

We may debate this later in the day when some of the heat and noise has gone out of the earlier exchanges—both those that happened and those that were expected to happen but did not—on education. We regret the failure to allow the time for such debate. In my view, we shall not have the time, with an hour and 10 minutes left, to complete the business schedule for today by any means. There are four groups of amendments on appeals—this is the first, and there are three remaining. We may not get beyond this debate by 10 o'clock, and that will be the end of it.

In this context, we are discussing the protection by law of some of the most vulnerable people who ever come to Britain to seek protection. It is unacceptable that Parliament should have to debate proposals put down on Friday afternoon, and published for the first time and available to colleagues for the first time yesterday morning, which nobody has been able to amend, even though we are meant to be able to amend new clauses and schedules on Report. It would not be acceptable even if they were relatively unimportant new clauses and new schedules. It is fundamentally unacceptable when they relate to the right of the courts to oversee the actions of the Executive and the process of appeals, and when they relate to this entirely new proposal, which, as I indicated to colleagues, the Labour party opposed five years ago—that an immigrant or asylum seeker may have to go abroad to pursue their case, but anybody else can have their case dealt with here.

It is fundamentally wrong as a matter of principle that if one comes here seeking shelter, one should not have the same appeal rights as someone who has gone through the employment appeal tribunal on an employment matter, through the social security appeal tribunal against a decision of the Executive on social security, or through the tax appeal system, for example. On behalf of my colleagues, I want to register our dissatisfaction with the process as well as the substance.

I shall give one example only of why what the Government are doing is fundamentally wrong. It relates to the intervention of the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart), in terms of the kind of issue that it raises. A well known case called Islam and Shah went to the House of Lords in 1999; it got there after an application for judicial review. It went through the process in the following way. Originally, the case had been put to the adjudicator and lost by the individual applicant. She was refused leave to appeal to the Immigration Appeal Tribunal. She applied for and obtained judicial review of the tribunal's refusal. The Home Office then appealed to the Court of Appeal and won. She then appealed to the House of Lords and won. It was not on an insignificant issue but on a hugely important issue relating to the rights of women in Pakistan. In many ways, that country might be regarded as one where proper process, in many years, might be acceptable, but the House of Lords was very clear that its decision was merited by a hugely important matter.

Let me set out what the Lords decided as regards whether someone could seek asylum on the basis of being a refugee as a result of belonging to a particular social group, which in some parts of the world could be women, people of a particular age, or people of a particular sexuality. For example, homosexuality is unacceptable in Nigeria and the safety of a homosexual who wants to return there might be at risk in some parts of the country.

The House of Lords said:

> "a 'particular social group' consisted of a group of persons who share a common, immutable characteristic that either was beyond the power of an individual to change or was so fundamental to the individual's identity or conscience that it ought not to be required to be changed. The existence of such a group did not, however, depend on an element of cohesiveness or co-operation or interdependence amongst the members of the group. Thus, as gender was an immutable characteristic that was beyond the power of the individual to change and as discrimination against women was prevalent in Pakistan in violation of fundamental rights and freedoms, women in Pakistan constituted a 'particular social group', within the terms of Art 1A(2) of the 1951"

convention on refugees.

The ruling continued:

> "Accordingly, as the appellants were members of a particular social group in Pakistan and as the Pakistani authorities were unable or unwilling to protect them against gender-related persecution, it would be contrary to the UK's obligations under the 1951 Convention for"

that person

> "to be required to leave the UK and"

her

> "appeal would have to be reconsidered by the Tribunal."

That woman came to this country and a couple of years ago the highest court in the land decided to uphold her case. However, it was upheld only because she had the right to have an Executive decision heard by our independent judiciary.

It is important not only to separate the powers of the Executive and the judiciary, but to understand that we often win the argument only because we have had the debate, like we did today. The hon. Member for Slough and others know that from their work before they came here. We do not stand a chance of winning a case if the only alternative is to have the papers looked at by someone in authority, with no chance of anyone putting the argument, which is what the Government propose.

Many of the greatest decisions in favour of liberty have been taken by courts in this land, the United States and elsewhere only because there has been debate and a court has been persuaded. The Government, to their shame, are suggesting that a group of people—not you or me, Madam Deputy Speaker, but people who have been subjected to the most awful circumstances before they arrive here—are deprived of that right. That must be wrong.

Mr. Barker: The hon. Gentleman's points are serious and important. I endorse what he says about the appalling lack of time available to scrutinise all the amendments properly. However, for the sake of clarity, is he saying that under the terms of the group criteria, the British Government should offer asylum to the entire female population of Pakistan? I may be wrong, but is that the essence of his argument?

Simon Hughes: The trouble with the debate is that we have such limited time in which to discuss the issues, and the matter that the hon. Gentleman raises is precisely what we should be considering. I have with me a sheaf of papers from Amnesty International, which knows what it is talking about, the Immigration Law Practitioners

Association, the Immigration Advisory Service and the Refugee Legal Centre. They all say, first, that we have not had time to consider people's concerns properly, and, secondly, that the proposal is profoundly wrong.

9 pm

The answer to the hon. Gentleman's specific question is no—the only asylum issues that are dealt with here concern those who get here to put their case. That is one of the flaws of the system, and it is one reason why the Secretary of State rightly says that we must try to have a saner system that does not require people illegally to board a channel tunnel train and put themselves and others at risk. However, if a Pakistani woman were here and there was evidence that she came from a part of Pakistan where she would be at risk, she would be entitled to asylum. The refugee convention, drafted by British lawyers after the war, was introduced specifically to ensure, among other things, that people in need could put their case when they found somewhere safe away from their own country.

The great bulk of refugees do not come to Britain. It is not as if all the world's refugees were coming here. That is another fallacy perpetuated by tabloid newspapers. Most refugees are in places such as Pakistan and the central African states. Europe has a very small proportion of the world's refugees, and of that proportion we have a very small number. There may have been between 70,000 and 80,000 applicants, but they constitute a relatively small proportion of those coming to Europe. The numbers go up and down, and although at the moment the United Kingdom and Germany have the highest numbers, that has not always been the case.

Crucially, between 40 and 50 per cent. of those who have come here in the past 10 years have had their claim upheld. It is not as if all those people were putting dud cases. Of course there are economic migrants who try to claim asylum—I know them and I have dealt with them, as we all have. However, between 40 and 50 per cent. are not like that.

I want to give the House a few more figures, which are not an invention but come from a written answer given by Ministers. On 19 April, at column 1259W, Ministers gave figures for the outcome of asylum appeals at judicial review for the last two years for which figures are available. In 2000, 365 judicial review applications were allowed out of a total of 755 made. By my calculation, that means that almost half of them succeeded. In 2001, 260 applications were allowed out of 390 made, which is well over half. The total for the two years is 625 applications allowed out of 1,145. Those are not my figures; they were given by the Government in a parliamentary answer. They show how important judicial review is.

There are many proposals in this group of new clauses and amendments, and I shall state briefly—I hope that it will take no longer than 10 minutes—why I hope that colleagues from all parties will support us. I understand and respect the difficulty experienced by Conservative Front Benchers, but I hope that Conservative Back Benchers and Labour friends and colleagues will support us in saying that the Bill is not acceptable.

I understand the pressure on Governments to try to have a co-ordinated European policy, and I welcome that effort. However, that does not mean that we have to misrepresent the position and take measures that are unnecessary and positively harmful. I quote to the Home Secretary a letter of 15 May 2002 from the then Minister of State, Lord Rooker, which sets out how the Government are succeeding on asylum:

> "The rate of making decisions is faster; appeals are being heard in record numbers . . . and the rate of removal of failed applicants has increased."

Last month, then, the Government were saying, "We are doing better."

We know that on the very day the letter, headed "asylum constituency casework", was sent to colleagues, the Prime Minister was meeting Ministers to discuss what action was required to reduce the number of unfounded asylum applications. One idea put to that ministerial group by civil servants was that it might be worth considering taking Department for International Development aid away from poor countries where large numbers of asylum seekers originate. I do not pretend that the Government adopted that suggestion, but it is the sort of idea that is being put to Ministers as part of the process.

Some of us, including the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) and the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, served on the Standing Committee on the Bill. During the Committee stage, the Government said that they would table some amendments—and they did. However, more announcements were made on 30 May, after the Committee had finished. It was announced that, in addition to the tightening up, the appeal on the papers alone and the removal of judicial review—all of which were introduced by the Government to their own Bill only after Second Reading—asylum appeals would have to be made outside the United Kingdom.

Let me explain why such a system is unacceptable, even if one or two other countries use it. First, all the evidence is that a person in France—to take the easiest case—will not have the same access to lawyers and advisers who can help in the British appeals system as a person here would have. In reality, such people's ability to lodge and argue an appeal does not work in the same way as it would if they were here. It is paradoxical that people who try to enter this country as immigrants and are turned down in, say, Tanzania or Lagos have their appeal heard here, but people who are here will now have to have their appeal heard here when they are somewhere else. That is simply illogical.

Worse than that, it is suggested that such people can go to one of two places. They can return to the country from which they came. Let us be realistic. The person from Kosovo who came to my constituency advice surgery three years ago, before there was peace in the Balkans, was hardly going to go back to Kosovo. A person who came here more recently from Afghanistan is hardly going to go back there. The fact that we are holding meetings with the Government of Afghanistan does not reassure people that the country is now entirely safe. I hope and pray that it will be safe, and it may well become so, but it will not become safe in a week, or a month, or even three months—life is not like that. The fears that drove people to leave will not suddenly be alleviated.

The Government offer those people an alternative, which is to go back to the last safe country they were in. I understand the logic of that, but it is actually a form of pass the parcel—passing the responsibility. It says that

[Simon Hughes]

such people are not our business—pass them to France. I went to Sangatte and talked to the people in the camp, and I honestly believe that many of them did not know how they got there. They came across Europe in a lorry, not knowing whether they crossed over the Romanian frontier, the Polish frontier, or the German frontier first. They do not know their point of entry into the EU—they did not go through passport control. What was the first safe country? What do the French do—send them to Germany? What do the Germans do—send them to Austria?

That is a nonsensical system, it is nonsensical that we are playing into that system, and it is an unacceptable system for us to adopt. The proposals are not merely dangerous to the interests of the applicant; they are bad policy if what we want is a coherent system for dealing with asylum and immigration.

Mike Gapes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Simon Hughes: No. I have told the hon. Gentleman that he does not normally make helpful interventions. He has made one unhelpful intervention today and I am certainly not going to give him the chance to make another.

The second argument that the Government might advance is that we need to pass the Bill as an emergency measure. We heard that argument last autumn and winter in respect of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Bill, and we accepted that there was an emergency. However, the Bill before us now is not an emergency measure. There is no justification for not carrying out proper scrutiny or for making bad decisions.

I hope that hon. Members have had a chance to read the representations from bodies such as Amnesty International which make it clear that the Bill embodies unacceptable decisions and proposals. I shall quote only Amnesty International, which says:

> "The provisions set out in Part 5 of the . . . Bill represent a profound attack on the right of appeal of asylum seekers. Amnesty International believes that, given the well-documented flaws in our asylum determination procedures, adequate appeal rights are an essential safeguard against erroneous decisions. Home Office statistics indicate a steady increase in the proportion of successful appeals, with the most recent figures showing a success rate of nearly one in four."

If, under criminal law, one in four innocent British people were convicted, there would be an outcry, yet the Government are willing to put before Parliament a provision that will reduce the percentage of appellants who put their case fairly and succeed. That is not right and cannot be justified on the grounds of an emergency; there is no reason for treating the Bill in the same way as the anti-terrorism legislation that we passed last year.

It is now Government policy that the Government decide which claims are unfounded. That is unacceptable; it cannot be right that the Executive, who make the first decision, then decide whether or not there is a case further up the appeal ladder. The whole idea is that somebody else reviews the initial decision, not the Secretary of State. May I tell the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration, who has just assumed responsibility for this, that the initial decision is often overturned—something which might have been considered unfounded has been shown not to be so? I therefore agree with the point made by the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard).

The difference between the proposals and the old white list, which the Labour Government, to their credit, abolished, is not clear. Under that system, someone would be treated as safe or unsafe depending on which country they came from. There has been no confirmation that clearly unfounded claims will not be similarly categorised now. It is not as if the matter has not been considered before, as it has been discussed by parliamentary Committees, particularly in the other place, which have said that the proposal to change the law is bad news. The House of Lords European Union Committee, after taking evidence, produced a report on minimum standards in asylum procedures. It said:

> "Whether so-called fast-track or accelerated procedures are in practice efficient has been questioned. The evidence we received, especially that from the appellate authorities, suggested that they were not. Witnesses pointed out the adverse effects, in terms of diverting resources, delaying other proceedings and placing burdens on the judicial process. We can see no benefit in the retention of such procedures and we have doubts whether an accelerated procedure has a place in the Directive. All cases, including manifestly unfounded ones, should be dealt with on their merits speedily within an efficient 'regular' procedure. That would also apply to manifestly well-founded cases.
>
> The general principle stated in Article 33(1) that appeals shall have suspensive effect is one of the major procedural safeguards established by the Directive."

I repeat for the benefit of colleagues that one of the best protections for appellants is protection against getting thrown out of the country before their appeal is heard. May I tell Ministers that if, by any chance, the provision gets through the House of Lords, and the courts when it is tested there—I hope that, if it succeeds here, it will fail in the Lords; but if it does not, I hope that it fails in the courts—the Government will have to deal with the consequences? Instead of people being able to go for judicial review, they will come to Members of Parliament. Calls will regularly be made to the Home Office duty officers who, if they do not decide to detain someone before they get on the plane, will call on Ministers to intervene; injunctions will be served on the Government; and people will be taken off planes because they are about to be sent back to unsafe countries.

That is undesirable for the Government, given the image of Britain as a supposed safe haven. However, they may have decided that it is all about playing and looking tough; they may want to sound tough before the Seville and Luxembourg summits so that other European countries can follow us. The Government tried such an approach on terrorism. They derogated from the European convention on human rights and said that that was justified and that all other European countries would follow them. Nobody has followed. No other European Union country has done the same thing or decided that the events of 11 September justify such derogation. The Government should not believe that adopting macho postures to the detriment of many vulnerable individuals is an appropriate response.

9.15 pm

I apologise not only for taking relatively more time than I did earlier, but for being absolutely unable to do justice in such a short contribution to the significant number of points that have been made by those who know what they are talking about in relation to immigration and asylum, and who have made the strongest representations about why judicial review is not a hindrance but a help, about why Governments should not seek to reduce such review, and about an approach whose basis is not argument about the facts, but a consideration of whether a reasonable decision was taken by the Executive authority. Those people have made the case for why it is important that people should be allowed to put their case clearly.

As far as I have been able to gather, all those who have been consulted have concluded that the people who work in the system as practitioners believe that a reduction of rights is not what is needed. They do not want an approach in which cases are decided only on the basis of the papers involved and in which people's rights to judicial review are taken away. They do not want the Lord Chancellor to be given power to take away rights, or provisions such as those before us which add to the right to penalise those who represent the applicant by awarding costs against them. There is no equivalent right to penalise the Home Office, which is often the cause of delay. The treatment is absolutely unequal. People tell me that as many delays are caused by the Home Office as by applicants' representatives; and such delays frequently arise.

People also believe that they cannot trust adjudicators any more. The hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) gave the example of an accommodation centre for Somali citizens with an adjudicator who is well versed in affairs in Somalia. Such a person would be perfectly able to tell whether good cases were being made or whether somebody was trying to play along with the court and delay matters unnecessarily. We are talking about the Government not trusting the independent authorities to make independent decisions with which they are comfortable.

The provisions are not an acceptable series of interventions. If the people making the representations believe there is a need for more resources, more adjudicators, more people in the Immigration Appeal Tribunal or more civil servants working in the system, let us remedy that failing. If Home Office bureaucracy is the failing, let us deal with it, but let us not visit the sins of the Home Office and our systems in recent years on the sons and daughters of people who come to this country because we have a reputation for being a defender of human rights.

The reasons why people come here may vary and depend on where they come from, but those people should expect the same service and upholding of rights as the rest of us. It is a theological and a civic moral premise that the way in which we deal with the least of our brethren—those with least resources and ability to look after themselves—is the way in which we should be judged and expect to be dealt with ourselves.

The new clauses are profoundly wrong, as are existing parts of the Bill. I hope that they will receive significant opposition in the Lobby.

Mr. Cameron: I want briefly to speak to new clauses 14 and 15. It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes), although he tends to speak expansively on these subjects, so that, like many liberals down the ages, I feel that I am being pushed towards the guillotine.

I agree fundamentally with what my hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) said about our desire to unpack the new clauses, although I respect what the Home Secretary said about the oversight committee considering the assessment of countries. That will help, although we wish that it went further. I want to make two points and ask a question. Before I do so, I want to say how depressing it is to see such fundamental proposals coming before us with so little time for consideration.

I did not serve on the Committee, so I come fresh to many parts of the Bill. There are just 12, or perhaps 24, hours to consider fundamental provisions that appear to take whole classes of people out of the ability to appeal and to represent huge attempts to limit the relevance of the Human Rights Act 1998 and other legislation. That is difficult to get to grips with. I have been relying on what the Minister for Social Exclusion said on "Question Time" on television to understand some of the beliefs that lie behind the provisions. If the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard), who is a great expert in this area, finds it hard to understand, what hope is there for the rest of us?

On the first of my two points, the new clauses are not much use without bilateral agreements, especially with France. Will the Minister say more about the timetable for securing that bilateral agreement? It is no good being able to send people back to the safe country from which they came—in many cases, France—if that agreement is not in place. What plans do the Government have for bilateral agreements with other countries that asylum seekers are using as a jumping-off point?

Secondly, the new clauses seem, in the most negative way, to invite judicial review. Subsection (3) of new clause 14 states:

> "A person who is in the United Kingdom may not bring an appeal to which this section applies . . . if the Secretary of State certifies that—. . .
>
> (b) there is no reason to believe that the person's rights under the Human Rights Convention will be breached in that country."

That is almost begging the courts to take a different view from that of the Home Secretary. That is likely to lead to many judicial reviews. How much of the Bill will survive? How much time has been put into thinking about it in the Home Office? We certainly have little time to consider it now.

My question is aimed at clarifying the drafting of subsection (5) of new clause 14 and subsection (6) of new clause 15, which deal with out-of-country appeals. They say that the appeal

> "shall be considered as if he"—

that is, the asylum seeker—

> "had not been removed from the United Kingdom".

Is there any intention behind using exactly those words? Someone who has come from France—say, from Sangatte—was in a safe country and should have applied for asylum in that safe country. If they should not have been here in the first place to apply for asylum, why should they have an out-of-country appeal? Do the words that I quoted mean that the person can claim legal aid and other rights?

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey explained the Shah case with his usual great power and vigour. The weakness of his argument is that saying that in every circumstance the right route for

[Mr. Cameron]

asylum applications is appeal, further appeal and judicial review—a highly judicial process—means that we need to work out what element of asylum applications should be an administrative process and what element should be a judicial process. There may be a strong case for saying that women who come from Pakistan or certain other countries should be seen as asylum seekers because of the way in which women are treated in those countries, but the Government should make a proposal about that, which we can debate in the House. This is where the decision about the framework should be made—it should not always be made, as it is currently, through very long judicial proceedings. That is one of the reasons why the system is getting so clogged up and our constituents think that we are incapable of dealing with the problem.

Simon Hughes: I accept the general proposition that many of us support the European Union's work towards a common basis of definition. As yet, France, Germany and the UK do not have the same definition of who qualifies for asylum. If we could reach that level, some of the difficulties would not exist and it would be much easier for the first decisions to be the right ones, so there would be far fewer appeals.

Mr. Cameron: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but if we believe that the issue should be determined fundamentally in a judicial context, the courts can take a different view, despite a common agreement.

I have already taken five minutes but I should be grateful if the Minister could clarify the mysteriously worded subsection (5) of new clause 14.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): I want to speak briefly about the refugee convention, which new clause 14(4)(b) mentions. The provision relates to a person being removed from the United Kingdom to a place that is specified as safe,

> "from which a person will not be sent to another country otherwise than in accordance with the Refugee Convention."

Can we be confident that the convention is adequate to deal with the issue? I am not familiar with all its provisions. How binding is it? Is it the only agreement with other countries or have other arrangements been made under which we would be likely to send people to other countries to have their appeals heard? Is not independent country assessment required to enable us to produce a safe list on which we could all rely and thus know that people would not be sent on to a country that was unsafe for them?

Mr. Malins: I want to speak briefly about the amendments that we have tabled in the group. I share the sadness of many hon. Members that, yet again, we shall not debate more than a small proportion of what we should discuss.

I want to speak about amendments Nos. 7, 8, 9, 155, 156, 157, 158 and 159. I assure those who believe that that is a mouthful that they are short and almost identical. They relate to clause 80, which was clause 74, and is entitled "Earlier right of appeal". It troubled many members of the Committee that considered the Bill, including my hon. Friends the Members for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) and for Bexhill and Battle (Mr. Barker). I am pleased that they are in their places. It also troubled the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) and one or two Labour Back-Bench Members. I recall contributions from the hon. Members for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) and for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz).

The amendments would substitute "an adjudicator" for

> "the Secretary of State or an immigration officer"

throughout clause 80. Why did the clause trouble us? For the first time, an essentially legal process could take place without the involvement of the judiciary. The provision relates to appeals under clause 66(1). Clause 66 is a general provision that determines what an immigration decision means. It defines several immigration decisions and refers to "an adjudicator". In simple terms, clause 80 provides:

> "An appeal . . . against an immigration decision . . . may not be brought . . . if the Secretary of State or an immigration officer certifies"

that it cannot be brought. Let us analyse what that means in practice.

The words are plain. The clause means that a junior caseworker can make a decision and certify that an appeal cannot be made against it. Such a decision could be wholly contrary to the interests of the applicant. How can it be the end of the story when a junior caseworker makes a decision, then a certification? The appellant would never see a judicial person.

9.30 pm

There is a point of principle involved here: the taking of powers out of the hands of the judges and putting them into the hands of the state is something to be avoided whenever possible. Quite a number of respected non-governmental organisations thought that clause 80 was unfair and wrong in principle. The debate that we had on, I think, 21 May illustrated just that. One or more of the NGOs have pointed out that the clause made the Secretary of State judge and jury in his own cause.

I asked the Minister during that debate whether it could really be right that a junior caseworker could make a decision and then say, "I certify that this decision cannot be appealed against to any judicial person." I asked why an amendment could not be tabled allowing the same certification to be made by an adjudicator rather than the caseworker. The response that I received from the Minister was that if such an amendment were allowed, it would take up more of the adjudicator's time. That is exactly what it would do, but what is wrong with that? Adjudicators are meant to spend time deciding tricky legal issues, and more and more are being appointed. It is not on for the Minister simply to respond by saying that this would be administratively inconvenient.

Let us look again at exactly what clause 80 is telling us. It says that a junior official, who is not qualified, can make a decision and then certify that that decision cannot be appealed against on the grounds there set out. That is what the clause says. That is the end of the story, so far as any judicial involvement is concerned. Is there anybody in the House of Commons who thinks that that approach is fair?

Who are these junior caseworkers who will make the certifications? The clause also mentions the Secretary of State, and I would be happy if he made them personally, but the task will be delegated. He will never know about them; nor will other Ministers. Dozens of certifications will be made by people who are not judges. Do they have to be qualified lawyers? No, they do not. Do they have to have had considerable training? No, they do not. What training have they had? Does anybody know? Does anybody in the Chamber tonight know exactly what legal or other training a junior caseworker has had? If so, will they intervene on me, and tell me whether they are entirely happy that those junior caseworkers are fully qualified to make a decision that could almost be a matter of life and death, so far as the applicant is concerned?

Mr. Coleman: I have been listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman, and he has made a compelling case for opposing the clauses before us this evening. Bearing in mind all that he has said, and the strong case that he has made, will he tell the House why he and his hon. Friends will be voting with the Government this evening?

Mr. Malins: The short answer to that is that, quite often in life, we look to the other place to make progress on our behalf. We often find clauses in a Bill, or clauses that are given to us rather later, with which we agree in part, but with which, in principle, we might have some problems, no problems or a lot of problems. Those matters are not as simple as that, and the truth is that, on appeals, the Government are dealing with certain issues on which we offer some support and sympathy for their approach while on others we remain unhappy.

The hon. Gentleman will share my unhappiness with the fact that the new clauses and some matters that we are discussing tonight landed on our desks yesterday afternoon. That is no way to do business. He is a man who approaches those topics with some knowledge and expertise, but here I am, trying to tell the Government in 10 minutes or so that I do not feel happy that vital decisions under clause 80 that will affect the welfare of someone who has a right of appeal may be taken by someone who simply is not qualified to make the decision. That troubles me immensely.

I return to a point that was reinforced by much of what the hon. Member for Walthamstow said. Were we to keep our eye on the ball, we would consider whether existing procedures in this country work well and efficiently. It is no good legislating year after year—there have been four Bills in the past nine years. What use is legislation when the basic workings out there in our immigration and asylum system are not functioning properly? I could talk for 10 hours or 10 weeks and it would not make a ha'p'orth of difference to what happens outside. *[Interruption.]* The Home Secretary is being very kind to me. On that note, I ought to quit while the going is good, but I must say to the House that fundamental administrative points in our system need looking at.

We need to watch out. It is unfortunate that a clause will allow a junior caseworker to make a decision and to certify it, saying, "You can't appeal against it, chum." How much better it would be if the powers to be given to the junior caseworker were given to an adjudicator. That would enable the principle that it is wrong to take powers from the judges and give them to the state to remain intact. I hope that, even now, the Government will take what I say seriously and consider taking steps, perhaps in the other place rather than under my amendment, to reassure not just me and my hon. Friends, but Members across the House of Commons who felt such concern about the provision when it was debated what seems like 10 years ago, but was, I think, only about 10 days ago.

Beverley Hughes: I shall try to respond to the points that hon. Members have made, but clearly we shall have further debates on new clauses 14 and 15. We have listened carefully to the comments and, I acknowledge, the genuine concerns that Members have raised tonight about parts of those provisions. The hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) began by claiming that it is difficult to judge whether a case is clearly unfounded and that the decision should not be taken by a junior official. I am concerned that that term has become common parlance among Opposition Members. In fact, those who make the decisions are experienced and concerned people. They want to make the right decision on the basis of the best available evidence. It does them a disservice to dismiss them as junior officials or junior caseworkers.

Mr. Letwin: I want to emphasise that I accept absolutely that the people making the decisions, like other civil servants in the UK, are trying to do the best job they can and, no doubt, they acquire in the course of their work a certain amount of expertise and understanding. That is not being challenged. However, they do not carry the same weight as a judge, which is why we have a system of adjudication.

Beverley Hughes: My hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) asked for clarification, and other hon. Members rehearsed the same question. In relation to clearly unfounded cases—mentioned in subsection (2) of new clause 14—return would be to a person's own country, or country of origin. In third-country cases, removal, by definition, would be not to that person's own country but to a third country.

I emphasise—we ought to keep this at the forefront of our minds—that the certification that would be allowed under the clauses would be discretionary and that certification would not be made in relation to any country regarded as unsafe.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes)—

Simon Hughes *rose*—

Beverley Hughes: I was about to deal with some of the points that the hon. Gentleman made, but I shall take an intervention now.

Simon Hughes: I know that the Minister has been in her job for only a week, but have she and the Home Secretary decided how the definition of safe country will be arrived at? We used to have a white list. What will be the difference between the new way of defining a safe country and the old way?

Beverley Hughes: My right hon. Friend made it clear that we will not have a list, but we are sympathetic to the points that are being made about the documentation, which is valid—many other countries draw on our process of assessment. We must ensure that the documentation used to assess the situation in countries is perceived as being robust and as independent as possible.

[Beverley Hughes]

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey mentioned social groups and women. As the Home Secretary said, social group is one of the factors that will be taken into account. Female genital mutilation was also mentioned; obviously such cases would not be regarded as being clearly unfounded. There is no argument about that.

I regret the linkage that the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey made between this Bill—in terms of process and also in terms of substance—and anti-terrorism legislation. There is no link whatever in our minds.

Notwithstanding the concerns to which I have listened, some of the issues that the clause is designed to deal with arise from the kind of cases that, if we are honest, we all deal with in our advice surgeries. We know from the stories that people bring to us, and from the accounts of their circumstances and where they come from, that their claims are unfounded. That raises the legitimate question as to whether, in those circumstances, that person should continue to be maintained here while appealing. It is a question not of denying the right of appeal, but of whether the person should remain here while the appeal goes through. The Home Secretary and I are not into macho posturing. We think that the new clauses raise important issues. There might be disagreement about the solutions proposed in them, but the issues need to be discussed.

9.45 pm

David Winnick (Walsall, North): We know the background, with people with claims of little or no merit appealing time and again, but is my hon. Friend aware that some of us, including Opposition spokesmen, remain uneasy? I would be happier if there were a double check. Perhaps the matter will be raised in another place. We should not have only one official—junior or otherwise, but it certainly will not be a very senior official—deciding that the case is unfounded. The decision should certainly go to another official, higher up the chain. My unease may be totally unjustified, but I had better express my view now.

Beverley Hughes: As the debate unfolds, various measures and solutions may be proposed that will provide some reassurance on the concerns that have been expressed, while still allowing us to make progress.

I do not recognise the figures on judicial review given by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey. I would be interested to know where he got them. My information is that, in the year up to March 2002, 3,200 cases were dealt with and 441 applications were granted, which is an average of 14 per cent. Perhaps that can be clarified in another place.

Simon Hughes: Whatever arguments we may have, they should not be about the figures, which I took from a parliamentary answer on 19 April 2002, at column 1260W. They are ministerial figures given only six weeks ago to Members of Parliament.

Beverley Hughes: I need to be clear about the time scale to which the figures relate and whether we are talking about the same thing. Judicial review outcomes are clearly significant for this debate, and we need to get the figures absolutely right.

The hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) asked about new clause 14(5). Legal aid will be available if the appeal is from a third country, subject to the usual merit and eligibility tests. It is a drafting measure to ensure that the adjudicator considers whether the appellant is a refugee.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the bilateral agreement timetable. The Home Secretary said today that, as the French elections conclude, we should try to make progress on the matter. Towards the end of May, Mr. Sarkozy made a statement warmly welcoming the approach that we are taking and expressing a desire to work with us to establish a bilateral agreement. We can be optimistic about making progress on a reasonable time scale.

The hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) referred to independent country assessment. We are sympathetic to the need to strengthen the perception that assessment is robust and rigorous, and as independent as possible.

Many of the provisions in the new clauses do not break new ground, either here in the UK or in Europe. The idea of having fast-track systems for manifestly or clearly unfounded claims is not uncommon in Europe, and indeed several countries do not have automatically suspensive appeals for such claims. That is the case in Denmark, Germany, France and Finland, for example. Obviously, an unfounded claim is not defined in legislation; none the less, case law exists and our courts are familiar with cases that fall into that category. I am not presenting those arguments to hon. Members as a validation of the principle of non-suspensive appeals; I am simply saying that the argument that the principle is far removed from reality is not itself valid.

Annabelle Ewing: The Minister says that, putting to one side the debate about the validity of the provisions in principle, they are not far removed from existing legislative precedent. If so, why were they tabled at the eleventh hour?

Beverley Hughes: As my right hon. Friend has made clear, we had to relate the provisions to our own legal system and obtain the legal advice necessary to ensure that what we tabled could withstand the robustness of our law.

Mr. Barker: In the light of the Minister's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) about the availability of legal aid for appellants in foreign countries, have the Government assessed the additional legal cost of making such appeals from abroad? Given that foreign law firms will be used, an additional cost will presumably be incurred.

Beverley Hughes: We will deal with such issues as we progress through the Bill.

The hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) spoke softly and persuasively on clause 80. Although an extensive debate took place in Committee—I have read it—I am afraid that he still does not fully appreciate the current position or the proposal. As we said in Committee, clause 80 simply builds on existing legislation. Perhaps he does not realise that the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 introduced the one-stop procedure for appeals—a measure that enjoyed support on both sides of the House. It provides for each asylum seeker to have one, and only one, substantive appeal. During such an appeal, all other grounds that an applicant may have for wishing to remain in this country must be raised. To ensure that the system could work, sections 73 and 76 of the 1999 Act introduced certification in exactly the way referred to in clause 80. Section 73 applies if an appeal is dismissed and an applicant raises grounds that they knew about, and which they could, and should, have raised earlier.

As I said, in 1999 agreement was reached in Standing Committee that the one-stop procedure was the right way forward. I should point out to the hon. Gentleman that the form of certification arising from the 1999 Act has been shown to work. Since October 2000, some 700 applications have been certified—by the officials about whom he is rather disparaging—to effect removal. Only three applications for judicial review of those certifications have been made. Two were refused permission on the papers, one was refused after an oral hearing, and no substantive hearings have challenged those certifications. There can be no better evidence that the concerns expressed then and now are completely unfounded.

Mr. Malins: When I told Ministers in Standing Committee that the procedure constituted a departure, the point was not denied. Indeed, the current scenario used not to exist. Under the terms of the clause, an appellant might never have seen an adjudicator—end of story.

Beverley Hughes: That situation might, in theory, arise, but I shall go through the process with the hon. Gentleman and show how clause 80 will build on the current provision. A person submits a claim, having been served with notice on more than one occasion that all the reasons to support the claim must be included in it. An initial decision is then made. Let us suppose that the claim is refused. That decision goes to appeal. It is only in circumstances in which an asylum seeker chooses at that point not to appeal or absconds, and then returns to try to make a fresh application, that it is possible to certify on grounds included in the 1999 Act that the person has already exhausted their access to a right of appeal.

We do not oppose the Opposition amendments because they would take up adjudicators' time, although they would: we oppose them because they would start to unravel the one-stop appeal process and would, in effect, allow another consideration by an adjudicator of the case of someone who had already gone through the process once, and submitted a fresh application. If that case was not then certified by the Home Secretary or an official and went to an adjudicator, there would be another appeal, which would cut across the procedure that we have all agreed in principle—that there should be one, and only one, substantive appeal.

I hope that on that basis the hon. Member for Woking can accept that we are not introducing new principles. We are building on what is already working well and what his party largely agreed when we discussed the process in proceedings on the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. There are no new principles included in the new clauses and, therefore, we oppose the Opposition amendments. They would start to chip away at a procedure to which we have all agreed.

Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 379, Noes 71.

Division No. 264] **[9.57 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brazier, Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Butterfill, John
Cairns, David
Cameron, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fallon, Michael
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Gray, James
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John

Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Hayes, John
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoban, Mark
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, Oliver
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Loughton, Tim
Lucas, Ian
Luff, Peter
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Malins, Humfrey
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marlew, Eric
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Mercer, Patrick
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, Rt Hon John
Primarolo, Dawn
Prisk, Mark
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruffley, David
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spicer, Sir Michael
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watkinson, Angela
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Angela Smith and
Mr. Phil Woolas.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Best, Harold
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Bruce, Malcolm
Buck, Ms Karen
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Galloway, George
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
McDonnell, John
McNamara, Kevin
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*

Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Moore, Michael
Mudie, George
Oaten, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Wareing, Robert N
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Bob Russell and
Mrs. Annette L. Brooke.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

It being after Ten o'clock, MR. SPEAKER *put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour, pursuant to Order [this day].*

New Clause 15

APPEAL FROM WITHIN UNITED KINGDOM: UNFOUNDED HUMAN RIGHTS OR ASYLUM CLAIM: TRANSITIONAL PROVISION

'(1) A person who is in the United Kingdom may not bring an appeal under section 69 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (c.33) (asylum) or raise a question which relates to the Human Rights Convention under section 77 of that Act (one-stop appeals) if the Secretary of State certifies that the appeal or question, or a claim to which the appeal or question relates, is clearly unfounded.

(2) A person who is in the United Kingdom may not bring an appeal under section 69 of that Act, or raise a question which relates to the Human Rights Convention under section 77 of that Act, if the Secretary of State certifies that—

(a) it is proposed to remove the person to a country of which he is not a national or citizen, and

(b) there is no reason to believe that the person's rights under the Human Rights Convention will be breached in that country.

(3) A person who is in the United Kingdom may not bring an appeal under section 65 of that Act (human rights) or raise a question in reliance on section 65(3) if the Secretary of State certifies that the appeal or question, or a claim to which the appeal or question relates, is clearly unfounded.

(4) A person who is in the United Kingdom may not bring an appeal under section 65 of that Act (human rights) if the Secretary of State certifies that—

(a) it is proposed to remove the person to a country of which he is not a national or citizen, and

(b) there is no reason to believe that the person's rights under the Human Rights Convention will be breached in that country.

(5) In determining whether a person in relation to whom a certificate has been issued under subsection (2) or (4) may be removed from the United Kingdom, the country specified in the certificate is to be regarded as—

(a) a place where a person's life and liberty is not threatened by reason of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, and

(b) a place from which a person will not be sent to another country otherwise than in accordance with the Refugee Convention.

(6) Where a person in relation to whom a certificate is issued under this section subsequently brings an appeal or raises a question under section 65, 69 or 77 of that Act while outside the United Kingdom, the appeal or question shall be considered as if he had not been removed from the United Kingdom.'.—*[Beverley Hughes.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Motion made, and Question put, That the clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 359, Noes 76.

Division No. 265] **[10.12 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brazier, Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Butterfill, John
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Francois, Mark
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul

Gray, James
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Hayes, John
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoban, Mark
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, Oliver
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luff, Peter
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Malins, Humfrey
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marlew, Eric
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Mercer, Patrick
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spicer, Sir Michael
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watkinson, Angela
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Angela Smith and
Mr. Phil Woolas.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Bruce, Malcolm
Buck, Ms Karen
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Coleman, Iain
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Galloway, George
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hermon, Lady
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
McDonnell, John
McNamara, Kevin
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Moore, Michael
Mudie, George
Oaten, Mark
Pugh, Dr John

Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'dns)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Wareing, Robert N
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Bob Russell and
Mrs. Annette L. Brooke.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

Question put, That Government amendments Nos. 219 to 226 be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 358, Noes 66.

Division No. 266] **[10.25 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brazier, Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Butterfill, John
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Gray, James
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Hayes, John
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
H[illegible]es, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoban, Mark
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, Oliver
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lloyd, Tony
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luff, Peter
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Martlew, Eric
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Meale, Alan
Mercer, Patrick
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali

Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John
    (Glasgow Anniesland)
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt H[illegible] Clare
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*

Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spicer, Sir Michael
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Watkinson, Angela
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
    (Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Angela Smith and
Mr. Phil Woolas.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Bruce, Malcolm
Buck, Ms Karen
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul

Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
    (NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Coleman, Iain
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*

Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hermon, Lady
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
    (Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
McDonnell, John
McNamara, Kevin
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark
Pugh, Dr John

Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Wareing, Robert N
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Bob Russell and
Mrs. Annette L. Brooke.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 80

EARLIER RIGHT OF APPEAL

Amendment proposed: No. 13, in page 44, line 19, leave out Clause 80.—*[Simon Hughes.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 58, Noes 363.

Division No. 267] **[10.38 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
    (NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*

Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
    (Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Bob Russell and
Mrs. Annette L. Brooke.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boateng, Rt Hon Paul
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brazier, Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Butterfill, John
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Farrelly, Paul
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Hayes, John
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoban, Mark
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Howells, Dr Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, Rt Hon Tessa
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luff, Peter
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Eric
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Mercer, Patrick
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Rt Hon Dr John *(Hamilton N)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim

Short, Rt Hon Clare
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spicer, Sir Michael
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watkinson, Angela
Watts, David
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Wiggin, Bill
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilshire, David
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Angela Smith and
Mr. Phil Woolas.

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendments made: No. 228, in page 44, line 20, after "decision", insert "("the new decision")".

No. 229, in page 44, line 27, leave out—

'the person is seeking to appeal'

and insert—

'the new decision responds to a request or application which the person made'.

No. 230, in page 44, line 30, leave out "has" and insert "had".

No. 231, in page 44, line 30, leave out "seeking to appeal" and insert—

'making the request or application'.

No. 232, in page 45, line 3, leave out subsection (4).

No. 233, in page 45, line 20, at end insert—

'or since a requirement under section 98 was imposed'.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Clause 81

NATIONAL SECURITY, &C.

Amendments made: No. 234, in page 45, line 35, at end insert—

'(2A) An appeal under section 66(1) against an immigration decision may not be brought or continued if the Secretary of State certifies that the decision is or was taken wholly or partly in reliance on information which in his opinion should not be made public—

(a) in the interests of national security,

(b) in the interests of the relationship between the United Kingdom and another country, or

(c) for another reason of a political kind.'.

No. 235, in page 45, line 36, leave out "subsection (1)(a) and (b)" and insert—

'subsections (1)(a) and (b) and (2A)'.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Clause 82

OTHER GROUNDS OF PUBLIC GOOD

Amendment made: No. 236, in page 46, line 10, at end insert—

'( ) Subsection (2) does not prevent the bringing of an appeal against an immigration decision of the kind referred to in section 66(2)(a) on the grounds referred to in section 68(1)(g).'.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Clause 85

APPEAL TO TRIBUNAL

Amendment made: No. 237, in page 46, line 33, at end insert—

'(4) The Lord Chancellor may by order repeal subsections (2) and (3).'—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Clause 94

REGULATIONS, &C.

Amendment made: No. 238, in page 50, line 31, at end insert—

'( ) An order under section 85(4)—

(a) must be made by statutory instrument,

(b) may not be made unless a draft has been laid before and approved by resolution of each House of Parliament,

(c) may include consequential or transitional provision, and

(d) may include savings.'.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Schedule 6

IMMIGRATION AND ASYLUM APPEALS: CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendments made: No. 245, in page 85, line 23, leave out "81(1)" and insert "81".

No. 246, in page 85, line 26, leave out "81(1)" and insert "81".

No. 244, in page 85, line 39, at end insert—

'(3) A person may bring or continue an appeal under this section while he is in the United Kingdom only if he would be able to bring or continue the appeal while he was in the United Kingdom if it were an appeal under section 66(1) of that Act.'.

No. 247, in page 86, line 33, at end insert—

'15A Paragraph 9 of Schedule 4 to that Act (appeals: procedure: Convention cases) shall be amended as follows—

(a) in sub-paragraph (1)(a), omit "(4), (5)", and

(b) omit sub-paragraphs (4) and (5).'.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Bill, as amended in the Standing Committee, to be further considered tomorrow.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Ordered,

BUILDING

That the Building (Amendment) Regulations 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 440) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION

That the Electoral Commission (Limit on Public Awareness Expenditure) Order 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 505) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

That the Local Government (Best Value) Performance Indicators and Performance Standards Order 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 523) be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

LIAISON COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 145(3) (Liaison Committee),

That this House agrees with the Report [16th May] of the Liaison Committee.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Catherine Meyer

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

10.52 pm

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise in the House the case of Catherine Meyer, whose two sons were abducted by her former husband eight years ago, in 1994. This is a tragic case. It is impossible to imagine the pain and suffering that this mother has had to go through over the last few years. It has been described as torture. As the parent of two young children, one the same age as Lady Meyer's children when she last had custody of them, I can only dare to imagine how awful must be her grief. I know that the Minister also has young children, so he will know what I mean when I say this.

Although this debate will focus on one case, it is one case among many—far too many. The House has debated the subject of child abduction before. The right hon. Member for Tonbridge and Malling (Sir John Stanley) raised the issue on 24 October 2000 when he called for a review of The Hague convention. The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) also raised the issue in respect of his constituent Lawrence Horne, on 22 April 1999. The shadow Attorney-General, the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash), has also talked about child abduction with his usual passion. We can change the names of the children, and the facts, but we seem unable to change the results.

Two Departments have responsibility for these matters: the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department; the Home Office also has a remit. This case has also been raised at the highest levels by President Chirac in 1997, President Clinton in 2000, and President Bush in 2001. Lady Meyer's husband is, of course, Her Majesty's ambassador to Washington.

We are also dealing with real gaps in an international convention, the complete failure of the German courts to bring justice to the situation, and the manipulation by their father of the emotions and the psychology of two young children. Dr. Hans Peter Volkmann has behaved appallingly in robbing his own children of their childhood.

This sad story began eight years ago. Catherine Meyer, a British citizen, had a legal separation agreement from her husband, Dr. Volkmann. She had legal custody of the children from the German court by a notarised separation agreement. It was 6 July 1994, and the two boys, Alexander aged nine and Constantine aged seven, were living with their mother in London. They went on a routine access holiday to be with their father in Germany.

On 24 August, four days before the children were due home in London, Dr. Volkmann wrote a 21-page letter telling Lady Meyer that he would not be returning the children to London and that he had applied for custody of the boys. Attempts by their mother to reach them by telephone were thwarted by Dr. Volkmann, who repeatedly said that they were not available. When she eventually spoke to Alexander, he said to her, "I'm German. I have to go to a German school."

There then began a history of court action, which continues to this day. It makes me wonder about the principles that underpin German justice. Dr. Volkmann's application for custody of the children was rejected by a court in Verden on 24 August 1994, but in spite of that

[Mr. Keith Vaz]

he decided to keep the children in Germany. He simply ignored the ruling. On 31 August, the High Court in London ruled the retention illegal and ordered the immediate return of the children. It also made them wards of court. A month later, the Verden court upheld the British order and ordered the immediate return of the children to the United Kingdom under the terms of The Hague convention, with help from the court bailiffs if necessary.

The father asked for half an hour to say goodbye to the children, and Lady Meyer's lawyer agreed. Volkmann and his family went to the café where the boys were waiting and threw them into the back seat of a waiting car. The car sped away to the town of Celle, where his family had influence. He immediately lodged an ex-parte application against the Verden decision. Neither Lady Meyer nor her lawyer was informed; they were simply not represented.

In November 1994, the appeal court in Celle reversed the two previous decisions and ruled that the children remain in Germany, as they were suffering in a foreign environment because German was not spoken at home or at school. The judges also deemed that the children, then aged seven and nine, were mature enough to have their views taken into account. By that time, Lady Meyer had not seen them in more than four months and they were under the exclusive control of their father and his family. In March 1995, the German Constitutional Court rejected her appeal.

The Lord Chancellor's Department told Lady Meyer that there was little it could do and that she was now in the hands of the local German courts, to which she should apply for custody and access. Since 1994, Lady Meyer has tried repeatedly, and failed, to find redress in the German courts. Not only were her sons not returned to England, but she has been denied normal access to them for the entire eight years since their illegal retention in Germany.

The boys are now 17 and 15. Since summer 1994, she has been allowed to see her sons for a grand total of 25 hours—only in Germany, usually in her ex-husband's house or on the premises of the Verden youth authority and on only three occasions without a member of the father's family or a German bureaucrat present.

The last visit was in early 1999, and the situation has gone from bad to worse. Lady Meyer is now forbidden to see her children until 2003. Then, she will no longer be able to apply for access under German law as her sons will be over 16. The handling of her case by the German courts and the youth authority has comprised a mix of bias, incompetence and malice, but the heart of the problem has been the creation of facts by the German courts, which justify subsequent decisions favouring her ex-husband. Central to that has been delay.

From the very beginning, the slowness of court proceedings has given her ex-husband ample opportunity to manipulate the children against her. It has taken up to a year to make a decision on access applications—not custody applications, but applications for access. Statements are extracted from the children, saying that they do not wish to see her. These are taken at face value by the German courts, which seem unable to understand that the will of the children is in fact the will of the father. Dr. Volkmann is therefore able arrogantly to tear up access agreements and force Lady Meyer to keep making these applications. For her, this has meant 20 fruitless trips to Germany over the last eight years, more than 30 applications and the expenditure of more than £200,000 in legal fees and travel costs.

The more time that elapses without her seeing her children, the more the courts and the youth authority resort to the argument that it would be too traumatic for the children to visit her. The German courts refused to fine Dr. Volkmann for disobeying access arrangements. In August 2000, a psychologist made a report after extensive interviews of all parties. His conclusion was that the children were being negatively influenced against their mother and that access to the mother should be resumed immediately in the mother's home. This led to the first positive decision.

However, Dr. Volkmann immediately appealed against the decision. A new psychologist was appointed; the mother was not even interviewed. The latest decision, scrapping all her access rights until 2003, is based on this very one-sided report.

The situation is not unique. There are many parents who find themselves in a similar predicament. These cases closely follow an established pattern. The court registers an agreed programme of access rights; the abducting parent refuses to abide by it; the court refuses to enforce it. The victim parent is required to begin again with new hearings. With the passage of time, the court relies increasingly on the child's will and the arguments of trauma of reunion with the left-behind parent. In too many cases, the victim parent cannot continue, emotionally and financially trapped in this vicious cycle. A few find release in suicide.

I have been alarmed at the number of children who go missing and are abducted every year. More than 100 children go missing every day in the United Kingdom. Although most are found or returned within a few hours, last year in England and Wales 1,300 children were still missing two weeks after they disappeared. Of these, 750 were from the Metropolitan police area. Some 546 had been abducted; 40 per cent. were victims of parental abduction. Reunite, whose work I want to commend, informs us that there was a 58 per cent. jump in the recorded number of children abducted from Britain between 1995 and the end of last year. The true figure could be far higher.

The US State Department estimates that at least 1,000 children are taken from the United States each year by a non-American parent without the consent of the other parent. In a parliamentary reply, the Lord Chancellor's Department informed us that, in respect of signatories to The Hague convention, there were 1,314 cases of abduction reported and 668 of these had been returned—a 51 per cent. success rate. It came as no surprise to me that Germany had 80 cases of abduction and a success rate of only 35 per cent., one of the worst figures of any country.

What now can be done to resolve the situation? First, I want ministerial action at the highest levels between Britain and Germany on the issue. I shall be writing to the Prime Minister today to ask him to raise this case directly with Chancellor Schröder. Germany is an EU member, a signatory to the convention and a close ally of Britain. We know that the courts are independent of

Government, but they are supposed to exist in order to ensure that justice is done, not that national interests are served. There was rightly a lot of Government anger over the detaining of the British planespotters in Greece. I would like to see some ministerial anger over this. I will ask again before the summer recess what action has been taken to follow it up.

Secondly, I want the Lord Chancellor's Department to do much more. I know that Ministers in the Department treat the issue very seriously indeed. The area of justice and home affairs is ripe for co-operation, and no issues of sovereignty are at stake. Let us have some positive judicial co-operation. I know that the German Justice Ministry has been reformed in its dealing with Hague cases, and that is thanks to the campaigning of Catherine Meyer and others.

Surely the courts and judges in the two countries can talk to one another about the issue and produce some positive results. Perhaps we can offer some judicial training in child care law to those in the German courts who would like it. We need to learn from the administrative mistakes that have been made. It would be helpful if the Lord Chancellor's Department could ask the German authorities to review the conduct of the German courts in this case. I shall write to the German Chancellor to ask him to raise the matter directly with the German chief justice.

Thirdly, this must be seen as a human rights issue. What advice can the Government give to Lady Meyer on pursuing the matter in the European Court of Human Rights, and what are we to do about The Hague convention? It is a pointless exercise to sign, as Germany has done, without any inclination to ensure that the articles are actually followed.

Fourthly, I would like the Minister to agree to a meeting between the Foreign Office, the Lord Chancellor's Department and Lady Meyer. Let us have some joined-up action.

Finally, I would like the Government to support much more actively the work of non-profit-making organisations. In particular, I commend the work of PACT, the organisation founded by Catherine Meyer as a result of her terrible ordeal. She is a courageous woman who has dedicated the past eight years of her life to her beloved sons. PACT stands for Parents and Abducted Children Together, and its website is at www.pact-online.org. It exists to give information and advice to those who suffer the horror of having their children abducted and seeks to raise the profile of cases and of the subject generally in a positive and constructive way. Lady Meyer may not be able to help herself, but she intends to help others.

Lady Meyer wrote a book entitled "Two Children Behind a Wall", chronicling her attempts to be reunited with her sons. Her love for her children is of course never-ending. She ends her book with a moving message to her young sons:

> "I have nothing left but my life to give you. This book is the only way I have left to communicate my indestructible boundless love for you. When you grow up and you are free perhaps you will read these words and understand. I do not know why life has burdened us with such a fate. I only know that even in my helplessness I will never abandon you . . . I will always be there for you but until the day when we are together again—and we will be—you must have faith. Till then sleep well, and let us meet in your dreams. In the dark at least our thoughts are our own to hold and to cherish and we can laugh again. For ever yours, Mummy."

I urge the Minister not to abandon this mother, and the Government to do what they can to help her and thousands of others who suffer because of the cruelty and spite of people such as Hans Peter Volkmann and the administrative failures of the German court system.

11.9 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) on securing this debate on the case of Lady Catherine Meyer, the mother of two children who were wrongfully retained in Germany by their father following an access visit in 1994. I congratulate him not only on the powerful case that he has made but on the way in which he has set it in the broader context of children who are abducted and disappear. Those of us who believe that family life should occupy an increasing rather than decreasing part in our society should be grateful to him.

I want to place on the record my admiration for my hon. Friend's persistence in this as in other matters relating to the right of mothers to be with their children. As children, we all learn to speak what is called a mother tongue. In today's world, the right of mothers to be mothers to their children is usually afforded primacy in law and custom, but this case is a grave and serious exception to that general rule. No one should doubt how seriously every decent European citizen would, once familiar with the details of the case as laid before the House tonight, regard the conduct of German lawyers in seeking to deny what Germans call Mutterrecht. The right of a mother to be a mother must be considered.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this important and distressing issue, and his initiating this debate is an indication of his commitment to Lady Meyer's case. As he said, there has been extensive parliamentary and public interest in it, and I welcome the opportunity to set out the action that the Government and we in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have taken so far on Lady Meyer's behalf.

As my hon. Friend pointed out, Lady Meyer's children were wrongfully retained in Germany by her ex-husband, following a contact visit in 1994. Before that, Lady Meyer had full custody under the terms of the separation agreement, and her husband had access rights. The High Court in England and Wales ordered the return of the children and made them wards of court. Initially, the lower courts in Germany made an order to return the children to the UK under The Hague convention, which governs the handling of abducted children by European countries.

In Lady Meyer's case, the initial decision of the German lower courts was overturned by the higher regional court, without her being present. Lady Meyer appealed against the decision, but lost in the German constitutional court in 1995. At that point, The Hague convention route was effectively dead. Lady Meyer therefore had no choice but to apply for contact with her children through domestic court processes in Germany. To aid those applications, the children ceased to be wards of court in the UK.

As my hon. Friend recounted in distressing detail, Lady Meyer has pursued applications for contact since November 1994. However, she has been permitted to see

[Mr. Denis MacShane]

her children for a total of just 24 hours throughout this period. Various contact orders have been awarded in Lady Meyer's favour, but the German courts have not enforced them. I believe that that is contrary to all European norms.

It is important to understand how Her Majesty's Government can assist families affected by child abduction. In broad terms, responsibility for assisting such families is divided into two areas: Hague convention cases and non-Hague convention cases. The Lord Chancellor's Department is the lead Department for abductions to and from Hague convention countries in England and Wales; Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own central authorities. The FCO is the lead Department for non-Hague convention countries.

The Hague convention on the international aspects of child abduction is a multilateral treaty. It seeks to return children who have been abducted abroad to their country of habitual residence, where issues of custody and contact can be resolved through the courts. It seeks to protect children from the harmful effects of international child abduction by providing a procedure to bring about their prompt return.

As I said, the FCO is the lead Department for non-Hague convention cases. Where The Hague convention is not in force between two countries, families of abducted children must pursue court proceedings in the foreign country to gain contact with, or custody of, them. The FCO provides support for parents who are pursuing contact or custody cases through the domestic courts of another country, but it also gets involved in Hague convention cases in which diplomatic intervention could expedite progress. That is why the FCO has been closely involved in Lady Meyer's case. Since January 2000, formal representations to the German authorities have been made on at least four occasions. Those have included correspondence to the German authorities from our ambassador in Berlin, our chargé d'affaires in Berlin and Baroness Scotland. Other embassy and consulate-general staff have been closely involved in negotiating a compromise between the children's father, the court in Celle, and the lawyer appointed by the Celle court to look after the children's interests.

Although I do not have direct ministerial responsibility for Germany, I know the country and its Chancellor, and I believe that the denial of Mutterrecht—the right of a mother to be a mother—is not acceptable in a modern, tolerant, liberal Europe. I give the House my assurance that I will give my personal support to the case. It is the considered view of the Foreign Office that the German courts have been incapable of dealing fairly and objectively with the unique circumstances of Lady Meyer's case. She has been treated unsympathetically.

Mr. Vaz: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for his remarks and appreciate greatly his support. Will he agree to convene a meeting with the Lord Chancellor's Department and Lady Meyer so that both Departments can be involved in helping her to pursue the next steps?

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office stands ready to work with Lady Meyer on the next steps of her case and looks forward to discussing that with her. I shall convey my hon. Friend's suggestion to my ministerial colleagues in the Foreign Office with direct responsibility for the matter, because it would be a sensible way to take matters forward.

Lady Meyer has clearly been active and energetic in pursuing contact rights to her sons. We will continue to provide assistance to Lady Meyer wherever possible and whenever she requests it. It is extraordinarily sad that Lady Meyer has been unable to secure substantial contact rights to see her sons. It is hard to accept that in a democratic, tolerant Europe that respects the rule of law this case has to be brought to the attention of the public authorities in such a way.

Lady Meyer's case is, in the experience of the Lord Chancellor's Department, atypical. There are currently—thankfully—no other cases in which British parents are suffering the same level of difficulties as Catherine Meyer, though parents of other nationalities are. While there have in the past been administrative difficulties concerning Hague convention cases in Germany, Germany has overhauled the court system that deals with Hague convention cases. The German Ministry of Justice recently reduced the number of courts dealing with cases under The Hague convention from 600 to 24 on the basis that fewer judges will lead to greater expertise. Those changes are welcome and they have come about not least because of the work done bilaterally by the Lord Chancellor's Department. But they are long overdue and it is a matter of deep regret that they are too late to help Catherine Meyer and other, non-British, parents in their predicament. We hope nevertheless that they will ensure that parents in future will not suffer what Catherine has suffered.

The answer lies in a common European system. That requires a decision, agreed by all EU member states, that the rules of unanimity mean that just one country—in this case, Germany—can exercise its veto to prevent a fair and just system from coming into operation. Those hon. Members who always insist on national rules and systems, and the right of veto über alles, so to speak, may reflect on what happens when national egoism prevails over a greater need for justice.

As my hon. Friend has stated, Lady Meyer has tried to use her difficult experience to help others. She has been the driving force behind the establishment of the charity Parents and Abducted Children Together—PACT. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to Lady Meyer's work with PACT and to welcome the presence on the Front Bench of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House who, while Foreign Secretary, gave his strong personal support to Lady Meyer's case.

Returning to Lady Meyer's case, I am confident that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has provided Lady Meyer with appropriate advice and consular assistance. My noble Friend Baroness Scotland, when she was a Minister at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, showed an active interest in Lady Meyer's case, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East when he was Minister for Europe. I will ensure that my noble Friend Baroness Amos, who now has responsibility for this issue, sees a transcript of tonight's important debate. I hope that the other interventions by my hon. Friend, which he mentioned earlier, will help to assist the case.

Staff at our embassy in Berlin and our consulate-general in Hamburg have also devoted a good deal of time to assisting Lady Meyer. We will continue to do what we can to provide Lady Meyer with support and assistance, and to take a close interest in her case. It is utterly irrelevant that she is the wife of one our ambassadors. She speaks as a mother denied the right to be a mother to her children. That is a crime against motherhood, and the German legal system and those who have denied her right to be a mother should be thoroughly ashamed of it. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office stands beside her, as we stand behind every mother who wants to be a parent to her sons.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-one minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 12 June 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

MERSEY TUNNELS BILL (*BY ORDER*)

Order for Second Reading read.

To be read a Second time on Wednesday 19 June.

Oral Answers to Questions

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Secretary of State was asked—

Community Violence

1. **Rev. Martin Smyth** (Belfast, South): What his assessment is of the levels of community violence throughout Belfast in the last two months. [57730]

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid): The recent violence committed by both sides of the community throughout Belfast is inexcusable. It serves no purpose other than to keep local communities in a never-ending cycle of sectarian hostility. It is time, quite simply, to stop. Violence will breed further violence, and bitterness will lead to further bitterness. Only dialogue will solve our problems.

Rev. Martin Smyth: We thought that dialogue was solving the problems. Does the Secretary of State agree that the violence has been planned for some time and is spreading through north, south, east and west Belfast? Is it not time to stop talking about the instigating and orchestrating, and to deal instead with the reality? Those who have benefited from the agreement are in government, but they have not fulfilled the terms of that agreement. Is it not about time that sanctions were applied against them?

Dr. Reid: As the hon. Gentleman says, there is little use in talking about who instigated the violence, because it is common currency in Northern Ireland for one side continually to blame the other. What is true is that intelligence, evidence and information exists to show that all paramilitaries have been involved in orchestrating or organising such violence at various stages.

As I have said, violence from both communities is to be utterly condemned. I am keeping all ceasefires under close review, but let us be clear: ceasefires, however effectively they are maintained, will not themselves be sufficient to maintain confidence in the political process. The shadow of paramilitaries and paramilitarism must be fully and finally lifted. There is no halfway house. The destination must be clear, the commitment to exclusively democratic and peaceful means must be assured, and the progress towards that end must be continual.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): Does the Secretary of State agree that the upsurge in sectarian violence on the streets of Belfast in particular is being initiated by, or manipulated by, paramilitaries both loyalist and republican? He says, as he has said many times, that there is no halfway house between the bullet and the ballot box, but such a halfway house has existed in Northern Ireland for some considerable time. When will circumstances dictate that paramilitaries will be fingered and announced as perpetrators of orchestrated and organised paramilitary violence who manipulate the political process?

Dr. Reid: First, to put this in context, without being complacent we should not forget that there has been movement away from the violence that we experienced previously. Some 50 people have been killed in the past three and a half years, and although each one of those deaths is tragic, we should remember that in the three and a half years before the ceasefire, seven times as many people were killed. Although much remains to be done, we should not take the view that no progress has been made. Nevertheless, continuing activity and violence is unacceptable and will be opposed by all means within the power of the state, not least through the Police Service itself.

The aspect of such violence that I find particularly detestable and distasteful is the misuse and abuse of children. Not only are they the victims of personal attacks or attacks on schools; they are also being permitted, or encouraged, to go on to the streets of Northern Ireland, putting themselves and others at risk. This is supposed to be the generation of hope. I appeal to every parent in Northern Ireland to make sure that their children are not involved, because they will simply inflict on the next generation the same misery that was inflicted on the previous one.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East): I concur with the Secretary of State's condemnation of the recent terrorism and violence in Belfast, and with the thrust of the question from the hon. Member for South Down (Mr. McGrady). However, will the Secretary of State try to understand the difficulty that many people in Northern Ireland have in understanding his criterion in judging whether a ceasefire has been breached? They remember the level of toleration that he showed for the Ulster Defence Association, and they note that since the Provisional IRA declared its so-called ceasefire, it has murdered more than a dozen people and shot more than 160, been involved in paramilitary beatings of more than 250 people, been found guilty of running guns from Florida, been involved in training terrorists in Colombia, and has shot five of my constituents in the past fortnight. Despite that, the Secretary of State is still reviewing the Provisional IRA's ceasefire.

Dr. Reid: If I were to base my judgments on every assertion made by the hon. Gentleman, they might be open to more question than basing them on the judgment of the security forces and advisers who advise me on those matters. As the acting Chief Constable has made plain recently, in his view there is no imminent threat to the ceasefire. However, that is not the point. The point is that the ceasefire is not in itself sufficient even if, in the round, it is in place. If it is alleged that some of the paramilitaries are involved not only in localised violence but in preparations for a terrorist war after a ceasefire, the political confidence in the process cannot be sustained. Therefore, it is incumbent on everyone who is committed to the process to ensure that no such allegations can be shown to be founded.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): The Secretary of State's powerful words in response to the question asked by the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth) will be supported by all people of good will, but I wish to ask my right hon. Friend whether those who criticise the Good Friday agreement have presented to him any viable and sustainable alternative to the peace process.

Dr. Reid: I can answer my hon. Friend simply and straightly—no, they have not. That is not only of little use to me, or anyone who wants to see the problems in Northern Ireland resolved, but it perpetrates the illusion on the people of Northern Ireland that some alternative or third way—if I may use that expression—exists to the course on which we have embarked and the terrible and tragic course that was followed for decades. It certainly has not been brought to my attention by anyone in general, or in particular by the hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), that a viable and realistic alternative exists.

Mrs. Patsy Calton (Cheadle): In view of the attack on another Alliance councillor's home last night after he had sought the removal of paramilitary murals in his area, when will the police make arrests for painting such murals and what action is being taken to curb the underlying causes of the violence we see daily in Northern Ireland?

Dr. Reid: Those are matters for the police in terms of operational activity. Nevertheless, I utterly condemn and deplore any attacks on people, especially elected representatives, on the basis that others disagree with their views. That is what gave us the tragedy of Northern Ireland. The people who use such violence use fear to try to shut others up, but they themselves are in the grip of a fear of the power of politics and democracy. They see their own power to impose their will on the people of Northern Ireland slipping away as the peace process progresses.

Mr. Quentin Davies (Grantham and Stamford): At the last Northern Ireland questions, I put to the Secretary of State a catalogue of evidenced cases of breaches of the ceasefire [illegible] the agreement by Sinn Fein-IRA and asked him what he proposed to do about it. The answer was that he proposed to do nothing at all. Apart from the usual ponderous phrases and evasiveness, the answer was zero. Now the situation is much more serious. We see vicious rioting from both communities, the shooting of civilians and policemen, and the attempted murder by the IRA of a Catholic policeman, from which the chairman of Sinn Fein pointedly refuses to dissociate himself. Is it still the Secretary of State's policy to do absolutely nothing?

Dr. Reid: I repeat the words of the Deputy First Minister of Northern Ireland, who said that when there are hotheads on the streets, it is helpful to have cool heads in Chambers such as this. It is not the case that intelligence has informed me that there was an attempted murder of a young policeman by the IRA. I have been informed that it was dissident republicans. *[Interruption.]* It may make no difference to Democratic Unionist Members who commits a crime, as their consistent position is to blame everything that happens on one section of the community. That is precisely part of the problem in Northern Ireland.

It is not the case either that evidence or information has been given to me as to who was firing the shots. Nevertheless, the point is that paramilitary involvement in civil disorder or in preparation for a terrorist campaign or the resumption of a war can do nothing but undermine confidence in the peace process. I have therefore made it absolutely plain that ceasefires are not sufficient, even if they are maintained in the round. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree with me on that at least.

Mr. Davies: The Secretary of State can always argue about who was responsible for the attempted murder of the Catholic policeman in Ballymena, but he cannot get away from the fact that the chairman of Sinn Fein, when pressed many times by John Humphrys on Sunday, pointedly declined to dissociate himself from it. So Sinn Fein is endorsing this kind of activity: is not that absolutely clear? Is not it an inescapable fact? Is not it something that the right hon. Gentleman should respond to?

Given that the Secretary of State seems completely at a loss, may I make one or two suggestions? Might not he put into suspense the additional concessions, going beyond Belfast, that he has promised to Sinn Fein-IRA? Might not he consider also withdrawing Sinn Fein's special status in this House? That would at least demonstrate that the Government have the backbone to withdraw concessions when that is called for, as well as making them.

Dr. Reid: If the problems of Northern Ireland could be solved by shouting, they would have been solved a long time ago.

I must correct the hon. Gentleman: according to my reading of the transcript of the interview, the chairman of Sinn Fein did not fail to dissociate himself from the attempted murder. He failed to condemn it. *[Interruption.]* It is important to get our facts straight in connection with such important matters of life and death. I am not only disappointed, but I deplore the failure of anyone to condemn the cowardly and murderous attempt on the life of a young Catholic recruit to the Police Service of Northern Ireland. First, because it is an act of murder, and secondly because people like that young recruit are attempting to bring about a new cross-community support for policing in Northern Ireland, which is an integral part of the peace process.

I say again to members of every political party in Northern Ireland that it is their duty and responsibility, as we bring in a new police service, to give full support to that and to condemn those who are attempting to murder people acting in the best interests of the public of Northern Ireland.

Mr. John Hume (Foyle): Leaving aside the two areas in which there has been serious sectarian activity, does the Secretary of State agree that in the rest of Northern Ireland there is massive support on the streets for the peace process? Does he agree that the atmosphere in those streets has been transformed, and that the peace process has the substantial support of both sections of our community?

Secondly, is he aware that there is an opinion abroad that the people behind the stirring up of sectarianism want to ensure that law and order is not restored because they are engaged in the mafia drugs trade? Is there any intelligence information to support that opinion?

Dr. Reid: First, we must all recognise that paramilitaries of all persuasions are involved in this. Secondly, we must recognise that at least one group of those paramilitaries is in government, through the political representatives of the republican movement. That means that there is a higher obligation on them to exhibit that they are committed to exclusively democratic means.

My hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mr. Hume) is right to suggest that there may be an attempt to defy the imposition of any law and order for criminal purposes, but there may well be other motives. However, we must also remember that in certain areas, although such things may be contributory factors, there have been riots going on in successive years for almost two centuries. It is very difficult to pin down one particular reason.

However, whatever the reasons, violence will only breed more violence and bitterness will only breed more bitterness. All sides should think very carefully and withdraw themselves from a situation of continual confrontation. It can only bring more misery.

Mr. Michael Mates (East Hampshire): I certainly would not accuse the Secretary of State of complacency, but does he not realise that responding to the points of the four Members representing Northern Ireland constituencies, who are from all points of the political compass, by simply saying that we need more dialogue is taking us round in circles? The right hon. Gentleman—perhaps wrongly, perhaps rightly—rejected the allegations of the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth), but he also said that he had hard intelligence that paramilitary violence was being carefully organised by the paramilitary groups. At what stage will he do more than seek further dialogue?

Dr. Reid: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. I am well aware of the strength of opinion on this matter, not least because of the representations of the leader of the Ulster Unionist party, who has made his views known to me in no uncertain terms. However, it is wrong to think that we are saying only that we need more dialogue. We are, of course, doing everything possible in terms of security, argument and politics to make it plain that a ceasefire is not enough if activity is going on that would still leave a ceasefire in place but give a distinct impression that preparations were being made for a breach of that ceasefire and that it was purely tactical. We are doing everything possible and, more than anything, we do not underestimate the seriousness of this or of the views of Northern Ireland Members.

Devolved Institutions

2. **Andy King** (Rugby and Kenilworth): If he will make a statement on the operation over the past 12 months of the devolved institutions in Northern Ireland. [57732]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Desmond Browne): The past 12 months have seen an increase in the stability of the devolved institutions, all of which are now operating fully. We will continue to work closely with those involved to ensure that devolution delivers the best results possible for the people of Northern Ireland.

Andy King: Will my hon. Friend cast his mind back just a few short years to when there was stalemate in the political process in Northern Ireland and no dialogue between parties and communities? Does he, unlike Opposition Members, agree with me that we have come a long way in two short years and that it is vital that the political devolved institutions in Northern Ireland succeed in order to give the people of Northern Ireland a future in which they can live in peace and be free from terror?

Mr. Browne: My hon. Friend does well to remind us of the progress that has been made. I need remind nobody in the House of my personal commitment to devolution, and the Government's record in this area stands for itself. We will do everything in our power to sustain devolution because it is what the parties and people of Northern Ireland want and it is delivering for the people of Northern Ireland. It is delivering, in particular, significant reform and additional investment in jobs and services and in public administration. *[Interruption.]* Although it is not easy, in devolved terms, to do that in Scotland or Wales, it is a sign of the maturity of the politics of Northern Ireland that these questions are being faced up to by local politicians. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call on the House to come to order.

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): We will, of course, do what we can in the devolved Administration to make progress. We acknowledge in particular the assistance from the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer with regard to our reinvestment and reform initiative. None the less, does the Minister not realise that it will not be possible to sustain the institutions without popular confidence, and that that popular confidence is at a low ebb? The main reason for that is the popular belief, reinforced by action after action by the Government, that no matter how badly republicans behave, the Government will do nothing to constrain them and that they have, literally, allowed them to get away with murder.

Mr. Browne: The right hon. Gentleman properly reminds the House of the special support that has been given to devolution in Northern Ireland by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor in the form of the economic package and I do not propose to go through the details. He also makes the very good point that devolution anywhere in the United Kingdom can be sustained only as long as it maintains the confidence of the people. Local politics and devolution are under strain in Northern Ireland for the very reasons that he identified. That is exactly why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has addressed the problems in the way that he has. We recognise that if organisations continue to give that impression to the people of Northern Ireland, it will undermine confidence in politics, which is unacceptable. As my right hon. Friend said, we all need to do everything in our power to see the shadow of paramilitarism lifted from the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr. Seamus Mallon (Newry and Armagh): Does the Minister agree that it would be a fundamental error to judge the success of the institutions in terms of either sectarian violence or the paramilitary stirring up of violence? Does he further agree that all the institutions that were created under the Good Friday agreement are working well and that for people in Northern Ireland—be it in the Short Strand, north Belfast, south Armagh or anywhere else—the choice is between those institutions and the sectarianism and violence that the thugs are bringing to us on our streets? I believe that the Secretary of State, the Minister and everyone here should support those institutions so that they can provide the only alternative to the men behind the masks.

Mr. Browne: My hon. Friend is correct in saying that the only way forward for the people of Northern Ireland is in the context of the agreement and the institutions that flow from it—not only the institutions of devolution, but the Equality Commission, the Human Rights Commission and the Policing Board, all of which have shown local people that working together can solve local problems. The only test that I apply to the institutions of devolution is whether local people are taking decisions about improving lives locally. In Northern Ireland, they are doing so. The system may not be working perfectly, but it would have seemed astonishing five years ago that it should work as it has—or at all. Northern Ireland people can be proud of the progress that they have made. They are an example to the world of civilised conflict resolution.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): In the Government's view, is it acceptable that the Executive in Northern Ireland should contain members of a party that is not only hostile to the police but directly responsible for creating a climate in the republican community that has directly led to the attempted murder of a Catholic recruit to the police—an attempted murder that the chairman of Sinn Fein has singularly failed to condemn?

Mr. Browne: The hon. Gentleman makes a point that has already been made today. While it may be clear to him who was responsible for, or started, individual incidents, to those of us who have ministerial responsibility in Northern Ireland it is far from clear who is responsible, from the information that we get. What is clear—I admit this to the hon. Gentleman as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State did—is that once they started, paramilitaries on both sides were involved. I unequivocally deplore and condemn that behaviour, as does my right hon. Friend, and I call on all community leaders, including the people who lead those organisations, to work for its cessation.

Parade Season

3. **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): If he will make a statement on the maintenance of order during the parade season. [57733]

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): Approximately 3,300 parades were held in 2001 and the vast majority passed off peacefully with only minor incidents occurring at a small number. We hope that that trend continues throughout the marching season. In the event of public disorder, this year as every year, the security forces have appropriate contingency measures in place to ensure that the determinations of the Parades Commission are upheld.

Helen Jackson: Is it not the case that in the past few weeks in this country there have been not thousands or hundreds but millions of people on the streets parading and celebrating the Queen's golden jubilee and the World Cup football results in Dublin and England? Is it not the case, therefore, that there is no need for a parade or street celebration to disintegrate into sectarianism or violence? Does the Minister agree that the essential components are good planning and organisation and consultation?

Jane Kennedy: I could just say yes, but my hon. Friend mentioned football, so may I take this opportunity to say how delighted I am that two football teams from the British Isles are doing well in the World cup? As for the rest of her question, my answer is yes.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [57760] **David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 12 June.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning—I suspect, in common with millions of others—I watched the England match, and I am sure that the whole House will wish to send our congratulations to the English team on reaching the next stage of the finals. Indeed, my next meeting was with the Prime Minister of Denmark—to discuss the next match, of course. This evening, I shall meet the President of Nigeria—of course, to discuss the last match. In addition, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others.

David Taylor: Given that German jobless figures are soaring to 4 million and French voters are veering sharply to the right, should not my right hon. Friend be discouraging some of his Ministers from their over-zealous promotion of the euro, which is partly responsible? Are not the Chancellor, as ever, and Mr. Rupert Murdoch, for once, absolutely right to urge great British caution towards that fundamentally flawed folly?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for that opening question after the recess. No, I believe that we should stick to the economic tests. If they are passed, we should put the issue to the British people in a referendum. I have to say that I believe that the European economy—after all, its interest rate is 1 per cent. lower than ours—has created 5 million jobs in the past few years, and many countries in Europe are now joined in a single currency area. I do not accept what my hon. Friend says about the European Union; I believe that it is in this country's interests to be a member of the EU, to make our weight felt in the EU and, should the economic tests be met, to be part of the single currency.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): May I join the Prime Minister in congratulating the England team? Like him and many others, I watched the match, but I did not watch it with him, which is probably a blessing for my side. May I suggest, however, that of all the people whom he is planning to advise and discuss in the next 20 minutes, given his record, he does not give advice to Sven-Göran Eriksson on who to pick for the next game?

Will the Prime Minister give a personal apology to Pam Warren and other survivors of the Paddington rail crash for his attempt to discredit them?

The Prime Minister: I endorse entirely what the Department for Transport said last week about that. I do not accept what the right hon. Gentleman says because there was never any attempt to discredit Pam Warren or anyone else. However, I stand entirely by the apology given by the Department for Transport at the time.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister is very careful with his words, but what he has said is very clear. *[Interruption.]* Oh no, he is very careful with his words because, when referring to the same set of words used before, Pam Warren said that they were totally inadequate. She went on to say that the actions of his Government were

> "very nasty and spiteful, and if anyone is going to apologise it has to be Tony Blair."

So, I repeat, will he now give Mrs. Warren and the other survivors the apology that they deserve?

The Prime Minister: I entirely understand why Pam Warren said that, because she had been told that there had been an attempt to find out or dig up dirt, as it was said, on her. That is simply not the case. Indeed, no inquiry was ever made about Pam Warren, but the Department of Transport said at the time—I endorse this and concur with it entirely—that it apologised for any distress caused to Pam Warren by a story about her that was actually false.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Weasel words. This is the same man who promised to bring in a new politics of honesty and trust, yet when any member of the public—Rose Addis, Pam Warren or anyone else—criticises the Prime Minister, his Government throw the weight of their machine at investigating their private lives and crushing them. I give him one last chance. He has the opportunity to get up and apologise now, without equivocation and without qualification, to Pam Warren for trying to discredit her.

The Prime Minister: First, in respect of Rose Addis, let us be clear. The hospital concerned asked the right hon. Gentleman to apologise for saying that the treatment given to her was wrong. There was never an attempt to discredit her; that is quite wrong. We are entitled, in circumstances in which the hospital disputed the complaint, to make that dispute clear. Secondly, in respect of Pam Warren, the truth is—if we want the truth—that there was never an e-mail attempting to dig dirt on her. If the right hon. Gentleman has such an e-mail, he can now produce it.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): Is the Prime Minister aware that since the introduction of the softly, softly approach to cannabis in my constituency and the borough of Lambeth, there are more drug dealers on the streets than ever, many young children are going to school in the morning zonked out on a very hard kind of cannabis, and more and more residents are being harassed and almost attacked by drug dealers on their way home from work? That approach has released 1.8 extra police officers. Will the Prime Minister do something about cleaning up these gangs of criminals and stick up for decent law-abiding citizens and residents who are fed up with being experimented on?

The Prime Minister: I would point out to my hon. Friend that serious crime has fallen in Lambeth. It is important, however, to give careful consideration to the results of the experiment that was carried out. If we do not do so, and if we had refused to carry out such an experiment, even though the police and others locally were saying that it was sensible to do so, we would have been criticised the other way. We need to consider carefully the results of the experiment.

In relation to street crime in London, however, I know that my hon. Friend will support the Proceeds of Crime Bill, which will allow us to get at the assets of drug dealers—I am afraid that that legislation is opposed by the Conservative party—and the measures on street crime, particularly restrictions on bail for persistent offenders, which we believe will have a serious impact on cutting street crime. She will know from the latest figures produced by the Metropolitan police that that measure is having that effect.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): When the Prime Minister became aware that a special adviser to the Secretary of State for Defence had recently taken up a private sector post with a commercial lobbying company with defence clients on its books, was he satisfied that the spirit and the substance of the rules governing such transfers had been met?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I was. The Ministry of Defence has carried out the relevant processes which apply to the whole of Government. The permanent secretary certified the arrangement, and it was made in consultation with the Cabinet Office in the normal way.

Mr. Kennedy: In terms of public perception, does the Prime Minister not think that special advisers should be subject to exactly the same rules as senior civil servants? For many people, this case, and the Government explanations attached to it, stretch credulity. When will the Prime Minister take further action to clean up this state of affairs?

The Prime Minister: I disagree, I am afraid, that action is necessary to clean it up. The permanent secretary in the Ministry of Defence applied the rules in the normal way, and the Cabinet Office was consulted in the normal way. That is the right and proper way to do it, and that is precisely the system that has been used for many years. Rather than dealing with perception—the right hon. Gentleman's question and that of the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) were about the perception that they want to create—is it not about time that we dealt with the reality? The reality is that special advisers, whether for Labour or Conservative Governments, do a perfectly good job. I fully support the special adviser system and it would be deeply unfortunate if we got rid of it.

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): Does my right hon. Friend share my concern that one insurance company has chosen to withdraw cover from areas that are judged a flood risk? People in much of my constituency in the Trent, Derwent and Dove valleys rely heavily on the insurance industry and on flood protection to ensure that they can live a normal life. Will my right hon. Friend emphasise the need for additional spending on this matter in the spending review?

The Prime Minister: We are spending substantial additional sums of money—running into many millions of pounds—on flood defences. Of course, I shall look into the particular point that my hon. Friend raises. It is a problem that we need to tackle with the insurance companies to try to ensure that everybody who can possibly get insurance gets it. I am afraid that one of the things that we know from the work that has been carried out and from the analysis of the changing nature of the climate is that these problems may well recur.

Q2. [57761] **Sir Peter Tapsell** (Louth and Horncastle): If the Prime Minister recommends to the British people that they should abandon the pound sterling in a referendum and they reject his advice, will he resign?

The Prime Minister: I think that we should wait until we get to the referendum and then wait for the result.

Q3. [57762] **Ross Cranston** (Dudley, North): My right hon. Friend will recall that three years ago, the health White Paper, "Saving Lives"—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Ross Cranston: That White Paper announced a plan for an alcohol strategy. Since that time, the charity Alcohol Concern has estimated that there have been about 2 million serious incidents of violence around pubs, 130,000 deaths from excessive alcohol consumption and numerous incidents of domestic violence. Will my right hon. Friend crank the machinery so that we have an alcohol strategy in place?

The Prime Minister: We will be investing somewhere in the region of £30 million in action against under-age drinking in particular, which is a serious problem. I point out too—it is important that the public understand this—that the police and local authorities now have two very specific powers to deal with this issue. First, they can seize alcohol from those who cause a nuisance in public places and, secondly—this is particularly important—the police will now be given the power to close licensed premises when there is a likelihood of trouble and they can arrest those who do not allow the alcohol to be seized when asked to do so. Those powers will give us considerable leverage on a problem that I know causes disturbances in many city centres in many parts of the country.

Q4. [57763] **Mr. Anthony Steen** (Totnes): In view of the close friendship between the United States and the United Kingdom, is the Prime Minister aware that the talks aimed at liberalising transatlantic services from Heathrow have stalled twice? Intense pressure has been put on No. 10 officials by British Airways and Virgin Atlantic because they do not want more competition. Bearing in mind the fact that he believes in open skies, will he put his seal of approval to an open skies policy across the Atlantic from Heathrow? Will he kick-start the talks?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that we are keen to liberalise the US-UK air services agreement. That is important, but it must be done on terms that are fair. The competition must be fair, otherwise we will put the jobs of thousands of British employees at risk. I am, in principle, very anxious to restart this process, but it must be on the right terms. At present, those terms are not right, but we are in intensive discussions with the American Administration to try to get the process going again.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): It is said that we are all Thatcherites now. May I, as a Bevanite who aspires to be a Blairite, tell my right hon. Friend that there are those of us who would rather undergo root canal surgery without anaesthetic, be cast away on a desert island with the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker)—with no ear plugs—or even be entertained to a full and frank discussion in the Whips Office, than accept such a description? May I ask the Prime Minister for his view?

The Prime Minister: Yes. I am delighted that we have moved this country away from Thatcherism. The problem with Thatcherism is that it took no account of social division; it grossly underinvested in our public services; it did not care about unemployment; and it isolated this country in Europe. That is precisely why I am delighted that we have a new Labour Government today to put the situation right.

Q5. [577[illegible]] **Mr. Roy Beggs** (East Antrim): The Prime Minister of the Irish Republic recently stated that the decommissioning of all illegally held weapons and explosives must take place within a year and that the IRA must be disbanded. When will the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland have the courage to set and achieve the same objectives?

The Prime Minister: First, we have to make sure that no level of paramilitary activity is considered acceptable, because no level of paramilitary activity is acceptable. I can go further and say specifically that by that I mean not the procurement of weapons, not the targeting of people and not the so-called punishment beatings that are actually acts of criminal violence. The absence of attacks on security personnel or bombing campaigns is not enough. A temporary or tactical ceasefire is not enough. If people want the process to survive, they have to make the democratic choice in absolute and not partial terms. The existence of any paramilitary activity is inconsistent with that.

I also believe, however, that the peace process offers us the best chance of achieving that aim. Even though I know that it is under strain, for the reasons implicit in the hon. Gentleman's question, it is precisely because people have got to make that democratic choice that there cannot be a halfway house. If we look over the past few years and at Northern Ireland as a whole, the vast majority of people have benefited from the peace process, the economy has benefited and security has benefited. We now have to work together to ensure that the aim that both the Taoiseach and I want to see is achieved.

Q6. [57765] **Mr. Ronnie Campbell** (Blyth Valley): Does the Prime Minister agree that if we are to eradicate pensioner poverty, pensions should be linked to earnings?

The Prime Minister: I do not, for the reasons that we have given many times. The best way to eradicate pensioner poverty is to do what we are trying to do. In particular, the minimum income guarantee is increasing pensioners' incomes far and above the rises that would result from a link to earnings. Universal elements, such as the winter fuel allowance, the free television licence for the over-75s and the new pension credit when it comes into effect, will help people on lower incomes far more than if we simply linked their pensions to earnings.

The trouble is that if we link the basic state pension to earnings, we will never get enough resources from Government to give such a lift to the basic state pension as it attempts to cure pensioner poverty. We have therefore to distinguish between different groups of pensioners. Some are relatively well off, some are very poor. It is the right duty for this Government, with our principles, to help the poorest most.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Last year, the Government said they would take away the driving licences from absent parents who failed to pay child support. They announced that three times and the idea received big headlines. Can the Prime Minister tell us how many people have lost their driving licences?

The Prime Minister: No, I cannot, but I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that as a result of the measures that we have taken to make parents face up to their responsibilities, the Child Support Agency is now working far better than the hopeless mess that everyone remembers, which we inherited from the previous Government.

Mr. Duncan Smith: After such big headlines and so many announcements, the answer is that one person has lost their licence out of nearly 200,000 parents who failed to pay child support. Two years ago, the Prime Minister announced that benefits would be withdrawn from people who failed to do community service. It was spun, and I quote him, as a

"fundamental to our reform of welfare".

To date, that policy has saved less than £5,000. Can he tell us now how much that scheme cost to implement?

The Prime Minister: No, but what I can do—*[Interruption.]* I will send the right hon. Gentleman the figures on how much the scheme has cost. Let me deal with the Child Support Agency. The test, after all, is whether or not more parents are facing up to their responsibilities. If we look at the figures—I will send the right hon. Gentleman the precise figures and perhaps we can discuss them next week—more people are facing up to their responsibilities now than they were a few years ago. In relation to community service orders, more people are fulfilling their obligations, and that is what we want to see.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The one group who are not facing up to their responsibilities are the Government. The answer to the question is that to make a small saving of £5,000, the Prime Minister spent £300,000. On Monday, he was back to his old tricks, when he re-announced plans to get more sick and disabled people back to work. I remind him that he spun exactly the same set of stories three years ago, but the number of people on incapacity benefit is rising. By next year, he will have increased the welfare budget by more than the health or education budgets. Surely the reality for the Prime Minister is that the unspun headline is simply, "He talks a good game, but when will he deliver?"

The Prime Minister: Let us deal with the welfare budget. If we leave aside the tax credits and the pensioners' help that we want to spend money on, and take the social security budget that is based on social and economic failure, we are saving £4 billion a year over and above the levels of spending that were in place when we came to power. Indeed, leaving aside the areas in which we want to spend money, social security bills are falling in real terms for the first time in years.

As for what we are doing in the welfare state, we are managing to get those bills down because we have an extra 1.5 million people in work. Although when we came to power hundreds of thousands of young people were on the dole, I can tell the House that as a result of the new deal, the number of young people who are on the dole today is 4,500. That is the difference that we can make by ensuring that we save money on failure and can then spend it on pensioners and working families, which is where we want to spend it.

Hon. Members: More, more.

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Q7. [57766] **Ms Bridget Prentice** (Lewisham, East): I doubt that my right hon. Friend is aware that Lewisham is the safest inner-London borough in which to live. However, there is still a problem in the Downham area of my constituency of young tearaways terrorising people with their behaviour. Will my right hon. Friend give me reassurances that I can share with my constituents about what the Government will do about that problem?

The Prime Minister: We must do a combination of two things. First, we must take measures on street crime, as we are doing with the Metropolitan police, the Crown

Prosecution Service and magistrates in London. Those are significantly successful and are beginning to reduce the figures for street crime. Secondly, we must invest in facilities for young people, and that is why the investment in my hon. Friend's constituency—in sports facilities, in youth services and in the new deal—is important. We will not deal with the issue of what she calls young tearaways unless we make sure that they know that if they commit offences they will be punished, and try to provide alternatives so that they can engage in lawful conduct and proper behaviour, enjoying themselves without disrupting the lives of others.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I know that the Prime Minister feels much put upon by the press at the moment, and I am sure that we all share his pain in that regard. If it is true that Mr. Mick Jagger has some good news coming, no one would begrudge Sir Michael such an honour, but the Prime Minister's stated policy is that honours should go to ordinary people who do extraordinary things and provide inspiration for others at times of great personal suffering and trauma, so would not Mrs. Pam Warren be a suitable candidate for such recognition?

The Prime Minister: We should give honours to a range of different people. While honours are given to people who are famous and celebrated, this Government introduced honours, and in particular knighthoods, for head teachers who have done an excellent job with their school. We will always have a mix of people in the honours system and so we should have.

Q8. [577[illegible]] **David Cairns** (Greenock and Inverclyde): In my constituency the police hold many outstanding arrest warrants against individuals for whom they have no current address, while the local jobcentre and Benefits Agency hold those addresses but are forbidden to co-operate with the police by the Data Protection Act 1998. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the Act is there to protect the innocent, not the guilty, and it should not be used in this instance as an obstacle to the fight against crime?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right. That is why we want to make sure that requests for information are now considered in respect of all crimes, not only the most serious. There have to be proper safeguards for the civil liberties and privacy of the individual, but the information is vital to the police in their work and I am sure that it should be made available to them.

Q9. [57768] **Sir Paul Beresford** (Mole Valley): I presume that the Prime Minister is aware of the BBC 2 programme that followed the Metropolitan police paedophile unit for the past two years. It is clear from that and other evidence that paedophile activity is much greater than many of us had realised, and might have been accentuated by the internet. There are three police paedophile units—I hope that the Prime Minister is listening.

The Prime Minister: I am.

Sir Paul Beresford: Good. There are three police paedophile units in the country, the largest being the Metropolitan police unit. In the mid 90s, that unit had approximately 17 policemen; in 2000, staffing dropped to 15; it is now down to 13, of whom only eight are operational. I assume that the Prime Minister is concerned about child abuse by paedophiles. That being so, will he tell us what the Government are going to do and when they are going to do it, and will he accept a small deputation on the matter?

The Prime Minister: I will certainly consider any request the hon. Gentleman makes, but the position within the Metropolitan police is obviously an operational decision for the police. I do not know what other measures the force is taking, but I know that the Metropolitan police treat the issue very seriously. As for the Government, we have made it clear that we want to tighten the law in that area, and we will do so as soon as possible.

Q10. [57769] **Valerie Davey** (Bristol, West): The traffic commissioner responsible for bus services in Bristol said recently,

> "I don't want to penalise the public by penalising the bus company."

Given the commissioner's ineffective powers, what more can the Government do to involve and protect the largest group of users of public transport, bus passengers?

The Prime Minister: The best thing we can do is make sure that we invest in bus services, especially rural bus services. Some £200 million is to go into rural bus services, and there are many more services available. Furthermore, under the Transport Act 2000 local authorities have the opportunity to produce transport plans and strategies. However, I think that such decisions are better taken locally.

Mr. Archie Norman (Tunbridge Wells): Is the Prime Minister aware that there is a reception in the House today for victims of cystic fibrosis? It is a debilitating disease from which victims suffer all their life and die prematurely. Does he remember pledging in 1997 to withdraw prescription charges for victims of that disease and reiterating that pledge in the House in March 1999? Does he realise that victims were entitled to take that pledge at face value and that it meant a great deal to them? Is this not a good occasion on which to demonstrate that it was not merely a politician's promise, but that he meant it sincerely and is now going to deliver?

The Prime Minister: First, I agree with the hon. Gentleman about cystic fibrosis and the suffering it causes. Only the other day I met a cystic fibrosis sufferer who made exactly the same points. True, we have to consider the matter within the context of the overall sums that the Government are putting into the health service; on the other hand we are aware of the things that were said previously and we intend to honour them.

Q11. [57770] **Mr. Gordon Marsden** (Blackpool, South): This week is national carers week. Six million people—including my constituent Mr. Norman Hosker, who is in his 50s and cares full-time for his 80-year-old mother, who has osteoporosis—save this country about £57 billion a year. Knowing that, and in view of a recent survey showing that only a fifth of local authorities currently have additional funding to implement the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000, will my right hon. Friend look favourably on further measures to assist carers in the comprehensive spending review?

The Prime Minister: We have put some £500 million into extra support for carers, which has meant that some 300,000 carers nationally have benefited financially. I agree—the reports that are being published today by the Department of Health are an attempt to do this—that we need to get greater co-ordination into the work that is done at a local level. That is precisely what those reports address today. Of course, the issue will be discussed in the next comprehensive spending review.

Points of Order

3.30 pm

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would it be possible to invite the Prime Minister to correct the parliamentary record, given the answer that he just gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) about youth employment? The Prime Minister said that 4,500 young people were unemployed, but may I invite him to correct the record, as the correct figure is 244,000, of whom 44,000 have been unemployed for more than six months?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a point of order.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Have you received any request from the Prime Minister to come to the House to correct his comment during Prime Minister's Question Time that the Conservative Opposition opposed the Proceeds of Crime Bill? I do not recollect that happening at all; rather, the reverse was the case.

Mr. Speaker: That is an extension of Prime Minister's Question Time.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that this point of order is not about any answer that the Prime Minister has given, as that is nothing to do with me.

Mr. Osborne: It is not, Mr. Speaker. The Downing street website does not include the hon. Member for North Swindon (Mr. Wills) in its list of Ministers, but yesterday, I saw the hon. Gentleman—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Downing street website has nothing to do with the Speaker.

BILL PRESENTED

CORPORATE RESPONSIBILITY

Linda Perham, supported by Mr. Barry Sheerman, Mr. Tony Colman, Mr. Frank Field, Mr. Martin O'Neill, Mr. Tony Banks, Sue Doughty, Mr. Simon Thomas, Glenda Jackson, Mrs. Jackie Lawrence, Sir Teddy Taylor and Mr. John Horam, presented a Bill to make provision for certain companies to produce and publish reports on environmental, social and economic and financial matters; to require those companies to consult on certain proposed operations; to specify certain duties and liabilities of directors; to establish and provide for the functions of the Corporate Responsibility Board; to provide for remedies for aggrieved persons; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 19 July, and to be printed [Bill 145].

Data Protection (Amendment)

3.32 pm

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to amend the Data Protection Act 1998 to provide exemptions in respect of Members of Parliament seeking information on behalf of their constituents; and for related purposes.

I believe that this Bill touches on an issue that is of current interest to hon. Members in all parts of the House; indeed, it was touched on during Prime Minister's questions only a few minutes ago. The background to the Bill is the gradual coming into force of the Data Protection Act 1998. As a result of that legislation, some organisations and companies, and public bodies such as local authorities and NHS trusts, are beginning to respond negatively to individual casework inquiries by Members of Parliament on the grounds of access to confidential personal data under the Data Protection Act. Moreover, some organisations are developing a general policy of writing to hon. Members asking them to obtain written consent from constituents before they will discuss any aspect of a constituent's case.

However, even obtaining subsequent written consent is not as straightforward as it might appear, as it entails deciding from whom the consent should be sought, such as in cases affecting children. For example, one colleague wrote to me recently about a mother who is the legal appointee of her disabled son. That is recognised by the social security commissioners and the ombudsman, but her county council still refuses to recognise her under the Data Protection Act.

Simple common sense dictates that our constituents have already given us their consent to seek such information by personally requesting us to take up their case in the first instance. People very often approach their Member of Parliament because they have experienced some frustration or perceived injustice from the system, which they request that we help to resolve on their behalf. In such circumstances, the last thing that our constituents need is another letter, this time from us, asking them to fill in yet another form so that we can even begin to look into something about which they specifically asked us to inquire in the first place.

Some organisations with which we deal also appreciate the problem, but feel bound to operate within the Act as it is currently drafted, as that is the legal advice that they have received. For example, I have a letter on the subject from Mr. Stewart Ashurst, chief executive of Essex county council—and before anyone asks me, I do have his personal consent to cite it in this context. On 21 March, he wrote to me:

> "Many thanks for your letter . . . letting me know of your intention to introduce a Ten Minute Rule Bill to amend the Data Protection Act. Although the Data Protection Act has many advantages, in particular giving people the opportunity to see information recorded upon themselves, it has also created many barriers to sharing information which can be unnecessary and unhelpful. An MP representing a constituent's interests is an obvious example but there are many others. I am pleased that this issue will be aired on the floor of the House of Commons as a result of the steps which you are taking."

At best, this new impediment is a bureaucratic waste of time; at worst, it could provide an opportunity for some organisations to try to hide behind the Data Protection Act and withhold information on the treatment or maltreatment of individuals, which could place the organisation in a bad light if it were revealed to Members of Parliament.

The issue has been raised in the House several times in recent months, including, on a number of occasions, during business questions. In fairness, the Government have intimated that they would like to take some action on the matter, but to date, despite various discussions, no specific proposals have been forthcoming. That is why I proposed this brief Bill in early May and am seeking to advance it today. It would remedy the situation by amending the Data Protection Act to make allowance for Members of Parliament who are pursuing casework inquiries. Specifically, it would amend part IV of the Act, which deals with exemptions—of which there are already quite a number—to provide a new general exemption for Members of Parliament who are seeking information in pursuit of a casework inquiry on behalf of a named constituent or constituents. Such an exemption would then be promulgated so that organisations would be aware that in future they could not continue to hide behind the Data Protection Act when in receipt of an inquiry from a Member.

In summary, the problem affects hon. Members on both sides of the House and represents an unnecessary bureaucratic impediment to our ability to do our job on behalf of the people who send us here. The Bill seeks to remove that impediment in order to allow Members to continue to assist their constituents as they always have done. For that reason, I believe that the Bill is worth while, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill ordered to be brought in by Mr. Mark Francois, Mr. Paul Goodman, Chris Grayling, Mr. Mark Hoban, Mr. George Osborne, Mr. Mark Prisk, Andrew Selous, Sir Michael Spicer, Mr. John Whittingdale, Mr. Bill Wiggin and David Wright.

DATA PROTECTION (AMENDMENT)

Mr. Mark Francois accordingly presented a Bill to amend the Data Protection Act 1998 to provide exemptions in respect of Members of Parliament seeking information on behalf of their constituents; and for related purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 21 June, and to be printed [Bill 146].

Orders of the Day

Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill

[2ND ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended in the Standing Committee, further considered.

New Clause 9

CONTROL OF ENTRY TO UNITED KINGDOM, &C.: USE OF FORCE

> In paragraph 17(2) of Schedule 2 to the Immigration Act 1971 (c.77) (control of entry, &c.: person liable to detention: use of force) for "if need be by force" there shall be substituted "if need be by reasonable force".'.—*[Ms Rosie Winterton.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

3.39 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: amendment No. 139, in clause 49, page 27, line 31, after 'detained', insert 'for a reasonable period'.

Government amendment No. 103.

Amendment No. 262, in page 27, line 37, at end insert—

'unless that person is a child'.

Government amendments Nos. 104 and 59.

Amendment No. 60, page 29, line 37, leave out Clause 52.

Amendment No. 141, in clause 52, in page 30, line 4, after 'persons', insert—

'whom the Secretary of State is lawfully entitled to remove'.

Amendment No. 169, in page 30, line 4, after 'persons', insert—

'over the age of eighteen'.

Ms Winterton: Many hon. Members who served in Committee will recall that, in response to points from the hon. Members for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) and for Woking (Mr. Malins), we agreed to consider whether it was necessary to specify in the Bill that the force that could be used by an escort had to be "reasonable". Although we remain of the view that the only force that may lawfully be used is reasonable force, we are content to make that explicit. We have tabled the necessary amendments to effect that.

The power in clause 50 is linked to paragraph 17(2) of schedule 2 to the Immigration Act 1971, which provides for police or immigration officers to enter premises to execute a warrant. That provision uses the same wording as the original clause 50. In the interests of consistency, we have tabled new clause 9, which will add the qualification "reasonable" to the use of force that is authorised in paragraph 17 of schedule 2.

[Ms Winterton]

Clause 58(1) creates a new power to allow removal directions to be given for the family of the person who is being removed as an illegal entrant, or following refusal of leave to enter. The immigration Acts contain no power to detain such people. Without such a power, it may not be possible to enforce removal in accordance with the directions. The new power that clause 58(1) creates would therefore be empty. Amendment No. 103 plugs the gap and will enable directions to be enforced if necessary.

Amendment No. 104 is a consequential amendment to section 24 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. It ensures that the bail provisions that apply to suspected international terrorists who are detained under the Immigration Act 1971 would apply to such people who might be detained under clause 49. Section 24 of the 2001 Act currently refers to a suspected international terrorist who is detained under the powers in the 1971 Act. Amendment No. 104 would add detention under the Bill. It places those who are detained under clause 49 on the same footing as those who are detained under the powers of detention in the 1971 Act.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): How does the amendment apply to foreign nationals who are detained under the new terrorism legislation, which does not require any rules of evidence to give information to defendants about the reason for their detention?

Ms Winterton: The changes that we are introducing will enable those who are suspected of international terrorism to apply for bail. I believe that they will be welcomed because they bring that group of people into line with others.

I hope that hon. Members will support the Government amendments. I shall, of course, respond to points about the other amendments later.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): We welcome new clause 9. I recall vividly a long discussion in Committee on the use of force. Anxiety was expressed that, increasingly, a wider variety of people in society can use force, including police, immigration officials and security officers. The debate was important and many Opposition Members wanted to include "reasonable" before "force". I am therefore pleased that the Government have introduced the new clause, for which I thank them.

I want to consider the amendments that we have tabled: Nos. 139 and 141. Amendment No. 139 applies to clause 49, and would include the words, "for a reasonable period".

3.45 pm

The Bill, as framed, appears not to set a limit on the period of detention. The purpose of our amendment is to make it clear that the period of detention must be reasonable, and that the likely period for which a person is to be detained is a consideration that the person making the decision must take into account when making that decision and at any subsequent review of someone's continued detention.

The amendment places the concept of reasonableness in the statute itself. I refer the Minister to the House of Lords judgment in the case of Saadi, which I think is about to come out. The case was heard in May. In the administrative court in September 2001, Mr. Justice Collins ruled that the detention of persons for only seven days at Oakington was unlawful, as it contravened article 5 of the European convention on human rights. His judgment was reversed in the Court of Appeal, but Lord Justice Phillips, obiter, indicated that detention could become unlawful under article 5 if a person was detained for longer than was reasonable to effect the purpose for which he was detained.

I apologise to the House for quoting from Lord Justice Phillips's judgment at some length, but this is an important point of principle. He said:

> "It seems to us that the Court is considering as lawful detention pending the consideration of an application for leave to enter or the making of arrangements for deportation and not applying a test of whether the detention is necessary in order to carry out those processes. The inroad that we believe the European Court has made into the right of immigration authorities to detain aliens pending consideration of the applications for leave to enter, or their deportation, is that these processes must not be unduly prolonged. It is in relation to the duration of detention that the question of proportionality arises. Although Collins J. held that detention at Oakington did not fall within Article 5(1)(f) at all, he went on to consider proportionality. In so doing the test that he applied was whether detention was proportionate to the need to process applicants speedily. He decided that it was not because he was not satisfied that it was necessary to achieve that object. We consider that the test of proportionality required by Article 5(1)(f) requires the Court simply to consider whether the process of considering an asylum application, or arranging a deportation, has gone on too long to justify the detention of the person concerned having regard to the conditions in which the person is detained and any special circumstances affecting him or her. Applying that test no disproportionality is demonstrated in this case. The Secretary of State has determined that, in the absence of special circumstances, it is not reasonable to detain an asylum seeker for longer than about a week, but that a short period of detention can be justified where this will enable speedy determination of his or her application for leave to enter. In restricting detention to such circumstances he may well have gone beyond what the European Court would require. We are content that he should have done so. The vast majority of those seeking asylum are aliens who are not in a position to make good their entitlement to be treated as refugees. We believe, nonetheless, that most right thinking people would find it objectionable that such persons should be detained for a period of any significant length of time while their applications are considered, unless there is a risk of their absconding or committing other misbehaviour."

It is clear that there is considerable judicial interest in this matter. That is why we have tabled this amendment on Report—which the Government should accept—qualifying the right to detain by saying that such detention should be "for a reasonable period". It would be most helpful to have that provision in the Bill.

Our amendment No. 141 applies to clause 52, which defines a "removal centre" as

> "a place which is used solely for the detention of detained persons but which is not a short-term holding facility, a prison or part of a prison".

Under our amendment, the clause would read,

> "'removal centre' means a place which is used solely for the detention of detained persons whom the Secretary of State is lawfully entitled to remove".

The emphasis is on the phrase "lawfully entitled to remove".

We had many discussions in Committee about the names of the various centres, and the change from "detention centre" to "removal centre". We may return to that issue in our debate today. Detaining asylum seekers is a sensitive issue, and detention should be used with the greatest sensitivity. Detaining persons whom the Secretary of State is not entitled to remove is an unhappy concept for many Opposition Members.

It is not many months since the fire at Yarl's Wood. Unless I am mistaken, a Home Office website note said that Yarl's Wood was used for the detention of people whose asylum applications had failed and who were about to be removed. However, Yarl's Wood contained a mixture of people. It could take about 900, but at the time of the fire it held only about 400 or slightly fewer. The key point is that they were not all being detained prior to removal. We would have a greater understanding of the situation if that were the case. We know that the Government want to develop the detention estate to about 4,000. We understand the reasoning behind that, but it is important to focus on exactly who will be detained. At Yarl's Wood, dozens of people were being detained whose asylum appeals were under way rather than exhausted. If current asylum seekers are detained, rather than persons whom the Secretary of State is lawfully entitled to remove, that creates a problem.

If a person is not lawfully removable, it is strongly arguable that he should not be placed in a removal centre. It is wrong to put other people, such as those awaiting the initial consideration of their asylum applications, into a centre that is now to be designated as a removal centre, as that sends a message that their application will not be considered in an open-minded and fair manner.

Imagine the scene: a lawful applicant whose process is under way is, without good cause—the Government will probably dwell on the question of what is and what is not good cause—placed in somewhere called a removal centre. What message does that send about the Government's attitude? Some people argue that that could be in breach of article 5 of the European convention on human rights. I am not sufficiently expert to pronounce on that, but I wonder whether the Minister has taken expert advice and whether she can reassure the House. Furthermore, placing people who are at considerably different stages of the determination process in the same detention environment creates irreconcilable problems for the managers of the detention facilities over the type of regime that should be in place. It may also mean that very vulnerable asylum seekers who, when their cases come to be considered, are found to be refugees will have to spend a lot of time among, not separate from, other types of immigration detainee, and will have to experience an inappropriately high level of security.

This makes sense, does it not? As we all know, even those remanded in custody in criminal cases before being tried are kept in different circumstances from those serving a sentence following conviction, with very different privileges, entitlements and so forth.

A person whose claim for asylum has not been fully determined, or whose appeal is outstanding, cannot lawfully be removed. I understand, incidentally, that in a fairly recent case handled by a very senior and established non-governmental organisation, a client was removed while his appeal was pending, and the Home Office had to bring him back to the United Kingdom.

I feel, therefore, that amendment No. 141 is as important as amendment No. 139.

Jeremy Corbyn: I have some sympathy with what the hon. Gentleman has said about the mixture of people in detention centres at present. Does he feel, as many of us do, that, in general, asylum seekers should not be detained, or does he believe that there should be different sorts of detention centre for different categories of asylum seekers, failed applicants and people whose removal is pending?

Mr. Malins: It is not practically possible to detain all asylum seekers. Many years ago, when the numbers were different, we might have been able to discuss that as a practical possibility, although there would have been merits to argue; but it is impossible to detain all the asylum seekers who are now arriving each year.

What is the proper approach? We support the Government's policy on accommodation centres, but how can I argue that an asylum seeker should be detained unless the authorities have a real fear that that person will abscond, and there is substantial evidence suggesting that detention is necessary? It may be thought that an asylum seeker poses a severe risk in terms of criminal activity; it may be thought that that person has committed a criminal offence. Fine. Subject to judicial oversight, there must be categories of asylum seekers, just as there are categories of ordinary people such as the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) and me. Certain categories do have to be detained, for various reasons. In today's climate, however, the suggestion that all asylum seekers should be detained is both wrong in principle and impossible, in practical terms, to implement. The whole issue is very delicate.

The hon. Member for Islington, North has been in the House for a long time and knows more about this subject than most of us, probably including me. He has a fine reputation. Nevertheless, he and I both understand that the theme running through many of our debates is the balance between involvement of the state in custodial issues, and the judiciary. We know how important it is to get that balance right—not to let it tilt too far to one side but always, as I said yesterday, to ensure that the judiciary are involved.

If I were ever locked up, I should want to be locked up on the order of a judge. I should feel much happier then, especially if I had the right of appeal to another judge. Then I would have to take my medicine. I am now rapidly wondering whether I have done anything to deserve it! Anyway, the hon. Gentleman understands the thrust of what I am saying. I do not think we are very far apart.

4 pm

I conclude by repeating my unhappiness at the fact that we are moving towards the use of new titles such as "removal centres". As far as I can tell, such centres will not be used to house people who are to be removed. The title "detention centres" is much more acceptable if such centres are to be used for those detained for lawful reasons, subject to the proper right to apply for bail, and so on. It is not surprising that we have tabled an amendment to clause 52 that would define a "removal centre" as a place used solely for the detention of persons

"whom the Secretary of State is lawfully entitled to remove".

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): The hon. Gentleman's reply to the intervention from the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) contained the assumption that, in some circumstances, detention is

[Mr. Mike Hancock]

the right course of action. The hon. Gentleman talks about the judicial review process, but at what stage should that process start? Should it kick in when a person is detained at the point of entry? Should it run alongside consideration of the asylum application?

Mr. Malins: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting question, but I am anxious not to stray too far from the narrow terms of my amendment. When someone makes an application for asylum on entry, it may or may not be perfectly proper for the Government to decide that they should be detained straight away. However, the point is that the process must be subject to judicial scrutiny, and quickly. If the Government are found to be right, that is fine; if not, that is equally fine. Let us be frank: the judiciary is independent, end of story.

It is not so much the principle of detention that troubles me. By and large, any Government—including the current Government and the previous Conservative Government—would do their best to act reasonably. What does trouble me is the prospect of a lack of proper judicial oversight. That brings to mind part III of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 and issues such as automatic bail rights, but that is a subject for another day.

Today's proceedings have got off to a slightly less stroppy start than yesterday's. I hope that the Minister thinks that my general approach has merit, and that, if she is not prepared to accept the amendment, she will consider using the other place to insert something similar in the Bill.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): I begin by apologising for tabling amendment No. 262 at this late stage in the Bill's passage. I doubt whether it is the most adequate amendment that has been discussed so far, but it is an important one that is based on an important principle to which I am absolutely committed: that children should not be detained in any form of custody. The only Government policy that I have deep antipathy towards is their willingness to lock up children.

My constituency has one of the largest child prisons in the country, Lancaster Farms, in which 360 children are shortly to be detained. Under the street crime initiative, we in Lancashire may be introducing custody for 12-year-olds. That is wrong, and we should not do it. We should use amendment No. 262 to promote the non-custodial treatment of all children who are caught up in the deeply distressing circumstances of asylum applications.

My proposals are entirely in line with the UN convention on the rights of the child, to which the Government are a signatory. The Government cannot continue to maintain an opt-out on the immigration and asylum provisions of the convention in defiance of a legal opinion obtained by Save the Children that the opt-out is unsustainable. I suspect that when the Government report to the UN committee on the rights of the child in Geneva in September they will—unfortunately and very sadly—be in great difficulty. Maintaining that opt-out in order to retain the ability to detain children goes against the spirit of the UN convention, which has been signed by every country in the world except two. Few of the signatories maintain any opt-out.

I shall not press the amendment to a vote. It is similar to an amendment that I tabled previously and I seek the Minister's assurance that she is not happy with detaining children in such circumstances, and that all measures possible will be taken to safeguard the welfare of any children who are detained. I ask again how the provisions of the Children Act 1989 can possibly apply to children in that situation. The broader principle about the rights and wrongs of holding children under 18 in any form of custodial institution are matters to which I shall continue to return in discussion of asylum and criminal justice legislation, until the Government do what is right and fall in line with some of their best principles. The Government have tried to be a good Government for children, and they now need to decide that such treatment of children is utterly wrong.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Like the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins), I welcome Government new clause 9 and we will not seek to divide the House on this group. I hope that that is helpful to hon. Members planning their afternoon. The hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) has spoken to amendment No. 262, and we support it because we support the principle that he enunciated of not detaining children. We were similarly motivated when we tabled amendment No. 169.

I shall speak to amendment No. 60, in my name and my hon. Friends' names, and amendments Nos. 141 and 139, which were tabled with both Conservative and Liberal Democrat support. This is the beginning of a debate on detention and removal that we have not yet addressed on the Floor of the House, although we debated it in Committee. It raises some important principles. The first is the one mentioned by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn)—the question of who should be detained. Like him, I believe that detention should not be the presumption. The presumption should be that a person seeking asylum is as lawful a world citizen as is a citizen of this country who was born here and who does not want to go anywhere else. On that basis, detention is necessary only if the person is a risk to society in some way, or has a criminal record that means that he or she should not be let out.

I accept too that detention may also be used at the very end of the process, when a person has put a case, and lost it after a proper appeal. The Minister knows that I believe that that process should happen in this country, and that people should be here when they appeal. At the end of the process it is acceptable—not desirable, but acceptable—that for a period it may be necessary to detain people immediately prior to their departure from the country. That is necessary to make sure that the link between the final decision that people cannot stay and their removal is not broken, and that people do not disappear from the system at that stage when they know that they cannot succeed with their cases.

Mr. Malins: The hon. Gentleman will know from his experience that an interesting parallel can be drawn here with what happens in the criminal justice system when a person who has pleaded not guilty to a crime and who has been on bail throughout a lengthy jury trial is finally convicted. If a custodial sentence is coming, it is appropriate for the judge to remand the person in custody for the final fortnight.

Simon Hughes: People who read these debates may not be aware that the hon. Gentleman sits as a recorder in our courts. He is absolutely right: the courts use the procedure that he has described because it is a way to make sure that the interests of the state are protected when there is a danger that they might not otherwise be enforced. That is the principle.

The second very strong principle that I want to enunciate is that we must not put people in things that are called removal centres if they are not at that stage destined for removal. In that, I share exactly the concern expressed by the hon. Member for Woking.

I have not begun to understand the Government case to the contrary, but there are all sorts of arguments for saying that it is absolutely wrong to put people in something that used to be called a detention centre—which is suddenly now known as a removal centre—when their cases have not been finally considered. I hope that Ministers will seriously consider the widespread objection to the redesignation. Names are important, and if the Government are going to change the name of those centres they should use an honest one, not a dishonest one. More importantly, there are likely to be adverse consequences.

The first adverse consequence is that people put in places called removal centres, when no decision has been taken about their case, will not be certain that they will be treated fairly. If they are placed in something called a removal centre, they will presume—I would, and other people would too—that, regardless of the value of their case or of the way they have expressed it, and regardless too of the so-called independent process involved, they will be removed.

Mr. Malins: It is like being on death row halfway through one's trial.

Simon Hughes: The hon. Gentleman makes an apposite point. People will be being told what the outcome of the process will be before they have had a chance to put their case. That must be wrong. I cannot understand how the Government could even think that the idea was justifiable. I shall be interested to hear whether the Minister can provide a justification, but she will have to find an argument that none of us have heard from a Minister before.

I am certain that the House of Lords will change the provision, because it is oppressive and harmful nonsense. People in that position will be adversely psychologically affected. They are likely to be more disruptive and less settled. There are all sorts of arguments why we should not go down that road. I sincerely hope that we can change the name, and that clause 52 will be deleted from the Bill, as my colleagues and I propose. Like the Conservative party, we have proposed amending part of the clause, if we cannot remove it, to achieve that effect.

4.15 pm

The improvement that the Government have made is to put the reasonableness test into this part of the Bill. If people are to be detained by force, they have to be detained by reasonable force. That is clearly welcome. The Government have also accepted the arguments that we made in Committee that there should be a reasonableness test. That is also welcome.

One reason why we need controls is that, as I understand it, detainee custody officers, who will not necessarily be public employees and are not therefore directly accountable to any public service disciplinary process or public complaints process, will be able to intervene, take possession of property, and so on. That is why my colleagues and I tabled amendment No. 59, to which the Home Secretary added his name. We are concerned that those who go into premises without a warrant to detain people who are then held should be subject to disciplinary processes and proper scrutiny. The least that we can do, therefore, is limit or control the force with which they enter premises. However, I hope that Ministers will go beyond that and let us see the rules that will govern searches of detainees. We have seen no such draft rules yet.

I hope that the Government will back off from the idea of giving unaccountable employees of private contractors powers that are greater than those of immigration and police officers, who are accountable public servants. It is quite wrong to go down that road, and as the Minister will know from our debates in Committee, my colleagues and I strongly believe that everyone involved in the accommodation and detention of asylum seekers and others should be in the public service and the public sector.

A bizarre twist is that in Committee, when my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) and I pressed to a Division a proposal on keeping asylum and accommodation centres in the public realm—the public estate or public provision—the Conservatives abstained, which seemed a perfectly reasonable view to take, and Labour Members opposed it. So the party that used to be the party of public service is opposing keeping things in the public sector. It would appear, according to the way people voted in Committee, that the Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties are much more concerned about these matters than are the Government.

If people go to a removal centre, it is highly likely to have an adverse effect on them, even if they are eventually allowed into the country. If they are asked where they spent the past six months of their life, Campsfield removal centre is hardly the best thing to put on their resumé or curriculum vitae when going for their first job, having been accepted as an asylum seeker in this country.

The way in which the Government are moving suggests that they want to give the impression that they will have ever greater powers to remove people, irrespective of the rights that they may establish. It is not as if it is justified on the basis of the figures. I know that the Government are keen to remove people: they say that they want to remove 30,000 people a year. I understand that it has been put in alternative terms at 2,500 people a month, most recently by the Home Secretary. Removals figures are much lower than that.

Is the redesignation a way to enable the Government to say that they have removed a certain number of people but that they also have more in removal centres? That would create a wholly false impression: it would make it look good to the uninitiated, as if those people were all

[Simon Hughes]

destined for removal, but of course many of them will be likely to win their cases. The figures are clear: many of the people who go into detention centres will be successful with their cases.

I will end where I began—following on from the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre. I do not understand how it is possible for this Government to preach human rights around the world but not to endorse in full the United Nations convention on the rights of the child and to hold such reservations. I do not understand how that can be other than hypocritical, or how it can be consistent.

Many of us have had experience of dealing with asylum seekers in our constituency work as Members of Parliament, and before that in our other lives. The hon. Gentleman did so as a social worker, the hon. Member for Woking and I were in the legal profession, and some colleagues, such as my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), worked for local authorities.

The reality is that the state has an obligation to treat young people as young people first, not as asylum seekers. It has a duty to treat children as children and to give them all the things that they need. Many come here unaccompanied, as you know well from your part of the world, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and many come with their families. The way we treat them will be reflected in the way they behave when they grow up. If young people are treated as prisoners and locked up, not only will it be bad for them—prisons will make them much more likely to become offenders, to have dysfunctional behaviour and the rest—but it will create the wrong impression about what we think is important about them.

I therefore endorse the request of the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre and I press the Minister, as he did, to say why the Government persist in keeping so many people under the age of 18 in prison in general and why they insist on the right to keep asylum-seeking youngsters in prison. If we are short of general and specialist social services accommodation, social services ought to have more money so that they can provide it, if that is the issue.

As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, secure local authority accommodation can be provided. Southwark council is a part manager of a place called Orchard lodge in south-east London on behalf of several local authorities; it is entirely secure. The alternative is not to put people in Rochester prison, Lancaster Farms, or anywhere else. Doing so is incompatible with our international obligations. It is bad practice and a bad example.

I hope that we will change this part of the Bill fundamentally. I also hope that the Minister will give as encouraging a response to these questions as the Home Secretary did on two of the issues highlighted in the first group of amendments that we debated yesterday. Then, the Government accepted Opposition arguments. I hope that they understand the force of the case. We do not want people who are not going to be removed put in places called removal centres. We do not want children to be imprisoned when they should not be. We want everyone to have the right to be outside such centres and to enjoy freedom unless there is a good case for them to be detained and to have their liberty taken away.

Jeremy Corbyn: I will be brief as there is much to debate today. The timetable motion has not done the House any favours. It has prevented debate on a large number of extremely serious matters.

A dispassionate outsider—indeed anyone—looking at this group of amendments would find it strange that in 2002 we are debating the use of force to remove people from this country, the detention of children, the renaming of centres as "removal centres", and the concept of accommodation centres that are in reality detention centres. They would also find strange the lack of support for many people who are so detained. I find that extremely depressing.

I have been involved in immigration and asylum law as long as I have been in the House and I have dealt with hundreds if not thousands of constituency cases. I have visited a number of the centres. I find it deeply depressing that the number of people detained rises inexorably over the years while the British increasingly proselytise around the world about being in favour of human rights. About 4,000 people are detained under immigration law, and that number is likely to rise as the years go by. We should be thinking about double standards here.

I find the principle of detention offensive. A person should be detained only by court order, not by Executive order, and should always have access to the courts, whatever the process behind the detention. The Bill does not allow for that. Indeed, immigration law in effect allows for arbitrary detention—dependent largely on the number of detention spaces available at any time, rather than on the merits, justice or injustice of the case. Surely we should be a bit more grown up than that.

I strongly endorse the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) and support amendment No. 262, which he tabled. I should be grateful to the Minister if she could tell us in her reply where compatibility of the detention of children with the Children Act 1989 comes into play. I have always understood—I may be wrong—that the Children Act supersedes all other legislation in relation to the treatment of children and that the priority is their welfare, education, health and support, not their likelihood or otherwise of absconding. We should think quite seriously about that.

Yesterday, the House failed to debate the serious issues of education. I would argue that the Children Act 1989 provides the opportunity for education to any child who happens to be resident in this country at any time, but the Bill contains the idea of arbitrary detention.

I have met many unaccompanied children who have arrived in this country to seek asylum. Without exception, they are deeply traumatised by what they have been through, to the extent that they are often unable to talk about it for several years. Even with very valuable psychiatric help, they find their experience very hard to confront. The horrors that they have experienced come out in their art, writing and conversation. Thankfully, children in this country never see the war scenes that those children have seen—I hope that they never do—yet we seek to detain those children.

I strongly support the view expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre. If we are keen to support UN conventions and resolutions—as we should be—why on earth can we not endorse the convention on the rights of the child, ratify it to its fullest extent and put an end to what I believe is a very serious abuse indeed?

Simon Hughes: About 6,000 asylum-seeking children a year arrive unaccompanied in this country. I want to reinforce the point that the hon. Gentleman makes. We are talking not about a handful of youngsters but about a significant number of young people who, for whatever reason, arrive in this country with no adult and no one to look after them.

Jeremy Corbyn: That is a fair point. The figure that the hon. Gentleman gives is about right.

Obviously, a significant number of children are involved, all of whom have a story to tell and deserve support. Unless they are treated properly and given the necessary support when they arrive here, what will be the effect on them in later life? They have gone through a terrible trauma, but they are, in effect, kept in prison. What kind of adults will they become? What kind of people are we developing as a result?

I hope that we can have a little more compassion and a bit more understanding and support. Let us remember that all those kids also have hopes, ambitions and ideas. They have a contribution to make to our society, and indeed many of them make that contribution.

My final point is that we saw the news, the demonstrations and the recent fire at Yarl's Wood. Obviously, what happened there was terrible. Obviously, any injuries sustained are terrible and those events are deeply regrettable. However, we should think for a moment about what would be our view of another country where a fire was caused at a detention centre and many inmates were put in danger as a result, when it was not very clear who was there, why they were there or whether they fell into the category of asylum seekers who had recently arrived but whose cases were dubious, of those who were due to be removed or of those whose cases had gone on for years without being determined.

There were also riots and disorder at Campsfield. I recall a visit to Campsfield and I could see on people's faces the frustration boiling up there. Having left what they believed to be a dangerous situation in their own countries, where arbitrary detention was the norm, they found themselves arbitrarily detained on arrival in this country. I would hope that the Bill, with its many faults, would at least not make worse the situation of arbitrary detention, unfair detention and lack of justice that is implicit in it.

I look forward to the Minister's reply. In particular, in terms of signing up to the UN convention on the child, we should ratify it, operate it, and, above all, give priority to the welfare, education, social and health needs of children, and not detain them.

4.30 pm

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): I support all the comments made so far by Opposition Members and Labour Back Benchers. At the outset, I want to say that we are talking about the clause dealing with the redesignation of detention centres, which will be known in due course as removal centres. I have before me a copy of a written question that was answered by the Home Office on Thursday 18 April, and a copy of a reply that I received from the Home Office to correspondence, dated 16 May 2002. Both those documents refer to Dungavel detention centre as Dungavel removal centre. That is curious on the basis that the legislation has not yet been passed, far less brought into force. Perhaps the Minister could clarify why Dungavel detention centre is being referred to in that way in advance of the legislation coming into force.

On the important substantive issues raised by the amendments, I agree totally that detention is not, in principle, acceptable when one is detaining people who have committed no crime. That is a key tenet of Scots law, and we have a very strict rule in Scotland that one must bring a person to trial within 110 days. The Government's approach to detention policy completely goes against basic principles of Scots law and of natural justice. So we cannot support the Government's detention policy.

On the specific matters raised, the amendments deal with various important issues concerning the length of time for which somebody could be detained, the grounds on which a person will be detained and the important issue of detaining children in what are effectively prisons. I use the word "prison" carefully. Dungavel detention centre in Scotland was, until very recently, a prison. I visited Dungavel recently, and it shares with a prison the key characteristic that those inside are not at liberty to leave the premises. I shall come back to the issue of children shortly, but, in a civilised state, placing children in what is effectively a prison is shameful.

On the issue of the grounds on which people are held, which is dealt with in amendment No. 141, it may interest the House to know that, further to a visit to Dungavel detention centre in April, the cross-party group on refugees and asylum seekers in the Scottish Parliament submitted a report, dated 22 April 2002, to the Home Office. I am not clear whether the Home Office has yet responded to the Scots Parliament, and perhaps the Minister will clarify that when she replies. The report raised various concerns about the operation of the Dungavel detention centre, including the grounds on which people were apparently held. That caused a furore in Scotland and led to the then Minister of State, Scotland Office, the hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), saying on a BBC Scotland programme on 28 April that the only people detained in Dungavel were those who

> "have reached the end of the line . . . have committed an offence, or . . . are regular absconders."

Those comments have been disputed by individuals inside Dungavel, who said that they had been living happily in the local community and reporting to the local police. After several years, they suddenly found themselves being taken off to Dungavel with no warning whatever. Perhaps the Minister will clarify exactly who is being held in detention centres and confirm whether anyone outwith the three categories outlined by the former Minister of State has been or is being held in a detention centre.

The length of time for which people are held in detention centres is unacceptable. As I have said, those people have been not been convicted of any crime but, in many cases, they are held for a very long time. That is unacceptable in a civilised country.

The detention of children is another issue raised by the amendments. I totally concur with what has been said so far. It is a disgrace that the United Kingdom Government

[Annabelle Ewing]

are proposing to pursue such a policy. They should be thoroughly ashamed of themselves. There are alternatives that they could properly have considered, one of which was suggested by the cross-party group in the Scots Parliament—a requirement on people to report locally in the community. I see no problem with that suggestion. In any event, the possible damage that could be caused to a child who is detained in what is, in effect, a prison should outweigh any other consideration.

I am happy to support the amendments, and I hope that the Government will reflect further on their policy for detention centres. The accountability and transparency of the operation of the centres is another important issue. The Dungavel detention centre is operated by a private company, Premier Detention Services, and I asked the Home Office whether the contract with the company could be placed in the public domain. On Friday 10 May I received an answer advising that the service aspect of the contract would be published in due course and that copies would be placed in the Library. One month later, that has not occurred. That sums up the problems surrounding the contracting out of such services to private sector companies.

My final point deals with a matter that is not raised specifically by the amendments but relates to the operation of detention centres. Perhaps the Minister will clarify how the costs of running them are funded. I imagine that the costs are fairly high. For example, the cost of converting Dungavel into a fully fledged removal centre is expected to be about £3.5 million, and that information has been provided by the Home Office itself. Perhaps the cost of this misguided Government policy will be clarified. Who will pay the £3.5 million for Dungavel? Will it come from the Scottish Executive or the Home Office budget?

Mr. Hancock: I am glad to have the opportunity to take part in this debate. When the Minister replies, I hope that she will answer many of the points raised, especially those relating to children.

I draw the Minister's attention to the reply that her colleague gave in another place. In a written answer to Lord Alton, Lord Rooker said:

> "Unaccompanied asylum seeking children are not detained other than in the most exceptional circumstances and then only overnight with appropriate care.
>
> Detention of children as part of a family unit is not a step to be taken lightly. In each case careful assessment of the need for detention is undertaken.
>
> When children and families are detained they are accommodated in special family units within dedicated family wings of the removal centre."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 29 April 2002; Vol. 634, c. *WA65*.]

That suggests that asylum seekers are taken to removal centres on arrival. However, the answer also contains two important statements: first, that that would happen only in exceptional circumstances, and secondly, that it would happen only after appropriate care and assessment. The Minister needs to assure us that nothing has changed since that answer was given.

We also need to consider the statistics on detention. As of 29 December 2001, 38 per cent. of asylum seekers had been detained for less than a month; 28 per cent. for longer than four months; and 65 people—5 per cent. of those detained during that year—for more than a year. The hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) asked about the timing of detention and judicial oversight. When visiting the Campsfield detention centre, the previous chief inspector of prisons, Sir David Ramsbotham, stressed that it is an important point of principle that when it is deemed necessary to deprive someone of his or her liberty, that should be overseen by judicial process. He also noted that the process should start quickly.

We need to be told about the Government's plans for allowing that to happen. Will judicial oversight of detention take place within days, a week or a month of an order being made and a person being detained? We know that some people are detained for a year. Is it right for them to have wait a year before they have redress to judicial oversight? That would surely be contemptible. I hope that the Minister will clarify those matters because people have a right to know. It would also help those outside this country to know what is happening here.

I also support what the hon. Members for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) and for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) said about children. My experience of leading the largest local authority in Great Britain for nearly five years was that the Children Act 1989 was paramount and took precedence over all other obligations that a local authority or, for that matter, the state had when it came to the rights of the child. To house children in such detention centres is a dramatic and draconian step by the Government.

As one of our representatives at the Council of Europe, I am party to writing a report on a common asylum policy for the 43 countries in the Council's family. It is an almighty task and I wonder how easy it will be to get Governments to agree once we have settled on a policy. Nevertheless, one of the fundamentals of the policy will be the rights of the child. Many of us have visited refugee camps in Macedonia, Bosnia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Those places offer little or no hope to the refugees and sometimes are not even places of safety.

I recently dealt with a family from Kosovo who were refugees in Macedonia. The mother was killed in a road accident in Kosovo. Her death was not connected with any action there. The father and his family were split up in Macedonia and he was put in a camp with his 13-year-old daughter, where she was raped. The father and the daughter got out of the camp, made their way across Europe and inevitably arrived in [illegible] United Kingdom. The father was detained on arrival and released fairly soon afterwards, but the daughter was put into the care of a local authority.

We are hearing now, however, that if those people were to arrive here in a few months, in the same circumstances, in all likelihood they would both be detained. The girl had already been through the most harrowing experiences that any child could contemplate, but under this measure she could have been faced with the possibility of being detained, even if only overnight. That is not a pretty picture.

4.45 pm

Mr. Speaker and I were lucky enough yesterday to meet a dozen people from the Basque country. They came to the House of Commons to present to Mr. Speaker a plaque commemorating the efforts of our predecessors in 1937 to evacuate Basque children from the war against fascism to the safe haven of the United Kingdom. Those children came here in their hundreds, unaccompanied, and last night several of them, now elderly people, told Mr. Speaker and myself of their experiences.

One woman had seen her father hanged in the street and her mother raped and killed. Others talked about families being bombed and their homes being burnt out. Each of them had stories to tell, and each had an emotional and truly thankful respect for this country and for the fact that in 1937 we welcomed unaccompanied children, who were brought to this country through the efforts of a Member of this House and by the Royal Navy. Two of them ended up staying here because they had nothing to go back to; their families were killed in that civil war.

As a nation, we have a proud record of recognising that children have a special place in all our lives. We know that there are 6,000 unaccompanied children in this country, many of whom have come from the most harrowing circumstances in Africa, central and eastern Europe and the Balkans. They represent 6,000 individual tragedies. Many more children arrive here accompanied by one parent. Surely the Government are not suggesting that any of those children, even those who are unaccompanied, should be subjected to the trauma of possible detainment, even for a short period. That cannot be right.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) made a point about the people who will be responsible for running the centres. It cannot be right that agency staff working for an as yet unknown operation will be able to recruit people, possibly without even training them properly, and then give them powers stronger than those currently available to the police and immigration officers. Surely the Government are not seriously suggesting that they will put such powers into the hands of an organisation over which Parliament will have little or no control and for which Ministers will probably deny liability if anything goes wrong.

Everyone agrees, I am sure, that the Government are right to try to tackle this issue. We must have policies that are clearly understood, and they must be firm but they must also be fair. They have to give people the chance to test the Government's case against them at the earliest possible opportunity. As hon. Members have said, we must ensure that we sign up to conventions on children's rights. We must then adhere to those conventions in responding to children's needs, and their rights must not be watered down. Those conventions must not be subsumed into legislation as though we can bypass obligations to which we have signed up and of which, as a nation, we should be proud.

We are obliged to ensure that we deal firmly and fairly, but also quickly, with asylum seekers. If people are to be detained for three months, surely it is not beyond the wit of the Government to come up with a system that allows people to have access to judicial comfort, either through a review of their case or through legal advice, and deals with asylum applications and the appeals process in a concentrated period. If people are to be detained because the Government believe that there are good reasons why they should not be on our streets, we have to have in place a system that can deal with their cases pretty quickly.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): I am sure that everyone agrees with what the hon. Gentleman just said. Would he like to take this opportunity to condemn the words of Liberal Democrat councillor Frank Roderick, who said in a newsletter circulated a few weeks ago that the Government were proposing a "Prison Camp for Speke/Garston", adding:

> "These are not genuine asylum seekers or legitimate immigrants which Labour are considering foisting on our area . . . illegal immigrants and asylum seekers whose applications have been rejected, instead of being immediately deported, are being herded into prison camps such as the one Labour is proposing for us."

Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is absolutely outrageous that that Liberal Democrat councillor is calling for people's immediate deportation, presumably without allowing them any legal rights whatever?

Mr. Hancock: The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to learn that those comments are news to me. This is the first time I have heard of them, but I certainly would not want to be a party to those suggestions. However, they have already been brought to the attention of my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey by the Minister, and my hon. Friend has undertaken to investigate the circumstances. Yesterday, the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) made an intervention that was far from helpful to the debate, and he has been equally unhelpful to today's debate by repeating something that is already in the public domain. He has brought a distasteful air to the debate by trying to score a silly political point rather than deal with the crux of the issue.

Mike Gapes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hancock: No, I will not give way again to the hon. Gentleman. He has only just come into the Chamber.

Annabelle Ewing: I echo the point that the debate was being conducted in a civilised manner and that the intervention by hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) lowered the tone considerably. If anyone should express regret about language used, we should start with the Home Secretary and his extremely unfortunate use of the word "swamping".

Mr. Hancock: That is a helpful contribution, because it reminds the House of that unhelpful and rather sad event.

We have an obligation to children. I want the Minister to assure me that there are commitments on which the Government are not going to renege. I want an assurance that the comments made by Lord Rooker when he had responsibility for these matters in the other place will be adhered to. Furthermore, we must be assured that the arguments made about early access to judicial procedures have been heeded and that such access will be available. Anything short of those assurances will seriously undermine the nation's credibility not only inside the country, but outside.

Ms Rosie Winterton: We have had a wide-ranging debate and many hon. Members have made powerful speeches about points of concern. It underlines the fact that we are all interested in ensuring that we have a system that deals with vulnerable people not only fairly and quickly but firmly. I hope to be able to give

[Ms Rosie Winterton]

assurances on many of the points made and to explain in more detail some of the background to the decisions that the Government have made and to our proposals.

I thank hon. Members for their support for new clause 9, which shows that we listened in Committee and that we have come back with appropriate changes. The changes in the Bill do not alter the types of people who are in removal or detention centres. It is the person who makes the decision about detention who is changed. Decisions are already made about families who are referred to detention centres. There has to be a choice in this matter. Whatever the reasons are for referring the principal member of a family to a detention centre, such decisions are not taken lightly, in terms of detention in the first instance, and also in terms of removal, which is a different matter. Separation of children from their families is not a road that we would want to take.

Annabelle Ewing: As I mentioned, it has already been suggested by the Scots Parliament cross-party group on refugees that community reporting is an alternative way of proceeding—a point that I am sure has been made by many others. The family would not be split up, but live in the community and report to the police with whatever frequency was deemed appropriate.

Ms Winterton: Of course, there are different options. I reiterate that there is always a presumption of granting temporary admission or release with reporting conditions. It is only in terms of detention from the outset, when there are strong grounds for believing that individuals would not comply or problems in identifying somebody, that such a course of action is taken.

All cases are usually reviewed within 24 hours by a more senior officer than the one who took the original decision. They are also reviewed administratively at monthly intervals, and progressively more senior levels in the immigration and nationality directorate or Immigration Advisory Service consider the decisions. Such decisions can change. For example, that may happen if it is felt that because an appeal is imminent, the likelihood of abscondence has lessened. During that period, there is always scope for the decision to be reviewed and the ability to apply for bail.

Simon Hughes: First, does the Minister accept that, as has been mentioned in other contexts, there is all the difference in the world between a decision being reviewed by another member of Government staff and its being reviewed by an independent member of the judiciary—a magistrate or judge? Secondly, she said that the Bill did not change whom we put in the centres, only who puts them there. In that case, there is no reason to change the name of detention centres. At the moment, it is accurate as they are used for detention, but the future name of "removal centre" is inaccurate, as some of the people who are held may not be removed.

Ms Winterton: I reiterate that the ability to apply for bail is included in the scenario. For people who are staying in removal centres because they are going to be removed, a very short period is involved, by and large, because removal directions will have been set. If somebody asks for judicial review of their removal directions, their stay will be prolonged. When such directions have been set, however, the time is relatively short, as some of the figures given by the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) demonstrated.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) made a very important point about children in removal centres, or what are currently called detention centres. He said that his amendment might be deficient and that it was tabled at a late stage, but he made a powerful speech, and I hope that I will be able to give him some assurances.

5 pm

Removal centres are subject to inspection by Her Majesty's inspector of prisons, and where educational facilities are present Ofsted will be involved in the inspection. As regards the Children Act 1989, the inspector of prisons has to ensure during inspections that the facilities offered are in line with the care that would be given under that Act. Obviously, we as a Government cannot instruct the inspector of prisons to make inspections, but thematic inspections, among others, will start in the near future. We are confident that no child in the centres would be denied human rights as guaranteed by the Human Rights Act 1998 and that they would receive adequate protection and a guarantee of their welfare.

Jeremy Corbyn: The Minister says that there would be an inspection by Her Majesty's inspector of prisons. Would there be a facility for a visit and inspection by the local social services authority, which seems to be a far more appropriate body to consider the rights and needs of children than the prison inspector?

Ms Winterton: Local authorities have no right to inspect centres in such circumstances.

Jeremy Corbyn: My understanding is that social services departments are given a specific responsibility under the Children Act to examine the children's welfare, and the prisons inspectorate does not fall within the ambit of the Act. Surely that issue must be resolved.

Ms Winterton: The provisions do not apply in that respect, but perhaps I can reassure my hon. Friend by saying that removal centre contractors work closely with local social services, and we expect them to continue to do so.

On the way in which centres are organised as regards family accommodation, such accommodation is entirely separate, secure and away from the remainder of the centre. There are education, care and play facilities, and professionals are involved in the care of the children. We envisage that that will continue in any new facilities.

The amendment tabled by the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) deals with the length of time for which people could be detained in removal centres. It would create an explicit requirement to detain a person for no more than a "reasonable period". Although there is no express requirement in legislation to detain persons for no more than the "reasonable period" necessary in the circumstances of each case, domestic and European convention on human rights jurisprudence is clear and well established on that point, as the hon. Gentleman said.

The power to detain may be exercised only for the specific purpose authorised by the statute. Detention is permitted only for as long as is reasonably necessary for that specific authorised purpose and the detaining authority must act with due diligence to pursue it. The principle is well understood and we therefore do not believe that it needs to be stated in the Bill.

I want to consider the issue of renaming detention centres "removal centres". Renaming the centres will reinforce the key role that detention plays in removing those who have no lawful basis for staying here. It does not signal a change of function for centres. Hon. Members have argued for a separation of those who are detained from those who are detained pending removal. However, we do not believe that it is feasible to make that sort of distinction in the centres. Removal centres will always need to be used in other circumstances and at other points in the process when we have power to detain.

Mr. Malins: Does the Minister believe that removal centres will always contain some people who are not subject to removal?

Ms Winterton: Yes. It may be necessary for removal centres to contain such people. That currently happens, and we are changing not the purpose of the centres but the name, to reflect the process more clearly. As hon. Members know, that fits an overall plan of ensuring that we have a clearer idea of people's position throughout the process. Hon. Members must consider the changes in the context of the other changes, such as trialling accommodation centres, and trying to establish a system whereby we can keep in touch throughout the process with people who seek asylum. The process must be firm and fair from beginning to end. If we believe that there is a danger of people absconding or if facilities are necessary for identifying people when there are problems, it is important that we have the ability to deal with that. Separation is not feasible.

Mr. Hancock: I appreciate the Minister's clarification that she expects removal centres to contain a mix of people. What will happen if a removal centre is full of people awaiting determination of their asylum application or appeals, and others who are about to be removed cannot get in to the centres? Many people fear that everyone will end up in a removal centre, based on the premise that the result of their application is removal.

Ms Winterton: I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman is right. When removal directions are made, removal will often be quick. Sometimes it will be almost immediate. There will, however, be a fairly fast turnaround of those who have had their removal directions set, as the hon. Gentleman's figures showed. We are seeking to expand the present system. The whole idea of these plans is to make the process speedier, so that people and appeals can be dealt with more quickly. We need, therefore, to ensure that the estate—removal centres, accommodation centres and so on—is adequate to provide the places that are needed.

Simon Hughes: I have two factual questions. First, will the Minister tell us the projected numbers of those who will have finished all their processes and who are being detained, but with their removal planned, compared with the percentage of people who will not have reached that stage, and who will therefore not be guaranteed removal because that may not be the outcome of their appeal? What will be the balance between the two? Secondly, on the name question, are not the Minister and her colleagues giving the game away? This is all about image, about looking tougher, and about sending messages—it does not matter if they are wrong or misleading. This is simply about trying to make the Government sound more and more right wing, hard-line and unsympathetic. That must be what it is about; otherwise the change would not be necessary.

Ms Winterton: No, it is not about that. This is about establishing a better system, which the hon. Gentleman knows we have to do. He is only too aware that these measures need to be taken to make the system more efficient. Refugees who have been waiting a long time for their status to be confirmed come to my surgeries. They have been through very difficult circumstances, and it is incumbent on us to ensure that we have a system that allows those with genuine claims to get through it quickly. I do not accept that this is simply about window dressing. It is about establishing a proper system and ensuring that we can speed up the process.

Mr. Hancock: Unfortunately, I am losing the Minister. I would like to know why the change of name from "detention centre" to "removal centre" will speed the process up. She has said nothing to convince me that simply changing the name will make the process any quicker.

Ms Winterton: Obviously the hon. Gentleman and the Government will have to differ on this matter.

I hope that I have been able to give some reassurance in some of my answers, particularly those on children in these situations. The provisions in this part of the Bill do not change the situation for the people in removal centres; they change the people who make the decisions in these circumstances. That is the extent of the provisions. I believe that there are adequate safeguards to address the concerns that hon. Members have raised, and I hope, therefore, that they will consider not pressing their amendments to a vote.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 10

WITHHOLDING AND WITHDRAWAL OF SUPPORT

'Schedule *(Withholding and withdrawal of support)* (which makes provision for support to be withheld or withdrawn in certain circumstances) shall have effect.'.—*[Beverley Hughes.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

5.15 pm

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: New clause 4—*Accommodation: adequacy*—

'(1) After section 97(1) of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (c. 33) (Supplemental) there is added:

"(1A) Accommodation provided under section 95 will only be regarded as adequate provided:

(a) it is fit for human habitation as defined by section 604 of the Housing Act 1985 (as amended);

(b) occupation of the accommodation by the asylum seekers and their dependants (if any) will not constitute overcrowding as defined by sections 324, 325 and 326 of the Housing Act 1985;

(c) it does not constitute a statutory nuisance as defined by section 79 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990;

(d) the Secretary of State is satisfied that, if occupied by them, the asylum seekers and their dependants (if any) would be reasonably safe from personal injury or from damage to their property caused by a relevant defect, as defined by section 4 of the Defective Premises Act 1972.".

(2) After section 100(1) of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (c. 33) (local authority and other assistance for Secretary of State) there is added—

"(1A) The Secretary of State may ask a local housing authority to take such steps as they are allowed by law to ensure accommodation provided under section 95 is adequate as defined by section 97(1A).".'.

New clause 17—*Accommodation of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children*—

'(1) All unaccompanied asylum-seeking children shall be offered the opportunity to be accommodated under section 20 of the Children Act 1989.

(2) Such children may be accommodated by any local authority.'.

Government new schedule 1—*'Withholding and Withdrawal of Support*—

Ineligibility for support

1 (1) A person to whom this paragraph applies shall not be eligible for support or assistance under—

(a) section 21 or 29 of the National Assistance Act 1948 (c. 29) (local authority: accommodation and welfare),

(b) section 45 of the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 (c. 46) (local authority: welfare of elderly),

(c) section 12 or 13A of the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968 (c. 49) (social welfare services),

(d) Article 15 of the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) Order (S.I. 1972/1265 (N.I. 14)) (general social welfare),

(e) section 21 of and Schedule 8 to the National Health Service Act 1977 (c. 49) (social services),

(f) section 17, 23C, 24A or 24B of the Children Act 1989 (c. 41) (welfare and other powers which can be exercised in relation to adults),

(g) section 29 of the Children (Scotland) Act 1995 (c. 36) (after-care),

(h) section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000 (c. 22) (promotion of well-being),

(i) a provision of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (c. 33), or

(j) a provision of this Act.

(2) A power or duty under a provision referred to in sub-paragraph (1) may not be exercised or performed in respect of a person to whom this paragraph applies (whether or not the person has previously been in receipt of support or assistance under the provision).

(3) An approval or directions given under or in relation to a provision referred to in sub-paragraph (1) shall be taken to be subject to sub-paragraph (2).

Exceptions

2 (1) Paragraph 1 does not prevent the provision of support or assistance—

(a) to a child, or

(b) under or by virtue of regulations made under paragraph 8, 9 or 10 below, or

(c) in a case in respect of which, and to the extent to which, regulations made by the Secretary of State disapply paragraph 1.

(2) Regulations under sub-paragraph (1)(c) may confer a discretion on the Secretary of State.

(3) A reference in this Schedule to a person to whom paragraph 1 applies includes a reference to a person in respect of whom that paragraph is disapplied to a limited extent by regulations under sub-paragraph (1)(c), except in a case for which the regulations provide otherwise.

3 Paragraph 1 does not prevent the exercise of a power or the performance of a duty if, and to the extent that, its exercise or performance is necessary for the purpose of avoiding a breach of—

(a) a person's Convention rights, or

(b) a person's rights under the Community Treaties.

First class of ineligible person: refugee status abroad

4 (1) Paragraph 1 applies to a person if he—

(a) has refugee status abroad, or

(b) is the dependant of a person who is in the United Kingdom and who has refugee status abroad.

(2) For the purposes of this paragraph a person has refugee status abroad if—

(a) he does not have the nationality of an EEA State, and

(b) the government of an EEA State other than the United Kingdom has determined that he is entitled to protection as a refugee under the Refugee Convention.

Second class of ineligible person: citizen of other EEA State

5 Paragraph 1 applies to a person who has the nationality of an EEA State other than the United Kingdom if—

(a) his presence in the United Kingdom is not in reliance on a right under or by virtue of the Community Treaties, or

(b) his presence in the United Kingdom is in reliance on a right under or by virtue of the Community Treaties which permits residence in a member State subject to conditions designed to avoid burdens on social assistance systems or social security systems.

Third class of ineligible person: failed asylum-seeker

6 Paragraph 1 applies to a person if—

(a) he was (but is no longer) an asylum-seeker, and

(b) he fails to cooperate with removal directions issued in respect of him.

Fourth class of ineligible person: person unlawfully in United Kingdom

7 Paragraph 1 applies to a person if—

(a) he is in the United Kingdom in breach of the immigration laws within the meaning of section 11, and

(b) he is not an asylum-seeker.

Travel assistance

8 The Secretary of State may make regulations providing for arrangements to be made enabling a person to whom paragraph 1 applies by virtue of paragraph 4 or 5 to leave the United Kingdom.

Temporary accommodation

9 (1) The Secretary of State may make regulations providing for arrangements to be made for the accommodation of a person to whom paragraph 1 applies pending the implementation of arrangements made by virtue of paragraph 8.

(2) Arrangements for a person by virtue of this paragraph—

(a) may be made only if the person has with him a dependent child, and

(b) may include arrangements for a dependent child.

10 (1) The Secretary of State may make regulations providing for arrangements to be made for the accommodation of a person if—

(a) paragraph 1 applies to him by virtue of paragraph 7, and

(b) he has not failed to cooperate with removal directions issued in respect of him.

(2) Arrangements for a person by virtue of this paragraph—

(a) may be made only if the person has with him a dependent child, and

(b) may include arrangements for a dependent child.

Assistance and accommodation: general

11 Regulations under paragraph 8, 9 or 10 may—

(a) provide for the making of arrangements under a provision referred to in paragraph 1(1) or otherwise;

(b) confer a function (which may include the exercise of a discretion) on the Secretary of State, a local authority or another person;

(c) provide that arrangements must be made in a specified manner or in accordance with specified principles;

(d) provide that arrangements may not be made in a specified manner;

(e) require a local authority or another person to have regard to guidance issued by the Secretary of State in making arrangements;

(f) require a local authority or another person to comply with a direction of the Secretary of State in making arrangements.

12 (1) Regulations may, in particular, provide that if a person refuses an offer of arrangements under paragraph 8 or fails to implement or cooperate with arrangements made for him under that paragraph—

(a) new arrangements may be made for him under paragraph 8, but

(b) new arrangements may not be made for him under paragraph 9.

(2) Regulations by virtue of this paragraph may include exceptions in the case of a person who—

(a) has a reason of a kind specified in the regulations for failing to implement or cooperate with arrangements made under paragraph 8, and

(b) satisfies any requirements of the regulations for proof of the excuse.

Offences

13 (1) A person who leaves the United Kingdom in accordance with arrangements made under paragraph 8 commits an offence if he—

(a) returns to the United Kingdom, and

(b) requests that arrangements be made for him by virtue of paragraph 8, 9 or 10.

(2) A person commits an offence if he—

(a) requests that arrangements be made for him by virtue of paragraph 8, 9 or 10, and

(b) fails to mention a previous request by him for the making of arrangements under any of those paragraphs.

(3) A person who is guilty of an offence under this paragraph shall be liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months.

Information

14 If it appears to a local authority that paragraph 1 applies or may apply to a person in the authority's area by virtue of paragraph 6 or 7, the authority must inform the Secretary of State.

Power to amend Schedule

15 The Secretary of State may by order amend this Schedule so as—

(a) to provide for paragraph 1 to apply or not to apply to a class of person;

(b) to add or remove a provision to or from the list in paragraph 1(1);

(c) to add, amend or remove a limitation of or exception to paragraph 1.

Orders and regulations

16 (1) An order or regulations under this Schedule must be made by statutory instrument.

(2) An order or regulations under this Schedule may—

(a) make provision which applies generally or only in specified cases or circumstances;

(b) make different provision for different cases or circumstances;

(c) make transitional provision;

(d) make consequential provision (which may include provision amending a provision made by or under this or another Act).

(3) An order under this Schedule, or regulations which include consequential provision amending an enactment, shall not be made unless a draft has been laid before and approved by resolution of each House of Parliament.

(4) Regulations under this Schedule to which sub-paragraph (3) does not apply shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament.

Interpretation

17 In this Schedule—

"asylum-seeker" means a person—

(a) who is at least 18 years old,

(b) who has made a claim for asylum (within the meaning of section 16(3)), and

(c) whose claim has been recorded, but not determined, by the Secretary of State,

"Convention rights" has the same meaning as in the Human Rights Act 1998 (c. 42),

"child" means a person under the age of eighteen,

"dependant" and "dependent" shall have such meanings as may be prescribed by regulations made by the Secretary of State,

"EEA State" means a State which is a contracting party to the Agreement on the European Economic Area signed at Oporto on 2nd May 1992 (as it has effect from time to time),

"local authority"—

(a) in relation to England and Wales, has the same meaning as in section 105(3),

(b) in relation to Scotland, has the same meaning as in section 105(4), and

(c) in relation to Northern Ireland, means a health service body within the meaning of section 109(4)(c),

"the Refugee Convention" means the Convention relating to the status of Refugees done at Geneva on 28th July 1951 and its Protocol, and "removal directions" means directions under Schedule 2 to the Immigration Act 1971 (c. 77) (control of entry, &c.), under Schedule 3 to that Act (deportation) or under section 10 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 (c. 33) (removal of person unlawfully in United Kingdom).'.

Amendment (a) to the proposed schedule, in paragraph 4(1)(a), after "abroad", insert—

'and is not otherwise seeking to claim support under a provision of European Union law, the European Convention on Human Rights, or any other international obligation and is not seeking to transfer his refugee status to the United Kingdom'.

Amendment (b) to the proposed schedule, in paragraph 4(1)(b), at end insert—

'and is not otherwise seeking to claim support under a provision of European Union law, the European Convention on Human Rights, or any other international obligation and is not seeking to transfer his refugee status to the United Kingdom'.

Amendment (c) to the proposed schedule, in paragraph 5(a), after "Treaties", insert—

'and is not otherwise seeking to claim support under a provision of European Union law, the European Convention on Human Rights, or any other international obligation'.

Amendment (d) to the proposed schedule, in paragraph 5(b), at end insert—

'and is not otherwise seeking to claim support under a provision of European Union law, the European Convention on Human Rights, or any other international obligation'.

Amendment (e) to the proposed schedule, in paragraph 6(a), leave out "and".

Amendment (f) to the proposed schedule, in paragraph 6(b), at end insert—

'and—

(c) he does not allege that his rights under the European Convention on Human Rights would be breached if he were removed and there are no outstanding appeals or judicial review proceedings in connection with that claim or his asylum application'.

Amendment (g) to the proposed schedule, in paragraph 7(b), at end insert—

', or—

(c) he has no other outstanding application for leave to enter or remain either before the Secretary of State or appeal before a Court, Adjudicator or the Tribunal'.

Amendment (h) to the proposed schedule, in paragraph 9, leave out sub-paragraph (2).

Amendment (i) to the proposed schedule, in paragraph 10, leave out sub-paragraph (2).

Amendment (j) to the proposed schedule, leave out paragraph 12.

Amendment (k) to the proposed schedule, in paragraph 13, leave out sub-paragraph (2).

Amendment No. 49, in clause 37, page 19, line 7, leave out paragraph (a).

Amendment No. 84, in page 19, line 18, leave out from "shall" to "House" in line 19 and insert—

'not be made unless a draft has been laid before and approved by resolution of each'.

Government amendments Nos. 217, 216 and 254.

Amendment No. 50, in clause 38, page 20, line 13, leave out "and" and insert "or".

Amendment No. 51, in page 20, line 14, at end insert—

'or both.'.

Government amendment No. 255.

Amendment No. 52, in page 20, line 17, leave out "and" and insert "or".

Amendment No. 53, in page 20, line 18, at end insert—

'or both.'.

Amendment No. 261, in clause 39, page 23, line 4, leave out subsections (3), (4), (5) and (6).

Amendment No. 54, in clause 43, page 24, line 35, leave out "may" and insert "must".

Amendment No. 55, in page 24, line 35, at end insert—

'(aa) give priority to meeting the person's particular needs'.

Amendment No. 56, in page 24, line 38, leave out paragraph (b).

Government amendment No. 218.

Amendment No. 143, in clause 45, page 26, line 3, after "appellant", insert "and any witnesses".

Amendment No. 144, in page 26, line 4, after "appeal", insert "or seeking legal advice".

Amendment No. 57, in page 26, line 4, at end add—

'103C Advice and assistance

(1) The Secretary of State may make a grant to a voluntary organisation which provides—

(i) advice or assistance to persons who have a right of appeal under this Part;

(ii) other services for the welfare of those persons.

(2) A grant under this section may be subject to terms or conditions (which may include conditions as to repayment).'.

Amendment No. 194, in clause 133, page 74, line 26, leave out paragraph (f).

Beverley Hughes: Many Members will be aware of the situation faced by many of our local authorities, which are increasingly being presented with individuals and families claiming support who are at various stages of the immigration and asylum process and have a different status. I recognise that this issue may present some hon. Members with an acute challenge. None of us faced with such people in our constituencies likes to say no. Most MPs want to help other people, wherever they come from, and it rightly does not come easy to us to contemplate withdrawing support or sending people out of the country. However, we must recognise our responsibilities to other constituents and to people who are legitimately settled in this country. The provisions in the new clause deal with some sharp questions.

Should local authority funds appropriately be used to support people who have established refugee status elsewhere, and should they continue to support those whose claim in this country has failed? Should that support continue in the face of decisions by those people not to leave even when the means of leaving is provided to them? We have concluded that the answer to those questions is no. In balancing the interests of people claiming support with those of local taxpayers, local people settled here and local authorities, the balance ought to lie with the latter. Perverse incentives in the current arrangements enable people to claim one source of public support from local authorities when their status excludes them from other such sources. We believe that we must grasp that nettle.

I know that hon. Members will want to raise issues on this new clause, but I should be grateful if they would allow me to set out the ground a little. I am introducing this amendment to assist local authorities by providing legal clarity when dealing with applications for support from certain categories of new arrivals in the United Kingdom.

At the moment, different local authorities adopt different approaches to claims for support from European Union and European Economic Area nationals and from refugees from EU and EEA states. Local authorities are being approached for social services support, usually under the National Assistance Act 1948, or in the case of people with children, under the Children Act 1989, as individuals try to claim and fail what is known as the habitual residence test. Many hon. Members will be aware that the habitual residence test is applied to those seeking access to income-related benefits such as jobseeker's allowance and income support. It seeks to ensure that those eligible for benefits have sufficiently close ties to the United Kingdom. It was introduced to restrict benefits for people with little or no connection with the UK, and no commitment to settling here. The underlying principle is that UK taxpayers should not subsidise people with very tenuous links to the UK.

An increasing number of people are now arriving in the UK and seeking assistance from social services. The extra demand is placing great pressure on local authorities' social services budgets, and creating significant problems for them. We do not know the precise numbers with which we are faced, which is an indication of the problems experienced by some of the statutory authorities that are trying to cope with what has been a significant influx in some areas.

We have received reports from local authorities and, indeed, from some of our Government offices. The evidence suggests that in Leicester alone between 2,000 and 10,000 people of Somali origin—probably a number in excess of the smaller figure—have migrated over the past 18 months or so. Although the problem is highlighted by the arrival of Dutch nationals of Somali origin, there are reports of growing communities from other areas such as Portugal and Montserrat.

Currently, when local authorities decide whether support in the form of accommodation or otherwise will be provided, they do not take account of the applicant's immigration status. That means that not just those with citizenship or refugee status in another EU or EEA state, but people who are unlawfully present in the UK, can receive support. Our proposals are intended to ease the pressure on local authorities, to clarify their legal position and to create a level playing field between one authority and another, while also giving individuals and their families the means to return to their home country or the country in which they acquired refugee status.

Two recent court cases have helped us. A very recent case, that of G *v.* Barnet in 2001, involved a Dutch national of Somali origin who asked for local authority accommodation for her and her child. Given the circumstances, the local authority offered her a voluntary place of care for her child, and the means for both to return home to Holland where support was available. The Court of Appeal decided that that was a reasonable offer, and that the authority was not obliged to house the family if they rejected the offer—although it would be obliged to house the child, and indeed was willing to do so. This year the cases of Ali and Mohammed *v.* Birmingham involved similar circumstances, and again the court found that the authority's approach was lawful.

As for those with citizenship or refugee status in another EU or EEA state, under the new proposals short-term accommodation may be provided for families with children, as well as a one-way journey to their home country. If the family do not take up the offer of travel, or fail to travel, all support will be withdrawn apart from an offer of support for the children under section 20 of the Children Act. For asylum seekers whose claim has not succeeded, who can go but who fail to comply with removal directions, all support will end. Local authorities will be able to offer support only to children, again under section 20 of the Children Act.

Jeremy Corbyn: The Minister says that the local authority will provide support for children only, and not for their parents. In such cases would the children be taken into care, or would the traditional social services approach of supporting the whole family in order to support the children apply?

Beverley Hughes: No, the children would be received into care under section 20 of the 1989 Act and given accommodation, but support for the adults would be withdrawn. That is the point of the measure. If, having been offered travel, the family refused to go or failed to comply, the arrangements would be offered to the children but not the adults.

Local authorities will be required to inform the Home Office about those resident in the UK unlawfully who are not asylum seekers, and who apply for local authority support, so that removal can be arranged. Again, local authorities may provide short-term accommodation to families with children until the date of removal. Should such a family fail to travel, all support will be withdrawn, other than the offer of support for children under section 20 of the 1989 Act.

We will ensure that children and other vulnerable persons continue to receive appropriate care, while allowing families to stay together by enabling them to accept the offer of travel home. In particular, those with special care needs will continue to have them met until the date of travel. If they do not travel, unless they have an acceptable reason for not doing so—for example, they are too ill, and a medical certificate supports that view—care will be provided at the minimum level, in compliance with the European convention on human rights.

Simon Hughes: These are difficult issues and no one should pretend otherwise. I shall give the Minister two examples that I am advised illustrate the unfair consequence of such a proposal. The first is that of an Irish citizen with a disability who has lived here for 30 years, who clearly has the nationality of another EEA state, and who is not seeking to use their Community treaty rights. As I understand it, under the proposal they would have to be sent back to Ireland, because they would be ineligible for benefits here.

The second and perhaps more acute example is that of a citizen of another country—say, Ireland—who is the dependant of a person with refugee status in another European country, such as the daughter of someone who settled in Germany 20 or 30 years ago. Does not the proposal imply that many people will be required to move from a place in which they have lived perfectly lawfully

[Simon Hughes]

for decades, and go to a country where they may have no relatives and, in effect, no home? That surely cannot be right.

Beverley Hughes: The hon. Gentleman rightly leads us into some technical areas. In cases where citizens of EU or EEA countries have rights under Community treaties of one kind or another, it is not intended that the policy will take away those rights. On the examples that he mentions, even the most draconian interpretation of the habitual residence test would regard someone who has lived here for 30 years as an habitual resident. Such a person would therefore meet the test and be entitled in the normal way.

In addition to the measures that I have outlined, we must accept the need to guard against those who may seek to abuse the support and facilities offered to them. For that reason, we are also introducing two new offences as part of the measures. First, it will be an offence for a person who has accepted the offer of short-term accommodation and/or a journey home to return to the UK to try to claim benefits again. Secondly, to help to ensure that local authorities have the best information before them when considering a request for support under these provisions, it will be an offence for a person to fail to mention—to fail to declare—any previous request for support under these measures. That is necessary to prevent people from going from one local authority to another and making claims.

5.30 pm

I am also placing an obligation on local authorities, as I have mentioned, to report to the Secretary of State any person in their area whom they reasonably suspect to be unlawfully present in the UK or any failed asylum seekers who are refusing to co-operate with attempts to remove them. That will help the Home Office in instigating removal action against appropriate individuals.

Mr. Iain Coleman (Hammersmith and Fulham): These are technical and complex matters. What discussions and consultations have been held with the Local Government Association, the Association of London Government and other local authority associations? Can my hon. Friend the Minister advise me of the detail of any such discussions and whether those organisations support the measures that she is outlining today?

Beverley Hughes: It is fair to say that the concern has arisen because of the situation that many local authorities have faced, the details of which they have brought to our attention. Some local authorities, including Barnet and Birmingham, have tested the case in law, as I mentioned earlier, but other local authorities—whose social security budgets are also very stretched—are unclear about the extent to which they can lawfully follow the example of those that have tested cases. The measures are in the spirit of requests from many local authorities to clarify the law and to make their position clear in legal terms.

When local authorities come to implement the provisions, we will need to provide guidance to them on some of the technical detail, and we will certainly do so. I am also satisfied that these measures comply with the requirements of the European convention on human rights and our other international obligations.

It has been established that those with refugee status in an EEA state or nationals of that state have entitlement to support elsewhere. Therefore, we have to come to the conclusion that for such people to claim support here is not an acceptable use of our resources and presents a considerable burden for local authorities and their social services budgets. We have to make it clear that local authorities will not be empowered to provide such support in future. That clarification will be helpful to local authorities, many of which have been uncertain whether, to what extent and in what circumstances they should provide support.

The Opposition have tabled several amendments to the new clause and the schedule. I shall reply on those amendments later, but I can tell the House in advance that I will not accept them. Many of them would undermine the whole principle behind the new clause. I shall be interested to hear what hon. Members have to say in their favour.

Government amendments Nos. 254 and 255 make it clear that a person is destitute if he or she does not have adequate accommodation and food, or other essential items. My hon. Friends listened carefully to the discussions in Committee and to the concerns that the original draft clause indicated a change in policy. While I am satisfied that the original draft achieved the policy aim and that we explained that point in detail to the Committee, we have taken the opportunity to amend the clause to take on board the points made.

Government amendments Nos. 216 to 218 are technical amendments that clarify the fact that support will not be provided to those outside the United Kingdom. Government amendment No. 216 amends the definition of an asylum seeker for support purposes and says that people must be in the United Kingdom if they are to fall within the definition. Government amendment No. 218 clarifies the fact that an appeal made under clause 45 against a decision to stop providing support, or against a decision that a person does not qualify for support, may not be brought by someone outside the United Kingdom.

Finally, Government amendment No. 217 is a small technical amendment related to clause 38. It has no effect other than to simplify the way in which the clause is presented. It does not alter the substantive arrangements.

Simon Hughes: As the Minister rightly said, Government new clause 10 is the method by which the proposals in Government new schedule 1 will be introduced. It is an enabling measure to which we cannot have objections in principle. However, we are concerned about the new schedule.

As I said earlier, this is complex territory. It is difficult for the House to do justice to such a proposal, given that it did not appear in the Standing Committee. It appeared only after the Committee ended. There is nothing new about that, but it is exactly the sort of proposal that should go before a Special Standing Committee, so that people can give evidence about it. It should at least be brought before the Standing Committee for detailed consideration.

The House deals with new schedules, new clauses and amendments in a certain way, however. Liberal Democrat Members have tabled a set of amendments to new schedule 1, but the way in which Government business is taken means that they cannot be voted on. At the end of the debate, therefore, we will seek to divide the House on new clause 10 to register our disapproval of some of the matters in the package. They include the complex issue in new schedule 1 of what, in shorthand, is called the problem of benefit shopping.

Amendment No. 49 embodies our strong objection to the Government's intention to change the financial support system to prevent people who have the chance of gaining accommodation with friends or relatives around the country from getting the financial support that would allow them to do so. That option saves a huge amount of money at present, as the accommodation is provided free of cost to the Government.

When we debated the matter in Standing Committee with the Minister's predecessor, we talked about the National Asylum Support Service support system and registered our strong disapproval and the fact that we did not believe that the proposals in the Bill would be in the Government's interest. It must be cheaper if people who are willing and able to look after themselves do not ask the Government to pay for their accommodation but only for their necessary living costs over and above the cost of accommodation. That must be cheaper for the Government than if they have to meet the costs of accommodating people and of paying them benefits as well.

We therefore object to some of the details that emerged only last week, and to the idea that the chance of benefits will be taken away from people who, as asylum seekers, might otherwise be given accommodation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) and I accept that there needs to be a regime across the EU that prevents people from gaining a set of entitlements in one country and then transferring them, without any authority, to another country. There need to be rules about that. However, that is a much wider area than could properly be covered in this debate.

The Minister probably knows from her constituency surgery, as I do from mine, of people who are lawfully in this country because they have been given refugee status but who have no automatic right to travel to other countries. They are lawfully here but cannot visit their relatives in Paris, for example, because there is no European Union-wide recognition of the rights of people who have less than full rights in EU member states. I am aware that the European Parliament has debated this, and colleagues there have talked to me about it. It strikes me that the way to deal with such issues is to seek EU-wide agreement on the rights of people who have been accepted in one place but may need, for a short or long period, to go somewhere else.

I do not argue that people who, to take the Minister's example, might originally have come from Somalia and then settled in the Netherlands should have the right to come to the United Kingdom and claim benefits in addition to those they receive in the Netherlands. Of course that would not be right—European Union member states should pay only once. However, it may be perfectly proper to transfer such rights, on application, from one country to another.

This is the largest group of amendments, new clauses and new schedules to be debated today. Some have been tabled by the Government, some by the Conservative party, some by the Liberal Democrats, and the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) has also tabled a new clause. I shall deal with these as speedily as I can and at least put the argument before the Minister. Inevitably, if the Government hold their supporters behind their policy, they will win the day today, but these matters will have to be revisited in much greater detail when they go to the House of Lords, because there has been no opportunity for parliamentarians to look at them in detail here.

I will take the proposals in order. New clause 4, tabled by the Conservatives and supported by the Liberal Democrats, would provide for tests of adequacy of accommodation. It is relatively self-explanatory; I support it and hope that the Minister will accept it. I should be grateful if the hon. Lady indicated in her reply whether a proposal along these lines is acceptable. It would ensure that those in the dispersal system have adequate accommodation and that they are not excluded from protection when it comes to the sort of decent accommodation that we would expect other people in poor circumstances to have if they were born in this country or were British citizens.

In new schedule 1, the Government propose that for those who have been given refugee status abroad, who are citizens of another EU state, who are failed asylum seekers, or who are unlawfully in the United Kingdom—each category may merit different treatment—a raft of potentially available benefits will disappear. We normally think of such benefits as coming under the National Assistance Act 1948 and being distributed through the social services.

Like the Minister, I represent an urban consistency and understand the pressure on all local authorities, particularly with regard to the social services budget. We know how councillors and officers have to juggle the budget and the huge pressure that they are under, to which the Government have, in part, responded. Our general concern—I am trying to be general as well as succinct—is that by taking away all such benefits, groups of people could, for periods of time, be without any recourse to benefit and have no practical alternative.

Our amendments to the new schedule would allow a continuing right to benefit for people with an outstanding human rights claim or appeal, those who might have another claim to support or social and medical assistance under the European convention on human rights, or those who seek to transfer their refugee status. To take the example given by my hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock), if people had fled from a country in which there was civil war, such as Ethiopia, and come to Europe only to discover that their wife, child or parent was in another European country, they would seek to be reunited. That is the sort of argument behind the amendments to Government new schedule 1.

On our amendment No. 49, clearly the option of cash-only support should be kept open. The Minister did not deal with that. I have not heard any arguments from her or her predecessors to suggest that what the Government are proposing will be any cheaper. They are saying that support only is being used to avoid dispersal. When the National Asylum Support Service system started, 100 per cent. of support-only applications were in Greater London. The figure is now only about 70 per cent. If that is the case, support only does not stand in the way of dispersal. Indeed, if it were withdrawn, many people who are staying with relatives and friends in London and other parts of the country would be disadvantaged.

5.45 pm

I understand that at the end of 2001, 25,000 asylum seekers were receiving voucher-only support and were not asking the Government to house them, whereas just over 40,000 were supported in NASS accommodation—a ratio of nearly a third to two thirds. I do not understand how it would be cheaper to get rid of that option. It would not, therefore, be in the Government's or our interests to do so.

Jeremy Corbyn: On the figures for NASS and non-NASS supported cases, am I right in thinking that it is the longer-term asylum seekers, who have come back to London after being dispersed elsewhere and suffering harassment or whatever, who are non-NASS supported? They are often living in terrible poverty, supported by other asylum-seeking families who are themselves trying to survive on 70 per cent. of income support.

Simon Hughes: That is certainly my experience. Many of the asylum seekers in my constituency are not asking the state for a great amount of support. Often, they rely on their church or faith community and on a network of provision that would normally be sent to support family in the home country, and which is therefore not sent.

The hon. Gentleman is right: many of these people were sent out of London. They found it better to come back here to people who speak the same language than to live on their own in an estate in, say, the east end of Newcastle—that is one example that I know for a fact—with no one else from their national group anywhere nearby, and no one to converse with.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): It would be better in an accommodation centre.

Simon Hughes: Indeed, it might be. The right hon. Gentleman knows that that is why we have supported such centres as an option. In many cases, however, dispersal was not satisfactory. He has made the case that it is working better, but it does not work better for everyone. Some people say that they are willing to take responsibility for themselves and stay with friends—albeit in dire, overcrowded accommodation—because it is more comfortable to be with people who come from the same place and understand their needs than to be miles from anywhere and from anyone who understands what they need.

On amendment No. 84, like the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard), we believe that there should be affirmative resolutions before we go down the road proposed in clause 37. It is important that social security matters automatically receive proper scrutiny from the House.

We do not object to Government amendment No. 217, as it tries to tidy up the legislation, which is what I suggested to the Home Secretary that we should do to the entire Bill at the end of this exercise. Asylum issues should be in one part of the Bill, separate from non-asylum issues.

We do not object to Government amendment No. 216. Clearly, the provision should relate to people who are in the United Kingdom, not those who are outside it. Nor do we object to Government amendment No. 254, which is for clarification.

In Committee we questioned what the wording meant, and we have tabled amendments Nos. 50 to 53, which would have had the same effect as Government amendments Nos. 254 and 255. The hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre has proposals that are along the same lines and has tabled amendment No. 261, which we support. I hope that he will have an opportunity to persuade Ministers that that amendment would be appropriate.

We are troubled by the Government proposals in clause 43, which would allow the Secretary of State to choose the provision by which the asylum seeker is offered support and, in effect, would not allow asylum seekers to suggest an alternative. Having taken advice, that is our interpretation of what the clause would mean. Under clause 43, people may have to take the support that they are told to take or they may have no support. For example, people may say that they are willing to stay with family and friends and that they would prefer cash support, but that is no longer an option. That is why my hon. Friends and I tabled amendment No. 54.

I accept that amendments Nos. 55 and 56 contain drafting errors. The Minister's advisers will have spotted those errors, and I apologise for them. Those amendments should have included requirements for certain things and not others, but they came out wrong, so I shall not pursue them at this stage. However, we want to make it clear that priority individual needs should be met.

I am coming to the end of the list. I apologise for its length, although the grouping of amendments was out of my control, but at least we can get rid of a lot of issues in one go.

We do not dissent from Government amendment No. 218. With such issues, it is proper that people cannot seek to appeal decisions involving benefits when they have left the country. That is entirely different from yesterday's debate on appeals to remain in the country. People should make those appeals when they are in this country; they should not be required to leave.

Under amendments Nos. 143 and 144, the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats jointly propose that people should be able to receive expenses for the travel involved in putting their cases, that their witnesses—if they are needed—should be able to receive financial support, and that legal advice should be available.

Under amendment No. 57, we propose that the Home Office should be able to give grants to those voluntary organisations that help people with social security, benefits and welfare appeals. That proposal is strongly supported by the Immigration Advisory Service, which is based in my constituency and whose chief executive is highly regarded throughout the House. I hope that hon. Members support that amendment and that the Government will be sympathetic to it.

Under amendment No. 194—the last in this group—we suggest that the cash-only support removal proposal should be subject to a separate debate in the House under the affirmative procedure before we agree to it.

I apologise for going through all the amendments in this group individually, but I thought that proper as they cover many issues. Unless the Government give us considerable comfort, we will not feel able to support their proposals at the end of the debate, because they have not been argued fully, because Parliament has not had a chance to debate them fully, and because they will produce some apparently wrong decisions, among some that are perfectly justifiable and correct.

Unfortunately, we cannot separate the issues by voting on each amendment, as the Conservatives did yesterday, so we shall register our opposition. More importantly, we hope that the Government will hear the voices of hon. Members and those outside the House and change some of these unnecessarily draconian proposals.

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I want to raise two issues briefly. First, I have a number of questions about new schedule 1. I must admit that I have difficulty in understanding all its implications; the schedule is complex and long.

Simon Hughes: It is recent.

Mr. Gerrard: I shall be generous: new schedule 1 has recently appeared on the amendment paper. Clearly, it will have a serious impact on the individuals who will be subject to some of its provisions, as they may lose all forms of support.

I well understand the argument that questions why a local authority should support someone who is entitled to be supported elsewhere. Why should someone who has perfectly normal rights to receive support in another EU country come to the United Kingdom, turn up at a local authority's offices and demand support? I understand the rationale behind such an argument.

I clearly understand the reasoning behind the proposals for children and families. Obviously, great pressure would be put on individuals who were told that they were to be removed from the United Kingdom, if the choice that faced them was either to comply with the removal directions, or for their children to receive support and be taken into care under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 while they themselves received no support.

I may be getting the proposal completely wrong because I have not had the time to understand all the details, but I find it difficult to see exactly how some of the provisions will work. Local authorities provided many but not all of the forms of support referred to in paragraph 1 of new schedule 1, including those under the National Assistance Act 1948, the Health Services and Public Health Act 1968 and Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968. There is a reference—I am not sure what it means—to section 21 of and schedule 8 to the National Health Service Act 1977. I hope that that does not mean that access to mental health services may be cut, if those services are relevant.

If those are the sort of benefits that may disappear and which people risk losing, it is fairly obvious that many of the decisions to remove such support will be taken by local authorities. A local authority will be faced with having to decide whether to give someone support under the National Assistance Act 1948, or withdraw the support that has already been given under that Act.

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): My hon. Friend makes an important point. When they make assessments for services, local authorities will have an opportunity to determine whether someone is eligible for assistance. What does my hon. Friend think will happen if someone already receives assistance? How will local authorities know how to implement Home Office decisions involving those who are receiving such services?

Mr. Gerrard: That is a very important point. Let us consider one or two examples. Let us suppose that failed asylum seekers who fail to co-operate with their removal directions have children and have therefore received some local authority support. Even though their asylum claims have been refused, they would still be eligible for support because they have children. According to new schedule 1, if failed asylum seekers do not comply with the removal directions that have been set, their support should disappear, except for that given to their children. I do not understand how that will operate or how local authorities will acquire the information necessary to decide that those failed asylum seekers should be cut off from support.

Let us consider someone who relies on rights under Community treaties. I have dealt with immigration and asylum casework for a good number of years, but when someone comes to see me at an advice surgery, I am often far from clear about the precise implications of Community treaties. Local authority staff who have to make decisions about whether to supply or continue support will need such knowledge. Perhaps I am getting all this wrong and there are simple answers, but I am bothered about new schedule 1 because of those concerns, although I understand the principle behind it.

I am also far from clear about how new schedule 1 relates to other parts of the Bill. How can those who are subject to decisions made under that schedule challenge those decisions? Suppose that someone is refused on the basis that they are a citizen of another EEA state and they are not relying on a right by virtue of Community treaties, but they claim that the decision is based on wrong information. Alternatively, a failed asylum seeker who had not co-operated with removal directions might challenge that by saying that they or their representative never received such directions. That is not unknown.

How will it be possible to challenge the decision? I cannot see how that will be done, unless it is through the mechanism of judicial review of the local authority decision. What happens to the person in the meantime if they try to go through that process? That is a complex matter, and it is difficult to comprehend quickly. I hope that we can achieve clarity with regard to those concerns about the new schedule.

6 pm

I shall say a few words about amendment No. 84, which I tabled with other hon. Members and which relates to the removal of the support-only option from the present National Asylum Support Service arrangements. The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) has gone through the arguments about the number of people who currently receive support only, and the reasons for that. My hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) and the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) raised the issue in Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), who was then the Minister, provided some clarification. She said that the clause was intended as an enabling power that would create the potential to move away from cash-only support. She went on to say clearly that that was not the Government's immediate intention, and that it would not make sense to implement it until the Government had managed to regionalise NASS and put more effective mechanisms in place. She added that she could foresee a time when, if the reporting system was

[Mr. Gerrard]

running properly and accommodation centres were working effectively, it might be possible to consider withdrawing the cash-only option.

A clear view emerged in the Committee that the proposal was long-term—that it would take effect only in the distant future when accommodation centres were up and running, accommodation was provided generally for all asylum seekers and there was no longer a need for cash-only support. I have always felt reassured by the then Minister's comments.

However, I found myself having to think again about the matter. Some hon. Members may have seen a document from Downing street that found its way into the press not long ago. It referred to ending cash-only support and commented that, among other things, that would create a risk of begging and destitution in London. It also included a comment about implementation in the autumn when NASS accommodation was ready. That worried me.

The document from Downing street may be totally inaccurate—I would much prefer the reassurances that were given in Committee by my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey—but amendment No. 84 introduces a safeguard. Let us assume that there will come a time when clear evidence can be provided by the Home Office that accommodation centres are working, NASS accommodation is available and cash-only support is no longer needed. If we reach that point, it should be possible for positive resolutions to be put before both Houses, which would allow us to debate and agree on the evidence. Everyone would then be much more comfortable with the provision.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern not just about the numbers of places available in accommodation centres, but about the quality of those places? People often take cash support because NASS accommodation has been unsuitable. It would not be acceptable to withdraw cash-only support just because we have 80,000 units of accommodation and 80,000 asylum seekers, if those 80,000 units are not in the right places and of the right quality.

Mr. Gerrard: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. People would opt for cash-only support for a variety of reasons. I am merely making the straightforward point that, instead of a statutory instrument, both Houses should consider positive resolutions. We might all then feel much more comfortable about a future proposal to end cash-only support. That is the purpose of amendment No. 84, which I hope will gain support in the House.

Mr. Malins: I wonder what the Government's reaction would be if a Member were to table a new clause saying that any asylum application must be decided within two days of its being made, and that any appeal must be lodged within 24 hours and decided within a further 24 hours. I imagine that their reaction would be, "Don't be silly: people need time to prepare," and that there would be a nodding of heads all around the House. If that is the Government's attitude, God bless them for giving us what the hon. Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) described as a complex new schedule and telling us that we have far less time than we would have under my fictitious new clause on asylum cases, and only a matter of hours to prepare all our arguments and to take advice from various non-governmental organisations outside the House. I am making a serious point. It is a tragedy that new, complex material is presented to the House without any of us having an opportunity to sit down and study it carefully.

I want to speak briefly about new clause 4, which I tabled with several hon. Friends. For accommodation provided under section 95 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, it defines what will be regarded as adequate. I shall not read through my new clause, but its purpose is to ensure that the accommodation provided meets the basic standards that we all expect of accommodation in this country. Furthermore, it ensures that certain landlords are not able to exploit asylum seekers to make profit at the public's expense by renting out properties that cannot be rented out to the general public. A reasonable, decent standard of accommodation is important.

The new clause cannot be thought objectionable, and I hope that the Government are prepared to accept it. They need to focus on the issue of the standard of accommodation. It is not many weeks since the controversy about the absence of sprinklers at Yarl's Wood, and there is a continuing problem with companies running removal centres and trying to negotiate insurance cover with various underwriters. All existing centres that do not have proper safety attributes, as suggested in my new clause, should be looked at carefully with a view to closure. I put the new clause out as a feeler, but, behind it, there is a strong point in relation to the adequacy of accommodation.

We also tabled amendments Nos. 143 and 144, which relate to witnesses and costs. Proposed new section 103B of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 says:

> "The Secretary of State may pay reasonable travelling expenses incurred by an appellant"

and amendment No. 143 would add the words "and any witnesses". Most witnesses in asylum appeals are other asylum seekers and they are often relatives who are living close to destitution. The Government accept that access to justice is important, so the expense of getting to an appeal could and should be paid for.

The money would be well spent because it would reduce the need for the adjournment of appeals or subsequent appeals to the tribunal resulting from the fact that, through no fault of appellants or their lawyers, witnesses could not attend. It would not cost much to pay expenses to witnesses who may be destitute, and it could save money in the long term. I hope the Government will consider that suggestion carefully, as points of principle and efficiency are involved. The amendment would enable the Government to have a better and more efficient system.

Amendment No. 144 also relates to clause 45, which says:

> "The Secretary of State may pay reasonable travelling expenses . . . in connection with attendance for the purposes of an appeal".

The amendment would add the words "or seeking legal advice". Again, that might be money well spent. As I have said, many witnesses in appeals are other asylum seekers, and access to the appeal and to the legal advice necessary for the appeal are important. If access to justice is important, the expense of getting to lawyers to prepare the appeal could and should be paid for. That would reduce the need for the adjournments that result when appeals are not fully prepared.

It is important for lawyers to take proof of evidence from witnesses, but I am told that that cannot always be claimed as a disbursement from the Legal Services Commission, or is not financially viable. That is especially so in Scotland where the Legal Services Commission does not operate and attendance of a person under the supervision of a solicitor is paid for at the rate of only £21 an hour.

These small amendments are not dramatic. They would not alter the Bill in any great way, but they would ease some of the mechanisms, and at little cost to the public purse. They would probably make for more efficiency. That is the view of Conservative Members and, the Government might like to know, of several respected non-governmental organisations. I hope that Ministers will have listened carefully to my arguments on the important new clause defining the adequacy of accommodation and on the two relatively non-controversial amendments. I hope that they will take them on board.

Mike Gapes: For once, and probably for the only time in the debate, I agree with something that the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) has said. It is regrettable these substantive proposals were not before us in Committee. That is unfortunate, because it means that we are not able to give proper consideration to their merits.

I wish to draw attention to the reasons why we may need some of these measures. I do not know whether any other Member saw the "Dispatches" programme on Channel 4 at the weekend. It used a hidden camera to show a Romanian man who had been removed from this country. When he was at Sangatte, he made it very clear that he would return to this country with a false identity. He acquired a family and managed to return to this country after several failed attempts. The programme reported that he was living in Manchester.

6.15 pm

If people act in that way, it is necessary to think about how we deal with the problem. I shall not betray any confidences from my advice surgery or mention individual cases but, in my 10 years in the House as a London Member of Parliament, I have dealt with hundreds if not thousands of cases involving immigration, asylum and nationality matters. We come across a significant number of cases in which we know we have not been told the full story, and we know of occasions when people have been abusing the system.

In the past few weeks, I have been dealing with the case of a Russian woman who applied for asylum and whose daughter came here as a visitor without revealing that she had any relatives in the UK. The woman, who had previously wanted to bring her husband into the country, divorced him and then married another man in this country so as to spin out her case for staying here. We have a corrupt immigration advice system in many areas that enables people to play the system and spin things out. As well as sorting out the legal system, we need to consider the way in which our social security and housing benefits systems are abused.

I have fought racism and intolerance throughout my life, and many of my constituents have parents and grandparents who came here as refugees. At Valentines mansion in my constituency, there is a plaque commemorating the Belgian refugees who lived there until 1919, after they fled Belgium in the first world war. They were sheltered in Ilford. Many Jewish people live in Ilford and many people in my constituency have fled from the conflict in the former Yugoslavia.

I have very many Somali constituents. It has been suggested that the introduction of the measures in the Bill will mean that people will resort to begging. I have never seen a Somali begging. Somalis do not stand at traffic lights on the north circular road with dolls or babies under their arms and intimidate motorists for money. They do not go round door to door knocking to ask for money from my constituents. That is done by organised gangs of criminals who are not asylum seekers. It is important to make that distinction, because sometimes the *Daily Mail* and other publications equate the issues in such a way as to create great tensions.

I want to introduce measures that will make it possible for the Iraqi Kurds who are fleeing a desperate situation and the Somalis who need our support to receive support without the system being abused by others who come from countries in central and eastern Europe and even from countries that are applying to join the European Union and claim political asylum when we know that there is absolutely no justification for it. There may be arguments about other human rights issues and about the level of law enforcement and criminality, but political asylum is not the issue in those countries.

It is time that those of us on the left who believe that we should be open, welcome immigration and have a diverse multicultural society were able to say loud and clear that we will not tolerate abuse and people exploiting our housing benefit and social security systems.

I share the concerns expressed by my hon. Friends the Members for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) and for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) about the level of competency and knowledge in council departments when it comes to making judgments about housing benefit and the habitual residence test. I want to be confident that the system will be applied properly.

Will the measures apply purely to new applications or will they apply retrospectively? I realise that we are dealing with difficult matters, but some people have been exploiting the system for years and we need to address that. If some families have been housed because they have children and we change the rules, will we face the serious problem of breaking them up? Many of my Asian constituents voice such concerns. I want to be able to tell them and others that the system will not be abused. I want to be able to reassure them that people will not take money or be housed to the detriment of those who have been waiting on housing lists and living in bad conditions for many years. However, I also want to be able to say that the measures will be applied sympathetically, carefully and, above all, accurately. I hope that the Home Office will rigorously improve the procedures within all its sections.

Mr. Hancock: I apologise for missing some of the debate, but I have been in a Select Committee.

[Mr. Hancock]

The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point, but he has not explained what is wrong with the current system. What aspect of it has failed that allows him to depict such a graphic tale of woe?

Mike Gapes: I suspect that I would be ruled out of order if I went into that. It would certainly take longer than the time available to give a litany of what is wrong with the way in which the immigration and nationality directorate and housing benefit departments have dealt with individual cases in the past 10 years. All of us whose casework involves many immigration and nationality problems could produce dossiers, perhaps lorry loads, of cases that have not been dealt with adequately.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), the former Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, and my right hon. Friend Lord Rooker, with whom I had the privilege to work, have done much to improve the situation, but a great deal more needs to be done to sort out the mess in those organisations.

Jeremy Corbyn: Surely one of the problems with the new schedule and the proposals is that we are making local social services authorities an extension of the Home Office immigration service. They are already overstretched and understaffed, and have great difficulty in coping with their work load.

Mike Gapes: I do not agree. The Children Act 1989 and the National Assistance Act 1948 place an obligation on local authorities to do certain things. We need to have a seamless system. The problem does not lie with the Home Office alone. All Departments, including the Department for Work and Pensions, operate on the same basis to achieve consistent decisions so that we have results that are not arbitrary, adverse or foolish. But I do not want to stray from the terms of the debate.

The proposal is politically necessary. It is right to question the mechanisms. I have much sympathy with the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow about how Parliament should scrutinise measures. I hope that when the Bill returns from the other place—no doubt after the Tories and Liberals have ganged up to decimate it, as they do with everything that the Home Office introduces to improve things—we will have another opportunity to discuss the merits of these measures.

Mr. Dawson: I tabled two amendments in the group, new clause 17 and amendment No. 261. The new clause would allow us to take a small but important step forward, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister accepts it. When young unaccompanied people come to this country, they are initially assessed by a local authority's social services department and should be offered accommodation by a local authority, although not necessarily the one that carries out the assessment.

Hon. Members referred to the 6,000 unaccompanied children who are under 18 and seeking asylum. That could be considered a considerable number, but it is 10 per cent. of the 60,000 children who are looked after by local authorities and a mere fraction of the 11 million children who live in the UK. We live in the fourth richest country in the world, and we are enjoying economic success and well-being for the first time in many decades. Surely, it is not beyond our capabilities to offer good care and support to such a small number of children who arrive here alone and destitute. In many cases, they are traumatised and in a terrible condition. Too often, we offer those children bed-and-breakfast accommodation, indifference and neglect. We make them vulnerable to trafficking and further abuse.

In the last few months of 2001, some hon. Members and I had the privilege of participating in a programme organised by UNICEF—the United Nations Children's Fund—Save the Children and other children's organisations, called "Journey of a refugee child". It followed a visit that some of us made to Angola, the worst country that I have been to, and which certainly fits the description of the worst country for children to grow up in.

As part of the programme, we visited some excellent projects in London. I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) will recall our visit to the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture. Unfortunately, it took place on Guy Fawkes night, so rockets and bangers were going off all around us while we sat in a room with many young people who had gone through the worst experiences that any human being could—

6.30 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. May I remind the hon. Gentleman that there is limited time for this debate? I am not sure that I can connect his reminiscences directly with the new clause to which he is speaking, which refers to asylum-seeking children rather than those who might potentially seek asylum.

Mr. Dawson: I am grateful for your advice, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall be brief, but I am trying to set out the profound needs of asylum-seeking children who come to this country, compared with the inadequate services that we currently offer them.

Jeremy Corbyn: I endorse everything that my hon. Friend said about the Medical Foundation, which does fantastic work in supporting unaccompanied children seeking asylum. Is he not concerned, however, as I am, that support for asylum seekers increasingly comes from charitable and voluntary organisations that receive public funding that is insufficient to deal with their casework? The problem with new schedule 1 is that it will probably increase the pressure on the charitable sector because the state will be withdrawing from provision.

Mr. Dawson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. That is precisely the issue that I try to address in new clause 17. If young people were offered accommodation under section 20 of the Children Act 1989, instead of the limited support available to them under section 17 of that Act, they would experience a good level of public sector care. They would undergo proper and thorough assessment by professional people, and they would be properly looked after, as children who come to this country should be. There is no reason why every local authority should not tackle this issue.

In the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, the Government strengthened section 20 of the Children Act, making even more powerful the argument that young asylum seekers should have the benefit of support up to the age of 21. Indeed, the experience of many who work with young asylum seekers is that they are hungry for the education opportunities that are available. Having demonstrated resilience in undergoing dreadful experiences, they should benefit from the support provided under the 2000 Act for people in higher education up to the age of 24.

During the proceedings on the Adoption and Children Bill, I tried to strengthen section 17 of the Children Act. I was assured by the Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), that more work was being done to ensure that local authorities carry out proper assessments under section 17. I accept that that is true for children from the United Kingdom who, even if their links with their birth families have broken, may have links with an extended family, with their community or with friendship networks that can support them.

However, Section 17 provisions are not appropriate for unaccompanied children who arrive in this country without any of those forms of support. We should offer them the opportunity to be looked after properly by local authorities. So often in the Chamber we hear criticism of local authorities and the care system, and in many cases it is justified, but there are good parts to the system. There is good foster care and good residential care, and a great deal could be offered to young people from abroad. We should have the confidence to deliver that.

Amendment No. 261 relates to measures to deny families with children the protection offered by section 17 of the Children Act. Frankly, that is deplorable. The issue was discussed in proceedings on the Immigration and Asylum Bill, and an amendment was passed to prevent such a provision being implemented. Section 17 is a fundamental building block in the support and care that we offer families with children in particularly difficult circumstances. It goes far beyond the provisions of asylum Acts and mere financial benefits. As an hon. Member said earlier, children are children, wherever they come from, and we should not exempt the children of asylum-seeking families from the Children Act.

Beverley Hughes: We have had a wide-ranging debate, although I accept that, judging by the comments made by some hon. Members about new clause 10 and new schedule 1, it has not been as wide ranging as they would have liked. No doubt additional points will be made in another place and again when the Bill returns to this House.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) did not go into detail about his amendments to new schedule 1, but I should like to comment on them for the record. Several of those amendments seek to ensure that the rights of individuals and rights granted by the European convention on human rights and EU law are safeguarded. When the hon. Gentleman has time to look at the new schedule in some detail, he will see that it specifically safeguards those rights.

As I said earlier, most of the amendments seek to reinstate the support that the measures propose to withdraw, so they are simply in complete opposition to the Bill.

Mr. Allan: The hon. Lady will accept our concern, which we tried to express earlier, that although we understand that the Government want to deal with a specific instance—that of an individual with refugee status who comes to live in a community in the UK—we believe that the issue goes much wider. When we are talking about the rights of every citizen of every other EEA state, we are talking about social security legislation that should be dealt with in the round, but it has been inappropriately tacked on to immigration law. We have tried to express that general concern in our amendments, but it was difficult, in such a short time, to deal with the generality of EU social security law, which is a huge and complex subject.

Beverley Hughes: The hon. Gentleman may take that position. However, I take him back to a principle that I outlined earlier. We have to consider whether it is perverse to allow people who cannot draw on central Government sources of support because they have support in another country, they have reached the end of the road in our procedures for assessing asylum seekers, or they have illegally entered the country, to get support from other sources at a local level. The issue is a difficult one, and I know that if the measures are implemented, all hon. Members—including me, as a constituency MP—will face difficult constituency cases. However, I still feel strongly that we cannot duck the difficult issues. There are important points of principle to be dealt with and we as MPs have to represent many different constituencies of people.

Having made those general comments on the proposed amendments to new schedule 1, I acknowledge that we have to work through a great deal of the detail of the implementation of the new schedule. My hon. Friends the Members for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) and for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) and others asked about those details. The law surrounding these issues is complex and the operation of the measures will, to some extent and in some areas, also be complex. I anticipate that when the measures are enacted, whatever form they take, considerable guidance and regulations will be required to help local authorities to implement them. However, I do not accept the view that the measures are about foisting on local authorities decisions that should be made by the immigration service, as one of my hon. Friends said they were. The decisions will be made by the Home Office, the immigration service and the immigration and nationality directorate, but implementation, in so far as it has implications for local authority support, will clearly and rightly be for the local authorities to carry out.

Mr. Hancock: It is useful that the Minister recognises that there will be additional tasks for local authorities. Will she give the House and, more importantly, local authorities an assurance that the Government will resource local authorities properly to pick up that obligation?

Beverley Hughes: No. In fact, if the hon. Gentleman thinks though the implications of the measures, the points I made at the start of my speech and those made during the debate, he will realise that local authorities have been providing support—and some continue to do so—to people whom the measures that we are dealing with will say are no longer entitled to that support. The measures are about removing that responsibility and the burden that that responsibility generates for local authorities, thereby considerably reducing the cost. I understand that before it

[Beverley Hughes]

took forward its recent case, Birmingham estimated that it had spent £2.6 million—I hope that I have remembered that figure correctly—on providing support that the measures before the House will allow local authorities legally to claim is not their responsibility. They will be able to say that, for specific reasons, it is not legal for them to give support. Therefore, the cost and the burden for local authorities will be reduced. None the less, I accept that the technical detail of the measures' implementation at local level will require local authorities to be given guidance and regulation, and we intend to provide that.

Jeremy Corbyn: The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) raised the question of non-NASS-supported asylum seekers who are sent to another part of the country but then return to London—it is usually London—to live. They receive no housing support but vouchers only, and they often live in terrible poverty with other similarly destitute families. Is there any discretion for local authorities to give such people any support?

Beverley Hughes: Under the measures that we are debating, that would depend on the immigration status of the individual. That is the provision that the measures introduce into existing arrangements. Currently, local authorities do not take immigration status into account; the measures will require them to do so.

New clause 4 deals with the standard of housing of asylum seekers who are currently within the NASS system. Hon. Members expressed concern about substandard accommodation. If there were to be substandard accommodation, I would share their concern. Such issues are the reason why contracts with both private and public sector accommodation providers already require that the accommodation provided must be fit for human habitation as defined by the Housing Act 1985, or in Scotland by the Housing (Scotland) Act 1987, and that it must meet all the regulatory requirements.

6.45 pm

It is reasonable to expect the Government to take reasonable steps to ensure that the accommodation they use is satisfactory, but to do as the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey seems to want—that is, to place a requirement on the Secretary of State directly to ensure statutory compliance—is neither reasonable nor feasible, given the large amount of housing that is needed and the fact that it is obtained under contract from both the public and the private sector. It is reasonable that the first route to achieving good accommodation standards is through contractual arrangements and the enforcement of those requirements where it is shown that they have not been met.

NASS carries out property inspections. Its contract managers carry out technical surveys of properties and they can get outside professional surveyors to do so as well. When accommodation is found to be below standard, the provider is required to take steps to remedy the problems; otherwise, they risk being found in breach of their contract. Local authorities, too, have a general duty under section 605 of the Housing Act 1985 to keep housing conditions in their area under annual review. Although we accept the spirit of the new clause and what the hon. Gentleman intends to achieve by it, the mechanisms proposed are not reasonable or feasible, and its aims can be accommodated within existing arrangements.

New clause 17, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), deals with the arrangements for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. My hon. Friend has great expertise in and a strong commitment to all matters relating to children, so I understand why he has raised the issue. However, he will know that unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are currently supported under the Children Act 1989. That means that, in practice, they are the responsibility of the local authority where they first present themselves and are accepted as children in need. It also means—I know that he is aware of this, as it is the point of his new clause—that there is currently no legal framework through which any other local authority can be compelled to accept responsibility for such a child, although authorities can voluntarily transfer cases between themselves.

My hon. Friend will understand why it is not in those children's interests for us to have the power to compel other local authorities to take them. We would need to ensure first that those other authorities had the necessary infrastructure and experience to provide good quality care. However, the Department of Health and the Home Office are working extremely hard with local authorities to negotiate voluntary arrangements, and I hope he agrees that that is the best way to proceed. Compelling local authorities could result in children being placed in areas that provided a range and quality of care that did not serve the children's best interests. I hope that he will not press his amendments, with the assurance that I understand the spirit of what he is trying to achieve. I hope that he accepts that although we are not changing the legislation, we are working to try to achieve what he seeks.

Mr. Malins: Will the Minister take the opportunity before 7 o'clock to speak to my two amendments and my new clause?

Beverley Hughes: If the hon. Gentleman will not intervene on me any further, I shall try to deal with all the issues that have been raised.

Mr. Dawson: I shall be very brief. I entirely accept the point that my hon. Friend makes and I am very pleased with the information that she has given to me. However, there is the further question of encouragement to use section 20 of the Children Act 1989 rather than section 17.

Beverley Hughes: My hon. Friend needs to understand that the vast majority of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are about 16 and 17, so they are not very young. There is certainly no intention to deprive children of section 20 support if they need it. The fact is that for the needs of many, if not most, of those older young people, section 17 support is more appropriate, because they do not want to live in children's homes and supported accommodation. As he will know, young people's wishes are an important element in the overall assessment of need. It is that assessment that determines the level of support, and when section 20 support is appropriate it will be provided.

My hon. Friend also spoke to amendment No. 261. If he will forgive me, I shall not dwell on that amendment, in view of the time. The substance of the proposal was debated extensively in terms of the procedures in the 1989 Act. I know he feels strongly about the point of principle that is involved, but with the establishment of a new system of support for asylum seekers, it was felt to be more appropriate that that system also provided for asylum-seeking children in families.

The hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) raised issues in respect of amendments Nos. 143 and 144 that were debated extensively in Committee. I understand his concerns in tabling the amendments, but between the Committee stage and now, we have not changed our view or become convinced that asylum seekers who are appealing against refusal or early termination of their support need access to legal advice or assistance and representation. I can tell him, however, that amendment No. 143 is unnecessary, because the current arrangements already allow for the provision of forms of support other than those specified in section 96(1) of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 when circumstances are exceptional. The power is a permissive one. It would not be reasonable to pay witness expenses in every case, but the legislation contains a power to do so where necessary.

The substance of amendments Nos. 54, 55 and 56 was also debated in Committee. I think that the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey knows we believe very strongly that, although personal preference will be one factor in placing asylum seekers in one place or another—accommodation centres or other forms of dispersal—it will not be the predominating factor. He received assurances in Committee about the factors that the Secretary of State will take into account.

Amendment No. 49 concerns the power sought in the Bill to enable the Government to remove the opportunity for cash-only support. As my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow said, this is an enabling power. We do not envisage taking the power in the short term. We want to see how the Bill's reforms impact; there may be no need to mobilise the power at all, so I ask the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey not to press the amendment.

Simon Hughes: I asked the Minister not only about the time scale, but about the cost that would be involved if the support-only option were removed. Can she share with the House any information on costs to show how it will be cheaper for the Government to spend the money on support and accommodation, instead of only on support?

Beverley Hughes: That brings me to amendment No. 84. As my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow made clear—there was an extensive debate in Committee about this matter—we would consider the evidence on all sides if any proposal were made to exercise the power in the part of the Bill with which the amendment deals. I am persuaded by him that if the Government decided to bring forward the power, it would be right for the matter to be debated through the affirmative procedure. I hope he will accept that the wording of his amendments needs to be checked by parliamentary counsel, but I assure him that we will table a suitably worded amendment to the same effect when the Bill comes before the other place.

With the exception of the issues on which hon. Members have said that they want a Division, I hope that they will agree not to press their amendments.

Simon Hughes: With the leave of the House, I shall speak for 30 seconds—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If the House is willing, the hon. Gentleman may continue, but he certainly has no right to do so.

Simon Hughes: With the leave of the House. I am grateful for the Minister's indication that there will be a further opportunity to vote on the removal of support and that we can return to the debate on that matter. For the information of the House, I should like to point out that we hold to our view that for reasons of time and detailed policy, we are not persuaded that we should support the new clause and the new schedule that goes with it. When the time comes, not least because there are new clauses that we have not debated at all, such as new clause 13 and others, we will ask the House to divide on the rest of the Government new clauses, because they contain certain provisions that we cannot possibly accept.

Question put, That the new clause be read a Second time:—

The House divided: Ayes 456, Noes 69.

Division No. 268] **[6.57 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin, John
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Tony
Baron, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney
(Chipping Barnet)
Chaytor, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Lynda
(Edinburgh Pentlands)
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey

Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Collins, Tim
Connarty, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cran, James
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Dodds, Nigel
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Micha[illegible]
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinbu[illegible] S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Heathcoat–Amory, Rt Hon David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoban, Mark
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkin, Bernard
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lammy, David
Lansley, Andrew
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leigh, Edward
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, Oliver
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Liddell–Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luff, Peter
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Malins, Humfrey
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Maples, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Mercer, Patrick
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Moss, Malcolm
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr Nick
Paterson, Owen
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prisk, Mark
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Randall, John
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rodney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruffley, David
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simmonds, Mark
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Singh, Marsha
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*

Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Spicer, Sir Michael
Squire, Rachel
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Tredinnick, David
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Tyrie, Andrew
Vaz, Keith
Viggers, Peter
Walley, Ms Joan
Walter, Robert
Ward, Ms Claire
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and
Mr. Jim Murphy.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Dawson, Hilton
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Galloway, George
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness W)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
McDonnell, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Marshall–Andrews, Robert
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sedgemore, Brian
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger–Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mike Hancock and
Mr. Andrew Stunell.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

It being after Seven o'clock, Mr. Deputy Speaker *put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour, pursuant to Order [11 June].*

Question put, That Government new clauses 12, 13 and 16 and new schedules 1 and 2 be added to the Bill:—

The House divided: Ayes 454, Noes 62.

Division No. 269] **[7.15 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin, John
Bacon, Richard
Bailey, Adrian
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Barnes, Harry
Baron, John
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cash, William
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chaytor, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clifton–Brown, Geoffrey
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Collins, Tim
Connarty, Michael
Conway, Derek
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cran, James
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Curry, Rt Hon David
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair

Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Dodds, Nigel
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flight, Howard
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Fox, Dr Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibb, Nick
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hain, Rt Hon Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hammond, Philip
Hanson, David
Harman, Rt Hon Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Heald, Oliver
Healey, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hoban, Mark
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hume, John
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Key, Robert
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lammy, David
Lansley, Andrew
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leigh, Edward
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, Oliver
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luff, Peter
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Malins, Humfrey
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Maples, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Mercer, Patrick
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, Rt Hon Estelle
Moss, Malcolm
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Rt Hon Paul *(Torfaen)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Naysmith, Dr Doug
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Palmer, Dr Nick
Paterson, Owen
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Randall, John
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruffley, David
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simmonds, Mark
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Spicer, Sir Michael
Squire, Rachel
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steen, Anthony
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Streeter, Gary
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tami, Mark
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*

Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Tredinnick, David
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Tyrie, Andrew
Vaz, Keith
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Ward, Ms Claire
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John
Wicks, Malcolm
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilshire, David
Winnick, David
Winterton, Mrs Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and
Mr. Jim Murphy.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Galloway, George
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
McDonnell, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Webb, Steve
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Sir Robert Smith and
John Thurso.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Clause 1

NATURALISATION: KNOWLEDGE OF LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY

Amendment made: No. 85, in page 1, line 8, at end insert—

'( ) In paragraph 2(e) of that Schedule (waiver)—

(a) for "the requirement specified in paragraph 1(1)(c)" there shall be substituted "either or both of the requirements specified in paragraph 1(1)(c) and (ca)", and

(b) for "expect him to fulfil it" there shall be substituted "expect him to fulfil that requirement or those requirements".'.—*[Beverley Hughes.]*

Clause 4

DEPRIVATION OF CITIZENSHIP

Amendments made: No. 17, in page 2, line 42, leave out "thinks" and insert "is satisfied".

No. 19, in page 3, line 5, leave out "thinks" and insert "is satisfied".

No. 88, in page 3, line 11, leave out "thinks" and insert "is satisfied".

No. 21, in page 3, line 23, leave out "thinks" and insert "is satisfied".—*[Beverley Hughes.]*

Clause 10

RIGHT OF ABODE: CERTIFICATE OF ENTITLEMENT

Amendment made: No. 213, in page 7, line 13, at end insert—

'( ) specify the consequences of failure to comply with a requirement under any of paragraphs (c) to (e) above,'.—*[Beverley Hughes.]*

Clause 38

DESTITUTE ASYLUM-SEEKER

Amendments made: No. 217, in page 19, line 20, that Clause 38 be divided into 3 clauses, the first consisting of subsections (1) to (6) *(Destitute asylum-seeker)*, the second consisting of subsections (7) to (11) and (15) *(Section (Destitute asylum-seeker): supplemental)*, the third consisting of subsections (12) to (14) and (16) to (19) *(Section (Destitute asylum-seeker): supplemental: Scotland and Northern Ireland)*.

No. 216, in page 19, line 25, at end insert—

'( ) who is in the United Kingdom,'.

No. 254, in page 20, line 12, at end insert "both".

No. 255, in page 20, line 16, at end insert "both".—*[Beverley Hughes.]*

Clause 45

ASYLUM-SEEKER: APPEAL AGAINST REFUSAL TO SUPPORT

Amendment made: No. 218, in page 25, line 34, at end insert—

'( ) An appeal under this section may not be brought or continued by a person who is outside the United Kingdom.'.—*[Beverley Hughes.]*

Clause 49

DETENTION BY SECRETARY OF STATE

Amendments made: No. 103, in page 27, line 34, after "10" insert ", 10A".

No. 104, in page 28, line 48, at end insert—

'( ) In section 24(1) of that Act (bail) after "the Immigration Act 1971" insert ", or under section 49 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002,".—*[Beverley Hughes.]*

Clause 50

ESCORTS

Amendment made: No. 59, in page 29, line 9, after "by", insert "reasonable".—*[Beverley Hughes.]*

Clause 57

SERIOUS CRIMINAL

Amendments made: No. 249, in page 34, line 4, at end insert—

'of at least two years—
(i) '.

No. 250, in page 34, line 6, leave out "but does include" and insert—

'(unless at least two years of the sentence are not suspended),
(ii) includes'.

No. 251, in page 34, line 7, at end insert—

', and
(iii) includes a reference to a person who is sentenced to an indeterminate period of custody (provided that it may last for two years).'.—*[Beverley Hughes.]*

Clause 97

LEAVE PENDING DECISION ON VARIATION APPLICATION

Ms Rosie Winterton: I beg to move amendment No. 239, in page 51, line 34, after "66(1)", insert—

'of the Nationality, Asylum and Immigration Act 2002'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government amendments Nos. 240, 241, 208 to 212 and 248.

Ms Winterton: These are mainly minor and technical amendments, but it might help if I run through them briefly in a little more detail—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

Ms Winterton: *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Will the Minister please resume her seat while I am on my feet? I am trying to restore peace for her. Will hon. Members who are not staying for this debate please retire quickly and quietly?

Ms Winterton: New clause 13 and new schedule 2 make provision relating to changes to the civil penalty and carriers' liability. Amendments Nos. 210, 211 and 212 to schedule 7 are minor and consequential amendments necessitated by new clause 13 and new schedule 2.

7.30 pm

The exception is the amendment to section 37(3)(c) of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, which addresses a non-binding concern of the Court of Appeal in Roth. It strengthens the rights of an applicant seeking the release of a detained vehicle by removing the requirement for them to have a "compelling need" for its release.

Amendment No. 208 repeals section 25A(7) of the 1971 Act, which is being renumbered as section 25D. Section 25A relates to the detention of ships, aircraft and vehicles in connection with offences of assisting illegal entry and harbouring. Subsection (7) is no longer necessary, as the definition of an owner is being added to the interpretation section by new clause 12.

Amendment No. 209 repeals references in section 28A of the 1971 Act to powers of arrest when a person is suspected of having committed an offence under the present section 25(2) of the Act. Section 25(2) is being repealed, and the new section 25(2) will not contain a separate offence. These repeals follow from that.

On amendment No. 248, hon. Members will recall that we discussed yesterday new clauses 14 and 15. Non-suspensive appeal rights will come into force on Royal Assent as a result of those new clauses, but the other provisions of part 5 will come into force at a later date. Therefore, there will be a transitional period while part IV of the 1999 Act continues to operate at the same time as the new non-suspensive system. Amendment No. 248 amends part IV so that there is no conflict between the new and old systems.

Amendments Nos. 239 to 241 correct a drafting error. Clause 97 introduces a new version of section 3C of the 1971 Act to extend a person's leave while their application is outstanding. However, the clause lacks references to the Act that is being referred to. I am amazed that Opposition Members—especially the hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson), who has a reputation for spotting these problems—did not notice that and table such an amendment themselves.

Having given that explanation, I hope that hon. Members will accept the amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Amendments made: No. 240, in page 51, line 38, at end insert "of that Act)."

No. 241, in page 52, line 1, leave out—

'the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002'

and insert "that Act)."—*[Beverley Hughes.]*

Clause 101

AUTHORITY TO CARRY

Simon Hughes: I beg to move amendment No. 66, in page 53, line 20, leave out clause 101.

We have more enthusiasm for this amendment than the Government had for their last amendments. It would leave out clause 101, which is the only clause dealing with the authority-to-carry scheme. Two provisions in the Bill relate to carriers' liability and involvement in immigration control. Sadly, as a result of the earlier guillotine, new clause 13 and Government new schedule 2, which deal with carriers' liability, were not debated. Like me, the hon. Member for Woking (Mr. Malins) regrets that, because those provisions raised substantial issues of interest to hon. Members and to commercial operators and their employees, and have been the subject of significant decisions by the courts, one of which resulted in the Government introducing legislation. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) shows her assent. It is a great pity that the only debate we can have about carriers is on clause 101.

Mr. Malins: I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman. A number of outside bodies, including the Road Haulage

Association, have worked flat out and diligently not just in the past few days but in the past few hours, to ensure that their views are put. They will be as disappointed as we are that the House was not able to hear their views.

Simon Hughes: Indeed, that is a frustration. When the hon. Gentleman and I were, quite properly, asked by Government Whips before the spring break what might be an appropriate balance for the debate, within constraints which we did not accept but which we knew the Government would impose, one of the problems was that we did not have sight of the new schedules and new clauses.

In Committee, we had an interesting debate on clause 101, during which new policy was revealed with almost every minute that passed. By the end of the debate it was clear that the Bill did not say anything about the subject, and clause 101 is limited in that it merely gives a sketch of the scheme that might apply. It provides for regulations to be introduced subsequently when an authority-to-carry scheme is brought before Parliament, so we will have the opportunity to debate the issue under secondary legislation. We learned far more about what the Government had in mind than we had known before.

My hon. Friends and I are unhappy that the Government are clearly set on replacing conventional immigration controls—which there have to be and which we accept and agree with—with a new form of control, but without the same safeguards as when immigration officers, those working for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Home Office in our overseas missions, the police, and Customs and Excise officers working as agents on our borders and in our ports, act to enforce immigration and related matters. In theory at least, the current system provides the possibility of challenging an Executive decision through administrative review, an adjudicator and a tribunal. Had the Bill not been amended adversely yesterday, every case could have gone back into the legal system for judgment by an independent judicial authority.

I shall sketch out what the Government are proposing and explain my objections. I do not intend to take long, as I am conscious that we have to fit in three substantive debates with votes between now and 9 o'clock when the guillotine falls. That shows the impossibility of the task that we have been given.

The scheme will allow the Secretary of State to make regulations that require a carrier that brings someone to the United Kingdom without the required authority to pay a penalty. That transfers significant responsibility, including financial responsibility, to carriers. There is a big question over whether that should be the case.

When I was in Sangatte, I talked to the Eurostar people about the Eurotunnel operation. They were pleased that the Government had decided that they should not continue to be penalised when, despite the company's best efforts, people get on to vehicles that come across the channel. Eurostar had put in place heat-detecting and X-ray equipment. It had done everything reasonably possible, and had spent millions of pounds. I observed for myself that security at the Eurotunnel and Eurostar depot was far more effective than at the SNCF depot on the adjacent tracks, which is the responsibility of the French Government. I understand the anger prompted by the continuing incursion into cross-channel traffic, given that the operators who seek to make a living have done a great deal themselves. It is not as though they have not done things that cost them money, and have not had to pass the cost on to users of the service they provide.

This is how I assume the proposal is intended to work. As I have been to Japan, I shall use it as an example. Having bought a ticket, the traveller goes to a Japanese airport. As he goes to check in, he suddenly discovers that his unacceptability as a passenger has been flagged up on the airline operator's screen. He will not be told why he is not acceptable—the information that is held will not have been divulged—but the airline will have a method of checking with the British authorities whether he should be allowed on the plane. In theory, if other Governments pass similar legislation it will be possible for airlines to check with their authorities.

What redress would there be? Let us suppose that the traveller wishing to return from Japan happened to be a Member of Parliament who had to be here to do his or her duty the following day. There would probably be no redress if that was not possible.

Let us imagine that the traveller was from India, wanting to attend a wedding here—an occasion like the wedding reception I attended on Sunday evening. If when that person checked in on Saturday he was told he was unacceptable, he would not be able to do anything, apart from going to the British mission in India, which would not be open until the next working day. By definition, the reason for the flight would then be aborted, as would be the cost.

That system strikes me as entirely wrong. I recognise that it is better than a system that would give a junior employee of British Airways, or any other airline, information on why Sir Alan Haselhurst, Mr. Jeremy Corbyn, Miss Rosie Winterton or Mr. Simon Hughes was not an acceptable passenger. Of course I would not want such information to be given. I see that the hon. Member for Woking is glad that I did not include him on that list! I was trying to be fair; if I excluded Conservatives, I did not do so on purpose.

I appreciate that we would not want junior members of staff, or any other members of staff in private companies, to know something that might or might not be true, or for suspicions to be entertained about anyone. Understandably, someone travelling to a wedding, or indeed to a political rally—or someone who might have a previous conviction, or might be suspected of having a link with an organisation that might be considered unacceptable—might not want the information to be shared. What I do not consider acceptable is the effective replacement of a system whereby immigration control deals with such matters, through a proper process, with a system—totally unexplained in the Bill—involving an administrative block run by a computer link with the Home Office, or at any rate the British Government. Against that, it appears, there would be an appeal system of an unspecified nature—we know nothing about it, beyond the fact that the Minister says it will exist—and a compensation scheme which will operate if the Government get it wrong.

Let me give a real example. Let us suppose that, owing to a blip in the system, the person whose name had come up and shown her to be an "undesirable" was Miss Beverley Hughes. Let us imagine that it should have been Mr. Simon Hughes. In that event, Miss Beverley Hughes

[Simon Hughes]

would rightly be aggrieved: she might find that the purpose of her visit had been entirely undermined. I do not think it would be easy to compensate her. I do not think it would have been enough for her to be told subsequently that she could have her money back, if the purpose of the visit had been aborted.

Mistakes do happen. I can give a parallel, although not similar, example. When I went to vote in a local election, a line had been put through my name on the electoral register. An inquiry revealed that the person whose name was above mine on the register had applied for a postal vote, and the line had been put through the wrong name. These things happen, and there is no immediate remedy.

7.45 pm

Mr. Allan: Is my hon. Friend also worried about the establishment of identity? Airlines and other carriers will now have to collect far more personal information that is not relevant to the purpose of travel—for instance, dates of birth, which are not normally collected on application for a ticket. "Simon Hughes" on its own will not be enough; date of birth, perhaps an address, and all sorts of other personal data will be required under the authority-to-carry scheme.

Simon Hughes: By implication, that is certainly a risk. My hon. Friend is more of an expert than most of us on those matters, which will arise later in another context, and he has made a very good point—but I now want to make a political point, Sir Alan—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I think the hon. Gentleman is confused. The House is not in Committee; the Bill is on Report.

Simon Hughes: I beg your pardon, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Let me make my political point. Let us imagine that last year, a person was travelling from Zimbabwe. The flight was with a nationalised airline, Air Zimbabwe. The person at the Air Zimbabwe desk, where there were also customs officers, police and so forth, noted that the traveller was, according to the airline, not acceptable. It is surely pretty obvious that the authorities in the country from which the traveller sought to leave would be alerted immediately that there might be something suspicious—and that could be replicated in any country, at any time, when someone tried to leave that country. Under this scheme, it will be possible to trigger a refusal to allow a journey that has been lawfully purchased, and for no explanation to be given at the time in a way that could protect people.

The Government have not thought through their proposals. We seem to be saying that we are willing to help people who are fleeing from persecution, while being prepared to do exactly the opposite—to alert the authorities in countries where personal liberty and safety may be at severe risk. I want to hear the Government's explanation of how that problem could be avoided, because I cannot see how it could be.

I understand that this has, in a sense, been happening recently in one part of the world. The British authorities have, I think, placed Home Office officials at Prague airport to monitor those coming in, in order to prevent a large-scale arrival in the UK of Romany visitors, or Roma people, from the Czech Republic or further east. As I have not been to Prague recently, I have no first-hand experience; I can only relate what I have been told. I understand that there is at least some evidence of pretty crude discrimination on the basis of ethnicity with regard to who should be allowed and who should not, which has had a disproportionate effect on members of a certain ethnic group—people of Roma origin. I gather on good advice from the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants that a court case challenging the procedure is imminent, if it has not already been instigated.

The really big policy issue is this: we are setting up a whole overall network of different immigration control networks in the public and private sectors, at home and abroad, that are not open to the scrutiny that we would expect in the case of such important decisions.

The Bill is, substantively, about three things: nationality—not a matter for this debate—asylum and immigration. I assume we are trying to say that we still uphold people's right to seek asylum here. My hon. Friend the Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) made a telling observation in an earlier debate about people who were accepted here during the civil war in Spain, and who have been grateful ever since.

I note that the Westminster Hall exhibition of Low cartoons includes a cartoon from a February 1947 edition of the *Evening Standard*. It depicts a British worker reading his newspaper and complaining about "all these immigrants" arriving. Standing behind him are the ghosts of the Saxons, Goths, Vikings and others who—if our history is correct—made up the British race. We are in great danger of undermining the spirit of the refugee convention. If people find it impossible to leave their countries, it will by definition be impossible for them to make a case for asylum in another country.

The clause will introduce a visa regime without safeguards. The Minister asked me in Committee whether I would prefer a system of visa control, and in many ways I would. At least everybody would then know where they stand. I realise that such a system might prove over-bureaucratic, and that problems would arise in terms of people visiting for weekends, bank holidays and other public holidays. However, at least they would be within the system, rather than outwith it. Unless we are persuaded by the Minister's reply, I therefore hope that hon. Members of all parties will join me in voting to remove clause 101 from the Bill. If we cannot remove a system that would give responsibility to carriers, and establish instead an alternative visa control system, we should at least allow the House of Lords to come back with a more acceptable proposal.

Jeremy Corbyn: I shall be brief, as there are other matters that need to be discussed. I was a Member of the House in 1987, when the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Bill, the forerunner of clause 101, was passed. The motive behind that Bill was to prevent people who wanted to seek political asylum in this country or elsewhere in western Europe from fleeing places where they felt unsafe, and in which the danger was clear. It coincided with an increase in the number of Tamil people seeking political asylum from Sri Lanka, and with similar efforts on the part of many other countries in which political tension was increasing.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) is correct: what lies behind this development is akin to the privatisation of immigration control. In reality, it denies a considerable number of people—their wish to apply for asylum in another country may well be entirely genuine and well-founded—the opportunity to get near enough to an airline desk to pursue that application. If we think back to the situation in Chile before 1990, the question of whether a political person fleeing Chile merited asylum would now be judged not by due process in this country, but by an airline clerk who would be frightened that the airline would be fined £1,000 for bringing in a passenger who would subsequently have to be removed. In fact, enormous pressure was indeed put on the desk staff of British airlines around the world not to allow people about whom they had the slightest suspicion to travel.

The hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey made a good point when he cited the example of Zimbabwe. In many other countries—Iran and Iraq, for example—someone could get as far as the airport to buy a ticket, only to be deterred from travelling by a clerk who knew nothing about the reality of the law and the justice of the claim, and who might well be a stooge of the police or the governing regime. That clerk could then deny them the right to travel, and as the hon. Gentleman rightly points out, if the police are observing them, they would be put in considerable danger.

Clause 101 is symptomatic of the paranoia that is sweeping Europe about people who seek political asylum. We live in a world that, for many people, is dangerous, divided and frightening. They regard the Geneva convention as their one hope. If we extend such controls and decision making to faraway airports, we will be comfortably ignorant of the facts. The reality is that some people put themselves at enormous risk merely by trying to exercise the rights that the United Nations convention has conferred in the countries that are signatories to it, of which we are indeed one.

In her response, I hope that the Minister will reflect on the impact of the Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Act and on the entire process, and that she will think again about the provision and the advice given to airline staff, which denies people their valuable human rights.

Mr. Malins: I want briefly to raise with the Minister a couple of matters relating to the authority-to-carry scheme that I discussed in Committee. I appreciate that she was not in her post at that time. I mentioned two rail trips that were causing some concern: the twice-weekly Bourg St. Maurice ski-train, and the Disney train. In both cases, when one purchases a ticket there is a Schengen exit check, but no UK check. I mention these matters now because the former Minister, the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), kindly said in Committee that she would ensure that we were in a position to respond to any sudden clandestine activity. If the Minister has no information to hand, I should be happy for her to write to me.

A connected matter is the critical position concerning exits from France. As Minister may know, there is at most one decent, working heartbeat detector machine for Calais and Coquelles. There is simply insufficient investment over there, and the same applies to Dover. The Minister must understand that, whatever her polices in relation to carriers' liability and the authority to carry, only one lorry in every 100 is checked at Dover, and there is only one heartbeat detector machine. Because it is not being used properly by certain Dover authorities, it has broken down and that had to be repaired on several occasions. Far greater investment in machinery is needed, not just at Dover but on the other side of the channel.

Those are small points that are really Committee points, and I am sorry to return to them, but the former Minister was kind enough to say in Committee that they would be considered. I should be glad to be told of developments in due course.

Beverley Hughes: As the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) said, the amendment would remove clause 101, which establishes an enabling power that allows for the making of regulations to establish the authority-to-carry scheme. However, removing that power would prevent the immigration and nationality directorate from embracing the potential of new technology, and deny us the opportunity to screen passengers better before they embark for the UK. There is an important point here. As the hon. Gentleman has acknowledged, the details of such passengers would be checked against data held by the Home Office, to discover whether they posed any known security or immigration threat. There is therefore no possibility of the carriers themselves, or anyone associated with them, having any idea of the information on which a decision would be based. All that the carrier would get would be a yes or no answer to the question whether it has the authority to carry the person in question.

The second important point is that the provision involves no decision as to whether the requirements of immigration rules are met. The provision is not concerned with immigration control in any shape or form. I should point out to my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) that it is also in no sense a transfer or privatisation, as he termed it, of immigration control. In that regard, it has no implications. Nor does it delegate, as my hon. Friend maintained, any decision making to clerks or carriers. It is important that people understand that point.

8 pm

Jeremy Corbyn: If the authorities in this country say to Iranian Airlines, for example, that person X is not likely to be admitted here for terrorist or immigration reasons, will not that give some important information to a state-owned airline in a country whose human rights record is patchy? It could have implications for the person's family, especially if he or she has family in this country who are applying for asylum.

Beverley Hughes: No reasons, be they terrorist or immigration-related, would be given to the carriers. They would simply be told whether they had the authority to bring the person to the UK. I understand well the point that my hon. Friend makes, but he and others need to consider my point: if the Home Office has information that suggests that someone is an immigration or security risk—perhaps he or she is travelling on a false passport or some information is known about his or her activities that raises concerns—is it right that we should allow that person on to an aircraft? That is the difficult decision that we have to face. If we have such information, is it right

[Beverley Hughes]

to allow that person to be carried to this country, with whatever consequences that might have? The Government contend—it may be a point of difference between us that we cannot bridge—that it would be wrong and irresponsible to tell a carrier that it can carry such a person even though we have unanswered questions about the security risk that he or she presents.

Mr. Allan: Will the Minister clarify the nature of the schemes proposed? They could vary from a narrow database that accurately defined individuals who posed a security risk to a blanket ruling that all Angolans travelling from Portugal are a risk because a passport scam is going on. In other words, schemes could be very specific or much more general. Will the schemes address specific individuals or classes of individuals?

Beverley Hughes: We would need to have further discussions about the regulations, but my understanding—I have read the Committee report in detail and received further advice from officials—is that the schemes will be concerned with individuals. To be fair, I must add that that point was made by Ministers in Committee. Data will be presented by individuals to the carriers and the stored information against which the data will be checked will be about individuals. The authority-to-carry scheme would be authorised in particular areas, but the process of identification would be on an individual basis.

Simon Hughes: Does the Minister not realise the dangerous direction in which these provisions could lead the world? For example, two years ago the Government of Sri Lanka could have told the British Government that they did not want our carriers to allow on to a plane in London anybody who might support the Tamil separatist movement. Someone could be prevented from flying to the US on the basis of the sort of dodgy information that has resulted in people being banged up in Belmarsh prison but then released by the courts because they had no case to answer. Relying on state information to stop people leaving countries is a very different ball game from relying on the duty of the British state to stop people coming into our country. It should not be our job to try to rule the world or to let other people try to rule the world outside their own territorial boundaries.

Beverley Hughes: The information against which a person's details would be checked would be the information held by our Home Office, not information that another Government had requested us to use. I accept that that point does not remove all the hon. Gentleman's concerns, but we have to strike a balance. The answer depends on judgments about what we should do when we have information about people and know the serious consequences that can arise from carrying people, especially in aircraft, who might be a security risk. The Government's judgment is that we have a duty and responsibility to consider refusing authority to carry when we are concerned that somebody poses a security or immigration threat.

I may not be able to bridge the gap between the Government and some hon. Members on this point, but I shall try to deal with some of the questions of detail in case that gives them some comfort. The Minister in Committee gave an open response to the concerns expressed and made it clear that the regulations would be subject to parliamentary scrutiny, and transparent. Attempts would also be made to provide sufficient remedy in the regulations for any passenger refused under the scheme to challenge the decision or the data on which it was based. We can discuss the nature of the remedy, but we might be able to provide a hotline through which cases of mistaken identity or wrong information could be checked. We do not have a closed mind about remedies, and hon. Members have already been assured that we will wish to consider, where possible, speedy remedies that will offset the potential disadvantage to people of not being able to board a plane at a certain time.

Mr. Allan: My hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) gave an example in which a person missed an event of great importance because they had been refused permission to board a flight. Does the Minister accept that in such cases of error it will be difficult to assign the blame to individual airline staff or to the Home Office? Given that the Home Office will require the airlines to implement the scheme, does she accept that the Home Office should pick up compensation claims? A hotline will not help an individual who has missed the event to which they were intending to travel.

Beverley Hughes: I make no commitment in relation to compensation per se, but if a carrier acts on the basis of information provided by the Home Office, it will not be liable for the consequences of implementing the decision. I return to the need to strike a balance on this issue. The example was given of a trip to attend a wedding. It may be that the remedy for a person—that is, attending the wedding—is not available if the authority to carry is denied. No matter how quickly the information could be checked, we might not be able to put that right. However, the alternative proposed by the Liberal Democrats—a visa scheme—could have unnecessary disadvantages for many more people. The imposition of a visa scheme on everybody in a country, as opposed to an authority-to-carry scheme that would identify only those individuals about whom concerns were felt, is another important and difficult question of balance. We do not want to impose visa regimes where they are not necessary. That would be an imposition on a whole population. The authority-to-carry scheme gives the option that individuals can be checked. Some people, such as those involved in the wedding to which reference has been made, may suffer irredeemable consequences, but that possibility has to be balanced against the consequences if a whole population had to go through a bureaucratic process to obtain a visa.

I might be able to give the House some comfort on some of the details. A question was asked concerning the type of personal data that would be requested, and whether the requirements would extend to sources of personal information that are not sought currently. I assure the House that addressees would not be asked for that sort of data. The information requested would be confined to the person's name, date of birth, gender and nationality, and the nature of the travel document involved. As I understand it, people seeking leave to travel have to give exactly that information now.

Concerns have been raised about asylum seekers. Authority-to-carry schemes are designed to identify people thought to pose an immigration or security threat. Almost by definition, they would not normally be people who had been to the UK before. Unless a first-time asylum seeker was known to present a threat for some other reason, he or she would not fall foul, almost by definition, of the authority-to-carry scheme. It is unlikely that there would be any information at all on such people. Why would there be?

Jeremy Corbyn: If a member of the family of a person in this country who has sought political asylum here applies to fly to Britain, will he or she be tagged on the system as a person likely not to be admitted, or will that person be allowed to come here?

Beverley Hughes: I have made it clear that the information needed to give a yes or no answer to carriers would be that which suggests that there is or is not an immigration or security threat. Relatives of people who come here legally and declare themselves to be asylum seekers so that a claim can be handled in the normal way would clearly not pose an immigration threat. It may be a different matter when it comes to people who come here illegally, but in the circumstances described by my hon. Friend I see no reason to believe that there would be an immigration threat.

This issue raises some difficult questions about balance. I have listened carefully to what the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey has said. I hope that he is persuaded by the points that I have made about the detail of the scheme and about the extent to which we want to get it right so that we can reduce to a minimum the negative consequences for individuals. On balance, we think that the authority-to-carry scheme is preferable to an all-out visa scheme. For that reason, I ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw the amendment. If he presses it to a vote, I hope that the House will support the Government's proposal.

8.15 pm

Simon Hughes: With the leave of the House, I take this opportunity to thank the Minister for her courteous reply. We are talking about new ideas, so there are many unanswered questions. The proposal has not been thought through or prepared sufficiently, although I do not dissent from what she has said.

I mentioned the option of establishing a visa system, but that is only one alternative. I shall offer another. If the Government had information leading them to believe that certain people thought to be in Pakistan or Iraq, for instance, would not be accepted here, they could use the normal channels and communicate the matter to the authorities in that country. That is what happens now, and it would mean that the Home Office and immigration authorities, the police and the internal administration system could intervene if they wanted to and if they thought the person involved would get leave to come here and pose a threat.

If a person has a criminal past or a history of being what the Minister called an immigration threat—a phrase to which I shall return—or, more importantly, a security threat, liaison with agencies such as MI5, MI6, Interpol and others would offer other ways in which to handle the matter. That would be better than using commercial operators to tell people that they would not be able to travel.

Secondly, if the Government are going to go down this road, the time to tell people that they cannot travel is when they seek to book their tickets. The people involved will at least then be alerted to the difficulties before they arrive at the airport.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) has pointed out to me that he has never been asked for his date of birth when booking an airline ticket or turning up at a checkout. Neither have I, so the sort of information that the Minister spoke about goes beyond what people would normally be asked for when purchasing tickets or boarding an aeroplane.

Thirdly, a real danger that the Government have not thought through—but which was mentioned by me and by the hon. Member for Islington, North (Mr. Corbyn)—involves people at risk in their own countries. If the authorities see someone being rejected and do not know whether that has happened because that person, in his or her past, came to Britain on a false passport, or because that person is an international security threat, they might draw the worst rather than the best conclusions. There is a terrible risk that a person in that situation could be regarded as much more dangerous than is truly the case. The result is that that person could become even more vulnerable, and that would also be out of our control.

Finally, if the Government want to pursue this proposal they should talk to partner Governments in the EU, in the international associations covering air transport and in the other international organisations, to see whether there can be agreement about a common scheme. However, any such scheme must defend people's liberties. It should not build yet more barriers around a fortress Britain in an increasingly fortress Europe and fortress world.

The Minister is right that a balance must be struck between combating international terrorism and preventing people from abusing immigration and other systems. We judge that the measure goes far beyond that. The implications have not been thought through, and I urge the House to support amendment No. 66.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 61, Noes 301.

Division No. 270] **[8.17 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Dodds, Nigel
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Heath, David
Hermon, Lady
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman

Laws, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Weir, Michael
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
John Thurso and
Sir Robert Smith.

NOES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hume, John
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry

Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vaz, Keith
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. Ivor Caplin.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 117

ASSISTING UNLAWFUL IMMIGRATION, &C.

Amendments made: No. 195, in page 62, line 35, leave out paragraphs (a) and (b) and insert—

'(a) does an act which facilitates the commission of a breach of immigration law by an individual who is not a citizen of the European Union,

(b) knows or has reasonable cause for believing that the act facilitates the commission of a breach of immigration law by the individual, and

(c) knows or has reasonable cause for believing that the individual is not a citizen of the European Union.'.

No. 196, in page 63, line 5, leave out "travel within" and insert "transit across".

No. 197, in page 64, line 2, after "which", insert—

'(a)'.

No. 198, in page 64, line 2, at end insert—

', and

(b) does not charge for its services'.

No. 199, in page 64, line 6, after "deportation", insert "or exclusion".

No. 200, in page 64, line 8, leave out paragraphs (a) and (b) and insert—

'(a) does an act which facilitates a breach of a deportation order in force against an individual who is a citizen of the European Union, and

(b) knows or has reasonable cause for believing that the act facilitates a breach of the deportation order.'.

No. 201, in page 64, line 12, at end insert—

'(1A) Subsection (1B) applies where the Secretary of State personally directs that the exclusion from the United Kingdom of an individual who is a citizen of the European Union is conducive to the public good.

(1B) A person commits an offence if he—

(a) does an act which assists the individual to arrive in, enter or remain in the United Kingdom,

(b) knows or has reasonable cause for believing that the act assists the individual to arrive in, enter or remain in the United Kingdom, and

(c) knows or has reasonable cause for believing that the Secretary of State has personally directed that the individual's exclusion from the United Kingdom is conducive to the public good.'.

No. 202, in page 65, line 7, leave out—

'brought more than 20 illegal entrants to the United Kingdom'

and insert—

'carried more than 20 illegal entrants'.

No. 203, in page 65, line 12, leave out—

'to bring illegal entrants to the United Kingdom'

and insert—

'in the course of the commission of an offence under section 25, 25A or 25B'.

No. 204, in page 65, line 23, at end insert—

'(9) In the case of an offence under section 25, the reference in subsection (5)(a) to an illegal entrant shall be taken to include a reference to—

(a) an individual who seeks to enter a member State in breach of immigration law (within the meaning of section 25), and

(b) an individual who is a passenger for the purpose of section 118 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 (traffic in prostitution).

(10) In the case of an offence under section 25A, the reference in subsection (5)(a) to an illegal entrant shall be taken to include a reference to—

(a) an asylum-seeker (within the meaning of that section), and

(b) an individual who is a passenger for the purpose of section 118(1) of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

(11) In the case of an offence under section 25B, the reference in subsection (5)(a) to an illegal entrant shall be taken to include a reference to an individual who is a passenger for the purpose of section 118(1) of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.'.

No. 205, in page 65, line 24, leave out subsection (2).—*[Ms Rosie Winterton.]*

Clause 119

SECTION 118: SUPPLEMENTARY

Amendment made: No. 206, in page 66, line 25, leave out subsection (3) and insert—

'(3) Sections 25C and 25D of the Immigration Act 1971 (c. 77) (forfeiture or detention of vehicle, &c.) shall apply in relation to an offence under section 118 of this Act as they apply in relation to an offence under section 25 of that Act.'.—*[Ms Rosie Winterton.]*

Clause 121

REGISTRATION CARD

Mr. Allan: I beg to move amendment No. 73, in page 68, leave out lines 19 to 21.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendment No. 207.

Mr. Allan: Amendment No. 73 deals with registration cards, which are to be issued to all asylum seekers. We understand that that work has already commenced. We expressed concerns about this in Committee; Liberal Democrat Members have concerns about registration cards in the wider sense, and we sought assurances that they would be restricted to specific purposes to do with asylum and immigration.

[Mr. Allan]

The amendment would prevent the Home Secretary from being able to extend the use of registration cards, even into areas of immigration, through secondary legislation. We remain concerned, as we were in Committee, about the possible extension of registration cards without proper parliamentary scrutiny.

8.30 pm

We understood from the Minister's comments in Committee that the initial intention was to limit the card to asylum seekers. Indeed, clause 121(1)(b) is specific about the card being

"issued . . . in connection with a claim for asylum".

We suggested in Committee that if the Government's intention was simply to extend the cards for immigration purposes, it would be better to spell that out in the Bill. The Government have not made any consequential changes and we are left, therefore, with a clause that clearly deals with registration cards for asylum seekers.

We understood the reason for that and the logic behind it—moving from the voucher system towards a system under which benefits could be claimed. Our understanding is that the cards are really entitlement cards and will be of advantage to the individuals who hold them. That is our general approach to the use of registration or identity cards—they are something that can benefit the individual, which justifies their introduction. On the face of it, however, the clause is saying, "Let us have registration cards for asylum seekers", but subsection (7) will leave the way open to the Secretary of State to

"by order . . . amend the definition of 'registration card'".

The Bill is called the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill and it deals with different categories of people. Asylum seekers are a small and well defined category. In Committee, it was certainly suggested that the amendment envisaged in subsection (7) might mean the inclusion of a broader category of immigration applicant. All people who have immigration business would be a much wider category than asylum seekers—all those with nationality business are a wider category again. Our concern remains that we do not want a provision for asylum seekers to be extended to those broader categories without further parliamentary scrutiny.

The Bill without the amendment, which would remove the order-making powers, leaves far too much discretion to the Secretary of State to extend the requirement for individuals to carry registration cards. We want further assurances from the Government. In particular, we seek an assurance that they intend further to define the registration card in a manner that will parallel the present definition, rather than leaving us with the definition in the Bill—that the card is for purposes connected with asylum, but with a get-out clause that would allow the Secretary of State to rewrite the provision and say that it is for purposes x, y and z without further defining what those are, other than that they must be generally within the immigration field. We hope that the Government do not intend to leave the legislation like that and we seek further information from the Minister as to what their intentions are.

Ms Rosie Winterton: I hope that I may be able to give the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) some assurances on that matter.

Clause 121 would insert new section 26A into the Immigration Act 1971. The section would introduce a number of offences to deal with the creation, possession and use of false or altered registration cards, which are also known as application registration cards, ARCs. Those cards are at present issued to asylum seekers and their dependants as an acknowledgement of their application for asylum. They contain information about the individual asylum seeker, including his or her name, address, nationality, date of birth, photograph and fingerprints, which are stored on a computer chip, as the hon. Gentleman said. They are issued to asylum seekers when they leave the induction process.

I emphasise that the card is not an identity card, but it will certainly speed up the process of establishing a holder's identity when reporting to the immigration service and when accessing any benefits that an asylum seeker may be entitled to at a post office. Holders of the card will not be required to carry it or to produce it to a police officer. That matter was raised in our earlier debates. Obviously, however, they may find it useful to carry the card to help to establish their identity.

Although the card has been designed to incorporate a number of security features, which will certainly make it difficult to forge or to alter, attempts may be made to do so. That is the reason why we have created the forgery offences in clause 121.

The definition of a registration card in subsection (1) of the clause refers to a card

"issued . . . in connection with a claim for asylum",

but it is possible that in future registration cards will be issued to other classes of person who are subject to immigration control. Subsection (7) therefore allows the Secretary of State to make an order by the affirmative procedure to change the definition of a registration card for the purposes of the offences in the clause. There would have to be an affirmative order to create the offence to ensure that if the card were extended to other areas, it would be an offence to forge it. The purpose of that power is to ensure that if registration cards are issued to non-asylum seekers, the offences contained in clause 121 will apply to those cards.

The amendment would not affect the immigration and nationality directorate's ability to issue cards to non-asylum seekers because, as I said, clause 121 is not concerned with conferring powers to issue cards, it merely creates offences in relation to cards that have already been issued.

If the amendment is intended, therefore, to restrict IND's ability to issue cards to non-asylum seekers, it would not achieve that purpose. Obviously, it would also create an anomalous and undesirable situation, as someone could commit a criminal offence if they altered a card issued to an asylum seeker, but would not commit any offence if they forged a card that was issued to, for example, an illegal entrant.

The order-making power in subsection (7) is subject to affirmative resolution, which offers a safeguard to ensure that Parliament has the opportunity to scrutinise any changes in the definition of the card.

The hon. Gentleman raises several issues about the way in which the card could be extended. Perhaps I can reassure him because, as he will know, the cards are currently issued to new asylum seekers, and we have a programme to extend them to existing asylum seekers. However, in future, the IND could consider issuing the card to other categories of people subject to control under immigration legislation. Obviously, the IND is not yet certain which additional categories of people will be covered by ARCs.

Mr. Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): My hon. Friend says that more categories of people could be included, but that would not include anyone who had received indefinite leave to remain, would it?

Ms Winterton: I was about to refer to the type of people who would be covered. The basis of the functionality of ARCs is a biometric representation of fingerprints, so it is unlikely that an ARC could be issued to anyone who could not be fingerprinted under section 141 of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. That helps to explain that the categories are limited to the people who could be fingerprinted.

I could give some examples if that would assist hon. Members. For example, people who fail to produce a valid passport with a photograph or other document satisfactorily establishing their identity and nationality on arrival in the United Kingdom could perhaps be given ARCs on the basis that their identity is open to doubt. We do not know their true identity or necessarily where they came from. Even if we know both those things, to remove them from the United Kingdom we would need the co-operation of their country of origin, which is by no means a forgone conclusion. I could give other examples, but I hope that I have reassured the hon. Gentleman that we seek only to extend the categories to those people.

I now come to Government amendment No. 207. Section 28B of the Immigration Act 1971 allows a justice of the peace to issue a warrant authorising an immigration officer to enter premises to arrest a person suspected of committing a relevant offence. A relevant offence for the purposes of that section is defined in subsection (5) and includes the current offence of harbouring an illegal entrant or overstayer under section 25(2).

Clause 123(2) will add new offences relating to ARCs and the possession of an immigration stamp to the list of relevant offences. However, the present 25(2) offence will be subsumed into the general offences under proposed new sections 25 and 25B, inserted by clause 117. The power to enter to effect an arrest for those offences will come under section 28C of the 1971 Act, so there is no need for the section 25(2) offence to be a relevant offence for the purposes of section 28B. Indeed, proposed new section 25(2) does not contain a separate offence. That is why we have tabled Government amendment No. 207. I very much hope that, with those reassurances, the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam will withdraw the amendment and accept Government amendment No. 207.

Mr. Allan: I thank the Minister for gently and courteously informing me that I have been tilting at the wrong windmill and seeking to limit the Government's power to specify the offences involving registration cards, rather than dealing with the registration cards themselves. It remains a great joy to me that we often end up talking about things by proxy when we debate legislation in the House. For example, primary legislation is not needed to introduce the registration cards, but it is needed to create the offences that relate to them. I am sure that we shall return to registration cards on many other occasions, but having heard the Minister's argument, I think it appropriate to beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 123

SECTIONS 121 AND 122: CONSEQUENTIAL AMENDMENTS

Amendment made: No. 207, in page 69, line 15, leave out "25(2),".—*[Ms Rosie Winterton.]*

Clause 125

POWER OF ENTRY

8.45 pm

Beverley Hughes: I beg to move amendment No. 90, in page 70, line 44, after "28CA", insert ", 28FA or 28FB".

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government amendment No. 91.

Amendment No. 74, in clause 126, page 71, line 16, leave out from "if" to end of line 17 and insert—

'on application made by an immigration officer a justice of the peace is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for believing'.

Amendment No. 75, in page 71, line 20, leave out "employee records" and insert "records of that employee".

Government amendments Nos. 92 and 93.

Amendment No. 76, in page 71, line 25, leave out "employee records" and insert "records of that employee".

Government amendment No. 94.

Amendment No. 77, in page 71, line 33, leave out "employee records" and insert "records of that employee".

Government amendments Nos. 95 to 102.

Beverley Hughes: These amendments relate to the new powers of entry to business premises and the power to search employee records. Section 146(1) of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 already allows an immigration officer exercising his or her powers under the Immigration Act 1971 to use reasonable force if necessary. Subsection (2) confers an equivalent power on anyone exercising the fingerprinting powers in section 141 or 142 of the 1999 Act or powers under regulations made under section 144, which relate to other methods of collecting information about physical characteristics apart from fingerprinting.

An immigration officer exercising the new powers of entry and search created by clauses 125 and 126 will be able to use reasonable force because these powers are being inserted into the 1971 Act. The use of reasonable force by anyone else, however, requires express provision to be made. As the clauses also confer powers on constables and, in the case of clause 125, on detainee custody officers, express provision has to be made to allow them to use reasonable force.

That has already been done in respect of the power of entry. The first of these amendments therefore makes the equivalent provision when a police constable is using the new powers to search for personnel records. The second makes the necessary consequential change to the title of the sections.

[Beverley Hughes]

The power to inspect employee records under the new section 28FA, which is inserted by clause 126, is very limited. It is a power that does not require a warrant because, for reasons that I shall explain, we believe that that is the only effective way in which it can be exercised. We also believe that we have provided sufficient safeguards in the exercise of the power to ensure that the rights of all parties will be properly protected.

The new power to inspect employee records can be exercised only when a person has been arrested on business premises for one of the specified offences, or when someone is present on business premises who is liable to be arrested for one of those offences. In other words, it requires that a person is identified who is thought to be an immigration offender. If, in addition, the constable or immigration officer reasonably believes that an offence under section 8 of the Asylum and Immigration Act 1996 may have been committed, and that employee records on the premises will be of substantial value to the investigation of the offence, this clause allows him or her to search for, seize and retain those records.

By way of an example, let us suppose that someone has been arrested on business premises for being an illegal entrant. In that case, such a person would not have permission to work in the UK. That would mean that the employer is likely to be committing an offence under section 8 of the 1996 Act by employing that person. When an officer reasonably believes that the employer has committed this offence, and that there will be records on the premises that will substantially assist the investigation of it, he or she can search the premises.

If amendment No. 74, tabled by the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes), were to be accepted, however, once someone liable to arrest had been identified, everything would have to stop while an immigration officer went off and applied to a magistrate for a warrant to search for the relevant employee records. Quite what the constable would do in those circumstances is unclear because, under the amendment, only an immigration officer would be allowed to apply for a warrant for that purpose.

If the officer were forced to go to the magistrates court to obtain a warrant, the employer would clearly have every incentive and opportunity to destroy any evidence of the section 8 offence that had existed before the officer returned. The fact that the employee had been arrested or identified as liable to arrest would clearly have alerted the employer to the interest of the enforcement authorities. In these circumstances, we believe that a power to search without warrant is necessary and proportionate. The amendment would therefore render the new power in the new section 28FA completely ineffective. That is why we cannot accept it.

Amendments Nos. 75 to 77 would limit the power to search for personnel records under the new section 28FA to a power to search for, seize and retain the records of the person who has been arrested or believed to be liable to arrest. We do not believe that such limitations are practical or desirable. Amendment No. 75 seeks to ensure that the power of search is triggered only when an officer reasonably believes that the records of the arrested person will be found on the premises. The amendment is unnecessary. The proposed new subsection (2) already makes it clear that the power of search will be triggered only if the officer reasonably believes that an immigration employment offence has been committed in relation to the person arrested and that employee records will be found that will be of substantial value in the investigation of that offence.

Amendments Nos. 76 and 77 seek to restrict the scope of the search that can be undertaken and the powers of seizure and retention of employment records to the records of the arrested person. Again, we believe that that limitation is impractical and does not take into account the realities of conducting a search of personnel records: one has to search a whole drawer of records to try to find the one that relates to the person arrested or who is liable to arrest. It is impractical—I would say impossible—not to search through other records to try to find the record one wants. It is highly unlikely that the records of the suspected offender will be kept separately from those of other employees.

If a constable or immigration officer is searching for the records of that employee, he or she must of necessity have to search through the records of all employees. If, in the course of that search, the constable or immigration officer comes across evidence of other immigration employment offences or evidence of NASS fraud, that person cannot simply ignore it. That would be absurd. He or she needs to be able to seize and retain that evidence immediately. That is what the clause allows.

Mr. Vaz: I understand what my hon. Friend is saying, but it sounds a bit like a fishing expedition. The hope is that looking at other records might mean that other offences are discovered. Can she assure me that the records will be returned as soon as possible after the person involved has been dealt with?

Beverley Hughes: It is not a fishing expedition. I am simply making the point that seeking the employment records of a person who has been arrested or is liable for arrest because he is a suspect inevitably means that a constable must go through a bank of records to see whether the one that he wants is there. In doing that, if records of other people who may be suspected of employment offences come to light, that fact cannot be ignored.

The Government amendments seek to clarify the conditions that relate to this power and that have to be satisfied for a search to be conducted under the new section. Our amendments are perfectly reasonable and understandable. I hope that the House will accept them.

Mr. Allan: I shall concentrate on amendments Nos. 74 to 77 and I give notice of our intention to divide the House on amendment No. 74, which deals with an important principle.

We believe that whenever possible there should be prior judicial scrutiny of requests by law enforcement authorities to search for personal information on premises and remove it. We need to strike a balance between the rights of the employer and the other employees. The hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz) referred to a fishing expedition. Our problem is not with those fishing expeditions that are successful because they catch a full haul of fish, but with those that go through the records of innocent fish for no particular reason. People are rightly aggrieved if their privacy is breached when no serious offence has been committed.

The rights of the innocent employees whose records may be seized under the provisions and the rights of the employers should be taken seriously. We would, of course, accept advice on who should seek the JP's warrant—the immigration officer and the constable as opposed to just the immigration officer, perhaps. However, without judicial scrutiny there is a serious risk that the powers could be used in an overbearing way.

If the judicial scrutiny element is included in the legislation, we could develop systems that work. That is especially relevant to those cases in which a constable or immigration officer believes that offences are liable to be committed and that employer X is employing people illegally. In those circumstances, there is no reason why they should not go to a magistrate and get authority for a search warrant as they would in many other instances that require law enforcement agencies to have warrants.

An additional safeguard is required. There is a risk that the powers will be used inappropriately if the Bill is left unamended, so we will seek to divide the House on amendment No. 74.

Mr. Malins: There is a problem with the clause. Whenever one sees a reference to search warrants, one wants to see a reference to the courts. The Minister will know that when an officer wants to obtain a search warrant for premises on which there are drugs, he goes before a district judge or magistrate, swears an information setting out his reasons for believing that the premises contain drugs and is then examined by the court, which asks for more information and cross-examines him on it. Only when the magistrate or district judge is satisfied that there is a reasonable case does he grant the warrant.

Proposed new section 28FA states:

> "This section applies where . . . a constable . . . reasonably believes that a person is liable to arrest for an offence."

In the example that I gave of drugs on the premises, there was a possible challenge to the constable's reasonable belief, which would have been made before the warrant was executed by the district judge. However, the Bill makes no provision for the reasonable belief of a constable to be challenged because there can be no prior challenge and a subsequent challenge would effectively be invalid. The Government have to address that dilemma.

The other dilemma that they face has been alluded to: will the proposal result in a fishing exercise? The amendments tabled by the Liberal Democrats attempt to narrow the remit to the employee records of the employee concerned. When the Minister reads *Hansard*, she will observe that she referred to the importance of "the relevant employee records". In other words, the records should be limited to that employee. She said that one has to search records thoroughly to find the relevant ones, but what distresses me is that all the records of a firm can be searched, removed and acted on because of the reasonable belief of an immigration officer, which is not capable of challenge. That is a big worry.

Beverley Hughes: I simply commend the amendment to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

It being Nine o'clock, MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER *put the remaining Questions required to be put at that hour, pursuant to Order [11 June].*

Clause 126

POWER TO SEARCH FOR EVIDENCE

Amendment proposed: No. 74, in page 71, line 16, leave out from "if" to end of line 17 and insert—

> 'on application made by an immigration officer a justice of the peace is satisfied that there are reasonable grounds for believing'.—*[Mr. Allan.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 58, Noes 292.

Division No. 271] **[9 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Galloway, George
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Heath, David
Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Weir, Michael
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Andrew Stunell and
Sir Robert Smith.

NOES

Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas
(Newcastle E & Wallsend)
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles
(Norwich S)
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann

Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry
(B'ham Hodge H)
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hope, Phil
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Lammy, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mahmood, Khalid
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John
(Glasgow Anniesland)
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. Ivor Caplin.

Question accordingly negatived.

Remaining Government amendments agreed to.

Order for Third Reading read.

9.14 pm

Mr. Blunkett: I beg to move, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

I should like to thank both past and present Ministers for their work and support over the past few months in introducing a complex and difficult measure. I should also like to thank Labour Members for the forbearance that they have shown and the contribution that they have made, and the two major Opposition parties for the way in which the debate has been conducted from Second Reading, through the Committee stage and over the past two days. That impressive difference in tone, compared with the way in which nationality, immigration and asylum issues have been dealt with in the past in this House and elsewhere, has made a difference to the way in which hon. Members and people outside the House have been able to address these very sensitive issues.

We have had disagreements and will continue to do so, but there has been a unanimity about the way forward that could not have been expected even a year ago.

In the White Paper and in subsequent debates we have tried to balance the critical issues involved. We want to offer a warm welcome to people from across the world who wish to come to our shores to settle, to work, to be educated, to visit, to be able to integrate through diversity in our society, to bring different cultures, experiences and enterprise, to contribute to the development of our economy and our social life, to make a difference to local communities and to be able to show a different face. This is Britain—a nation that has been built up over the generations and centuries and of which we are proud today.

Only six months ago, there was controversy about being proud of that heritage and welcoming people as British nationals prepared to learn our language and about our citizenship, culture and history, and to participate in a ceremony to celebrate an important event. Over the past six months, that controversy has died away. The Bill's passage through Second Reading, Committee, Report and, I hope, Third Reading has signalled that people no longer believe that that is a controversial issue.

It is also no longer controversial to take the view that we can welcome people legitimately into our country while being robust in developing a system that is trusted, that has the confidence of the British people and that protects our borders and prevents clandestine entry and illegal working. The Bill encapsulates, as the White Paper sought to, the balance between that warm welcome and a hard-headed and sensible, but sensitive, approach to ensuring that our hospitality is not exploited. I said that when I presented the White Paper and on Second Reading, and I say so tonight. We can be proud of providing a sensitive and balanced policy that gets it right in terms not only of our humanitarian obligations and simple humanity, but of our common sense and knowledge that there will always be those who exploit the weak and the timorous, who do not hear the clarion call of clear leadership. That is why, in taking on prejudice and racism, we must be clear about our own leadership and the values that we hold. We must take a common-sense approach that ensures that people know both that we are not to be taken for granted and that we understand what is necessary to protect their interests.

It is in that spirit that I ask the House to give the Bill its Third Reading. I do so briefly, so that hon. Members can express their views and have their opinions heard in that broader context: not on individual items on which we may have differences, but on the broad thrust—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I mean the right hon. Gentleman no discourtesy, but he should address the Chair.

Mr. Blunkett: I shall happily address the Chair, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

That broad thrust, which unites so many hon. Members and people outside the House, is not to make mischief, not to pretend that we are introducing measures that we are not, not to use terms such as "concentration" for open accommodation centres, and not to encourage people to believe that we are introducing measures that suppress the right of people across the world to come to our shores and to be welcomed in doing so, but to ensure that we as a Parliament express a unified view that we can take all these measures in a manner that commands the support of the British people. If we can do that, we shall do the British nation and our global humanitarian interests a great service.

I intend to try to achieve the goal through bilateral and multilateral negotiations with our European partners on behalf of our Parliament, and by ensuring that we build social cohesion in our communities, understanding for our stance and a deep and lasting commitment against racists, who will always exploit differences and would bring us to our knees if they had the chance.

9.20 pm

Mr. Letwin: I join the Home Secretary in welcoming the tone of our national debates on asylum in past months. I am also pleased that our discussions have been rational and that some progress has been made in understanding each other's positions. I welcome the Government's significant moves towards our position.

The Bill remains a curate's egg—it has some good and bad bits. It is good that it sets out the legal foundation in domestic law for the move towards bilateral and multilateral agreements. The Home Secretary knows that I pressed him on that for months, and I shall continue to do that for, I hope, not many more months. I have no doubt that he will claim a great victory when he achieves the bilateral agreement. I hope that he will remember that there was a time when he did not believe in the need for it. I shall consider it a major success if we manage, through him, to achieve that necessary goal.

The measure sets out a framework for accommodation centres—another Conservative suggestion with an older origin. It is a credit to my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) that she began the process of persuading the Labour Government of the need to move in that general direction. We have pointed out at many stages that, although the accommodation centres are an improvement on our starting point, they remain unlikely to fulfil the critical role that is essential if the system is to work properly. I shall not speak about the many detailed amendments that are required for the centres to operate properly.

I want to animadvert to perhaps the most ingenious coup that the Home Secretary has pulled off in his term of office. I know of no other major officer-holder in the Government who has managed to create a problem and subsequently collect so much praise from so many quarters and so much opprobrium from others for solving it.

By dint of moving towards large centres in rural areas, the Home Secretary created the problem that local schools could not withstand the effects of having all the children in the centres deposited on them. He subsequently solved the problem, thereby acquiring a reputation in parts of the right-wing press as the sort of Home Secretary who should be the shadow Home Secretary. I wrestle with that problem daily. I cannot understand why his production of a solution to a problem that he created is a matter for congratulation in the right-wing press. I hope that we will persuade him of the need for smaller centres that will not cause the difficulties, and thus deprive him of a victory for solving a problem that did not need to arise.

The need, which the Home Secretary identified, for a balanced and effective system remains. It has to balance the needs of people who are desperate with those of our

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nation to control the flow of immigration through proper and fair rules. It has to be effective, because if it is not, the whole immigration system will be brought into disrepute, and control over it will cease to be a possibility. We share those acknowledgments, not just across these Dispatch Boxes but more widely, in Parliament and beyond.

The great advance that we have made is that there is now a general recognition—I agree with the Home Secretary about this—that this subject needs to be addressed, and that we need a system that is not only balanced but effective. I hope that three years from now, the Home Secretary's measures will have achieved that, and that he will make enough further changes to the Bill to maximise the chances of achieving that desirable result.

9.25 pm

Angela Eagle (Wallasey): I had not thought, when I wound up the Second Reading debate on the Floor of the House on 24 April, that I would be making my contribution on Third Reading from the Back Benches. But the view from up here is quite good, and I am sure that I am going to enjoy myself.

I should like to thank those right hon. and hon. Members who were kind enough to compliment me at the beginning of the debate on Report—it was much appreciated. I also wish the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration, my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Beverley Hughes), very well in her new post. I admire her greatly and I am sure that she will do a good job.

Given my new-found freedom, it will not surprise the House that I shall now be making a different speech on Third Reading from the one that, two weeks ago, I had anticipated making. Before anyone gets too excited, I should say that this speech will not consist of sudden and spiteful anti-Government rhetoric. Indeed, I continue to support what the Government are trying to achieve in the Bill. I wish, however, to air publicly a couple of the points that I have been making in private, which I believe will increase our chances of success.

We are right to see immigration and asylum as one of the most emotive and difficult issues facing us today, which is why I welcome the tone of our debates, both Upstairs in Committee and on the Floor of the House. We are right to see it as a difficult issue for Governments of the progressive left, and to accept that it is not one that we should duck. A superficial analysis of recent elections in Europe will blame worries about illegal immigration and asylum for the string of losses suffered by social democrats. While the uncertainty and hostility to illegal immigration was undoubtedly a feature in some cases, that analysis is an over-simplification.

I cannot agree with the third-way guru, Anthony Giddens, who recently argued that the far right can be beaten by being tough on immigration. I might have agreed with him if he had said "illegal immigration", but since he did not, I have to say to him that we will not deal with this issue by out-Powelling Enoch. Indeed, it would be immoral to be caught triangulating with far-right fanatics. Fortunately, that is not what the Bill does. We need a system that makes decisions fairly and effectively, cuts out the profits of the traffickers and deals firmly with those who seek to abuse either the asylum or the immigration system. This should include those who employ clandestine immigrants illegally in the United Kingdom.

Giddens went on to argue that we need to be

"tough on the causes of hostility to immigrants".

That is part of his agenda with which I can agree, and this is an area in which we need to do much more. Too many of our ethnic minority communities still suffer a daily experience of racism and discrimination, exacerbated by certain debates and by hysterical press coverage of the asylum issue. The Government must work harder to make our vision of equality a reality for these communities. The Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and the recent introduction of tougher sentences for racially and religiously motivated crime is a step forward, but that should be only the beginning. The work being done on community cohesion in the aftermath of last summer's riots is vital if we are to demonstrate by our actions rather than just by our rhetoric our absolute rejection of racism and our abhorrence of the discrimination that is its inevitable consequence.

We need to look at the White Paper and the Bill as a whole. They present a more holistic approach to the issues than we have seen in the past, and I for one take some pride in that. The Bill, for example, provides for the development of a resettlement programme that will, for the first time, afford a legal gateway into the UK for UNHCR refugees, better integration programmes for those accepted as refugees, and the extension of legal routes for economic migrants to enter the UK to work in both the high and medium-skilled categories. The Bill also strengthens powers to tackle illegal working and introduces new offences of people-trafficking to fight the organised gangs that are currently making huge profits from the trade in human misery and exploitation. Those are all extremely welcome developments, which I support wholeheartedly.

I now want to take a little time to raise the two issues that I mentioned earlier. The first concerns administrative coherence in the immigration and nationality directorate, and the second is the lack of a low-skilled migration route into the United Kingdom, which regrettably the White Paper omitted to deal with.

I am not the first hon. Member to make an observation about the IND, but I believe that more needs to be done on general administrative coherence and competence. Some standards are improving, and many staff do a superb job, but they are badly let down by the systems in place. The systems are largely paper based, and files are too often duplicated or lost, or go missing, which leads to unnecessary delay and confusion. The system can be especially slow for those who are waiting for upgrades. Although Labour in office has improved the Conservative average for end-to-end casework from 20 months to 13, that is clearly still not good enough. We need a step change. Without good progress in this area, these reforms will not lead to the improvements that we all want.

The second issue is the creation of a new, low-skilled migration route into the UK to assist our returns policy. We know that there is a demand for low-skilled labour in the UK, which is currently being met by illegal immigrants in the black economy, often in exploitative conditions. Their arrival in this country is usually facilitated by the traffickers.

We know that many of the countries whose citizens are involved benefit from the flow of funds that such workers send back, so they are reluctant to accept them back when we seek to return them. It is impossible to return any citizen of a country without that country issuing papers to the individuals concerned to allow them to go back. Despite the arrival of many Chinese citizens every month, last year the Chinese Government issued papers for the return of only seven of them. Would not it be more sensible to say to such countries that, if they take back their clandestine entrants, we will issue permits that allow their citizens to come and work in the UK legally in the low-skilled areas that are currently short of labour? I believe that everyone would gain from such an approach. The demand for such labour here is far better filled legally than illegally. We and the countries with which we reached agreement would decide which individuals could come and work here and for how long, rather than the criminal gangs that currently make such decisions for us, usually upon payment of large amounts of money. I was disappointed that that chance was not taken when the White Paper was written, and I hope that we will be able to put that omission right soon.

I welcome the chance to speak in the debate. For the first time in many years we have an opportunity to make progress together across the Floor of the House on these difficult issues. I support the Bill, and I wish it progress and every success.

9.33 pm

Simon Hughes: It gives me great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle). I repeat my tribute to her work in her time in the Department. We are happy to have worked with her, whatever our disagreements may have been. I also join the Home Secretary and the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) in saying that I have valued the constructive, co-operative, rational and intelligent way in which we have conducted the whole debate from Second Reading until now, whatever important disagreements we have had and will probably continue to have. I hope that between the end of this debate and the passage of the Bill into law we will have more constructive dialogue inside and outside the parliamentary Chambers so as to get as much as possible of a Bill on which we can agree, even if it is not the Bill that my colleagues and I would have put before Parliament.

On Second Reading, I recommended to my colleagues that we reserve our position, and we did not vote against the Bill. We thought that it was right that it should proceed. I expressed some of our reservations, and the significant reservations of others. Since then, two major events have occurred. First, major parts of the Bill have gone undebated in Committee and on Report. In the past two days alone, we have had 84 Government amendments, eight Government new clauses and two Government new schedules. In today's earlier debate that was guillotined at 7 o'clock, we dealt with only two out of 14 groups of amendments. The largest part of that was new Government business that was introduced last week and had never come to Parliament before. That in itself is enough to make me tell my colleagues that the Bill is not fit or ready to proceed to the House of Lords, and that is why my colleagues and I sought yesterday to recommit it to a Standing Committee so that we could do the work properly, rather than in a hurried way.

Many others, advising us from positions of great authority, have said that parts of the Bill have been hurriedly and badly drafted. In relation to the amendments concerning appeals, the Public Law Project wrote only this week that it was

> "extremely concerned about the substance of these developments along with the fact that they have occurred partway through the Bill's passage and without meaningful consultation."

Mr. Blunkett: They are lawyers.

Simon Hughes: The first body whose words I used was the Immigration Advisory Service, a Government- funded agency of the highest reputation. Many people involved are not lawyers, and the lawyers in this instance work for those who are the most disadvantaged. I hope that the Home Secretary will repress his innate dislike of lawyers, and understand that there are much more significant interests here.

Of course there are good things in the Bill. It is best that we improve citizenship and nationality law, despite the remaining confusion about nationality definitions. The Home Secretary and the Government know that we welcome the principle of induction and accommodation centres. We need more work permits for immigrants—and, as the hon. Member for Wallasey knows, I have long argued that they should be available to low-skilled as well as highly skilled workers. Of course it is also right to provide more resettlement programmes under the UNHCR.

Nevertheless, the Bill contains things that are significantly wrong. Although yesterday's concession—people in families would be in accommodation centres for only six months—was welcome, the centres are likely often to be in the wrong places. They could be privately run; the conditions of residence could be oppressive. The facilities are not guaranteed, and as the Home Secretary knows, in every case bar one that he currently contemplates, they will be far too large to command the confidence of the public and all the agencies concerned.

There are severely bad proposals to withdraw the option of support for asylum seekers who stay with their families or with friends. There is no justification for such proposals. There are also badly argued and insufficiently debated proposals to remove other benefits. That should be done on a European basis as a social security reform, not on a national basis as a way of making it more difficult for people to stay here.

There is the completely inexplicable change of name, from "detention centres" to "removal centres"—although many people in the centres will not have completed the process preceding a decision on their case. Making those people think they will be removed before any adjudication will give them no confidence in the impartiality of the system. That too is entirely unjustified. There is no automatic bail: the Government have proposed the repeal of their own measure in that regard. Perhaps the worst proposal of all is not only to deny rights of appeal in this country, so that people must go abroad to exercise those rights—that, in most cases, will mean their not being exercised at all—but to take them out of the normal process of judicial review. Some of the carrier proposals that we have not debated are also wrong, as are some proposals relating to offences.

Mr. Letwin: I share many of the hon. Gentleman's reservations, and we too tried to recommit the Bill to a

[Mr. Letwin]

Standing Committee; but is he really saying that the country would be better off without the Bill, imperfect as it is?

Simon Hughes: The Bill is not fit to proceed, and we cannot support it in its present form. It is possible to deal entirely properly with immigration and asylum matters if time is taken over it, but on three previous occasions Parliament has rushed legislation through without listening to advice. On all three occasions, it has got the legislation badly and—in some cases—criminally wrong.

My colleagues and I are not, therefore, willing to endorse a fourth mistaken set of proposals, and we are going to rely on the other place to amend the Bill as far as possible. *[Interruption.]* The Home Secretary may say "sanctimonious", but I shall end simply by saying this.

We in this country have a proud tradition of standing up for human rights, and whatever the Government do, I hope that the courts will ensure that we retain that proud tradition. Immigrants have been the backbone of this country. They have contributed and continue to contribute to it economically and in every other way. We have a duty to asylum seekers to offer them the best reception. In the words of Will Hutton in last weekend's edition of *The Observer:*

"it's time to stand up for your liberalism".

Although Governments throughout Europe are running scared of this issue, and although the argument of mainland European Governments may differ from ours because, unlike us, they fall within the Schengen agreement, it is not justifiable for any Government of this country—let alone a Labour Government—to worsen the position of immigrants and asylum seekers by moving further to the right.

I am afraid that we must vote against giving the Bill a Third Reading, and in doing so we make it absolutely clear that it contains many proposals that will be bad for race relations, bad for immigration policy and bad for asylum seekers. I ask hon. Members on both sides of the House to join us in opposing a Bill that has got worse, not better, in the past few months.

9.41 pm

Mike Gapes: If that was a constructive contribution, I would hate to hear the Liberal Democrats make a destructive one. *[Interruption.]* That was a typical response—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order.

Mike Gapes: It was a typical response from a party that is unable to make a constructive contribution to anything. In Committee, I listened for hour after hour to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes). The main reason why we did not discuss most of the clauses was that he spoke at interminable length, and for far longer than anybody else. Nor was that the first time that he has done so. *[Interruption.]* I remember when we discussed legislation on the Greater London Authority and on terrorism in Standing Committee. He is an expert at taking up the time of other Committee members and Members of this House. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will address his remarks to Third Reading.

Mike Gapes: I shall return to the substance of the issues before us. The Bill is vital. It contains important provisions on citizenship, integration and respect that we in this country can be proud of. It is also about incorporating our black and ethnic minority communities, so that they have full rights and are fully integrated. The fact that the Liberal Democrats propose to vote against it tells us a great deal about the nature of their party. *[Interruption.]* As we know, in parts of the country such as Oldham, they have pandered to racism and xenophobia, and have played a duplicitous role in respect of accommodation centres. *[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mike Gapes: It is time we told the truth about the two-faced, Janus-like Liberal Democrats, who say one thing in one street, and another in the next. *[Interruption.]* When it suits them, they are on the left—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman of what I said a few moments ago. Will he please address his remarks to Third Reading of the Bill?

Mike Gapes: I appreciate your strictures, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I will do as you say.

Importantly, until the previous contribution, the tone in the House and in Committee showed that this country as a whole—including local government and central Government—welcomes immigration and wants to establish a legal route for primary immigration for the first time in 30 years. It is very important that we talk, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) said, not only about professional people coming to work and live in this country, but about other people from all over the world. Some operators charge poor people, who put their families in hock for the money, $7,000, $10,000 or even $12,000 to smuggle them in dangerous conditions from, for example, Sri Lanka through the Balkans into western Europe. When they arrive, those people live in semi-slave conditions, often working illegally with no social protection. That undermines the national minimum wage and thus one of the other achievements of this Labour Government—the attempt to raise people out of poverty.

From the left—*[Interruption.]* The Liberal Democrats are laughing because they are not of the left. The Labour party has always stood up for the rights of the oppressed and the poor. Those who are most oppressed and the poorest in our society are the black and Asian people who work in hotels and catering, in sweatshops and garment factories in the east end of London, and those who are paid £1 an hour or less as home workers. We need to ensure that such criminal exploitation does not continue. I hope that the Home Office will work with other Departments, especially the Inland Revenue and the Treasury, to ensure that we have rigorous enforcement of the law on employment. In that way, as we welcome more people to this country, we will ensure that they work in the right conditions with proper taxes and national insurance. They need to be here legally so that they can join trade unions and consult Members of Parliament to expose the bad employers and those who do down the socially inclusive policies for which we all stand.

9.47 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury): I suspect that there is no Member of Parliament who does not want to see a just and tolerant society. One of the tragedies of the Report and Third Reading stages of this Bill is that we have had such a short time that we have tended to emphasise our differences instead of finding common ground. I suspect that considerable common ground could be found on these matters. My first ever speech, as a 19-year-old student to a Conservative party conference, was in support of the then Conservative Government's decision to allow east African Asians into the United Kingdom in 1972. I suspect that the differences between the sides are not great, but I am concerned about the size and location of accommodation centres. Little attention has been paid during the debate to those who have raised concerns.

For example, Oxfam has written to every hon. Member about the Bill. It has stated:

> "Oxfam is particularly concerned about the proposals to set up Accommodation Centres. We believe centres with 750 beds will inevitably be highly institutionalised, and result in damaging 'warehousing'—with knock-on rises in boredom, stress and even violence among what is likely to be predominantly a young male population . . . It also appears that a number of sites under consideration for the location of Accommodation Centres will be too isolated."

The Refugee Council has said:

> "The size of the centres is a major concern . . . the capacity of such centres should not exceed 100 bed spaces."

It also believes that

> "the locations the Government is currently considering are remote from urban centres and away from the kind of support infrastructure that asylum seekers and their families would need."

Many other organisations have made similar comments.

All I ask of the Home Secretary is that Ministers approach this trial with open minds. Indeed, I hope that all of us will evaluate the experiment fairly and properly. The trial will include only three accommodation centres in its initial phase. For reasons that we rehearsed yesterday, they will all be in Conservative-held constituencies in relatively rural areas.

The centres are an experiment that involves us all, so I shall simply repeat what I said yesterday. If, after the due process of the planning system and the public inquiry that I hope will be held—at which the Government will be judge and jury in their own cause—it is decided that there will be an accommodation centre in my area, I hope that hon. Members of all parties will visit my constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) shares that hope in connection with his constituency. It is important that all hon. Members should be involved in evaluating the experiment.

The last thing that I want people to say when my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) and I tell the House about accommodation centres as we experience them through our constituency surgeries is that we are being nimbyist. I suspect that we are the three least nimbyist hon. Members in the House. The House has a collective responsibility in this matter, and I hope that other hon. Members will be willing to share in that responsibility.

Mr. Letwin: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Tony Baldry: Indeed.

Mr. Letwin: I just want to correct an apprehension that may exist among Labour Members by putting on record the fact that I think that the three Conservative Members involved in this matter have behaved with astonishing propriety and courage in a very difficult situation. They have argued the case for their constituents without the slightest nimbyism.

Tony Baldry: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that comment. We all appreciate that other hon. Members—and I see that the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser) is in his place—also have problems with the proposals. We do not deny that. However, the Government have decided that the experiment will involve huge numbers of people in comparatively remote locations. I say again that the responsibility must be shared. If the accommodation centres go ahead, I very much hope that other hon. Members will visit the relevant constituencies and see them.

Mr. Blunkett: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Tony Baldry: I give way to the Home Secretary.

Mr. Blunkett: I am grateful. I want to put on record the fact that we understand perfectly well why the hon. Gentleman and those of his colleagues affected by the proposals have stated their position on more than one occasion. On a slightly lighter note, I think that the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) has been outdone when it comes to being the least nimbyist of hon. Members. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Allan) is at this very moment looking for a site in the south-west of Sheffield to house an accommodation centre. I greatly look forward to receiving that application.

Tony Baldry: I conclude by saying that there is one matter on which the Home Secretary and I will always agree. That is that, whatever initiative we take in politics, we will always be outdone by the Liberal Democrats.

9.53 pm

Mr. Gerrard: On Second Reading, I acknowledged that there were parts of the Bill—the proposals on trafficking, work permits, and so on—that would be welcomed by everyone. However, I did raise some concerns about the Bill, and nothing that has been said in Standing Committee, and in particular on Report, has served to decrease them. In fact, the opposite is the case.

Much of what the Bill contains in relation to asylum seems to be an example of the Government seeking to impose legislative solutions on matters that are not really legislative problems. We are placing a new and more expensive system of support on top of a system that was already complicated and which did not work especially well.

[Mr. Gerrard]

If accommodation centres are established—and I shall be interested to see when we get the first one—they will be very expensive. They will have to be large—otherwise the Government will find it incredibly expensive to provide services on site. I still have my doubts about on-site education.

Much of the argument has been misplaced, as it is clear that the accommodation centres are much more about processing applications than about providing accommodation. I would prefer the millions of pounds-worth of capital being devoted to establishing and running the accommodation centres—which will generate about 1,200 jobs—to be used to improve the Home Office systems that exist now. Perhaps we could start paying asylum seekers at income support level instead of at 70 per cent. of that level.

If we had not made the mistake in 1997 of sticking to the Tories' spending proposals and getting rid of people from the Home Office, perhaps we would have had a chance of getting Home Office systems that worked. We might have got answers to letters that we sent and decisions might have been made and implemented in a reasonable time. I accept that implementing decisions means removing people who are refused, yet last week someone turned up in my surgery five years after I had written to a Minister and been told they would be removed. If that is what is happening, it really does not matter what we do in legislation. That is where our efforts should go.

As we have done three times in the past 12 years, we are yet again grossly overestimating the effects that legislation can have on the numbers of people coming to this country and the numbers of unfounded claims. We should deal with claims quickly and enforce the decisions.

I believe that much of the asylum legislation is unnecessary and some of it is bad. I am not convinced that accommodation centres will work—I think that we will live to regret them. The provisions on the removal of appeal rights and judicial review, and the loss of support are all fundamentally bad legislation. As with previous legislation, the Bill will penalise the genuine applicant as severely as the applicant who is not genuine.

The Bill is in many ways designed to send messages rather than solving the problems that should be solved. I am afraid that it will not have my support in the Lobby tonight, and I know that some of my hon. Friends will be joining me.

9.56 pm

Mr. Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): The Bill provided me with my first opportunity since entering the House of Commons to serve on a Standing Committee, which is probably why I have been called at 9.56 pm. Nevertheless, it was a real privilege to serve on the Committee considering such an important and serious piece of legislation.

It was also a real privilege to serve under the expert, generous and wise tutelage of my hon. Friend the Member for Woking (Mr. Malins), whose combination of rapier-sharp intellect and faultless charm is deadly. Although we did not agree with the Government on many issues, hon. Members on both sides in Committee proceeded in a professional and workmanlike way. I was impressed at the way in which all Members worked together. That was partly due to the skilful stewardship of the Bill by the hon. Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), as well as by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, the hon. Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton). That is why I was particularly surprised to see the hon. Member for Wallasey so unceremoniously dumped from the Government at such a critical time in the Bill's passage.

I wish to make three points. The first relates to the welfare and well-being of the majority of asylum seekers who do not remain in this country. Throughout the Committee's proceedings, we debated ad nauseam the welfare of those who are to remain, the education of the children and the nature of the naturalisation ceremonies. However, we largely ignored the fate of the 78 per cent. of asylum seekers who, in theory, are to be removed from the country. While it may be fair and even just that they are returned whence they came, it cannot be right that we simply wash our hands of them. Far more needs to be done to address the problems that will face those people who, we hope, with the passage of the Bill, will be returned to their point of origin.

My second point deals with the size, scale and location of the centres—issues that have been well rehearsed. However, I would say that the concerns raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) are not nimbyism. They are shared by all members of isolated rural communities the length and breadth of Britain who see their own social infrastructure and public services stretched and underfunded.

My final point concerns the way in which this legislation was rushed through Committee, and then through the House tonight. We were—

It being Ten o'clock MR. DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to Order [11 June] put the Question already proposed from the Chair:—*

The House divided: Ayes 362, Noes 74.

Division No. 272] **[10 pm**

AYES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Austin, John
Baldry, Tony
Banks, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Barron, Kevin
Battle, John
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bellingham, Henry
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe
Bercow, John
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, Rt Hon David
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Bradley, Rt Hon Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brazier, Julian
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David

Clapham, Michael
Clappison, James
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Conway, Derek
Cook, Rt Hon Robin *(Livingston)*
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, Rt Hon Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon David *(Haltemprice)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, Rt Hon John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Donohoe, Brian H
Doran, Frank
Dorrell, Rt Hon Stephen
Dowd, Jim
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fitzsimons, Mrs Lorna
Flint, Caroline
Flook, Adrian
Flynn, Paul
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings)*
Foulkes, George
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Edward
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Hayes, John
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hendry, Charles
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, Rt Hon Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hume, John
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Irranca–Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby & Kenilworth)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr Ashok
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lammy, David
Lansley, Andrew
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Letwin, Oliver
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Dr Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Lloyd, Tony
Loughton, Tim
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luff, Peter
Luke, Iain
Lyons, John
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McIsaac, Shona
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
McLoughlin, Patrick
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Malins, Humfrey
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Mates, Michael
Maude, Rt Hon Francis
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miliband, David
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Moonie, Dr Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Ottaway, Richard
Owen, Albert
Page, Richard
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pope, Greg
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Cov'try NW)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Short, Rt Hon Clare
Simon, Siôn
Simpson, Keith *(Mid–Norfolk)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, Rt Hon John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Swayne, Desmond
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Rt Hon Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth R *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Tyrie, Andrew
Vaz, Keith
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Whittingdale, John

Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan
(Swansea W)
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wilson, Brian
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Young, Rt Hon Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Angela Smith and
Joan Ryan.

NOES

Allan, Richard
Atkins, Charlotte
Baker, Norman
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy
Beith, Rt Hon A J
Bennett, Andrew
Brake, Tom
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Rt Hon Menzies
(NE Fife)
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Coleman, Iain
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Galloway, George
George, Andrew *(St Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Hancock, Mike
Harris, Dr Evan *(Oxford W)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Nigel *(Cheltenham)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Kirkwood, Archy
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
McDonnell, John
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark
Öpik, Lembit
Pugh, Dr John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sedgemore, Brian
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns)*
Smyth, Rev Martin *(Belfast S)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr Jenny
Tyler, Paul
Wareing, Robert N
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Bob Russell and
Mr. Andrew Stunell.

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read the Third time, and passed.

Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill (Money)

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

10.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): I beg to move,

> That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Housing Benefit (Withholding of Payment) Bill it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—
>
> (a) any expenditure incurred by the Secretary of State under or by virtue of the Act, and
>
> (b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided by virtue of any other Act.

The motion concerns the private Member's Bill promoted by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). On Second Reading, I welcomed the Bill on behalf of the Government. I said that we were sympathetic to its objectives and content for it to proceed into Committee. That was then agreed by the House.

There was clear agreement from all sides about the scale of the problems caused by antisocial behaviour and the so-called "neighbour from hell" problem. Unfortunately, it is something that we all see in our constituencies. The Bill offers a new approach to the problem which we are keen to explore.

However, I also made it clear that the Bill would need substantial amendment to make it technically workable and to address human rights concerns. I said that we would work with my right hon. Friend to try to resolve those points. We have been doing that, and I hope that in Committee next week we will be able to debate this thoroughly.

For that reason, I do not propose to talk about the details of the Bill today. In any case, my right hon Friend is unable to be here. He has asked me to pass on his apologies to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to the House.

One essential point is that this Bill is designed to be an additional weapon in the fight against antisocial behaviour. It is meant to be neither the sole solution nor the main solution. However, this Bill might send the message that the right to support from the state is linked to the responsibility to behave appropriately.

We are tabling this motion because it is likely that the Bill—whatever precise form it took—would lead to additional expenditure for my Department and for local authorities, which administer housing benefit. The costs involved would depend on the shape of the Bill at the end of the Committee stage. However, we felt that it would be prudent to seek this resolution tonight. I commend it to the House.

10.14 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): As the Minister rightly said, this is the money resolution for the private Member's Bill promoted by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field). Sadly, he cannot be present for this debate.

The Bill will permit the Secretary of State to withhold payments of housing benefit in certain circumstances because of antisocial behaviour. The resolution is concerned with authorising expenditure, and I appreciate that if I were to venture into a debate about the merits and the substance of the Bill you would soon rule me out of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. However, in the light of the Minister's comments, it will be helpful if I point out that we share the Bill's objectives. When it had its Second Reading, it received a general welcome from my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), who spoke on behalf of the Opposition.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): A very great man.

Mr. Clappison: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. As the House well knows, my right hon. Friend is also a caring man. No doubt because of his caring nature, he gave the Bill a warm welcome. However, it was not just that. He shares our concern with the problem that the Minister described. The problem of antisocial behaviour affects many of our constituents—it plagues law-abiding and decent people.

The Minister has adverted to the Bill's history and to the Government's intention to table amendments. It is useful to know that at this stage, but I gently draw the House's and the Minister's attention to the fact that the Bill received its Second Reading on 19 April. We were given to understand that it would go into Committee today. The Minister looks puzzled, but we have received notification of a change of date and that the Bill will go into Committee next Tuesday.

As of today, the only amendments that have been tabled are those in the names of myself and other Opposition Members. They were tabled a little while ago and we have yet to see any Government amendments. The Bill will go into Committee next Tuesday and Friday is a non-sitting day. Although the Minister has said that the resolution will authorise general expenditure, one would have thought that that point would have been clear when the Bill received its Second Reading. Whether or not that is the case, it is appropriate to consider how such expenditure might arise, and the nature of the amendments is important for that. However, as matters stand, we have not seen the amendments, and we do not know how extensive they will be. We gather from what the Minister said that they could be fairly extensive. We should have the opportunity to table amendments to the Government's proposals. The amendments that we have tabled already are to the Bill as it stands, but we do not know what the Government will propose.

I shall not venture into the Bill's merits, but the amendments are germane—the Minister accepted this in his remarks—to the money resolution. Although we do not wish to express anything but sympathy for the Bill's aims, we gently draw the Minister's attention to the circumstances facing us and to our wish to give the Bill proper consideration, as is our duty.

10.19 pm

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Although I and my Liberal Democrat colleagues have considerable reservations about the Bill, we think that the resolution is appropriate. The remarks of the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) about the process and procedure leading up to the Committee stage next week enhance my concern that we might end up with a Bill that is less satisfactory than it should be. Nevertheless, we shall not oppose the resolution.

10.19 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome the principle behind the Bill. People who live with neighbours from hell, as they are commonly called, should be afforded protection. However, I want to put down a marker. Housing benefit is paid from money that comes to Northern Ireland from the Treasury. I take it that the Northern Ireland Assembly will have to amend legislation because the measure relates to social legislation, which it covers. I certainly wish the proposal every speed in this place so that we do something to protect good neighbours from those who are bad.

10.20 pm

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) rightly emphasised that there is general support on both sides of the House for the principles behind the Bill. As my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) suggested, my right hon. Friend the shadow Leader of the House also supports it. He is renowned for his compassionate and caring approach—

Mr. Bercow: And generosity of spirit.

Mr. Goodman: Of course.

However, the Minister said something that is slightly puzzling and it threatens to disturb the happy consensus across the Floor of the House. The Government have introduced the money resolution but have not tabled amendments to the Bill, which received its Second Reading on 19 April. I understand, however, that its Committee stage has been delayed. The puzzle is that the Government have introduced the money resolution but we do not know what it will apply to because we do not know what the Government amendments will be. My hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere is also puzzled by that and was entitled to raise it. We are concerned and disturbed because the puzzle threatens the consensus on a popular and necessary Bill.

10.22 pm

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I have three points to add. First, I want to reinforce the contention that it is impossible to have proper scrutiny if the Government continue to table amendments at the last moment. They did that on the Adoption and Children Bill, which also had widespread support. Those amendments dealt with hugely complicated material. Many of them were welcome, but they were produced at the last minute, just before Report.

Secondly, I cannot emphasise how strongly I support a money resolution to fund the measure. My surgeries are dominated by the problems caused by antisocial behaviour. Some people may wrongly imagine that Canterbury is a leafy and comfortable part of the world, but it has a great deal of poverty. I would never identify poverty with villainy. Far from it. It is certainly true, however, that poor people suffer from the villainy of antisocial behaviour far more than the better-off. Any measure that tries to address that is welcome.

Thirdly, the particular merit of the measure, as opposed to almost all the other measures that have been introduced to tackle antisocial behaviour, is that it is specifically civil rather than criminal. The problem with criminal measures to deal with antisocial behaviour is so obvious that it

[Mr. Julian Brazier]

should not be worth explaining. However, hardly anyone has thought it through. As antisocial behaviour is by its very nature—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that we are discussing the money resolution to the Bill.

Mr. Brazier: You are right, Madam Deputy Speaker. There will inevitably be many disputes between neighbours, and I was merely observing that it is well worth spending the money on a measure that offers a civil route to solving those problems because it does not require the high standard of proof that would be necessary in criminal proceedings.

I join my hon. Friend the Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) in welcoming the money resolution. However, I am also disappointed that the Government are frustrating the scrutiny process.

10.24 pm

Malcolm Wicks: With permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will respond to the debate.

I welcome the support for the measure which has been reiterated in the House this evening. The main emphasis has been on the fact that we are all concerned to tackle antisocial behaviour because it affects so many of our constituents.

There is no discourtesy to the House in the delay in tabling our amendments. I made it clear on Second Reading that we were sympathetic to the Bill's purpose, but translating it into purposeful policy involved complexities, not least those involving the European convention on human rights. We had to take proper advice about those matters, and it would have been foolish to rush into amendments. I am sorry if the delay has inconvenienced the House, but there are reasons for our need to take careful counsel on the issue. Any amendments will be tabled, and we will be discussing these matters in Committee next week, when I hope we can have a full and frank debate.

As for Northern Ireland, these matters will be for Northern Ireland itself to decide, and it will need to debate them. We know that they affect people throughout the United Kingdom.

Again, if Members have been inconvenienced by the fact that amendments have not yet been tabled, I regret that, but this is technical and complex legal territory. We know that rushing into legislation can produce bad social policy, and no one wants that.

Finally, we discussed fully with the Bill's promoter, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), the delay in the Committee proceedings, and of course he agreed that there was a need for that slight delay.

I hope that after those words, and with the strong feeling among hon. Members that something must be done about this pressing social problem, the House will agree to the money resolution.

Question put and agreed to.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE CONVENTION

Ordered,

(1) There shall be a standing committee, called the Standing Committee on the Convention, for the consideration of reports from the United Kingdom Parliamentary Representatives to the Convention on the future of Europe.

(2) At any sitting of the standing committee, the chairman may permit the Parliamentary Representatives to make statements on the discharge of their responsibilities, and questions may then be put thereon by Members;

Provided that no proceedings under this paragraph may continue after the expiry of a period of one and a half hours from their commencement, except with the leave of the chairman.

(3) (a) At the conclusion of proceedings under the preceding paragraph, the committee shall consider only a motion proposed from the chair 'That the committee has considered the report of [date] from the United Kingdom Representatives to the Convention on the future of Europe'; and the chairman shall put any Questions necessary to dispose of the proceedings on such a motion, if not previously concluded, when the committee shall have sat for two and a half hours;

(b) The chairman shall thereupon report that the committee has considered the report of [date] from the United Kingdom Representatives to the Convention on the future of Europe, without putting any further question.

(4) (a) Notwithstanding Standing Order No. 86, the standing committee shall consist of those Members of the House nominated for the time being to the European Scrutiny Committee (appointed under Standing Order No. 143) and to the Foreign Affairs Committee (appointed under Standing Order No. 152), together with the Parliamentary Representatives to the Convention; and

(b) Any Member of the House, not being a member of the committee, may participate in the proceedings of the committee, but shall not vote or make any motion or be counted in the quorum.

(5) (a) Alternate Representatives to the Convention on the future of Europe who are members of the House of Lords may, if that House thinks fit, make such statements as are mentioned in paragraph (2) of this Order, answer questions thereon, and participate in debate on the motion made under paragraph (3), and

(b) other members of the House of Lords may participate in the committee's proceedings, but no member of that House may vote or make any motion or be counted in the quorum.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

PETITION

Stocksbridge Bypass

10.27 pm

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): I wish to bring to the attention of the House the petition of 2,000 of my constituents and others about the dangers of the Stocksbridge bypass, following the tragic deaths of Tom and Kieran Moore which brought the death toll on that road to 24. Subsequently there have been even more deaths.

The petition states:

The petitioners request that as a matter of urgency the Minister of State for Transport should implement road improvements which will make the A616 Stocksbridge bypass safer.

And the petitioners remain etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Myalgic Encephalopathy

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

10.28 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): It is my pleasure and privilege to speak tonight on the subject of myalgic encephalopathy. I do so with enthusiasm and commitment, the more so because I know that the debate will be answered by the new Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy). He has had a meteoric but thoroughly deserved rise to office. I wish him well in fulfilling his responsibilities, and in particular I look forward to what he has to say in response to my speech.

In the House since 1997, interest in ME, or chronic fatigue syndrome, has been manifested in no fewer than 116 written and oral parliamentary questions; a number of early-day motions—three, if I remember correctly, of which the most popular was the one tabled by the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) in November 1997, which attracted no fewer than 164 signatures; and several Adjournment debates. Of the latter, two in particular stick in my mind. The first was initiated by the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Mr. Wright), whom I am pleased to see in his place tonight. The chairman of the all-party ME group, he has devoted himself to the issue with remarkable results, and his conscientiousness has earned him the justified respect of hon. Members on both sides of the House. The other debate was introduced by the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke), who is not able to be with us tonight; he spoke on 6 February this year, to telling effect.

My motivation is straightforward: the ME Association, which is one of at least six such organisations and does pioneering and appreciated work in the field, recently moved its headquarters from Essex to my Buckingham constituency—a thoroughly judicious choice of location. Its offices are on the Buckingham industrial park. I said that I wanted to support the association in its work, and I meant it. I pay tribute to the efforts of its chairman, Ian Franklin, its new chief executive, Val Hockey, its public relations and communications manager, Tony Britton, and the excellent medical adviser to the association, Dr. Charles Shepherd.

There has been a long-standing argument about the cause of ME or chronic fatigue syndrome, but about its appalling symptoms and consequences there can be no doubt. Due not least to the work of the hon. Member for Great Yarmouth, it is now, I am pleased and relieved to be able to say, a clinically diagnosed condition. It is severe and potentially disabling, resulting in muscle and joint pain, sleep disorder, sore throat and enlarged glands, and loss of balance, concentration and memory; it can cause intolerance of food, alcohol and even light. The House and the wider public must understand that ME sufferers experience sheer exhaustion and excruciating pain. Those are often the daily endurance and harrowing ordeals of sufferers, who can be afflicted by the illness at any time of their lives. A quarter of ME sufferers suffer depression as a result of their affliction.

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury): My wife suffers from ME. In addition to the crippling illness and symptoms that my hon. Friend has graphically described, one of the problems that my wife faces is that it is not understood that ME is a disease that often affects highly capable and very active people. I am sure she would want me to emphasise that to the House tonight.

Mr. Bercow: My hon. Friend is absolutely right—ME can strike someone at any time of their life and its effects can be variable and unpredictable. People can be well one day, and the next day be incapable of performing the most personal and simple task. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making that point.

It is estimated that there are about 4,000 cases of ME per million of the population. The *Effective Health Care* bulletin recently speculated, with some authority, that ME sufferers comprise between 0.4 and 2.6 per cent. of the UK population. Millions of days are lost to ME in the workplace each year. The monetary impact is estimated to be about £4 billion. A 1997 study relating to schoolchildren found that ME was the single most common cause of absence from school.

However, there have been good developments. The establishment of the working group on chronic fatigue syndrome or ME was one such positive development. Set up by the Department of Health in late 1998 and chaired by Professor Allen Hutchinson, director of public health at the school of health and related research at Sheffield university, the working group was given important duties and has discharged them to admirable effect. The working group's terms of reference obliged it

> "to review management and practice in the field of . . . ME with the aim of providing best practice guidance for professionals, patients and carers to improve the quality of care and treatment for people with . . . ME."

The group produced its findings on 11 January this year in relation to the diagnosis of the disease, its management and its treatment. There were several conclusions, with which the Minister will be broadly familiar. It was concluded that health care professionals should recognise the chronic character of the disease and co-operate with affected parties. Early diagnosis, instead of a third of people having to wait 18 months or more to be diagnosed, is viewed as a priority. There is a crucial imperative for clinical evaluation and follow-up, preferably by multidisciplinary teams. The quality of support from GPs in co-ordinating strategies and then, where necessary, making appropriate referrals to specialists must be part of the mix.

The focus on domiciliary services should not be ignored either. There is a role for therapeutic strategies. Some of them—cognitive behaviour therapy and graded exercise—have come to be extremely controversial. That is why many experts think that there should be a new emphasis on pacing, which will require a commitment from Government and other agencies. There is a role for patients in the management and treatment of their condition. There is an overriding need, on which everybody, from whatever side of the argument, agrees, for more research, not least into the physical causes of the affliction. In relation to children, it is thought that care is best co-ordinated by an appropriate specialist—usually a paediatrician.

I think it is a positive development that that work has been done and that we now have the endorsement of the chief medical officer, Sir Liam Donaldson, for the

[Mr. Bercow]

proposition that this is a recognised disease. The days in which it was pejoratively and offensively dismissed as yuppie flu, and as something whose resolution required people simply to get their act together, are rapidly being consigned to the dustbin of history.

I hope, however, that the Minister will understand that I want to put a number of particular questions to him. I do so making it absolutely clear that this matter is not a party political football as far as I am concerned. The Government have done considerable good work on this subject, so I am not cavilling at them, but performing the proper role of a constituency Member of Parliament as well as an Opposition Member in seeking to encourage still greater efforts from the Administration.

Who is now on the scientific advisory panel established by the Medical Research Council? The chief medical officer and the Government want the MRC to have such an independent panel and to produce a strategy. I think it was originally expected that that strategy would be produced by the end of February. Later, in debates both in the other place and here, it was suggested that we would hear further from the MRC in spring this year. We are now, even by the most elastic definition, into the summer, and a good deal that we had expected has not yet been forthcoming.

What patient involvement will there be in the work of the MRC? When will its biomedical and health services research strategy be finalised, announced and started? Does the Minister agree with me—and, I suspect, other hon. Members in all parts of the House—that the matter is pressing because too little is known about the aetiology and pathogenesis of ME? What use are the Government making of the ME Association's booklet "ME/CFS/PVFS: An Exploration of the Key Clinical Issues", which is authoritative and is designed to be useful to them in communicating to all the agencies, including general practitioners, good and effective practice?

What assessment has the Minister made of the levels of primary, secondary and tertiary care, and what plans does he have, on the strength of his few days in his important post, for their improvement? In the light of the fact that another Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), declared at column 1008W on 12 March this year that there was merit in the development of clinical learning networks at local level, can he advise the House whether there has been any progress on that subject? Is it his judgment that such work should be undertaken before, after or concurrently with the formulation of the MRC strategy?

Has the incapacity benefit handbook for medical service doctors been changed? The Minister will know—if he does not, that is excusable and he will soon be informed about the matter—that there is great anxiety that, in the past, not recognising the disease meant unfairness for sufferers who tried to get the benefits to which most of us now believe they are entitled. Has the handbook been revised? Has the changed decision, the new attitude and the reformed culture been communicated to the people who determine whether sufferers get that to which they are entitled? Is the Minister satisfied that people are getting what they are due?

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the Adjournment debate. Despite the chief medical officer's deliberations and findings, does not the hon. Gentleman believe that great problems remain locally because some GPs continue to fail to recognise ME as an illness?

Mr. Bercow: I do. I say in no frivolous spirit that I was guilty—I frequently am—of seriously understating my case. I brought a delicacy of touch and natural kindness to bear in my remarks. I should have stated more bluntly that the Government should not only provide advice and communicate the new culture to GPs but put their foot to the backsides of those who have consistently misunderstood and displayed insensitivity towards people suffering badly at a difficult time in their lives. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown), whose point of view on the subject I share. Much remains to be done.

Does the Minister acknowledge that the ME Association is playing its part through funding a major study by Dr. Derek Pheby, director of applied epidemiology at the university of the West of England, under the auspices of the Ramsay Research Fund? It is designed to consider factors that might explain ME that is so chronic that victims become housebound or even bed-bound.

Will the Minister visit the information centre that the ME Association is developing in my constituency? I do not know how he can resist such a gracious entreaty only days after his appointment. I should be delighted to act as host. He knows from my remarks that the invitation is made in a non-partisan spirit. The issue is too big for political games. I should be delighted to welcome him if his busy schedule permits him to make such a visit at some stage. I know how pleased the ME Association would be.

Sir Liam Donaldson accepted the conclusions of the working group report on the subject without exception. They represented a milestone. Genuine progress has been made and there is no time to let up. We must not hold back; we need to consolidate and build on the progress. The evil of chronic fatigue syndrome must not be compounded, through errors of commission or omission, by chronic delay syndrome.

I am pleased to encourage the Minister, who well deserved his promotion as I said earlier, in the work that must follow. I look forward enthusiastically to his reply.

10.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) for his remarks and I congratulate him on securing the Adjournment debate. It is my first Adjournment debate as a Minister and I am pleased that it is on such an important subject as ME and chronic fatigue syndrome.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned several detailed matters and he will forgive me if I reply to some of his substantive points in writing. However, I hope that most of my comments will tackle the important issues that he raised.

I welcome the debate, not least because it provides an opportunity for us to state clearly our policy on chronic fatigue syndrome and ME more generally. I want to begin by acknowledging how distressing and debilitating the condition can be for individuals, their carers and their families. The hon. Gentleman was quite right to illustrate how debilitating this condition can be for individuals, and the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) described very clearly the effects of the disease on his wife.

In January, an independent working group reported on ME. It is quite clear from the report that some patients have found it very difficult to get the treatment and care they need to help them to manage their illness and to make a recovery. We now want to move to a situation in which everyone with ME gets the treatment and care that they need, when and where they need it. I know from my own constituency that not only patients but the voluntary organisations that serve them are anxious that the momentum created by the publication of the independent working group's report should not be lost. I would like to assure hon. Members that we are aware of these anxieties, and I hope to address them in my speech.

It is fair to say that this is a controversial area, and that many in the field have different views on the nature of this very debilitating complaint. However, harnessing the views of patients, parents, families and carers to underpin the guidance was afforded high priority by the working group. The group aimed to capture views from individuals with special interests or expertise, and from a wider constituency, and to structure that material to reflect the range of opinion.

On the basis of that opinion, I want to make it absolutely clear that the Government endorse the view of the working group that this is a chronic illness. Health and social care professionals should recognise it as such. We welcome the publication of the report as the start of a process of improving awareness and understanding of ME. I acknowledge that the working group was faced with a difficult task. There is widespread uncertainty surrounding this condition, along with disbelief and controversy about its existence, and disagreement about the best way to treat it.

Four key challenges face clinicians caring for people with ME. First, there are no agreed diagnostic criteria. Diagnosis is often made by eliminating other conditions through a series of tests. There is agreement, however, that overwhelming fatigue is one symptom that characterises ME. There is a continuing debate about which other factors should be taken into account when making a diagnosis.

Secondly, we do not currently know the cause of ME, although there are many theories about that. Research has demonstrated immune, musculoskeletal and neurological abnormalities, and shown that physical, psychological and other factors are interrelated and all play a role. Thirdly, there is no one form of treatment to suit every patient, but treatment to relieve the wide variety of symptoms that individuals can experience is a matter for individual doctors to decide in consultation with their patients.

Finally, we are aware that there is controversy about some of the approaches used for managing ME. It is clear that the task ahead is to ask all the stakeholders in this field to work together to establish what treatment, or combination of treatments, will best help patients to get better, or at least relieve their symptoms.

The potential to develop service networks between the various stages of care—tertiary, secondary and primary—alongside primary care trusts and strategic health authorities is also important. This would improve access to the skills, experience and resources of secondary and tertiary centres, and incorporate the principles of shared care.

The report was not intended to be a comprehensive clinical guideline, and has not been developed as such. A referral to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to provide guidance on management and treatment is being considered. Thought needs to be given to what is the most appropriate clinical tool for helping patients with this condition.

An audit, a referral protocol or a guideline might best meets the needs of patients with ME. These matters need to be discussed in some detail with the national institute. It would be better to consider all the evidence, rather than to rush in and create a guideline that may turn out to be wrong in the short term.

Mr. Anthony D. Wright (Great Yarmouth): I take on board the point that the Minister has just made about referral to NICE. Is he aware that such a referral sometimes takes up to two years? The length of time that it sometimes takes to come to the working group is too long. We need to speed up the process. Bearing in mind the seriousness of the issue, will he give a commitment to consider that problem, and to try to deal with it as a matter of urgency?

Mr. Lammy: As a new Minister, I shall of course give a commitment to consider that issue. This is a complicated area. The report is substantial and makes serious recommendations. The consultation with NICE is being considered at the moment, and I hope that in due course I can come back to my hon. Friend with some conclusions about where we are at now.

We will also ensure that the external reference groups that will develop the two national service frameworks for children's services and adults with long-term conditions consider this report and its recommendations for improving treatment and care.

Within those frameworks, ME may not be considered as a specific condition. However, the NSFs will address some of the generic issues affecting the management of illness in childhood and adolescence and long-term medical conditions in adults. NSFs set standards for treatment and care, and support health and social care professionals in the delivery of high quality services.

I want to address some of the points that the hon. Member for Buckingham raised. He referred to the Medical Research Council. I understand that earlier today senior members of the MRC appeared before the all-party parliamentary group on ME. They described the process that the MRC is using to develop a research strategy for ME.

Hon. Members will recall that, following the publication of the independent working party report on ME, the Department of Health asked the MRC to develop a broad strategy for advancing biomedical and health services research on chronic fatigue syndrome and ME. The MRC has now assembled a small group to develop this research strategy. The group comprises individuals who are not active in the CFS field but have the requisite scientific expertise. They will be joined by lay members drawn from the MRC consumer liaison group and others to take this issue forward.

[Mr. Lammy]

The proposed terms of reference for the group are to consider the report of the working party on ME, including its recommendations for research; to consider other recent reviews—the hon. Gentleman referred to one—of the current knowledge and understanding of ME; to take account of patient and lay perspectives; to recommend a research strategy to advance understanding of the epidemiology and biology of ME; and in the light of current knowledge to suggest what areas of further research are needed with regard to possible treatments.

I understand that the MRC hopes to conclude the process by the end of the year, but it recognises that the consultation steps may require slightly more time than previously anticipated. The MRC considers it vital that the process is not rushed. I can provide the hon. Gentleman with a list of the membership of that group if he so wishes.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the issue of benefits for ME sufferers, and I realise that that is a sensitive area. The Department for Work and Pensions recognises that ME is a debilitating illness. However, entitlement to benefit is dependent not on claimants having any particular diagnosis, but on their care and mobility needs in the case of disability living allowance or on the illness's effect on their ability to perform prescribed work-related functions in their assessment.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: May I stress that ME can lead to a patient being unable to walk?

Mr. Lammy: I am sympathetic, and assessments are made relating to such factors as mobility. The hon. Gentleman may be aware, however—I know this from the report, which I have with me and which I read at some length in the Library earlier today—that there is a spectrum of diagnosis. It is therefore right for a proper benefit analysis to be made, and for full account to be taken of the variety of debilitating effects that the disease can have.

Clinicians face challenges, and we agree that the working group has provided an evidence base from which to start. We fully support the need for more research on a wide range of aspects of ME, and we have asked the Medical Research Council to develop a strategy; I have mentioned the terms of reference. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware of a long-standing and important principle of successive Governments—that Governments should not prescribe the details of what research councils should do. The Department is considering the benefit aspects in depth, but benefit will rather depend on the spectrum of complaints that an individual may have.

Mr. Bercow: I understand the Minister's point of view, but does he accept that, historically, the bias of research projects has tended to be towards psychiatric explanations of the disease rather than its physical causes?

Mr. Lammy: I think it would be wrong for me to comment on the science of what is a complex disease. I am not a physician. We have a working report, which is being studied.

As I have said, there are many views on this complex complaint. What is important is that the Government take it seriously, that clinicians, general practitioners, primary care trusts and strategic health authorities—among others—take it seriously, and that consultation takes place with NICE. I hope to return to the hon. Gentleman in due course with news of that. Moreover, the Medical Research Council is engaged in a strategic study of the issues.

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at two minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 13 June 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

LONDON DEVELOPMENT AGENCY BILL (*BY ORDER*)

Order for Second Reading Read.

To be read a Second time on Thursday 20 June.

Oral Answers to Questions

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

The Secretary of State was asked—

EU Enlargement

1. **David Cairns** (Greenock and Inverclyde): What assessment she has made of the impact on British business of EU enlargement. [58215]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): European Union enlargement will benefit British business by creating the largest single market in the world, with nearly 500 million consumers, and a level playing field for business across Europe.

Yesterday, I urged British business to seize the opportunities created by EU enlargement at a joint Foreign and Commonwealth Office/Department of Trade and Industry business press briefing.

David Cairns: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that answer. She will be aware that tremendous goodwill towards the United Kingdom exists throughout the applicant countries. In fact, they would rather do business with the UK than with any of our competitors. She also knows, however, that those new jobs will not fall into our laps but have to be earned. In addition to the advice that she gave yesterday, will she outline what further advice and support the UK Government are able to give to British businesses to ensure that they can fully exploit the undoubted potential that will arise post-enlargement?

Miss Johnson: We have given a wide range of advice and much help to British business. Indeed, as a result of British Trade International's opportunity central Europe campaign, an extra 1,000 companies registered an interest in being involved in central Europe—that is in addition to the 15,000 companies that Trade Partners UK estimates are already exporting to or investing in the region. The website that I launched yesterday provides a number of links to key support and help for firms interested in that development.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): I am sure that the hon. Lady is right when she says that we can only benefit by enlargement of the European Union, but the question concerned what assessment she has made. Is she aware that the Minister for Europe told me in a parliamentary written answer that the Government have made no assessment, nor have they any intention of ever making one, on the costs or the benefits of our membership of the European Union, whether it be enlarged or not? Will she please go to her colleague, the Minister for Europe, who is responsible for these matters, and ask that the Foreign Office for the first time conduct such an assessment without any further delay?

Miss Johnson: The hon. Gentleman is talking about membership of the European Union, not about EU enlargement. The point is that that enlargement will create 2 million new jobs in the candidate countries, and we estimate that it will create an extra 300,000 new jobs in existing EU member states. Indeed, the estimated gain to the United Kingdom's gross domestic product is £1.75 billion.

Michael Fabricant: Where does that figure come from?

Miss Johnson: It is from independent research conducted in 1997.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): Does my hon. Friend agree that our country's many creative industries, for example film and broadcasting, are one of the areas of British business that would greatly benefit from EU enlargement into central Europe? I am sure that she is aware of the excellent proposals that the British Council is putting forward to allow our creative industries to expand their contacts and networks in central and eastern Europe. Will she join me in welcoming those proposals and could she give her Department's support for them?

Miss Johnson: Indeed I can join my hon. Friend in welcoming that initiative. It is another example of the many benefits that will accrue to us and the industries concerned through enlargement. The Department will give its full support for just that sort of enlargement activity.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): I have been a pro-European for 40 years, enthusiastic about enlargement as it will underpin the emerging democracies of eastern Europe, but will the Minister take into account the problem that the one-size-fits-all single currency implies a huge transfer of funds from the more successful economic regions of Europe to the less successful, such as my region in the north-east? Would not enlargement make that problem that much more difficult to solve?

Miss Johnson: As I said, there will be real gains both to the candidate countries and to existing EU member states because of the economic benefits of enlargement for all parties. Obviously, it is a matter for individual countries that accede to the EU under enlargement when and how they join the euro, just as that is a matter for debate and consideration in this country.

Coal Industry

2. **Paddy Tipping** (Sherwood): What estimate she has made of the amount of coal produced in the UK during the last financial year. [58216]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The UK coal industry produced a total of 32.8 million tonnes, including slurry, in the last financial year. Deep mines produced 18.1 million tonnes and opencast sites produced 14.2 million tonnes.

Paddy Tipping: Does the Secretary of State agree that the current coal aid operating scheme has helped to sustain that level of production? She will know that the scheme finishes on 23 July. Will she outline the very welcome new framework agreed only last week by the EU, and does she propose any measures to link the two schemes—the one that finishes on 23 July and the new one that will come into effect in 2003?

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend about the enormous help that the existing coal aid scheme has given to enable pits to survive the difficult price and trading conditions that existed between 1999 and last year. I am also delighted that last week at the Energy Council we agreed a new framework for support for the coal industry, including a new framework for investment aid—something that my hon. Friend has been pushing for and for which we argued strongly. We are urgently considering how to take advantage of that new framework in order to ensure the future survival and success of our coal industry.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): The Secretary of State may be aware that the management of Betws colliery in my constituency are meeting her officials this afternoon to inform them of imminent mass redundancies at Betws colliery in the absence of continued support after 23 July. Can she confirm that the option of extending the existing scheme until the end of the year is still under consideration, and that Ministers will meet the management at Betws before any final decision is taken?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Construction is himself meeting the management and work force at Betws colliery shortly. That is in addition to the meetings with officials that are already taking place. I must stress to the hon. Gentleman that Betws colliery has already received nearly £3 million in coal operating aid which, under the terms of the operating aid scheme, was granted on the understanding and condition that the mine, like other mines, was viable beyond July 2002. Of course we are looking at all the options and we will discuss the issue with management before final decisions are made.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that there will be a continuing problem with the coal industry in providing money that, in some ways, finishes up in the back pocket of the owners? We decided in respect of Railtrack, some time ago, that we should not continue to pour public money into the pockets of the shareholders who were making a fortune out of it. Would it not make a lot more sense when we save the coal industry—or the remnants of the Tory operations of the past 18 years—to take it back into public ownership? We could buy the shares for a song; we would not be putting money into the pockets of the shareholders; and the chances of survival would be much greater than if we leave the industry to people who are concerned only about themselves.

Ms Hewitt: I am sorry to disappoint my hon. Friend by saying that renationalisation of the remaining pits is not actually on the Government's agenda, but he makes a very important point about the danger, with some forms of aid, of subsidising companies rather than ensuring the future of the work force. There are difficult decisions to be made, especially in the case of those pits where geology makes it impossible for the pit to have a viable economic future. We are working closely with the industry and its work force to deal with those situations.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Does the Secretary of State agree that the net effect of the EU Council meeting and the new framework announced recently is that the Germans can subsidise their coal industry, in effect, by billions until 2010, which will result in subsidised coal and electricity coming into this country, affecting our own producers and suppliers?

Ms Hewitt: No. The Germans certainly pour a great deal of public money into their coal industry but none of that subsidised coal is exported, and we have worked closely with the Commission to ensure that there is no distortion that would undercut our own coal industry.

Mr. Michael Clapham (Barnsley, West and Penistone): I heard my right hon. Friend's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner), but may I point out that Tower colliery, which is owned by the men, is more successful? Within the framework for new aid, will my right hon. Friend consider the involvement of the Coal Authority so that proper direction can be given to the investment that will follow the new aid scheme?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes a very important point about the success of Tower colliery. Of course we will consider the point he raises in deciding what kind of investment aid support we may be able to put in place under the new framework that we have successfully negotiated.

Company Directors

3. **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): What measures can be taken against company directors who persistently default in their financial and legal responsibilities. [58218]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): A number of measures can be taken, including investigating the company and disqualifying and/or prosecuting the company's directors.

Mr. Jack: I am grateful to the Minister for her answer. A constituent of mine has been the victim of a serial liquidator, as has Customs and Excise. During the past few years, the individual concerned has put five companies into liquidation, leaving my constituent out of pocket by some £20,000 and Customs by £38,000, yet nothing seems to have been done so far to stop that individual continually walking away from his obligations.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Name him.

Mr. Jack: I am advised that, if I do as my hon. Friend suggests, the individual could well go to ground, thus making it more difficult for the authorities to get hold of him. May I ask the Minister, first, what powers can be deployed to deal with such people and, secondly, whether, if I furnish her with a file of the cases that I have in mind, she will give me an undertaking to investigate them with all speed?

Miss Johnson: I take the right hon. Gentleman's comments very seriously. Such cases need to be looked at, and I will, of course, ask the appropriate authorities to look into any details that he can furnish me with so that the matter can be dealt with appropriately.

In relation to the further issue that the right hon. Gentleman raises about the forms of redress and penalty that can be used, there are a number of different ways to tackle such issues. Obviously, directors can be disqualified as being unfit—indeed, 12,000 have been since the Insolvency Act 1986 was put in place, and in the year to March 2002, 1,750 directors have been disqualified. Companies can also be wound up and other measures can be taken, as I said earlier.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): I hear what my hon. Friend says, but will she also bear it in mind that one of the problems that small businesses have faced in recent years has been the culture of blame attached to insolvency? The Government have been trying to change that culture so that businesses and those who finance them are prepared to take a chance on people, so that we get a better balance. Always focusing on the defaulters when businesses go wrong is to get the balance wrong. The focus should be on trying to help people back into business. Those who deserve punishment should get it, but the emphasis must be on supporting those businesses that get into difficulty.

Miss Johnson: I completely agree with my hon. Friend on this issue; it is a matter of striking the right balance. Indeed, that is what we shall do through the current Enterprise Bill, which will be considered on Report later today. In fact, we are considering making a distinction between bankruptcy for those who are not reckless and those subject to bankruptcy restriction orders, which can last for between two and 15 years and will recognise the reckless nature of bankruptcy where that occurs. In that way, a distinction can be made between those who have unwittingly become bankrupt and should be given a fair chance to start again without stigmatisation and those who rightly should be stigmatised and kept from running companies because of their previous track records.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Does not the Minister agree that the Government's proposals in the Enterprise Bill to make bankruptcy easier, to remove the stigma from it and dramatically to reduce the scope for investigating bankruptcies will make it easier for rogues or well-intentioned incompetents to leave a trail of financial wreckage in their wake?

Miss Johnson: That is absolute nonsense, for the reasons that I have given in answering my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill). The hon. Gentleman misses the point: there are penalties of between two and 15 years under bankruptcy restriction orders. Indeed, in relation to the remarks made by the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), the previous record of bankrupts will be taken into consideration by the courts in looking at bankruptcy restriction orders, so serial bankrupts will be very much an issue for those in the courts who consider imposing bankruptcy restriction orders and the very serious penalties that they involve.

Social Enterprises

4. **Mr. Colin Challen** (Morley and Rothwell): What plans she has to support social enterprises in the UK. [58219]

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Stephen Timms): We are preparing a Government strategy for social enterprise at the moment. We want an environment in which social enterprises flourish, because of their benefits in boosting productivity and competitiveness, in contributing to the regeneration of communities and in developing new ways of delivering public services.

Mr. Challen: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. I congratulate the Government on setting up the national social enterprise unit, which is a great initiative. I want to tackle the issue at a local level and have us focus on what happens on, say, council estates, many of which were designed in the 1960s and 1970s with no provision for the possibility of enterprise. They consist of just housing and perhaps one pub, one chippy and one shop.

We need to consider how we can build the capacity of local populations. I want the Government to consider how joined-up thinking might help local people create accredited community safety schemes in the social enterprise arena. In considering capacity-building structures, we ought to look at places such as west Yorkshire where, for example, there is no co-operative development agency for local people to consult.

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend makes some important points. Our aim is for enterprise to be centre stage in community regeneration in every part of the country, particularly in some of the areas with the characteristics that he describes. We want in every area a sustainable base for business and jobs in order to provide income and services for people locally. We see social enterprises alongside conventional enterprises as key to bringing communities out of decline. That will be at the heart of our social enterprise strategy, which will be published in the summer. A wide cross-section of the social enterprise sector has been involved in working on that.

I agree with my hon. Friend about increasing capacity through community development finance intermediaries, and of course the community investment tax credit in the Budget will be helpful in achieving that.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): Does my hon. Friend agree that post offices are a very good example of social enterprises benefiting the local community? Will he assure me that the announcement this morning by Allan Leighton—now, I am pleased to say, of Royal Mail—will not lead to further closures of post offices in rural areas and market towns?

Mr. Timms: I agree with my hon. Friend about the importance of post offices in rural areas. We have made it clear that we are absolutely committed to the postal network. Post offices provide a lifeline in many of the communities to which she refers. That is why we placed a formal requirement on the Post Office to maintain the rural network and to prevent avoidable closures. That is not affected in any way by the announcement this morning. Of course, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State will have more to say about the Post Office in a few minutes.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): I recently visited three businesses in Aberdeen—Printability, Turning Point and Square One—which have adopted the social enterprise model to deliver work placements for people with mental health problems. I was very impressed by what I saw. It should be a model for the future as it not only provides a supportive work environment but keeps people out of hospital, gives them an important role in society and eases them back into work. What help can the Government give to such enterprises to ensure the provision of that valuable work and that the schemes fit the model of welfare to work for disabled people put forward by the Department for Work and Pensions?

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend describes an excellent example of exactly what we want to encourage with the social enterprise strategy, which will be published in the summer. We are taking a range of measures to encourage such enterprise. As she says, the benefits are in providing employment opportunities and in delivering services to local communities, often where those services are not available otherwise. That will be the aim at the heart of the strategy. I draw her attention to the community investment tax credit, which will be a big help in that regard, although there will be a number of other measures in the strategy. I would be interested to know more about the example in her area.

Cefn Croes Wind Farm

5. **Mr. Roger Williams** (Brecon and Radnorshire): If she will make a statement on the Cefn Croes wind farm application. [58220]

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): Consent was granted on 23 May. Copies of the decision letter are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Williams: I thank the Minister for that reply, but I am sure he will accept that there is considerable disquiet in Wales about the way in which the application was handled. Groups of people still wish to contest the decision. However, I wish to move on.

There is cross-party support in the National Assembly for Wales for decisions on all power stations to be devolved to the National Assembly. I believe that there is considerable cross-party support for that in this House as well. Is the Minister willing to enter into discussions with the Secretary of State for Wales and appropriate Ministers in the National Assembly to see how devolution of decision making could be achieved? Will he report back on the outcome of those discussions?

Mr. Wilson: The short answer to the main part of the hon. Gentleman's question is yes. The discussions are going on.

This issue remained a reserved matter at the time of devolution because the transmission system for England and Wales operates as one. Therefore, it was more appropriate to deal with it on an England and Wales-wide basis. Scotland has a separate grid system, so responsibility for it was devolved to Scotland.

Discussions are going on to get the balance right, and I have no strong feelings about the issue. The current system depends on the way in which devolution was arranged. If it is suitable to change it at some future time, let us look at that. However, at the moment, we operate within the rules as they are laid down.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): The Minister will know that I supported this application which is in my constituency. However, the way the application was decided left a sour taste in the mouths of many people in my area and it left many people in Wales feeling that they had been treated as infant children who were not able to take planning decisions for themselves.

I welcome what the Minister has just said about looking at the issue again. He can do that at the stroke of a pen. In the previous Session, I introduced a Bill to change the electricity legislation and to allow changes to happen, so I hope he will consider that to see how he might easily change the system. Notwithstanding the applications that will come to him from my constituency and elsewhere in south Wales, will he give an undertaking that this is the last time he will take such a decision and that in future he will leave it to the people of Wales to decide?

Mr. Wilson: The hon. Gentleman is having his wind farm and eating it. He agrees with the decision, but he is moaning about the way in which it was taken. I am a strong believer in local democracy and an important point is the fact that the local authority voted 18:3 in favour of the wind farm. That fact is totally ignored in most of the coverage of the issue—all that is talked about is the vociferous minority who have better access to the media and, indeed, to the House of Lords. I make no apology for the decision or the democratic input into it.

I am not suggesting that the present system is wrong. I have given the rational basis for it, but other, wider factors are coming into play to create a UK-wide transmission system and they might make it appropriate to consider the issue in a different context.

Gender Pay Gap

6. **Julie Morgan** (Cardiff, North): What plans she has to address the pay gap between men and women. [58221]

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): As well as the Equal Pay Act 1970 and the provisions in the Employment Bill to strengthen the Act, we have the national minimum wage and we are spreading good practice on equal pay through the fair pay champions and castle awards. On top of that, all Departments will carry out an equality audit by April 2003 and we taking forward recommendations from the Kingsmill report.

Julie Morgan: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. I am sure she is aware that in Wales women's hourly earnings are 87 per cent. of men's. As the pay reviews are voluntary, can she tell me what the Government are doing to encourage employers in the public and private sectors to undertake them so that we have a detailed picture of the gap?

Ms Hewitt: I welcome the progress that has been made in Wales where the pay gap is somewhat narrower than it is in other parts of the country. As I said, we are taking a lead in the public sector by ensuring that equality audits take place in all Departments and agencies. We have also given the Equal Opportunities Commission an extra £100,000 to do work with employers to ensure that effective tools are available to them to carry out the pay reviews which are a fairly new idea. I welcome the fact that many private sector employers have already started to carry out those pay reviews to uncover the real underlying problems that give rise to the persistent pay gap.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the right hon. Lady confirm that the equal opportunities policy extends to the highest levels of Government? In that regard, will she say whether there are any unpaid lady Ministers? If there are not, would not it give rise to a claim to the Equal Opportunities Commission from unpaid male Ministers?

Ms Hewitt: There is rightly a statutory limit on the number of ministerial salaries at the Prime Minister's disposal. I understand that there is an unpaid Minister who is a man and, in the past, at least one unpaid Minister was a woman. I do not think that that situation will give rise to a claim for unequal pay.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): A new report shows that more than a third of female workers are earning more than their boyfriends or husbands. However, nine out of 10 women say that they are worn out with the demands of work and home. That suggests two things: first, that men are still not pulling their weight in the home even though their wives and girlfriends may work the same hours and have the same responsibilities; and, secondly, that not enough attention is given to the work-life balance and child care. One of the disincentives for women to go for higher-paid jobs and longer hours is the belief that the support is not available for them to balance their family life with their work life. Can I urge my right hon. Friend to ensure that that part of the picture is attended to within the Department of Trade and Industry and the economic agencies?

Ms Hewitt: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend, who raises an extremely important issue. Women who do very low-paid jobs often work at night. Their partner is at home looking after the children and they get no sleep because they have to look after the children and the home during the day. Those women face the biggest problem of juggling work and family.

Of course we are looking at how we can help women and men to balance work and family more effectively. That includes an enormous investment in child care. It also includes pressing employers to make part-time and flexible work available in the full range of jobs so that women in particular no longer face the choice of either trading down from their skills and qualifications to get the hours they want, or continuing in a job that uses their skills and qualifications properly but which does not allow them the time they need to get on with the rest of their lives.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): Can the Secretary of State say whether measures to address the pay gap between men and women will be included in the wholesale review of workers' rights, which we understand her Department is intending to undertake later this year? Can she confirm reports that that will also include consideration of full employment rights from day one and a further lowering of the threshold for trade union recognition? Is that the way in which the Secretary of State intends to meet the objective that we are told she set out to her third way colleagues at the weekend, that there should be absolutely no danger of the Labour party being seen to have too close a relationship with business?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman is a bit behind the curve. We made it plain when we introduced the Employment Relations Act 1999 that there would be a review of its provisions after it had been in force for a couple of years. We said in our manifesto last year that we would conduct that review as promised. I anticipate that we will publish a discussion document in the summer to take that review forward in full consultation, as the hon. Gentleman would expect, with employers, employees and their unions.

Mr. Whittingdale: The Secretary of State may claim that that has been forecast for a long time, but she does not seem to understand the despair in the business community that the announcement of the review has caused. The Confederation of British Industry called it "totally inappropriate" and the Forum of Private Business said that it is "completely unworkable" and "unnecessary". Is it not proof that the Government have finally given up trying even to pretend that they are seeking to relieve the burden on British business and that, instead, they have swallowed the trade union agenda hook, line and sinker?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman is talking complete rubbish. I remind him of the recent report by the Economist Intelligence Unit which found, once again, that thanks to our outstanding management of the economy and to the pro-business and pro-enterprise climate that we have created, the United Kingdom remains one of the best places in the world for entrepreneurs, ahead even of the United States of America.

End of Life Vehicles Directive

7. **Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell): If she will make a further statement on the implications of the end of life vehicles directive. [58222]

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): We continue to analyse carefully all the implications of the directive in order to ensure that we get the implementation of this complex measure right.

Chris Grayling: I thank the Minister for that response. Does he not realise that the continuing delay in establishing the premise on which vehicle manufacturers may or may not have to meet some of the costs of recycling vehicles in future is creating instability in the motor industry and uncertainty about future investment and will do the manufacturing sector in this country no favours whatever?

Mr. Wilson: No, I do not agree with any of that. I recognise the hon. Gentleman's constituency interest in this issue. I think that the company in his constituency, like every other manufacturer, will be much happier if we get this right than if we get something introduced quickly that proves to disadvantage the British motor manufacturing industry. We are in the same boat as everyone else in the European Union, where there has been delay in implementing the measure because it is complex and because it is important to get it right.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Are we to understand that under the directive it is the last owner of any vehicle who has to pay the costs of putting things right—of the destruction of the vehicle? In that case, is it not the poorest among our constituents who will have to bear those costs? Can it possibly be right that someone with an old banger should have to carry costs that should rightly be carried by the first owner, who got the vehicle new? In those circumstances, can the Department look again at a ten-minute Bill that I tried to introduce to make manufacturers responsible for the death of a vehicle at the design stage? Is not that the right way to do it?

Mr. Wilson: We are talking about two separate phases. From 2007, exactly the kind of producer liability that my hon. Friend refers to will operate. The question is how that is implemented. I think that that is a matter of particular interest to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling). We are therefore talking about an interim period until 2007. We have not made an announcement yet on how that is to be conducted, but we are anxious that during that period we do not put British manufacturers at a disadvantage relative to manufacturers in other EU states. Things may well go in the direction that my hon. Friend suggests, but the major problem of the last owner paying and the problem that already exists of cars being dumped are primarily registration problems. That must be addressed at the same time. It would have to be addressed anyway, whether the directive were coming into force or not.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): In view of that response, can the Minister explain the public claim this week by the British Motor Manufacturers Association that he has accepted its proposal for 2007 to do precisely what the hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) fears, effectively imposing a poll tax on low-income final owners of the car? Do the Government accept the judgment of the all-party Select Committee, which concluded in clear terms that such a proposal would not work "in practice" and that

> "there would be strong incentives on owners of old cars simply to abandon them"?

Does the Minister accept the reasoning, based on Home Office figures, that the current cost of abandoned cars to councils and emergency services of about £400 million would double or treble if the manufacturers' proposals were accepted?

Mr. Wilson: I think the hon. Gentleman is talking about the situation before 2007, not post-2007 when producer liability will apply, but the question implies recognition that there is already a problem with dumped cars—a very big problem in some areas. As I say, that would have to be addressed whether the directive were coming into operation or not, through action on the registration system and traceability, which is at the root of the issue. We will announce very soon what we will do in the interim period, but I stress again that the key motivator will be to ensure that British car manufacturers are not disadvantaged vis-à-vis manufacturers in other EU countries.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): My constituency, like many others, suffers from a lot of abandoned vehicles. I am told by the local fire service that some 55 vehicles a month are set on fire there. A number of small businesses are looking to help the local authority with the recycling of abandoned vehicles. Will the Minister ensure that appropriate advice is made available to such companies, so that they can carry out their duties properly under the directive?

Mr. Wilson: Absolutely, and my hon. Friend makes a couple of important points. One is that good schemes are already being operated between local authorities and the private sector in some areas. The introduction of the directive will give a further stimulus. It points to the fact that there is an existing problem that must be addressed before the directive comes into operation. We must ensure that the industry has time to adapt and that there are places where vehicles can be taken. Above all, we must ensure that there is a strong disincentive to dumping. That approach will be effective only if it is possible to trace owners. Measures must go hand in hand. We must make sure that there is a penalty that can be applied if people dump vehicles.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): It has been reported that the Government are to delay imposing the burden of the end of life vehicles directive on the motor industry until at least 2007. Is it not inevitably the conclusion that in saving the motor industry

£450 million a year by leaving responsibility with last owners of vehicles, the Government are effectively imposing a £450 million highly regressive tax on motorists who are least able to pay it—those who are driving end-of-life vehicles? Can the Minister honestly tell the House that he thinks that that is the best way to tackle the problem of abandoned vehicles?

Mr. Wilson: The best way to tackle the problem is what will happen from 2007, when there is producer liability. It is an interesting view from the Tory party if the hon. Gentleman is saying that we should be immediately penalising British motor manufacturers vis-à-vis their competitors on the continent.

The basic point is that the directive is a good thing. It will lead to a large increase in recycling in this country. If properly implemented, alongside the measures on traceability, it will get rid of the growing social and environmental problem of dumped burnt-out cars in our community.

Small Businesses

8. **Mr. Wayne David** (Caerphilly): What further measures she is taking to tackle the problems caused to small businesses by late payment of invoices. [58224]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Nigel Griffiths): The Government take the issue of late payment very seriously. That is why from 7 August we are giving all businesses a new right to claim interest on late payments, a new right to claim a fixed sum of compensation for debt recovery costs, and a new right to have a trade federation or other appropriate organisation to challenge any attempt contractually to reduce the right to statutory interest.

Mr. David: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. I am pleased that the third phase of the 1998 legislation is being introduced. Will my hon. Friend say how effective current legislation has been in reducing late payments?

Nigel Griffiths: The latest information that we have from the European business survey by Grant Thornton confirms that the average time taken to pay invoices is down from 50 days before legislation came into effect to 41 days. That is a cut of almost 20 per cent.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I warmly welcome the Minister's response to the main question, but does he not agree that smaller businesses are squeezed at both ends? Often, a large business will squeeze them because it uses them as what I would call a cash-flow till. At the other end of the scale, the banks levy substantial charges against smaller businesses. Is it not important that we ensure that the acorns that we hope will produce the big businesses of the future are allowed to use their money to expand, rather than allowing bigger companies to use them as a cash-flow mechanism?

Nigel Griffiths: The hon. Member puts the point well. I think that the whole House greatly welcomed the action taken by the Secretary of State in ensuring that there was a proper inquiry into bank practices. The banks have been instructed to modify those practices to the benefit of small businesses.

The hon. Member is also right about the issue of a minority of irresponsible large businesses who regrettably seem to follow the advice of a former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, then President of the Board of Trade, in his previous business career of delaying payment to the last possible moment. That is deplorable advice, and it is not the advice being given by the Government.

John Mann (Bassetlaw): The small business community will undoubtedly welcome that further improvement. Some of the worst culprits [illegible] Government Departments and agencies. Will the Minister monitor them and name and shame those that cost the Exchequer money because of interest levied as a result of their failure to pay up on time?

Nigel Griffiths: Yes, and my hon. Friend makes a particularly good point, as we now publish information on the time that Government Departments and agencies take to pay. The target is 100 per cent. prompt payment. Government Departments and agencies achieving that now exceed 95 per cent, so there is room for improvement, but they are setting quite a good standard. However, we want them to achieve the full target.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): Does the Minister accept that beyond the changes that will take place then, the overwhelming priority for most small business organisations is the promotion of best practice in credit management rather than the imposition of new regulatory controls?

Nigel Griffiths: Of course, but small businesses and small business organisations tell me that they need tough action to back that up, perhaps contradicting the messages from one or two people, and regulations are necessary to achieve that. If we are going to introduce measures on 7 August, which the hon. Member welcomed, we need regulations. To my mind, those regulations do not impose any burdens but, I hope, help to liberate small businesses and allow them to play the vital part in the economy which the House knows they need to play.

Clean-Coal Technology

9. **Mr. Eric Illsley** (Barnsley, Central): If she will make a statement on her Department's support for clean-coal technology. [58225]

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): The Department is supporting cleaner-coal technology by providing some £17 million over the period 1999 to 2005 for research and development and technology transfer, as well as assisting with the promotion of United Kingdom exports of clean coal.

Mr. Illsley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his reply. At a time when our whole energy policy is under review, it is essential that we maintain our coal industry, especially with increasing gas prices and certain nuclear power stations coming to the end of their life. Will my hon. Friend press for more investment and the application of research and development of clean-coal technologies to provide extra markets for our coal industry?

Mr. Wilson: The short answer is yes to all of that. Clean-coal technology is important domestically—if we are to continue to have a coal industry, it must be based on cleaner coal—but it also has tremendous export potential. Probably the best thing that we could do globally for the environment is to make sure that clean coal is used in countries that are heavily dependent on coal and in most cases on old and dirty technology.

David Burnside (South Antrim): The Minister should be aware that the cleanest coal is not the black stuff but the brown stuff; it is called lignite and is used extensively by a number of our colleagues in continental Europe, especially Germany and Spain, for power production. Near my home in Ballymoney we have extensive lignite resources close to the surface; there are extensive resources in the west of my constituency at Crumlin and Lough Neagh, and there is lignite throughout the United Kingdom. Will the Minister give a commitment in any review of energy priorities that may be in production that lignite will be given precedence? Will he liaise with his colleagues in the devolved Assemblies and Parliaments to see that lignite, the clean coal, is used for power production in the UK in future?

Mr. Wilson: I am interested in what the hon. Gentleman said. In the context of the consultation on the White Paper and the emphasis on cleaner-coal technology, I am pleased to give the undertaking for which he asked.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): Does my hon. Friend agree that if the Government supported the new IGCC—integrated gasification combined cycle—for clean-coal technology in particular, that would result in a long-term future for our coal industry? It would reduce greenhouse gas emissions, the need to transport coal—because plants can be sited on colliery premises—and the need to quarry limestone. It would also provide new opportunities for our engineering industry.

Mr. Wilson: I have no quarrel with any of that. As my hon. Friend knows, I have been having discussions with interests that are particularly relevant to his constituency.

Mr. John Smith (Vale of Glamorgan): Will my hon. Friend remain mindful of the special needs of coal-fired power stations such as Aberthaw in my constituency, which was designed exclusively to burn coal from south Wales, in particular from Tower colliery, with a high sulphur content? In future, the pressure will be on those power stations to increase limitations on their emissions.

Mr. Wilson: I realise that. One option that we are considering in the clean-coal programme is retrofitting to reduce emissions from existing power stations.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

The Minister was asked—

Private Clubs (Discrimination)

29. **Mr. Robert Walter** (North Dorset): What plans the Government have to deal with discrimination against women members of private clubs. [58250]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I understand that the hon. Gentleman intends to introduce a private Member's Bill on this subject later in the month. I have already welcomed a Bill on the same issue that has been introduced in another place. I can of course make no commitment in regard to parliamentary time, but we will certainly keep the matter under review, because there can be no justification for treating women who are members of mixed-sex private clubs as second-class citizens.

Mr. Walter: I am somewhat disappointed by that reply. When the Sex Discrimination (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill was proceeding through the House of Lords—it is due to have its Third Reading on Monday evening—it was supported by the Government, Conservative and Liberal Democrat Front Benches. I hoped that the Minister would be able to give us a clearer indication that Government time would be made available when that Bill came to the House of Commons and took its place alongside my virtually identical Bill. It seems to me that the Government are more interested in the welfare of foxes than in the welfare of women.

Ms Hewitt: Until that point, I was full of sympathy for the hon. Gentleman. As I think he knows, there are technical problems relating to Lord Faulkner's Bill and the Bill that the hon. Gentleman intends to introduce, connected with, for instance, amendments to the Licensing Act 1988 and aspects of the drafting. If the hon. Gentleman wishes, I shall be happy to ensure that my officials discuss the drafting of his Bill with him; I shall certainly continue to discuss the issue with the business managers.

Construction Industry

30. **Mr. Russell Brown** (Dumfries): What she is doing to encourage more women to enter the construction industries. [58253]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): We are continuing to work with the construction industry, particularly through the rethinking construction initiative—using demonstration projects, case studies and best-practice dissemination to help companies improve their productivity and competitiveness—especially by making better use of the people available to them. One strand of that initiative aims to demonstrate the business benefits of diversity in the workplace, including of course the employment of women.

Mr. Brown: Like my right hon. Friend, I am well aware of the number of women who are becoming involved in civil engineering in particular. There is, however, a major skills gap in the construction industry: there is a desperate need for electricians, plumbers and bricklayers. May I urge my right hon. Friend to have discussions with the trade unions, particularly the Union of Construction Allied Trades and Technicians, to establish exactly where the gaps are and what the unions can do—in conjunction with her own good work—to achieve the aim of bringing more women into the construction industry?

Ms Hewitt: I entirely share my hon. Friend's desire to see more women moving into the construction and civil engineering sectors. We will never overcome those skills shortages if companies continue to recruit and promote only half the talent that is potentially available.

I will ensure that my hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Construction picks up on the discussions with the union, as well as those with the companies concerned. I remind my hon. Friend that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills is ensuring that, through the training and new deal programmes, we reach out to bring more women who are currently not in work into the very jobs to which he refers.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): Given the importance of the role of women in industry, does the Minister realise that the number of women directors in the top 100 FTSE companies has fallen for the second year running? According to the Cranfield school of management, 64 per cent. of Britain's leading companies had women directors in 1979; that figure has fallen to 57 per cent. today. What do the Government propose to do to arrest that decline in the role of women in British business?

Ms Hewitt: It is disappointing that at a time when more women are taking up senior positions in business and in government the number of women in the boardroom in so many leading companies has fallen. I recently asked Derek Higgs to undertake a review of the role of non-executive directors. He and I are most concerned about the failure of companies to appoint a wide range of people to the boardroom. Getting more women there is high on our agenda.

Gender Pay Gap

31. **Hugh Bayley** (City of York): What progress the Government have made in narrowing the pay gap between women and men. [58255]

33. **Mrs. Betty Williams** (Conwy): What initiatives she is promoting to reduce the gender pay gap. [58258]

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): As I said earlier, we are taking steps to tackle the pay gap between men and women, which currently stands at 18 per cent.—slightly down from 20 per cent. in 1997. The national minimum wage has made a genuine difference to the pay of more than 1 million low-paid women. We are also strengthening the Equal Pay Act 1970 through the Employment Bill, working with the private sector to promote equal pay audits and ensuring that that happens throughout the public sector.

Hugh Bayley: Does my right hon. Friend realise that the pay gap between men and women is even greater for older women? That is not simply because older women tend to have fewer qualifications than younger women; the pay gap between male and female graduates of a similar age is even greater than that among non-graduates. What are the Government doing to investigate the reasons for the problem and to tackle it?

Ms Hewitt: We have already published useful research on the underlying causes of the pay gap. My hon. Friend's point about the difference in the pay gap for younger and older women is correct. The gap between younger women and men is narrowing significantly. The big challenge is ensuring that as the younger generation of women start to have families the pay gap that has afflicted older generations does not reopen.

Mrs. Betty Williams: If the Equality Opportunities Commission is combined with the Disability Rights Commission and the Commission for Racial Equality in a single body, can my right hon. Friend assure us that women's pay will not be sidelined?

Ms Hewitt: I readily give my hon. Friend that assurance. As she would expect, my hon. Friend the Deputy Minister for Women and I will ensure that, as we consult on the proposal for a single equalities commission and if we subsequently decide to accept it, we have a structure that enables women's pay and the broader issues of work-family balance that lie behind it to remain high on the agenda.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): The Minister said that the pay gap had narrowed from 20 per cent. to 18 per cent. in the past few years. Instead of warm words, will she give us a target to reduce the gap even further in the next few years?

Ms Hewitt: As I have said, we are continuing to act on the causes of the problem. As an employer, the Government ensure that every Department and public agency conduct a proper equal pay audit to tackle the pay gap in the public sector. We are also working with the private sector to ensure that it takes the same steps and, beyond that, to provide the child care provision in which the Conservative Government never invested, to ensure that women can make choices about balancing work and family.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): The hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) has already highlighted the problem of the graduate pay gap. Will the right hon. Lady ensure that our own House is in order? Figures that I have recently obtained show that 21 per cent. of senior officials in the House of Commons are female. That figure has remained static for the last four years. Will the Minister ensure that this is not, in effect, exacerbating the pay gap by stealth and that the House of Commons is an equal opportunities employer beyond reproach?

Ms Hewitt: That is a very important point. It is a matter for the whole House, and one that I hope all parties will take seriously and take appropriate action on. I am glad to say that, in my own Department, the number of women in the senior civil service is increasing significantly. The arrangements for pay, recruitment and promotion within the House of Commons are, however, a matter for Parliament and not for the Government.

Business of the House

12.30 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): May I ask the Leader of the House to let us have the business for next week, please?

The President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business for next week will be as follows:

MONDAY 17 JUNE—Conclusion of remaining stages of the Enterprise Bill.

TUESDAY 18 JUNE—There will be a debate on European Affairs on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

WEDNESDAY 19 JUNE—Opposition Day [3rd Allotted Day-2nd Part]. Until 7 o'clock, there will be a debate on the reduction of world poverty through trade, on an Opposition motion. Followed by a motion to concur with their Lordships on the establishment of a Joint Committee on the House of Lords.

THURSDAY 20 JUNE—There will be a debate on Energy: Towards 2050 on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

FRIDAY 21 JUNE—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the following week will be:

MONDAY 24 JUNE—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Export Control Bill.

TUESDAY 25 JUNE—Opposition Day [15th Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion. Subject to be announced.

WEDNESDAY 26 JUNE—Consideration of Lords amendments that may be received to the Tax Credits Bill.

THURSDAY 27 JUNE—Estimates [3rd Allotted Day].

There will be a debate on public-private partnership for London underground followed by a debate on individual learning accounts.

At 7 o'clock the House will be asked to agree all outstanding estimates in accordance with Standing Order No. 54(5). The list of estimates to be agreed will be advised in due course.

FRIDAY 28 JUNE—The House will not be sitting.

The House will also wish to know that on Monday 17 June 2002, there will be a debate relating to reception of asylum applicants in European Standing Committee B.

On Tuesday 18 June, there will be a debate relating to broad economic policy guidelines in European Standing Committee B.

The House will wish to know that I hope to make an announcement regarding the summer recess dates next week.

[Monday 17 June 2002:

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Union document: 8351/02; Reception of asylum applicants. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Report: HC 152-xxxi (2000–01);

[Tuesday 18 June 2002:

European Standing Committee B—Relevant European Union Documents: 8389/02; Broad Economic Policy Guidelines. Stability and Convergence Programmes: SN 1107/02; SN 1108/02; SN 1109/02; SN 1111/02; SN 1112/02; SN 1113/02; SN 1319/1/02 REV1; SN 1320/1/02 REV1; SN 1321/02; SN 1322/02; SN 1323/02; SN 1324/1/02 REV1; SN 1325/1/02 REV1; 2002/C 51/06; SN 1361/02; SN 1382/1/02 REV1; SN 1383/1/02 REV1. Relevant European Scrutiny Committee Reports: HC 152-xxiii and HC 152-xxxi (2001–02)].

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the Leader of the House for letting us have the business. May I ask him when the Government intend to bring forward proposals, or a resolution, to enable the Select Committee structure to reflect the recent changes in the structure of Government Departments? Given the right hon. Gentleman's respect for the Select Committee system and the known desire of the House to maintain and strengthen it, we are all keen that those proposals should be introduced as soon as possible.

Given the excellent ten-minute Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) yesterday, may I ask the Leader of the House when the Government intend to do something about the Data Protection Act 1998? My hon. Friend should be praised for bringing this matter to the attention of the House in such a positive way. I know that it is in the mind of the Leader of the House to do something about this, but a lot of time has now passed and hon. Members are getting anxious about it. We would be grateful if the right hon. Gentleman could tell us when the Government are going to seize the issue and deal with it.

On the debate on energy next Thursday that the Leader of the House has just announced, does it not seem a little odd that the Select Committee on Trade and Industry will be on a fact-finding visit to China next week? The oddity is that the Government should select next week to debate energy, because one of the documents relevant to that debate is the Trade and Industry Committee's report on energy. I would not dream of accusing the Government—or, indeed, the Leader of the House—of sinister motives or any sort of dodgy conduct in this regard, but, given that we now know that the Select Committee will be away, I would ask the right hon. Gentleman to look again, even at this late stage, at the timing of that debate, to give the relevant Committee members an opportunity to participate in this long-awaited debate on a subject for which that Committee has responsibility. I hope that he will agree that that is not an unreasonable request.

On 20 October 1998—I refer to column 1071 of *Hansard*—the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) asked the Deputy Prime Minister to confirm that, in June 1997, he had said:

> "I will have failed if in five years time there are not . . . far fewer journeys by car. It's a tall order but I urge you to hold me to it."

In reply—this is set out in *Hansard*—the Deputy Prime Minister said:

> "The hon. Gentleman quoted both the question and the answer and I agree to keep to that commitment: judge my performance in five years."—[*Official Report*, 20 October 1998; Vol. 317, c. 1071.]

All that I ask the Leader of the House is this: when will he give the Deputy Prime Minister an opportunity to come to the House and be judged, as he invited us to do? That is a very straightforward question. It is straight out of *Hansard*—there can be no question about it.

In that context, I am sure that the House will welcome the widely quoted words of the Leader of the House yesterday. Among many other excellent statements, he said:

> "we have failed if we allow presentation to become more important than substance."

He went on to say that he was always a close admirer of John Smith, whose strength was

> "the blunt honesty of his political style."

I am sure that everybody in the House will welcome the right hon. Gentleman's words and that he speaks for all of us in this respect. The trouble is that that seems slightly at odds with what seems to be going on even now inside the Government and in several Departments.

For example, following on from the comments that I have just quoted from the Deputy Prime Minister, why were many newspapers quoting Whitehall sources as having denied what he had said? How does blunt truth and honesty come into that? Or to take a different example, when will we get to the bottom of the case of Mr. Hood, that special adviser from the Ministry of Defence who now has a highly paid and cushy job on the back of having been a special adviser? Apparently, on Monday, the Cabinet Office was saying that it had not been part of the process and that there was no need for it to be so, but that is directly at odds with what the Prime Minister said yesterday in column 858 of *Hansard*. He said that the process of dealing with Mr. Hood

> "was done in consultation with the Cabinet Office in the normal way."

Despite the words of the Leader of the House yesterday, we have examples of how a Department is saying one thing on the one hand, and the Prime Minister is saying something completely different on the other.

To give yet another example, what about the bizarre episode involving the Press Complaints Commission? Without going into the details—I am sure that the House would not want me to do so at this stage—all that I ask is this: who should we believe? Perhaps the Leader of the House can tell us. Should we believe No. 10 Downing street or Black Rod? It is a pretty simple choice. I do not know which one the right hon. Gentleman believes; perhaps he will tell us. Perhaps we should have an opportunity to debate the matter in some detail, because it touches on some very important issues.

There was another bizarre episode just yesterday. In column 862 of *Hansard*, the Prime Minister said:

> "I can tell the House that as a result of the new deal, the number of young people who are on the dole today is 4,500."

Almost immediately, in column 867—you will recall what was said, Mr. Speaker, as you were in the Chair—my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) said:

> "the correct figure is 244,000."—[*Official Report*, 12 June 2002; Vol. 386, c. 858, 862-867.]

Someone is wrong and someone is right, so all I ask is that the Leader of the House give the Prime Minister the chance to come to the House as a matter of urgency and tell us whether he was right in saying that the figure was 4,500 or whether my hon. Friend the Member for Havant was right in saying that it was 244,000. There is a discrepancy and I think that we are owed the truth.

Leading directly from what the Leader of the House said yesterday—and we want to support him in what he said—all that we are asking is that he give his colleagues opportunities to come to the House to correct the record, tell the truth and put an end to all this spin and deception.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): What a load of crap.

Mr. Cook: I am not quite sure how that will be reported in *Hansard* tomorrow. I was about to begin by welcoming the support of the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) for what I am trying to do.

Obviously the right hon. Gentleman has missed our weekly exchanges over the past two weeks, because he has given me a real multiple choice question this afternoon. I shall try to address all his points as briskly as I can.

On the changes to Select Committees, it is a cardinal principle of our departmental Select Committee system that the Select Committees should track the Whitehall Departments. It is therefore necessary that we should put the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee on the same footing as those Departments that now exist in Whitehall. I am keen to make sure that when we do, we do so in a way that ensures continuity of scrutiny of those Departments. For instance, the DTLR Select Committee has just commenced the study of the draft local government Bill that was published yesterday, and I would not want to see that work disrupted.

Before we rise for the summer, I intend to bring before the House a motion that will establish new Committees, but I will do so in way that ensures that there can be continuity of scrutiny and no break between one set of Committees ending and new Committees starting.

Mr. Forth: And the Chairmen?

Mr. Cook: It is not for me to decide on the Chairmen. I am very grateful to say that it is for the House to decide on the members of those Committees and for the Committees to decide on their Chairmen, thank heavens.

Moving swiftly on to safer territory, on data protection, I can say to the House that I anticipate that before the summer recess we will bring before the House a statutory instrument, and it would be my intention to address the two big problems affecting Members in their constituency work. The first is the rather bizarre argument that we should not be empowered to pass on to any third party what a constituent says to us in our surgeries. That seems topsy-turvy to me; constituents come to our surgeries in order that we then tell someone about their problem. Secondly, we want to remove from those to whom we write on behalf of the constituent any impediment to their replying frankly and openly about what they may know about that constituent's case. That would be of great assistance to Members on both sides of the House and I hope that we can take that step.

On the debate on energy, the right hon. Gentleman has been here as often as me when I have been lobbied from both sides of the House, but particularly from my right hon. and hon. Friends, on the importance of having such a debate. When I announced that debate three weeks ago,

[Mr. Cook]

there was a broad welcome from Members in the Chamber that we were to have an opportunity to explore energy-related matters.

Mr. Forth: The Select Committee will be away.

Mr. Skinner: There's always somebody away on a junket.

Mr. Cook: I was going to express it with more dignity and respect for the Select Committee than my hon. Friend, but it is open to members of the Select Committee to be here for the debate rather than elsewhere if they choose to do so, and there will be plenty of Members who will wish to take part.

I looked at the possibility of delaying the debate but, as the House will see, the subsequent week is crowded. If I were to delay the debate, I would need to delay it for some time. That would not be welcomed by the majority of my right hon. and hon. Friends who want to proceed with this important debate.

On the question of the Deputy Prime Minister, the right hon. Gentleman will have seen the terms of the reshuffle and he will know that the Deputy Prime Minister has assumed a responsibility which will, I am sure, involve him in more exchanges in the House. If hon. Members wish to question him on any matter, they will have the opportunity to do so. However, I have to say that the key reason why we have seen increased mobility within Britain and the increase in the number of journeys is because of the remarkable success of the Government in running a sound economy with fast growth, for which we make no apology.

I appreciate the right hon. Gentleman's support for the speech that I made yesterday to the Press Gallery. I shall try to make sure that, on future occasions, he is in the audience in order that he may vocally support and applaud me in the course of what I say. I remind him that one of the passages that he might have found more difficult to applaud had he been there was that in which I expressed pride in the record of the Government, particularly in the way in which we have secured a sharp drop in poverty among children and, at the other end of the age spectrum, produced a sharp rise in the income of the poorest pensioners.

It is perfectly true that I offered the Press Gallery a deal, and the right hon. Gentleman accurately quoted part of it; it was that the Government should cut out the spin and cut down the packaging and that the media should concentrate more on reporting content and substance, rather than the Westminster village gossip. I very much hope that since the right hon. Gentleman is persuaded by one half of the deal, he might buy the package as a whole. Our people out there want to hear about how politics are affecting their lives, not about the lives of spin doctors and press officers.

On Andrew Hood, I should declare an interest—Andrew Hood worked for me for some eight years as a special adviser, in opposition and at the Foreign Office. I would not wish any Member to be mistaken about the interest that I have in his welfare, his future and the success of his career. The approval of his appointment to a private sector firm was indeed handled in the normal way. The Cabinet Office was consulted about the procedure—

Mr. Forth *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Cook: It was consulted. I am not saying that it approved the outcome, but it was consulted about, and approved, the procedure. The decision was taken not by Ministers but by officials, in full agreement with the permanent secretary. It should be stated that Mr. Hood had no dealings of a commercial character with commercial firms, and he was not closely involved with suppliers to the Ministry of Defence. Nor does his appointment at Brunswick involve his working with clients. Having said that, as somebody who wishes Mr. Hood well and who has a very high regard for him, I am not at all surprised at his securing a position of high status in the private sector. However, I am always mildly ambivalent about seeing a good man go into public relations. *[Laughter.]*

On the numbers involved in the new deal, what the Prime Minister said yesterday reflects entirely accurately the number of long-term young unemployed who have been unemployed for more than 12 months. Whatever definition the right hon. Gentleman chooses to apply—6 months or 12 months, new deal or otherwise—any figures that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister produces for long-term young unemployed people will be lower than those recorded when the right hon. Gentleman's party were in office. That improvement is another thing of which I am proud.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): May I suggest to the Leader of the House that we could all have been in his audience if the speech that he made to the Press Gallery had been made in the House? Why did he choose to talk to the media about their role in sleaze, spin and funding of democracy? Surely such a speech should be made only here. Why has he denied on several occasions on Thursday afternoons that the Government have any new proposals on the state funding of democracy? As recently as 23 May, he told me at business questions that there was no such proposal, but he seems now to be saying that there is a new proposal. Can we have an urgent statement and a debate in the House on the funding of democracy?

I also remind the Leader of the House that, on 23 May, he promised me that he would examine the outcome of the war pensions appeal tribunal's decision in the case of Shaun Rusling. The right hon. Gentleman will recall that, according to a tribunal report, the Ministry of Defence changed the terms of the submission to avoid any responsibility for Gulf war syndrome. May I ask him to expedite a statement from the Secretary of State?

The Leader of the House will be aware that, next Tuesday and Wednesday, the US congressional sub-committee on national security, veteran affairs and international relations will hold unprecedented hearings in Parliament—in Portcullis House—on Gulf war veterans and Gulf war syndrome. I ask that we have the Secretary of State's statement on the Rusling case before those hearings take place, given that they are material to it.

In view of the squalid little conspiracy between Conservative and Labour Whips on 16 May, which defeated the right hon. Gentleman's own proposals for more transparent and open appointments to Select Committees, has he received appropriate assurances that appointments to the new Transport Select Committee will not be interfered with in that way, and that the appointment of the Chairman will not be subject to such interference?

Mr. Cook: The simple and straightforward answer to the question of why I spoke to members of the Press Gallery is that they invited me to do so. Indeed, I should tell the House that there may well be future occasions when I accept invitations to speak outside this House. I stand entirely by what I said to the hon. Gentleman in our previous exchanges: there are no Government proposals for state funding of political parties, nor did I pretend yesterday that there were. However, as I have said, there is a debate as to whether there should be such funding.

As I observed to the Press Gallery yesterday, its members have put beyond all doubt the fact that business donations are open to innocent misconstruction, and that has certainly been the role of the press in this matter in the past six months. Donations by, and funding from, the electorate as a whole are not open to such misconstruction. It is my personal view—I do not claim to speak for the Government collectively—that the credibility of Parliament is being undermined by the current argument over funding of political parties. We cannot have parliamentary democracy without political parties, and we cannot have political parties unless they are funded. I believe that the best, most secure and most transparent way to fund political parties that is least open to misconstruction is from the public purse. I have no doubt that, in future, we will return to the issue on several occasions in the Chamber.

As I recall, when the hon. Gentleman asked me about the tribunal ruling and Gulf war syndrome before the recess, I said that the Ministry of Defence will want to consider carefully the judgment and respond in due course. I shall certainly draw Ministers' attention to the hon. Gentleman's view that due course has now arrived and that it is time that the MOD expressed its view on the tribunal ruling and gave its response.

Little new can be said about the vote in May. I am pleased that a majority of Labour MPs voted for reform, and I regret that I did not have a majority of the Labour Whips voting with me for reform. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Deputy Chief Whip was a paragon of virtue on that occasion. As for any future appointment to a Select Committee that will arise from the orders that I shall put before the House, I remind the House that the Labour party has already changed its procedures and the decisions will be made by the party, not by just the Whips.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): Within the context of five years of outstanding management of the economy, when will the Government tackle the problem of the two-speed economy, which discriminates against areas such as the north-east that are strong in manufacturing, to the extent that despite continuous growth we have fallen further behind the nation as a whole? May we have a debate on that issue?

Mr. Cook: I would stress to my right hon. Friend that the Government have placed strong emphasis on regional policy. That is why we have introduced the regional development agencies and recently published a White Paper on the potential for regional government for those regions that wish it. On economic policy, it is a remarkable and substantial achievement of this Government that unemployment in every region of the UK is now lower than the EU average. I share my right hon. Friend's concern about manufacturing and he will be aware that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has made a specific statement on her strategy for manufacturing. The issue is at the front of her concerns and we will continue to do all that we can to ensure that manufacturing shares in the remarkable growth and success of the British economy.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): Can the Leader of the House tell us how the Chancellor is getting on with his comprehensive spending review? Can he give a date when the Chancellor will make a statement to the House? Against the background of what the Leader of the House has just said, can he assure us, first, that the outcome of the CSR will not be trailed, leaked or spun to the press and that the House will hear it first and, secondly, that we will have an adequate opportunity to debate it?

Mr. Cook: I am happy to assure the right hon. Gentleman that the spending review will be of great importance to Government, Parliament and the nation and, therefore, must be adequately considered in the House. I have no doubt that that will take place. However, I would be in grave difficulty with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor and many other members of the Cabinet if I were to reveal now what will happen in the spending review. I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for his invitation, but I will resist temptation. As for the date, I anticipate that it will be before we rise for the summer recess, but I cannot go further than that now.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): On Wednesday night, we will be presented with a list of names for the new Joint Committee that will consider the reform of the House of Lords, but no one has asked me if I want to join the Committee. I feel that I have something to contribute, and I think that my hon. Friends would agree with me—[Hon. Members: "Hear, hear."] I would like this to be taken as a formal application to join the Committee and I look forward to hearing the response from the Leader of the House.

Mr. Cook: I am delighted to respond by saying that I take note of my hon. Friend's application, although I hope that it will not be a precedent for the remainder of the business statement to be turned into applications for membership of the Joint Committee. I anticipate that the names will be tabled on Monday night and will appear on the Order Paper on Tuesday, so that we may have a full debate on Wednesday.

Mr. Forth: It has all been decided. It is long done.

Mr. Cook: I assure the right hon. Gentleman that nothing has been decided and will not be decided until Monday when we table the motion. However, I draw the House's attention to the fact that we have provided—by agreement with the Opposition, for which I am grateful—for a three-hour debate on the motion on Wednesday.

[Mr. Cook]

That is right, given the importance of that Committee and the Government's innovation in proposing a Joint Committee and asking Parliament to decide that important policy question. The House should welcome the opportunity to express a view.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): I thank the shadow Leader of the House for his kind remarks and I welcome the announcement by the Leader of the House that he will introduce a statutory instrument to solve some of the problems with data protection by the summer recess. As the Member who moved a ten-minute Bill on the subject yesterday, I am grateful to hear that. In the right hon. Gentleman's negotiations—presumably with the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Information Commissioner—will he concentrate on the question of so-called sensitive personal data, as defined in the Data Protection Act 1998, as that appears to be the principal sticking point, in particular in correspondence with social services departments and national health service trusts?

Mr. Cook: I am well aware of the matter to which the hon. Gentleman refers and I thank him for having ventilated it in the Chamber in a way that received support from both sides. The sensitive information is the nub of the problem. In truth, we cannot serve our constituents when they come to see us about matters to do with the health service, for example, if we cannot have a free and frank exchange with the relevant authorities about such sensitive data. That is why we will be introducing a statutory instrument that will enable us to carry out a representational function that none of us thought would be impeded when we passed the 1998 Act.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Following last Monday's welcome statement, may we have further opportunities to consider India and Pakistan? May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to early-day motion 633?

[That this House urges the Governments of India and Pakistan to seek to resolve their differences peacefully and to reduce the risks of nuclear conflict.]

That motion has already attracted the support of 417 Members of Parliament from across the political spectrum, including prominent supporters of each of those countries. It reflects the extent to which Parliament shares the Government's grave concern that, notwithstanding recent progress, there remains a high risk that confrontation could turn into war, which could go nuclear, bringing terrible suffering and death to many millions of people in southern and even central Asia.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that that remains a matter of concern and that too much tension remains within the subcontinent. I very much welcome the steps that have been taken recently on both sides to reduce that tension. I hope that we can accelerate those steps so that it is clear that both sides have backed away from any attempt at a military solution to a problem that can be resolved only through diplomatic progress and a greater rapprochement between the two countries, both of which we regard as our friends. Obviously, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will be considering developments carefully. Should there be a requirement for a further statement, I am sure that he will wish to make one to the House.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): The Leader of the House will be aware that on Tuesday, Mr. Speaker kindly allowed me to raise, under Standing Order No. 24, the redundancies at Fisher Foods, where 400 people have already been made redundant and there may be another 1,000 job losses in the community. He has also kindly allowed me an Adjournment debate on the subject next Thursday. Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that Government Departments are involved, namely, the Department of Trade and Industry, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs? What mechanism exists to try to co-ordinate the approach of those Departments and what advice would the right hon. Gentleman give me?

Mr. Cook: If I remember correctly, the company to which the hon. Gentleman refers is the same company that was involved in the closures at Peterhead, with which we dealt in a business statement just before the recess. As I said then, Government Departments are very willing to assist in any way that is valuable or relevant to find alternative buyers and an alternative future for the employees. I fully understand his concern and that of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) that the plants that are at risk—and the work force who face redundancy—are highly profitable, successful and have made a large amount of investment. It is important that we do all that we can to ensure that they can continue in production if at all possible. In the first instance, that is a matter for the private sector, but we stand ready to help in any way we can to find alternative management so that production can continue and to assist the work force should they face redundancy and loss of employment. There is a well worn and well trod path of co-operation through which those Departments will put in a joint task force to assist the work force and the local economy. Since the hon. Gentleman invited my advice, I suggest that he discusses that with the DTI and the DWP.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I am sure that the Leader of the House is aware that today the United States formally withdraws from the anti-ballistic missile treaty so that it can develop its national missile defence system. I draw his attention to early-day motion 1279, in which hon. Members express their concern about the matter.

[That this House notes the death of the ABM treaty in mid-June owing to USA withdrawal and recognises that the United States Government is now free to request use of Menwith Hill and Fylingdales as part of its proposed missile defence system; further notes that any use of these bases for a missile defence system will directly affect the people of the United Kingdom and that as yet their representatives have had no chance to express their views on the proposals in parliament; and urges the United Kingdom Government to call an urgent debate in the House before any such system is considered.]

Given the awful effects that the development of that system could have on world peace and the threat to this country in particular if the facilities at Fylingdales and Menwith Hill are used, will he assure the House that those facilities will not be made available and that time is allowed for an urgent debate on the matter, which surely affects all of us?

Mr. Cook: We have had no request for the use of those facilities for any such new purpose. Should such a request be made and should the Government reach a view on it, I am sure that the matter will be debated and explored in the House. In the meantime, surely we must all welcome the recent historic agreement between the United States and Russia to achieve historic cuts in their nuclear arsenals, taking us to levels that we had never hoped to secure. I very much welcome the agreement that has been reached between those two countries, which are of course the only signatories to the anti-ballistic missile treaty.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): As we Ulster Scots would say, "There's mair than yin moose loose aboot this Hoose". I have seen a mouse in the Terrace cafeteria, in the Members' Tea Room and, indeed, in the House of Lords. Is the Leader of the House taking seriously early-day motion 1393?

[That this House is concerned at the large number of mice which currently reside in the Palace of Westminster including the dining rooms; believes that it would be fiscally prudent for the Sergeant at Arm's Department to invest in a House of Commons cat to try to tackle this problem; and calls upon the House of Commons Administration Committee to investigate this matter.]

Will the right hon. Gentleman address the problem? As a cat lover and with some experience, I know that, as the mice do not discriminate between the Lords and the Commons, the problem will have to be addressed in similar ways. Will the right hon. Gentleman accept my advice that the females of the species are much better hunters than tom cats?

Mr. Cook: I understand the concern that prompts the hon. Gentleman's question. The Chairman of the Catering Committee, with his characteristic vision and foresight, suggested some years ago that we might employ a cat in the House. I have some sympathy with the view expressed by the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) that if there was a House of Commons cat it would rapidly become spoilt and overfed and would compete with us for the use of the sofas in the Library. As the proud owner of two Scottish terriers, I might move the modest amendment that we should try a Scottish terrier.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): The Leader of the House will be aware of concerns that terrorist groups can obtain materials to produce nuclear weapons. He will also be aware that Governments of different political philosophies already have such weapons and that if they are used they would be just as catastrophic as if they had been deployed by terrorist groups. Because of the consequences of the use of nuclear weapons, can time be set aside for a debate on weapons of mass destruction?

Mr. Cook: I am not sure that I can promise the House the opportunity for a specific debate on weapons of mass destruction, although the issue frequently arises when we debate other matters—notably, for instance, in relation to our anxiety to ensure that Saddam Hussein does not succeed in his ambition to acquire such weapons. I am sure that my hon. Friend would back the Government fully in our efforts to ensure that that does not happen.

I wholly share my hon. Friend's view as to the importance of ensuring that we guarantee that the non-proliferation regimes are as healthy and strong as possible. I also share the view that, as we have managed to secure an end to the cold war and a reduction of tension in the northern hemisphere, we may be becoming complacent about the degree of risk from nuclear weapons elsewhere. It is in the interest of us all to ensure that nuclear weapons are not used in any circumstances, whether by Governments or non-governmental bodies.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): May we have a statement from the Prime Minister or, even better, a debate on early-day motion 1412?

[That this House is concerned to see the name of the honourable Member for Swindon North still listed on the official 10 Downing Street website as one of eight former Government ministers who had resigned; notes that the honourable Member was reported by the media as long ago as 2nd June to have been appointed Minister for Information Technology and Criminal Justice at the Home Office, but that this appointment had still not been listed on the Home Office Ministerial Team page of the official Home Office website by l0th June; and calls upon the Prime Minister to consult with other relevant Cabinet ministers to clarify the position.]

The early-day motion concerns the status of the hon. Member for North Swindon (Mr. Wills). The Leader of the House may be aware that on 29 May the Government reshuffle announced that the Queen had accepted the resignations of eight Ministers, including the hon. Gentleman. On 2 June, however, the press reported that the hon. Gentleman had been appointed a junior Home Office Minister, yet for a full fortnight after the first announcement the official No. 10 website recorded that the hon. Gentleman had indeed resigned and that the Queen had accepted that resignation. Only yesterday, after the tabling of the early-day motion by my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne), was the official website altered. It now states that the hon. Member for North Swindon has indeed been appointed an Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department and that he is

> "driving forward the reform to business processes and working practices . . . to deliver a modern and joined up Criminal Justice System".

It does not sound very joined up to me. Even today, when one enters the words "Michael" and "Wills" on the search engine of the Home Office website, why can one find no trace of him?

Mr. Cook: I have to confess to the hon. Gentleman that I have not had the leisure to peruse the websites as frequently and with such diligence as he has, and I am sure that the House is grateful to him for his explanation of his experience of surfing the Home Office website. My hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Mr. Wills) is indeed now at the Home Office, and I understand that he will be in action next week when he presents a Home Office statutory instrument.

If I may allude to an earlier exchange in the House, I have found my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon extremely helpful in the matter of data

[Mr. Cook]

protection. If we are successful in carrying that statutory instrument, I would want my hon. Friend's role to be properly recognised.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): Greenpeace has responded to the Prime Minister's speech on science by suggesting that the application of science in the future should become some sort of popularity contest, ignoring completely the fact that, unless scientists are allowed to get on with their research, we will not have any technology to apply in the first place. When will we debate science? When will we debate the Prime Minister's speech? When will we get an opportunity also to put ideas such as creationism firmly in the file marked "crackpot"?

Mr. Cook: I am very firmly of the view that those who teach science in our schools should stick very closely to established and agreed scientific fact and that we should not confuse that process by offering our school children an alternative perspective that has no sound scientific basis. I am not sure that one can readily argue that it is good teaching if children are offered as equally valid a scientific and a non-scientific explanation, and my hon. Friends at the Department for Education and Skills have to reflect on that matter with great care.

On the central point that my hon. Friend makes, I totally agree with him on the importance of our pursuing and providing every opportunity for scientific research. None of us, sometimes including those who are involved in the research, knows what may come of it at the end of the day, and we should not prejudge it before we start.

I entirely share my hon. Friend's wish for science to be debated properly. I particularly welcome the bid for the House to debate the Prime Minister's speech; I am always happy to consider such bids favourably. Given the crowded schedule of legislation that we have to clear before the summer recess, I cannot promise that that will be possible on that timetable, but we shall certainly consider my hon. Friend's wish, which the Prime Minister will share, to consider carefully his very good speech on science policy and its importance to our nation.

Angus Robertson (Moray): I am not certain whether the Leader of the House has been able to read the excellent report, published this week by the European Scrutiny Committee, entitled "European Scrutiny in the Commons", among the conclusions of which was the concern of members of that Committee, including myself, that

> "not all information about EU discussions relevant to the devolved administrations and legislatures has been forwarded to them by UK Departments."

The Committee has received some documentation from various Departments in which they confirmed that they had not been forwarding key documents about Council of Ministers' meetings. That contradicts parliamentary answers, stating that information is shared, to written questions that I have tabled, as well as assurances by the United Kingdom Government and Ministries that agendas would be distributed, and it breaches the spirit of the concordats signed with the devolved Administrations.

Since the publication of that report, the European Scrutiny Committee has received information from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs about who will receive the agendas for this week's Council of Ministers' meeting on fisheries, but it does not mention the Scottish Executive, nor the Administrations of Wales or Northern Ireland. That is of great concern to members of the European Scrutiny Committee and hon. Members from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Will the Leader of the House find the time for us to debate that matter?

Mr. Cook: I have read the Committee's recommendations. I regret to say that I have not yet had time this week to read the full argument leading up to those recommendations, but I thought that that would be a satisfying way in which to pass part of this weekend.

On the specific point that the hon. Gentleman raises, as Foreign Secretary I oversaw the agreement of the concordats between ourselves and the devolved bodies. I am very keen that we ensure that we honour not only the letter but the spirit of those agreements. By and large, relations between central Government and the devolved bodies over presentation in Brussels have worked well, and it has been a good partnership, but we shall certainly look carefully at whether there is any way of improving the distribution of documents as part of that process.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside): Will my right hon. Friend allocate time for an early debate on the actions of e-SURE, the internet insurer, which has announced that it will be considering withdrawing the option of cover for up to 10 per cent. of its customers because of where they live? Does he agree that that breaks the moratorium that has been agreed with the rest of the industry? Will he consider how the industry designates a flood area? Sealand in my constituency has not flooded to any serious extent for more than 200 years, yet it is considered at high risk.

Mr. Cook: I am not an expert on the areas to which my hon. Friend refers, but 200 years seems to be a fairly solid basis on which to make an insurance judgment for the future.

The matter came up yesterday during Prime Minister's questions, and I remind the House that the Government are investing several hundred million pounds in trying to ensure that we improve flood defences in order that no substantive population should have to experience the difficulty to which my hon. Friend refers.

As we work hard to try to ensure that we secure the future of properties and communities, and that no household is disadvantaged by its location and the flooding that we have come to expect over recent years, I hope that the private sector will consider how it can assist, and that the insurance industry in particular will reflect on whether it is wise to act at the very time that we are trying to ensure less flooding rather than more.

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): Will the Leader of the House please find time for a full and urgent debate on the crisis in national health service dentistry? In my constituency, particularly in Boston, 2,000 people have recently been deregistered from an NHS dental practice, others are having to wait more than three years to be allocated an NHS dentist, and both adults and children are not able to access dental care—either routine or urgent. In a low-wage area such as my constituency, the crisis is causing great hurt to those who are hardest hit.

Mr. Cook: We are seeking to put more money into NHS dentistry, as we are into all parts of the NHS, and we are trying to ensure that members of the public have access to NHS services. The hon. Gentleman is sadly mistaken if he imagines that the problem has arisen only recently. I do not know what he was saying to his own Government when they were in power for 18 years, but during that period, particularly latterly, they dramatically increased charges for NHS dentistry. It was perfectly clear to those of us in opposition at the time that there was a clear strategy to make NHS dentistry so expensive that more and more dentists and patients would be driven into the private sector. We saw the problem coming for the public; it is a pity that the hon. Gentleman did not acknowledge it until it was happening.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): Could time be found for a debate on the appalling behaviour of some loan sharks—in fact, all loan sharks? I refer to that because one has had a particularly terrible impact on one of my constituents, Doris Armstrong, who has successfully seen him off through the courts. He was an appalling example of the sleazy end of the financial services industry. If it were not for the courage of Doris in taking him through the courts, she would now be homeless due to a loan for £2,000 that she took out 10 years ago and has repaid—I think—three times over.

Mr. Cook: I congratulate my hon. Friend's constituent on her courage and determination and her success in the courts. At the bottom end of the financial services market, unscrupulous people are charging wholly intolerable interest rates that would never be contemplated by those who had sufficient income to pick and choose from whom they were taking money and the borrowing undertaken. It is right that those unscrupulous people should be exposed, and I congratulate my hon. Friend on having raised a very important issue in the Chamber.

We have just reorganised financial services regulation and I hope that will result in proper and proportionate attention being paid to those at the bottom of the market who exploit the poverty of the most desperate.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): Will the Leader the House find time soon for a discussion on the availability of advanced drugs in the national health service? To give two examples, visudyne can prevent blindness in cases of macular degeneration and glivec halts the progress of myeloid leukaemia in seven out of 10 cases. Both drugs are readily available in most European countries but are not readily available in the United Kingdom. That must be wrong. As one consultant has said:

> "When we have one of the best drugs that was ever invented nobody will let us use it. It is bonkers. This policy is costing lives."

Could be therefore have a debate on the terms of reference of the National Institute for Clinical Excellence?

Mr. Cook: It was a decision of the Government that we should make sure that decisions as to whether drugs can be prescribed on the NHS should be taken not by politicians, but by medical and scientific experts. That is why we set up NICE. Not all NICE's recommendations have met with universal political and public approval and some have resulted in controversy. However, I still believe that the principle is sound and right. As a member of the Cabinet, I have not the least scientific qualification by which I can judge a prescription or a drug. It is right that we should have an independent body to advise us, and we should be very careful before we depart from the advice that it offers us after careful consideration.

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): May I repeat the request of my hon. Friend the Member for Halifax (Mrs. Mahon) for a debate on the implications for the United Kingdom of today's American withdrawal from the anti-ballistic missile treaty? My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House legitimately says that we have currently received no requests from the American Administration for the use of Menwith Hill or Fylingdales for their national missile defence programme. However, when asked the same question, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence points out that, although there are existing budget lines in the American budget for upgrading work at both establishments for the new star wars programme, the Ministry of Defence says that it is a matter for the United States Administration and not for the United Kingdom. Surely, it is important that the House debates the wisdom or folly of any UK involvement in the nuclearisation of space and the consequences—catastrophic as they may be—for our involvement in that process.

Mr. Cook: I do not deny the importance of us having a debate on an important issue for our country that has wider repercussions for the state of arms control on the globe. However, when we have that debate, it must be founded not on something that may be proposed by the United States in its budget but on a request that it makes to the Government. When we receive a request, I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will respond and I am sure that any response will be a matter for debate and exchanges in the House.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I should like to ask the Leader of the House a question about the use of the Parliament Act, a tool that is used to ensure that the will of the elected House is not in the end blocked by the House of Lords. Is it his and the Government's view that the procedure should be used to ensure that votes on large majorities in this House can find their way into legislation even when they are delivered in a free vote? Or is the tool to be used only to defend Government-backed policy and Government Bills? In other words, can the Government be trusted to use the Parliament Act to defend the will of the House as expressed in a free vote or is it used to defend just Government Bills and Government policy?

Mr. Cook: I will need to do some research in my weekend reading. However, as I recall it, the Parliament Act does not make any distinction between a vote in the House on a party basis and a free vote. It would therefore apply equally to both.

The hon. Gentleman's question is slightly elliptic, but the Government are seeking a consensus on a way forward on—if I can use a word he avoided—hunting.

[Mr. Cook]

Whether we shall be able to secure that consensus remains to be seen, but we have promised a free vote in the House. Thereafter, the legislation will take its course.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): May I also welcome the Prime Minister's speech to the Royal Society on 23 May in support of science and the remarks by the Chancellor echoing that speech at the Amicus conference in Blackpool? However, not everything is rosy in the arena of science. The Roberts report brought some of the problems to the notice of the House. There are also problems with science teaching in schools, and science departments in universities continue to close. Salford university had the largest chemistry department, in which I used to work, in Britain in the 1970s. Last week, it announced its closure with a terrible loss of resources, including staff and library facilities. May I underline the request made by my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) that we have a debate on science? I hope that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will allow that to happen as soon as possible in the autumn.

Mr. Cook: I shall certainly put down the interest in a debate on science as something for us to consider when the opportunity arises. I welcome what my hon. Friend says in praise of the speeches by my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. I always welcome the opportunity to support and agree with as many speeches as possible by my Cabinet colleagues.

As my hon. Friend underlines, there is a commitment to science at a high level in the Government. We certainly want to ensure that we maintain the strong, excellent and necessary infrastructure that we have in science teaching and research in this country.

Consignia

1.21 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I should like to draw the attention of the House to my declaration of interests contained in the register.

With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall make a statement to the House on postal services in Britain. This morning, Allan Leighton, the chairman of Consignia, announced the second phase of the company's restructuring plans. He announced that the Royal Mail would save £350 million a year by moving to a single delivery at a consistent time, six days a week, and that those plans would result in a further 17,000 redundancies over the next three years. He said:

> "The underlying loss from operations . . . graphically shows why we need to restructure the company and embark on a three-year renewal programme to restore profitability".

Thousands of postmen and women now face an anxious and difficult time. These are very painful decisions for the work force, who have shown their commitment to serving the public and who have often been frustrated and angered by poor management and failure to invest in better ways of working. Allan Leighton has made it clear that the company aims to achieve the reduction in jobs on the basis of voluntary redundancy and by offering alternative jobs within the company. Early indications from the Parcelforce restructuring, which I reported to the House on 25 March, suggest that that can be achieved. We will, of course, do everything that we can through Jobcentre Plus and other agencies to help people who leave the Royal Mail to get new jobs as quickly as possible.

The need for radical action is underlined by the company's financial results for the last financial year, published today, in which it announces a £1.1 billion pre-tax loss. Much of that loss comprises exceptional costs from restructuring, but the company made an underlying loss of £318 million on its day-to-day operations.

Central to the programme to restore the Royal Mail's business to profit, and to improve customer service and efficiency, is the reorganisation of mail deliveries that Allan Leighton announced today. The Communication Workers Union has said that it, too, supports the ending of the second delivery.

Twenty years ago, 15 per cent. of all mail arrived by the second delivery; today it is just 4 per cent. But that 4 per cent. of mail accounts for 20 per cent. of delivery costs and 30 per cent. of delivery time. Most other European countries, with far higher postal prices, make only a single delivery each day and none of them has a target of delivering before 9.30 am.

In future, customers who regularly receive 20 or more items of mail a day will get their delivery between 7 am and 9 am. That will include people working from home as well as businesses. All other customers will receive their mail by lunchtime. These changes will mean that 1 million more first-class letters every week should arrive on time. The changes will also mean that within a six-day delivery system, postmen and women will be able to work a five-day, instead of a six-day, week.

Let me put Consignia's announcement into context. This morning, Allan Leighton said:

> "These losses did not happen overnight. Unresolved issues and problems stretching back for up to a decade are reflected in these results".

When this Government came to office in 1997, we immediately took steps to fulfil our manifesto commitment to give the Post Office what management and unions had long been arguing for—greater commercial freedom. The Postal Services Act 2000 completed that process, creating a public limited company and giving it the freedom to borrow for growth investment. We cut the dividend to normal commercial levels and announced the appointment of a new finance director in October 2000.

In April 2001, Lord Sawyer was appointed to look at deep-rooted industrial relations problems in Royal Mail. This year, we strengthened management further by appointing a new chairman, Allan Leighton, and securing a new chief executive for the Post Office network.

Greater commercial freedom is the right policy, but in exercising those new freedoms, decisions were made that, with the benefit of hindsight, we can now see were wrong. In his announcement, Allan Leighton said:

> "management mistakes have been made over a number of years".

The company decided, for example, to expand internationally, a strategy that was supported by many distinguished observers, including the Select Committee on Trade and Industry. But other European postal operators were already ahead of the game, and in the meantime, disastrously, Consignia lost control of its costs at home. Costs went on rising at a time when revenue growth was slowing. In 2001, the growth of mail volume, at 3 per cent., was half that of 1999.

The financial results published today show that, over the past year, overall turnover grew by 3.6 per cent., but that was outstripped by a 4.8 per cent. rise in costs. The result is that the company is now running at an underlying loss of £1.2 million a day. Those losses cannot continue, and over the next three years, under the renewal plan, the losses will be eliminated and the company returned to profit.

I can also inform the House that the company announced this morning that the group chief executive, John Roberts, will retire later this year once his successor has been appointed. The search for his successor will begin immediately.

Let me stress that today's announcement, like the Parcelforce restructuring, is not the result of any decision by the regulator. Both announcements are about stemming the losses and creating an efficient company. Today's announcement would have been made whatever the decision by Postcomm. However, I would like to put on record the fact that I welcome the announcement by Postcomm a few weeks ago about the adjustments to the timing of its proposals for market opening, the change in the definition of bulk mail and the decision to monitor the market closely to ensure that the universal service, its first statutory objective, is not put at risk. In reaching its decision, it is clear that Postcomm has listened to the many representations made by hon. Members as well as by other stakeholders, including the CWU. The challenge now for Consignia is to improve the quality and reliability of its services, so that it can keep its customers rather than losing market share.

Let me deal next with the financial issues associated with today's announcement. I have agreed a package of measures to put the company on the right financial footing to enable it to deliver this renewal programme.

Consignia plc has reserves on its balance sheet of £1.8 billion, which represents accumulated past dividends and cash generated by the business. These are more commonly referred to as the gilts. We now propose that the £1.8 billion of gilts will be held by the group holding company as reserves while the business is being turned around. Those reserves will be available to back the investment required in the mails business to implement the renewal programme and to support the nationwide network of post offices, subject, where necessary, to the relevant state aid clearances.

As I explained to the House on 25 March, the Government have agreed to forgo the projected dividend for 2001–02, releasing an additional £64 million for the company. I told the House then:

> "A decision on dividends for other years . . . will be taken in the context of the strategic plan."—[*Official Report*, 25 March 2002; Vol. 382, c. 571.]

I can tell the House today that the company will be allowed to retain the notional dividends for the previous year, as part of the overall £1.8 billion of reserves.

In addition, in case there is any doubt, I can confirm that the Government do not expect to take cash out of the business by way of future dividends during the three years of the renewal plan.

As part of the decision on the gilts, we have agreed to fund the Post Office network's historic losses. David Mills, the new chief executive of the Post Office, is working up a strategic plan for the network that will look at new ways of increasing revenues from commercial activities. As we informed the House on 26 April, we have also committed up to £210 million for compensation for sub-postmasters in the urban networks who are planning to leave the business, and for investment to improve urban post offices. The House will have a further opportunity to debate this when state aid clearance is granted.

I welcome today's announcement by the company that it intends to change its corporate name to Royal Mail Group by the end of this year. I can inform the House that Her Majesty the Queen has agreed in principle to this name change. I do not think that any of us will mourn the disappearance of the name Consignia.

Allan Leighton and his colleagues have shown that they are willing to make the very tough decisions that are needed to turn the company round. But the company is now set on a course for renewal and recovery. It will not be easy, as today's announcement shows, but it is essential if we are to have a Royal Mail that the work force can be proud of and that delivers the service that customers deserve.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): I thank the Secretary of State for giving me good notice of the statement that she has just delivered. However, does she agree that the figures that have been announced by the Post Office today are truly shocking?

Three years ago, the Post Office was making annual profits of about £500 million. The then Secretary of State was boasting that it had a golden future in the public

[Mr. John Whittingdale]

sector and that it was set to become a major global player. Instead, its performance has steadily deteriorated, morale and industrial relations have plummeted and it is now losing, by its own admission, £1.2 million every trading day. Yet this disastrous collapse has occurred during a period when the Post Office still has a monopoly in its core business, and when the volume of mail has gone on rising every year. It is an extraordinary achievement to have turned a highly successful business into a financial disaster, when turnover has gone on rising and it is protected from any competition.

As the right hon. Lady says, part of the blame lies with weak management. It lies also with militant trade unions. Ultimately, however, responsibility must rest with the Government, who remain the sole shareholder in the Post Office and who have been interfering in its management on a daily basis. Yet in her statement there was no acceptance of any blame on the part of the Government. Instead, as usual, she tried to suggest that somehow the fault all lay with the last Conservative Government. Will she at least accept that her Government must take some responsibility for this disaster and express some regret?

The measures that have been announced by the Post Office today are undoubtedly necessary. They will not have come as a surprise to the work force, who learned before Christmas that up to 30,000 redundancies were in prospect. At the time, we were told that that was speculative arithmetic. We now know that that forecast was entirely accurate, although we welcome the fact that it has been stated that it is intended to achieve the redundancies by voluntary means.

The Secretary of State said that the cost is to be met by utilising the money invested in gilts by the Post Office over many years. However, until now, that money was regarded as a payment to the Treasury under the requirements of the negative external finance limit. Will the right hon. Lady confirm that in essence the Government are giving the money back to the Post Office? Will she confirm also that that will require clearance by the European Commission under the provision for state aid?

I turn to the other elements of the restructuring proposals. The Secretary of State did not even mention that the Post Office has applied for a price increase in the cost of first and second-class mail. Will she give an indication of the Government's attitude towards that application? Is she satisfied that the Post Office will not simply try to increase its prices in the area in which it still has a monopoly to subsidise its heavily loss-making operations in areas where it is subject to competition?

The Secretary of State said that the changes would mean that in future up to 1 million more first-class letters should now arrive on time. I have to say that that is not much of an accomplishment if the target time for delivery is to be moved from 9 am to lunchtime.

The Post Office has sought to justify its decision to drop the second delivery on the ground that it accounts for just 4 per cent. of the mail, but 20 per cent. of its costs. Will the Secretary of State acknowledge the fears of some small firms, many of which operate from home, that rely on the post for their cash flow and orders and are worried that the decision may lead to a significant drop in the standard of service that they receive and add a significant extra cost? Will she ensure that people who are concerned that they may not qualify for the protection and additional priority given to those who receive 20 items of mail a day have some capacity to apply to the Post Office for priority treatment?

The Secretary of State made brief reference to the regulator's proposals to open the postal market to competition, which is clearly a crucial factor in the Post Office's long-term prospects. I welcome the fact that the Government have resisted pressure from Labour Back Benchers to abandon the commitment to introduce competition and that the revised timetable issued by Postcomm involves only a slightly longer delay before full liberalisation takes place.

Does the Secretary of State agree that liberalisation offers considerable additional opportunities to the Post Office, including new sources of revenue, by allowing other operators access to its delivery network? However, if that is to be achieved, it is vital that sensible network access charges are agreed, so does she share my regret that the Post Office has so far been unwilling to negotiate realistically with those who wish to set up competing services? Does she agree that if there is to be true competition, it should be on an equal basis, which requires the issue of VAT to be addressed? Does she accept that, under the present arrangement, the Post Office has a 17.5 per cent. cost advantage over its competitors for about half its business, which acts as a barrier to the development of fair competition?

What are the Government's long-term intentions for the Post Office? When the Postal Services Act 2000 was passed, we were assured that it would remain a fully state-owned corporation, yet we now know that just a short time afterwards, negotiations were opened to sell it to the Dutch post office, TPG, and that that would have happened had negotiations not broken down. Are any negotiations currently under way and are the Government still willing for the Post Office to be sold to a foreign operator such as Deutsche Post? What do the Government intend to do to maintain and sustain the post office network, particularly in rural areas? The Secretary of State barely mentioned that in her statement, yet it is now just nine months until payment of benefits across post office counters ceases, which will deprive sub-post offices of up to 40 per cent. of their revenue. Even now, the Department for Work and Pensions is preparing letters to benefit recipients informing them that in future they should get their benefits via bank accounts.

The recommendations of the performance and innovation unit report have not been implemented. The "Your Guide" project was successfully trialled in Leicestershire, but has now disappeared completely. The Postcomm report on supporting the rural network has been sitting on Ministers' desks since December, yet nothing has been done. The Government must make clear what they intend to do to maintain the rural network and prevent the closure of thousands of sub-post offices that are under threat.

Finally, I welcome the one piece of good news that has been announced today—the decision to drop the name Consignia and revert to Royal Mail. Will the Secretary of State admit that the decision to drop a name trusted and respected across the country and replace it with an utterly meaningless name that has become the object of mockery and derision was one of crass stupidity? Is it not typical of the Government that, rather than tackle the underlying problems, they preferred to waste money on a re-branding that has cost millions and persuaded no one? Is it not the case that when the history of the Government is written, the name Consignia will always be remembered, along with the Jo Moore e-mail, Tony's cronies and the millennium dome, as a symbol of all that is rotten about them?

Ms Hewitt: Until that last comment, I felt that the hon. Gentleman was treating this matter with exactly the seriousness that it requires.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the £1.8 billion of gilts. As I have said, we made it clear to the company that we had pledged that money to back the investment in Royal Mail's business to turn it round and to support the nationwide network of post offices. I can add that we have said that we will work with the company to help it to ensure that its borrowing requirements for working capital will be met from the national loans fund on appropriate commercial terms.

The point about the gilts is that, particularly under Conservative Governments, the company was forced to exchange the dividends—at a rate of 90 per cent. of the profits—for gilts. That reserve was never available to the company so that it could invest in the modernisation that was required. We are now making it available, to support the necessary investment and restructuring.

Royal Mail is discussing the application that it intends to make for a 1p rise in the prices of first-class and second-class stamps with both the regulator and Postwatch, the consumer body. It hopes to make the application before the end of the month.

It would have been quite wrong to agree price rises in the past simply to mask and compensate for the company's inefficiency. Some years ago, Lord Heseltine, the former President of the Board of Trade, confessed to the Select Committee on Trade and Industry that in the case of a publicly owned monopoly there was always the temptation—indeed, it was a reality—to go on raising prices rather than dealing with underlying losses and inefficiencies. I hope that, now that the company has grasped the seriousness of the problem and established the necessary restructuring, the regulator will look favourably on this modest application.

The hon. Gentleman raised important questions about the need to ensure that small businesses and people working from home, who do not necessarily qualify for the 20 items per day, will nevertheless have their requirements met by the tailored delivery service. That is exactly the kind of issue that the company will bear in mind when the pilot schemes start next month.

The hon. Gentleman raised a number of serious points about market opening and the role of regulator. As we made clear in the Postal Services Act 2000, we believe that the regulator's first duty must be to preserve the universal service obligation. Subject to that, however, both Royal Mail and customers can gain real benefits from market opening and the competition, innovation and greater choice that will result from it.

In Germany, where the bulk mail sector has been open to competition for some time, there has been a substantial increase in the amount of bulk mail. That has benefited Germany's former monopoly company, not only because it is securing its own share of that growing market but because it can sell network access to its competitors. That is precisely what will happen in Britain as the bulk mail sector is opened up. The company must of course negotiate fair and non-discriminatory pricing for network access with new entrants to the market. I believe that it will do so, but if it does not, Postcomm will be able to adjudicate.

The hon. Gentleman clearly forgot that his question about VAT was dealt with in the sixth VAT directive, which I am sure he knows well. It requires VAT not to be levied on public postal services.

The hon. Gentleman asked about long-term intentions. As the then Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness, my hon. Friend the Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Alexander), made clear to the Select Committee some weeks ago, the company was reviewing all its strategic options last year, including partnerships with other companies. As part of that, it entered into discussions with the Dutch mail, TPG, about the possibility of a merger. It was not possible to reach an agreement or common ground and no decision was made by Ministers because no proposal for a merger was put to us. The vision and the intention is simple: we want a successful, publicly owned postal service.

I stress that imposing on the company a duty not to close rural post offices, except when unavoidable because no one can be found to do the job, has slowed down—indeed halved—the rate of sub-post office closures in rural areas. Contrary to what the hon. Gentleman said, we are implementing the important recommendations of the performance and innovation unit report. The universal banking service is on track for next year. It is important to remember that when people cash their benefits at the sub-post office, whether through the new post office card account, a basic bank account or an ordinary bank account using one of the automatic teller machines, the sub-postmaster or mistress will receive a transaction fee and benefit from the fact that customers are coming to the post office.

As the hon. Gentleman said, there was a useful pilot of "Your Guide" in Leicestershire and Rutland. It is currently being evaluated, and I expect to receive the report in a few weeks. We shall shortly announce our decisions on payment, which cannot be met commercially, for the social services that rural sub-post offices provide.

The hon. Gentleman acknowledged that we are considering major decisions by a company that is determined to turn itself around. I hope that he will recognise that the source of the problems that have caused today's great losses goes back a long way. It is important not to indulge in finger-pointing, name-calling or trying to allocate blame but to support the company in its difficult decisions, and support the management and, above all, the work force in taking the company forward. The Government and Labour Members are doing that; I hope that the hon. Gentleman and Conservative Members will give the company the support that it deserves.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement, and emphasise that some of us who argued for according greater commercial freedom to the Post Office underestimated its management's lack of commercial awareness at the time. That is a major consideration in Allan Leighton's new approach, which most of us welcome.

Does my right hon. Friend appreciate that the redundancy targets are ambitious? In London or Edinburgh, which have a high staff turnover, it may be possible to

[Mr. Martin O'Neill]

secure the figures through voluntary redundancy or even early retirement. However, in places such as the town of Alloa in my constituency, where working for the Post Office continues to be regarded as a good job, albeit not an especially well-paid one, people will hold on to the jobs desperately. The package must contain far greater flexibility to ensure that the trust and commitment of people in areas of high unemployment, who look to the postal services for secure employment, will not be betrayed at the stroke of a pen.

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes an important point. This morning, Allan Leighton again underlined that he is determined to achieve the job losses through offering people other jobs in the company or through voluntary redundancies. We all know that the problems are not the workers' fault.

I understand the specific problem of securing the redundancies in more remote areas, where fewer alternative jobs are available, and I shall discuss it with Allan Leighton. However, he is confident that all the necessary job losses, though painful, will be achieved through redeployment and voluntary redundancies.

Indeed, because the union and management have quite rightly negotiated a generous redundancy package, he rather fears that, if anything, he will be oversubscribed in relation to the number of redundancies actually required.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I echo the earlier comment that our first concern should be for the families of the people who are to be made redundant. As it would appear that these redundancies will be funded from public funds, will the Minister give the House an estimate of the total cost of the redundancy package? Is it, as I believe, something of the order of £1 billion?

Is not the real scandal of today's statement the fact that the money that has been taken out of the Post Office in the form of dividends over a long period should have been invested to accumulate financial assets that are now going to be liquidated, not for investment purposes but to make people redundant? That is a terrible comment on the way in which the Post Office has been managed over many years through the Government.

I want to ask several specific questions. On the second delivery, why have the pilot studies not yet been conducted, in response to the petitions from small business? Can I have a reassurance that, when they are conducted, the concerns of many small businesses about the second delivery will be fully taken into account?

On the price increase, does the Minister acknowledge that one of the relevant factors is that the real price has actually been falling for some years? That now needs to be addressed. The price of stamps in British post offices is now significantly lower than the price in comparable European countries, including those with privatised postal services.

Does the Minister not now believe that the regulator's discussions about competition need something more radical than adjustment, and that they should probably be shelved? With the Post Office in its current dire position, it would be totally inappropriate for private sector companies to come into the industry, without paying an entry fee, and to cream off the few remaining profitable bits of the business. Does the right hon. Lady agree that it would be much more appropriate to allow the European Union liberalisation rules to apply?

Does the Minister acknowledge that the biggest losses—£160 million last year—occurred in the Post Office Counters network, and that, on top of that, there will be a further loss of £450 million next year because of automated credit transfer? Can she explain why the Consignia statement contains no estimate for banking income, and no mention of "Your Guide"? When do the Government intend to produce a clear business plan explaining where these additional sources of income are to come from, so that the counters network does not collapse in the same way as the rest of the Royal Mail system?

Ms Hewitt: First, on the issue of the use of the gilts and the cost of restructuring and redundancy, provision is made in the accounts that have just been published for £682 million in redundancy and restructuring costs. Further provision will be made in the current financial year's accounts, when they are published next year, for the additional redundancy and restructuring costs of the Royal Mail. The provisions in last year's accounts, just published, relate to the Parcelforce restructuring.

The hon. Gentleman's central point that the profits accumulated over many years of operation should have been used for investment and modernisation is absolutely right. On that we are completely at one. If the modernisation and restructuring had been done much earlier, the process might well have been less painful. We must recognise, however, that whenever the restructuring was done, it would have involved a certain number of job losses and redundancies in any case, because the process would have involved making the company more efficient. The important thing, however, is not to worry about the past but to determine how to get out of this situation and to ensure that the company now has access to those reserves—that £1.8 billion of gilts—to take forward its restructuring and to support the post office network.

So far as the price of stamps is concerned, we do, indeed, have almost the lowest postage costs in the European Union. As I suggested earlier, however, I do not think that there has been any justification for a price rise at a time when the company has shown itself unable or unwilling to deal with its underlying inefficiencies and with what were, frankly, appalling industrial relations. We have to remember that almost 1 million days were lost in strike action in 1996 and that there were very deep-seated problems, which I am glad to say that the company is now sorting out in partnership with its trade union. It is only now, in the context of the renewal plan, that the company can quite properly go to the regulator and seek a price rise.

On the broader issue of competition and market opening, I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman that the proposals and decision that Postcomm has made should now be shelved. I am surprised to hear him blowing hot and cold on competition. One might have thought that the Liberal Democrats were in favour of competition and of encouraging new entrants to the market in the interests of consumers. [HON. MEMBERS: "That was yesterday."] However, as I hear Opposition Members saying, that was yesterday; today is today, and opportunism is never far away when the Liberal Democrats are present.

If the opening of the market, which is already taking place in many other European Union countries, is done sensibly and at a sensible pace, it will benefit consumers and also the Royal Mail, by ensuring that it does not fall back into the bad old ways of a protected monopoly that relied on price rises to cover up its inefficiencies. The hon. Gentleman has got the situation the wrong way around. One of the paradoxes of Royal Mail's current situation is that, in many cases, it is making a profit in the parts of its business that are open to competition, but has, extraordinarily, none the less succeeded in making a loss on its monopoly business. Of course, that will have to change.

On Post Office Counters, as I have indicated, we are on track to create and deliver the universal banking services. The Royal Mail and the Post Office are in discussion and reaching a conclusion to their negotiations with the banks and the Department for Work and Pensions. Those negotiations are commercially confidential, which is one reason why figures have not been published. On "Your Guide", as I have said, we will get the evaluation report very soon. We will then make a decision about whether rolling out "Your Guide" across the country as a whole would provide the value for money and new income for sub-postmasters, new customers and service to citizens that it has the potential to deliver.

As I said, the new chief executive, David Mills, is conducting a strategic review of the post office network and looking not only for opportunities to provide services for government, but for new commercial opportunities. It is quite extraordinary that the household insurance that sub-postmasters and sub-postmistresses are now selling very successfully is the first new product that the Post Office has rolled out since it invented postal orders decades ago. We will be looking to David Mills and Allan Leighton to come forward with a strategy for the network that includes a significant expansion of its commercial opportunities, as well as, quite properly, a role for government in supporting its social function.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The House has important business to transact this afternoon, so I appeal to hon. Members to put very brief questions. I hope that they may get brief answers.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): The matter with which we are dealing goes back many years, and it is to this Government's credit that we have seized the issue since 1997 and tried year on year to tackle serious problems. May I ask my right hon. Friend about the provision of local post offices and, in the decisions that are being made, her views about how consultation with local communities should take place, bearing in mind low-income communities in which people do not have cars in which they can travel to the nearest urban centre? Also, can I ask her about the viability of post offices—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady is not getting us off to a very good start, first with a prefatory statement and then two questions. I think that that is quite enough.

Ms Hewitt: The question is extremely important. In the reorganisation of urban post offices that has just begun, we have told the company that as the restructuring is taken forward, it must ensure that at least 95 per cent. of people living in urban areas are still within one mile of a sub-post office after the reorganisation. Of course, the majority should be within half a mile of a sub-post office. But no sub-post office in an urban area will close until there has been consultation not only with sub-postmasters, but with Postwatch and, above all, the local community.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Will the Secretary of State promise that there will be no further redundancies and no further reduction in service quality after this statement? When will the Post Office be back in profit? Does she agree that the third way idea of a not-for-profit corporation has been taken to extremes by Consignia?

Ms Hewitt: Allan Leighton made it clear this morning that there should be no further redundancies in the front line work force. He was not willing to make the same promise to management. The renewal plan that he announced this morning includes £100 million worth of savings in management and administrative overheads. I hope, and he expects, to be able to find further savings in that direction. Far from representing a reduction of service quality, the renewal plan will enable the Royal Mail to improve its service standards.

Many hon. Members know from their constituents' experience that, in parts of the country, the mail is not arriving on time and it is pretty haphazard as to whether people receive it within a few days or a few weeks. That has to change and the renewal plan will enable the company to increase its service standards, I hope dramatically, over some years. We expect the company to be back in profit by the end of this three-year renewal plan.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): Does my right hon. Friend accept that it is very difficult to see how the universal delivery service can be maintained on the back of thousands and thousands of swingeing redundancies of this type? Does she also accept that the difference between profit and loss in the Post Office is between 2p and 3p on a first-class stamp? She says that the director of Postcomm has been listening to the comments of hon. Members; you could have fooled me. Would it not be better to clear out the director of Postcomm and his loony plans and to bring in a regulator who cares about public service?

Ms Hewitt: There is no threat whatever to the universal service from the changes to the delivery specification and, in particular, the ending of the second delivery. The second delivery has never been part of the universal service. The union itself has been arguing for the ending of the second delivery, and quite right, too. As I have said, 4 per cent. of mail is costing 20 per cent. of the total cost and 30 per cent. of the hours walked by postmen and women. That is not sensible.

I do not agree with my hon. Friend's comments about the Postal Services Commission. I welcome the fact that, as it spelled out in its decision, Postcomm has clearly listened to the representations made to it. Although, as it says in its decision, Postcomm was reluctant to reward, as it saw it, an incompetent management by slowing down the introduction of liberalisation, it none the less appreciated the real risks of introducing competition too quickly and has therefore scaled back and delayed the introduction of that competition.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): May I be certain that I understood the Secretary of State? Will she confirm that

[Mr. Peter Atkinson]

a business that receives an average of more than 20 items of mail per working day will receive early delivery? Will she confirm that that would apply to a sole trader and to businesses in rural areas as well as urban?

Ms Hewitt: I can certainly confirm that the early delivery—7 o'clock to 9 o'clock—will apply to a sole trader as well as a larger business. The size of the business is not the issue here. There are obviously greater difficulties, particularly in very remote rural areas, in making the delivery by 9 o'clock. That is one of the issues that the pilots in rural areas will be specifically designed to address to ensure that businesses and sole traders in our rural areas get the service that they need to succeed in their business.

Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale): Will the Secretary of State explain why the Post Office has been allowed to slip from being a very profitable business for many years? Despite poor management, bad industrial relations and lack of investment, it constantly made a profit until quite recently, when it became a loss-making industry. Does she share my view that perhaps it is easier for a loss-making industry to make huge redundancies and to sack 30,000 people than it would be for an industry that was seen to be in profit?

Ms Hewitt: As I explained a few moments ago, a number of different factors have contributed to those very large losses, and my hon. Friend has referred to some of them. In addition to a lack of investment over the years and bad industrial relations, there was also a failure to appreciate the effect of the growth in e-mail, faxes and courier services. The company did not anticipate the slow-down in the substantial annual growth in mail volumes on which it had relied for years. Above all, since being given commercial freedom it has simply lost control of its costs. At a time when revenue growth was slowing, costs were rising massively, and it has now to deal with that situation. The job losses, which will be achieved through re-deployments and voluntary redundancy, are the means of eliminating a large part of the company's underlying inefficiencies, and ensuring that it is once again the profitable business that it ought to be.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The statement is rather disappointing, inasmuch as it appears to water down the idea of universal service obligation. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Lady shakes her head, but in many areas in my constituency deliveries are not made before lunch as it is. With fewer postmen delivering, one wonders when—if ever—people will receive their post.

The right hon. Lady mentions redundancies. Echoing the comments of the hon. Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill), in areas in my constituency such as Bala and Llanrwst, the sorting offices are small, so there is no possibility of job transfers. What will happen when those employees refuse voluntary redundancy?

Ms Hewitt: As I said, today's announcement contains no threat whatsoever to the universal service obligation. As the hon. Gentleman has suggested, in his constituency the second delivery probably does not operate at all, and in any case it does not form part of the universal service. There is a very real problem with thoroughly unreliable deliveries in some parts of the country. In certain areas, the Royal Mail is perfectly capable of delivering not just 92.5 per cent. of first-class mail on the day after it is posted—the target figure—but 100 per cent. However, in many other parts of the country—sometimes because of industrial relations problems or logistical problems—nowhere near even 90 per cent. of such mail is being delivered. Reorganisation and the tailored delivery programme will ensure that customers get a much more reliable service, and that the universal service is delivered in every part of the country to the same high standards, which is what we all want.

The hon. Gentleman and my hon. Friend the Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill) mentioned the position of postmen and women in parts of the country where few other jobs are available. Management and unions are discussing that issue, and will take it forward as part of the consultations on the redundancy programme.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Will this high-flying management of the Post Office, who have been running the show for the past few years and brought it to this sorry state, be awarded fat cat payments? My right hon. Friend referred to a fella called Roberts, who is packing it in. How much money will he get? Is this not the appropriate moment to say that, at a time when the taxpayer is having to foot the bill, the people who have managed the affairs in this way should not get fat handouts?

Ms Hewitt: There is no question of awarding fat cat payments or rewarding failure. Of course, John Roberts will receive an appropriate payment, in line with his contract. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] We are putting in place for the new chairman and the new executive and non-executive directors salary packages with a very significant element of performance-related pay. Allan Leighton has set an example in this regard by taking no additional payment as new chairman, over and above the £20,000 a year that he received as a non-executive director. The whole of his pay as chairman will depend on his turning around the company and delivering on the targets that he himself has committed to. We will expect an equivalent emphasis on performance-related pay in the appointment of other non-executive directors. Of course, with the appointment of the new chief executive, we will need a package that can attract an outstanding manager to lead the organisation through the renewal programme, but it will also have a large element of performance-related pay.

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): Will the Secretary of State tell the House why it has taken the Government five years to realise that the previous management was not up to scratch?

Ms Hewitt: As I indicated in my statement, we have taken a series of actions since 1997 to strengthen the performance of the company. We started by giving it much greater commercial freedom and then we brought in a new finance director, because one of the highest priorities was to ensure that the company regained control over its costs.

The hon. Gentleman may not be aware of the untimely death of the finance director early in 2000. Because of that, and the time inevitably taken to appoint his successor, the board was without a finance director for many months, and that contributed to the problems on which the new finance director, who arrived at the beginning of last year, has had to get a grip. We have made significant changes in the management of the company and we are continuing to do so to ensure that we get the first-rate management that we need. I hope that Opposition Members will give the management and the work force the support that they deserve to turn the company around.

Diana Organ (Forest of Dean): What reassurances can my right hon. Friend give to my constituents about the future viability of rural post offices? When will the universal bank be fully implemented and when will other commercial products, such as house insurance, be introduced into rural post offices, to increase footfall and keep the businesses viable?

Ms Hewitt: That is one of the issues that we have asked the new chief executive, David Mills, to take forward. With a background in retail banking, he is ideally placed to ensure that the Post Office develops those new commercial products, especially in financial services, to serve communities that are often financially excluded. Sub-post offices have an important role to play in that and the success so far of the household insurance product illustrates the potential. The universal banking service is on target for introduction next year, as I have previously confirmed.

Mr. Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): A sizeable part of my constituency is rural and some of it is very remote. In those remote areas, some businesses will receive more than 20 packages or letters a day. If they are to get priority service, will the other people who live in that area also get it, because it would be a nonsense to duplicate the service in those rural areas to which the reliable universal service is essential?

Ms Hewitt: The hon. Gentleman makes a sensible point and that is exactly the sort of practical issue that will be considered in the new pilots for the tailored delivery scheme. Where businesses—perhaps only one or two—are located in a remote rural area and receive 20 or 30 items of mail a day that they need to have delivered early in the morning, it may make more sense to have a single delivery for everybody in that village, instead of going out again later in the morning. That is an operational and practical issue and the company will draw conclusions on that point from the pilots that it intends to run in rural areas.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): My right hon. Friend gives cause for optimism when she tells us of the acceptance by the management of the error of their ways, including the daft change of name. Have they learned the lesson that not beating up staff is one way to create enterprise among them? Can she do anything to instil a sense of respect for the staff that has been so sadly missing in the past two or three years?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend will be aware that I have previously expressed criticisms of the management in part of the business. One has only to read the Sawyer report to see just how bad the management and industrial relations had got, not everywhere, but in some of the sorting offices in particular. I pay tribute to the union, in particular, and to the new management for the way in which they have worked together since the publication of the Sawyer report. We have seen an enormous reduction in the number of days lost to strike action, from hundreds of thousands five years ago to a few hundred in the past few months.

We are going in the right direction and Allan Leighton, who has made a point since becoming interim chairman of going to the sorting offices at 5 am, visiting delivery centres late in the evening and talking to the front-line staff, has been welcomed by the work force as the breath of fresh air that the company so badly needs.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): Given the £1.2 million a day loss that Consignia is enjoying at present, what operating loss does the Secretary of State anticipate next year?

Ms Hewitt: The company is anticipating that its total losses next year, including exceptional items, will be about the same as this year. It is rightly making cautious assumptions in order not to disappoint on its targets as it has so often done in the past. As I said, further redundancy costs will arise from this morning's announcement and those will, of course, be included in next year's accounts for the current financial year.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Could the Secretary of State clarify her role in ensuring that the reborn Royal Mail will provide good public services in poor urban areas, such as Liverpool?

Ms Hewitt: I am already working with the new management of the company to ensure the first-rate management that we need and to ensure that the board and the management understand the importance of delivering the universal service obligation and higher standards of customer service throughout the country but, in particular, in vulnerable areas, whether those are poor urban areas such as my hon. Friend's constituency or rural areas where the post office and the Royal Mail play a uniquely important role. Equally, I have made it clear to Allan Leighton and David Mills that we must sustain an effective and modernised network of sub-post offices so that those can continue to play their vital social role, in particular in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): The Secretary of State has just shared with the House the fact that next year the Post Office will make a further £1.1 billion loss, thus leaving only two years to return to profitability. As the owner of the company, will she tell the House what profitability targets will have to be achieved in years two and three to return to the profitability that she set, what rate of return on the company's capital she has agreed in future and, if those targets are not agreed, what sanction she will apply to the management?

Ms Hewitt: As I said, the company—rightly, in my view—is making very cautious assumptions and is allowing for the fact that in the current financial year it will have to make further provision for the exceptional costs of redundancies and restructuring that flow from this morning's announcement. The path that it has set, however, is—as Allan Leighton made clear and as the

[Ms Hewitt]

right hon. Gentleman will see from the accounts, which are being published today—for a return to profitability by the end of the third year. We will be monitoring the company's progress extremely closely on those profitability targets. If they are not met, we have made it clear to management that they will not only not receive their performance-related pay but that we will, if necessary, make further changes to the management.

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): It is always a pleasure to be behind a Front-Bench spokesman who is willing to listen and then to act. In that spirit, will my right hon. Friend listen to customers in the forthcoming years of liberalisation, revisit the universal service obligation and strengthen it?

Ms Hewitt: I have already said that the universal service obligation is at the heart of our policy. That is why we gave it statutory backing in the Postal Services Act 2000, but the biggest threat to that obligation comes not from liberalisation and market opening—provided that that is done sensibly and at a sensible pace—but from the company's own inefficiency and losses. If it had continued like that, there would have been a very serious threat to the universal service. That is why it is so important that the company, under its new leadership, has now put forward and agreed this renewal plan and is taking it forward in partnership with the union to ensure that that obligation is strengthened and that quality of service is delivered throughout the country.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): What is the Secretary of State going to do about the independent regulator if he says that it is not reasonable to increase the price of a stamp? Furthermore, what is the point of having an independent regulator if the Secretary of State tries to lean on him by prejudging his decision? If the price of a stamp goes up, does she agree that it will mean, in effect, that the customers are paying for this awful incompetence?

Ms Hewitt: I have made it clear several times already that I would not have supported any price rise—nor thought it justified—if it was simply masking the inefficiency of the company's operations. The regulator—the Postal Services Commission—was, rightly, set up as an integral part of the move to commercial freedom for a publicly owned company. The members of that body are reasonable people—as the hon. Gentleman would expect; they have clear statutory objectives and I have no doubt that they will continue to make reasonable decisions, as they did on this occasion. Their independence, as the chairman, Graham Corbett, recently confirmed, is under no threat whatever, but he thought it perfectly proper—as did I—that I should make my views of the risks inherent in the earlier proposals known both to the Consignia chairman and to the commissioners.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): Ultimately, the success or failure of the Secretary of State will be judged in the communities that I represent in Orkney and Shetland by the continued security of the universal service obligation. Will she, therefore, bring early pressure to bear on Postcomm to publish in detail the targets and performance indicators that it will use to assess any possible threat to the universal service obligation? In all sincerity, I have to point out that nothing in Postcomm's performance in recent months gives me any confidence that it understands either the importance of universal service to communities such as ours or, indeed, what is required to preserve it.

Ms Hewitt: As I have already told the House today, the universal service obligation and its preservation are the No. 1 and overriding statutory duty of Postcomm, and I have no doubt that, as Postcomm has indicated publicly on several occasions, it takes that duty extremely seriously. Postcomm will shortly publish a further report—a consultation document—on the definition and scope of the universal service, and I shall certainly draw attention to the point made by the hon. Gentleman about the need to understand not only how important that universal service is in a constituency such as his but also the steps that have to be taken to ensure its delivery.

Enterprise Bill (Programme) (No. 3)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That the Order of 10th April (Enterprise Bill (Programme)) (as amended by the Order of 1st May (Enterprise Bill (Programme) (No. 2)) be amended by substituting for paragraph 4(2) the following—

> 'Proceedings on consideration shall be taken on each of the two days allowed by the Order as shown in the first column in the following Table and shall be taken in the order so shown, and each part of the proceedings shall, so far as not previously concluded, be brought to a conclusion at the time specified in the second column.

TABLE

Proceedings	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
First day	
New Clauses (other than those relating to Part 10), New Schedules, amendments relating to Clause 1, Schedule 1, Clauses 2 to 12, Schedule 2, Clause 13, Schedule 3, Clauses 14 and 15, Schedule 4, Clauses 16 to 20, Schedule 5, Clauses 21 to 67, Schedule 6, Clauses 68 to 82, Schedule 7, Clause 83, Schedule 8, Clauses 84 to 87, Schedule 10, Clauses 88 to 162, Schedule 9, Clauses 163 to 178, Schedule 11, Clauses 179 and 180, Schedule 12, Clauses 181 to 202.	10.00 p.m. (7.00 p.m. if it is a Thursday)
Second day	
Amendments relating to Clause 203, Schedule 13, Clauses 204 to 231, Schedule 14, Clauses 232 to 234, Schedule 15, Clauses 235 to 241, New Clauses relating to Part 10, Clause 242, Schedules 16 and 17, Clauses 243 and 244, Schedule 18, Clauses 245 to 250, Schedule 19, Clause 251, Schedules 20 and 21, Clauses 252 to 257, Schedule 22, Clauses 258 to 262, Schedule 23, Clauses 263 to 269, Schedule 24, Clauses 270 and 271, Schedules 25 and 26, Clauses 272 to 274, remaining proceedings on consideration.	9.00 p.m. (6.00 p.m. if it is a Thursday)'

—[*Miss Melanie Johnson.*]

2.23 pm

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Here we are again—yet another programme motion for the Enterprise Bill.

I do not expect to speak for more than a few minutes and I certainly do not want to divide the House on the motion, but it would be wrong to let it pass—*[Interruption]*—despite the obvious hilarity it causes the Government Whip, for reasons that may or may not become apparent—without saying something about the time that has been, and will be, allotted to such an important measure. I say that far more in sorrow than in anger. I have made the point previously—it is still valid—that there is little, if any, party politics in the Bill, but it is an extremely large measure. Like other Bills, it has gathered moss as it rolled down the legislative hill—bits have been added over time—and we have ended up with a substantial document. Despite our best efforts, it did not shrink during Committee but grew to 274 clauses and 26 schedules.

We have never been able to understand why the Government have been so enthusiastic about pushing the Bill through at such a gallop. The Bill is not only large but extremely complex; it affects a range of areas of the law, practice and business that are themselves massively complex—from competition and merger regimes to the new cartel arrangements, and from criminalisation to insolvency. All those matters need and deserve detailed scrutiny. We have done our best, with the Liberal Democrats taking the occasional walk-on part, to improve the Bill and to ensure that it was scrutinised, but we simply have not had enough time.

As I have pointed out previously, if ever a Bill cried out for pre-legislative scrutiny, it was a measure of this huge size and complexity. It remains a complete mystery to me why other Bills are afforded that treatment while this one was not.

The original programme motion—for the Bill's consideration in Committee—was tabled by the Government some time ago with no consultation at all. Relations then fell to an all-time low because the Government took a further unilateral decision to change the order of consideration just before the Bill went into Committee.

All that was made worse by the Easter recess; the Bill was published on the day the House adjourned and Second Reading was on the day we returned from the recess. I do not blame the Government for the Easter recess, but I certainly blame them for giving so little real, working time—not only to the Opposition parties but, perhaps more importantly, to outside bodies ranging from the Consumers Association to the CBI, to the insolvency practitioners, and to the whole range of outside bodies on whom nowadays the Opposition depend for briefings, for draft amendments, for indications of where the Government may have got something wrong and for proposals to improve legislation.

The net result was that chunks of the Bill were not debated in Committee. Sadly, that state of affairs is not unusual in our present system. It was especially unfortunate that one of the undebated chunks related to consumer protection measures. I hope that we shall have a chance to come back to those issues on Monday—or rather, to come to them.

In fairness to the Government, they eventually realised that they could not sustain the speed that they wanted so we got some extra time in Committee. However, it was not much more time and we completed the Committee stage in 18 sittings. As I have pointed out, for a Bill of this size—274 clauses—that is quite an achievement. I challenge anyone who reads the *Hansard* reports of the Committee to find any padding or time wasting on the part of Opposition Members. Things moved briskly. Many matters could not be considered but we worked hard to improve the Bill. Indeed, on a good day, the Minister accepted one or two of our proposals.

Things got worse after that, however. During the past couple of days alone, the Government have tabled about 223 amendments. There is obviously a panic to try to perfect the Bill—although that is probably beyond the wit of man—before it goes to the other place, but it simply is not on to introduce so many amendments at this stage of its consideration. Of course, a great number of them are minor and consequential, but one has to go through them, and the Bill, to come to that conclusion.

Some of the amendments are substantial, however. Today, we were due to debate one of the central issues although, by agreement, we shall now more sensibly

[Mr. Nigel Waterson]

debate it on Monday; it relates to whether, in insolvency, a bankrupt's home—their sole residence—should be taken into account as one of their assets. We touched on that huge issue in Committee and the Government said that they would reconsider it. Only a few days ago, however, they tabled a long new clause, which will require substantial debate, to deal with it.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): The House should be aware of a simple fact. The hon. Gentleman is trying to make something of the number of Government amendments. As he said, many of them are tidying, consequential and minor drafting amendments. Indeed, I wrote to him and all other members of Standing Committee B, which considered the Bill, to explain exactly which amendments are minor and consequential and what the remaining few amendments involved in each case were. So he has not had to go through all the amendments to find out which are minor and consequential. The vast majority of them are just that, and they have been drawn directly to his attention by a letter from me.

Mr. Waterson: I do not want to get into a spat with the Minister this early in the day, but with the greatest respect to her, it is not right that the Opposition should simply take it at face value when we are told that amendments are minor or consequential. It is important that we go through them to check for ourselves.

I am trying to make the point—I do so finally, so that we can get on to the substance of the Bill—that this large and complex piece of legislation will have all sorts of effects on business, the legal professions, accountancy and so on. It is very important that we get it right; otherwise we shall have to revisit it shortly, and the law of unintended consequences, of which this Government are masters, will kick in with a vengeance.

We have not had enough time to consider the Bill; I do not know why, because other business seems very light at the moment, but there it is. As I say, there is no party politics in it, so I have never been able to fathom the Government's motives. However, I am happy not to divide the House on the programme motion, in the hope that we can get on to the substance of the Bill.

2.31 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): I am keen to move on, so that we can debate the major items, but I wish to make a brief point. I could not possibly claim that there has been insufficient time to debate the Bill, having served on the Standing Committee and felt rather as though we were ploughing through the desert on certain occasions. We now have two days in which to deal with the remaining stages, so all that seems perfectly adequate. However, have we not made an error in the division of time between the two days? Is the balance right?

Time has been taken up with two very important statements today, so the time that we have left compares very differently with the second day. We have to deal with 270 amendments today, but only 86 on the second day. Such things are not decided by mathematics, since some amendments and clauses will be more significant than others, but 202 clauses have to be covered today and only 72 on the second day. We have to deal with 11 different batches of amendments, but only eight on the second day.

Many of the amendments deal with the earlier clauses. That is perhaps natural because they tend to help to define what comes later and the major principles involved. So if the division between the days were to come at about clause 40 or 41, it might represent a much more serious attempt to spread out the different matters that need dealing with.

Something similar worked in Committee. As the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) said, there was an occasion on which the timetable bar came down and certain things were lost, after which changes took place. On the second occasion the bar was due to drop, it was removed altogether. During the 16th sitting, we were ploughing into the desert with a host of amendments that seemed to come from the CBI and the debate looked as though it would go on and on so that we would not make the 7 o'clock cut off.

Suddenly, when the bar was lifted, everything miraculously progressed and we finished at four minutes to 7, and we did everything that needed to be done up to that point. Indeed, our final sitting—the 18th—lasted just over an hour, and the arrangement was similar to the one that exists now: we are likely to finish more quickly on the second day than on the first.

It would be convenient for the House—it would certainly be convenient for me, given the amendments that I have tabled—if the arrangements were adjusted more sensibly. If that cannot be done, I hope that the Opposition are listening, as they may have a curious interest in the amendments that I have tabled, even though they could not possibly support them, and they may wish to find out where those amendments lead us.

2.35 pm

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): May I apologise to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) for not having been present throughout the entirety of his speech? I think that I picked up the gist of it—certainly towards the end.

May I tell the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) that I dearly wish we lived in a world where the business was ordered for the convenience of such a gentle and thoughtful hon. Member, but unfortunately, my experience of the past year leads me to think otherwise?

I wish briefly to place on record the fact that Liberal Democrat Members share the concerns expressed by the hon. Member for Eastbourne. Good progress was made in Committee, but sufficient time has not been allocated to debate the Bill on Report. A substantial number of Government amendments have been tabled, not necessarily exclusively because of undertakings given as a result of debates in Committee.

I accept—I may as well place this on record now because we shall never be able to debate the issue later—that the Minister has tabled very welcome amendments in relation to the cartel offence and, in particular, to obtaining warrants in Scotland, for which I take this opportunity to thank her publicly. However, one inevitably has to wonder about the efficacy of a system that involves our sitting in Committee, week after week, getting assurances from Ministers that the parliamentary draftsmen have got it right, only to find that such a large number of amendments need to be tabled on Report.

2.37 pm

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): In rising to speak, I am mindful of something that the Minister said in Committee. During one particularly dreadful moment in a long sitting, she said that brevity was a mark of intelligence.

I accept all that the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) has said about the undue haste that the Government have shown at times, about the fact that important issues need to be debated, and about how the law of unintended consequences can easily kick in. However, in relation to his comments in Committee, there was almost a failure of prioritisation.

It is true that we may not have had enough time, but I looked through *Hansard* and found that we had discussed the Oxford philosopher, G. D. H. Cole, and the uncle of the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes). A lot of that was very amusing, and I certainly enjoyed listening to the hon. Member for Eastbourne—I think that he enjoyed listening to himself, too. However, not only did I feel that we were losing the wood for the trees, but that we were sometimes losing the trees for the leaves. The *Hansard* record will show that an inordinate amount of time was consumed in saying very little, so I shall not take up any more of the House's time.

2.38 pm

Miss Melanie Johnson: I shall be brief. I can assure the House that I will be extremely brief in speaking to groups of Government amendments that are entirely trivial and consequential, about which the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) need not concern himself.

On the question of time wasting, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will not pursue that path too vigorously, because I am sure that scrutiny of the record will show that time was not entirely well spent during debates in Committee, as the hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) has just suggested. I could add some other instances to those that he gave.

I am sorry that my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) is not directly included in the processes of the usual channels in discussing programme motions. However, I understand that this programme motion has been introduced on the basis that it has been agreed through the usual channels. That was certainly the case with the programme motion in Committee—it, too, was agreed.

I appreciate that the hon. Member for Eastbourne may not have got to grips with the contents of the Bill when it was published before Easter, but by the time we discussed the programme motion for the Committee, he must have been able to get to grips with the Bill and therefore to raise any concerns that he had about that programme motion. He did not raise such concerns about the division of time for those sittings.

Mr. Waterson: I would not want the Under-Secretary to be in danger of misleading the House. First, I made a different point, which was about all the outside bodies and organisations that were totally taken by surprise, first by the Bill's publication just before the Easter break, and then by the change in the order of consideration.

Secondly, I can only place it firmly on record—I do not think that anyone can contest it—that we were never consulted on the length of time allotted in the original programme motion for proceedings in Committee. Indeed, partly over the Easter break, I prepared a draft of how I thought we could allocate time. That, although proffered to the usual channels, was not thought to be helpful to the discussion. Let us be clear on those points.

Miss Johnson: A large number of outside bodies were very well aware of the Enterprise Bill and its general contents—and, indeed, some of its specific contents—well ahead of its publication.

I reiterate that the vast majority of the Government amendments are technical and consequential. They are attempts by parliamentary draftsmen to get the Bill exactly right. There is nothing wrong with that; it is part of the normal passage of a Bill. We have two days for Report, and I hope that the House will rapidly agree the programme motion and make progress on the substance of proceedings.

Question put and agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Enterprise Bill

[1ST ALLOTTED DAY]

As amended in the Standing Committee, considered.

New Clause 4

EXCISIONS FROM REPORTS: PART 3

'(1) Subsection (2) applies where the Secretary of State is under a duty to publish—

(a) a report of the OFT under section 43 or 60; or

(b) a report of the Commission under section 49 or 64.

(2) The Secretary of State may exclude a matter from the report concerned if he considers that publication of the matter would be inappropriate.

(3) In deciding what is inappropriate for the purposes of subsection (2) the Secretary of State shall have regard to the considerations mentioned in section 238.

(4) The body which has prepared the report shall advise the Secretary of State as to the matters (if any) which it considers should be excluded by him under subsection (2).

(5) References in sections 37(4) and 104(11) to the giving or laying of a report of the Commission shall be construed as references to the giving or laying of the report as published.'.—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

2.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government new clause 5—*Excisions from reports: Part 4.*

Government amendments Nos. 235, 236, 240 to 242, 258 and 298 to 300.

Miss Johnson: All the amendments relate to reports by the Office of Fair Trading and the Competition Commission. New clauses 4 and 5 and amendments Nos. 258 and 298 relate to excisions from reports. New clauses 4 and 5 make provision for the Secretary of State to have regard to the need to exclude certain information when publishing a report that she has received from the Office of Fair Trading or the Competition Commission. I shall be happy to give Members further details if they require them.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): The Under-Secretary is right; we need not detain the House long on this group of amendments, but I have a few questions with which I should like to probe a little further.

The background to this matter is the formalisation of the status of the Office of Fair Trading. That harks back to Conservative legislation in the 1970s, which set up the original structures. It was common ground in Committee that it was right to revisit the matter, and we broadly support the basic proposals and the new powers and functions of the OFT.

There were various debates in Committee, which I do not intend to rehearse, about the contents of the differing reports that will be produced under the Bill when enacted. We as a party have been keen to emphasise the concern of business—whether it be the CBI, the mention of which seems to raise the hackles of the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), or any other business organisation—that, no matter how laudable the aims of the legislation, and particularly this part of the Bill, in protecting consumers and people generally against malpractice, it must be borne in mind that unless such matters are dealt with properly, there can be enormous costs to businesses, partly because confidential or commercially sensitive information may find its way into the public domain.

We already know about the extra £15 billion worth of costs that have been heaped on business under this Government, and about the worries about red tape to which organisations such as the Institute of Directors have drawn attention. Indeed, we know about the CBI's figure of £5.8 billion a year extra in taxes on business under this Government. Against that disastrous background, it is important that we do not heap further burdens on business.

New clauses 4 and 5 are similarly worded. In both new clauses, subsection (2) refers to the publication of matter that would be inappropriate, and new clause 4 goes on to say that the body that has prepared the report—whether it is the OFT or the Competition Commission—will advise the Secretary of State on matters to be excluded by him or her when the report is published. Is it considered that the Secretary of State will feel able to make further excisions from such reports? I am asking, perhaps over-laboriously, whether the Secretary of State will be able simply to accept or refuse the proposals of the body preparing the report, or whether it is envisaged that she or he will have, as it were, a final censor's job and make his or her own excisions on top of those proposed by the body.

The other issue is what is defined as inappropriate. The new clauses helpfully refer to section 238, which sets out three or four different considerations: first, matters that are contrary to the public interest; secondly, commercial information where disclosure might significantly harm legitimate business interests; thirdly, information related to the private affairs of the individual, the disclosure of which might significantly harm the individual's interests; and fourthly, whether the disclosure of any such information is necessary for the particular purpose. Does the Under-Secretary regard that list as exhaustive? Could the term "inappropriate" be used to cover all matters which are of perfectly understandable concern to those who are the subject of the report, or, indeed, to Ministers and those who advise them?

Under clause 43, where the Secretary of State issues an intervention notice, the OFT will produce a report on the public interest issues, including representations that it has received. Again, I assume that all that applies equally not just to the conclusions in the report, but to all the, as it were, second-hand information given by way of evidence to the OFT. Otherwise, of course, there might be a disincentive for people to be wholly open and honest in making such representations.

Where the Secretary of State refers matters to the Competition Commission, the reports under clause 44 will be based on an initial investigation under clause 60 and where the Secretary of State refers a matter under clause 61. As I understand it, those are all instances in which the proposed provision would bite.

The principal issue that we want to raise is whether the lists that I have gone through are exhaustive, or whether there is an element of flexibility, which we would welcome, in excising what is inappropriate. We on the Opposition Benches might take some modest credit for persuading Ministers that the issue should be taken even more seriously in the Bill than it was originally. Subject to those explanations, we would welcome a tightening of the provisions.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): I confess that I am slightly confused by the Under-Secretary's suggesting that this group of amendments is entirely confined to matters of excision of information from reports. As I understand it, some of the Government amendments do something substantively different. I want to explore why amendments Nos. 235, 236, 240 and 242 are necessary and what is intended by them.

The Under-Secretary has written to us to clarify the purpose of the amendments. Under the first two amendments in respect of mergers, and the second two amendments in respect of market investigation references, where a public interest intervention notice has been served, the OFT or the Competition Commission will report to the Secretary of State.

Under the Bill as previously drafted, the OFT or the commission would have had the opportunity to make recommendations to the Secretary of State as to the actions that she could take under the legislation. As far as I am aware, the provisions for mergers appeared in clause 41 and those for market investigations appeared in a later clause. It would have allowed the Secretary of State to receive undertakings under clause 151 and to make orders under clause 155.

The Government amendments will mean that the commission can recommend to the Secretary of State that she should take other action, but that action is not specified. So I have a very simple question: what is the other action? If the action falls within the confines of the remedies set out in the respective provisions available to the Secretary of State, why is it not already sufficient for the OFT or the commission to be able to specify such remedies? If the action is beyond the confines of the Bill and what is available from the relative undertakings that can be derived from it, why are the additional remedies not specified in the Bill? I confess that nothing in the correspondence that the Under-Secretary has provided to us specifies what the other action might be, and under what legislative form it sits.

Miss Johnson: The hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) asked whether the Secretary of State would be able to make her own excisions as well as those suggested. The answer is yes. The list of inappropriate coverage takes account of all the issues that the hon. Gentleman highlighted. It is not exhaustive, but we are not aware of any considerations other than those currently in the text. I hope that I have reassured him on that point.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) raised several points and he is right to suggest that other issues are involved. He referred to Government amendment No. 242, but that relates to the voting rules for the decisions taken by the Competition Commission's reporting panels. Perhaps he meant to refer to amendment No. 241, but that was not absolutely clear.

Amendments Nos. 235, 236, 240 and 241 correct drafting oversights in clauses 46(7)(b) and 62(4)(b). These two paragraphs deal with the Competition Commission's ability, in its reports in public interest and special public interest cases, to recommend the taking of remedial action by other persons, and other than in the form of undertakings accepted or orders made under part 3.

Such action might include, in the case of Ministers, the amendment of existing legislation—whether by introducing new primary legislation or by using delegated powers to amend existing legislation—so as to remove a regulatory barrier to entry and to prevent a merged firm from exploiting a position of market power. Recommendations for the taking of such action are provided for in non-public interest merger cases by clauses 34(3)(b) and 35(2)(b).

As currently drafted, the reference to

"the taking of action by other persons"

in clauses 46(7)(b) and 62(4)(b) appears immediately after a reference to the taking of remedial action under the Secretary of State's part 3 powers, thus apparently excluding the possibility of the commission's recommending in public interest or special public interest cases that the Secretary of State should take remedial action other than under her part 3 powers.

Although such action is likely to emerge only very rarely as part of a reasonable and practicable remedial strategy in a merger case, it was not our intention to prevent the commission from being able to recommend that the Secretary of State should take remedial action of this kind in public interest or special public interest cases. The amendments ensure that this possibility is preserved.

Question put and agreed to.

Clause read a Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 5

EXCISIONS FROM REPORTS: PART 4

'(1) Subsection (2) applies where the Secretary of State is under a duty to publish a report of the Commission under section 136.

(2) The Secretary of State may exclude a matter from the report if he considers that publication of the matter would be inappropriate.

(3) In deciding what is inappropriate for the purposes of subsection (2) the Secretary of State shall have regard to the considerations mentioned in section 238.

(4) The Commission shall advise the Secretary of State as to the matters (if any) which it considers should be excluded by him under subsection (2).

(5) References in sections 130(4) to (6), 137(2) and (5) to (7), 142(3) to (5) and 166(10) to the giving or laying of a report of the Commission shall be construed as references to the giving or laying of the report as published.'.—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Brought up, read the First and Second time, and added to the Bill.

New Clause 3

USE OF FINES BY OFT

'.—(1) The OFT will consider whether any fines which it imposes under Chapter I or Chapter II of the 1998 Act might be applied for any purpose or purposes which would contribute towards remedying harm suffered by consumers generally as a result of the infringement of those provisions.

(2) The OFT may in pursuance of subsection (1), make such direction as it considers appropriate.'.—*[Mr. Waterson.]*

Brought up, and read the First time.

Mr. Waterson: I beg to move, That the clause be read a Second time.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment No. 3, in clause 4, page 2, line 24, at end insert—

'and

(d) an assessment of the additional costs to business of the exercise of its functions.'.

Government amendment No. 156.

Amendment No. 6, in page 2, line 34, leave out—

'seriously and prejudicially affect the'

and insert—

'significantly harm the legitimate business'.

Amendment No. 210, in clause 6, page 3, line 9, after "consumers", insert "and producers".

Government amendment No. 157.

Amendment No. 8, in page 3, line 20, leave out—

'seriously and prejudicially affect the'

and insert—

'significantly harm the legitimate business'.

Amendment No. 211, in clause 8, page 3, line 35, after "consumers", insert "and producers".

Government amendment No. 223.

Amendment No. 212, in page 3, line 39, after "consumer", insert "and producer".

Amendment No. 213, in page 3, line 41, after "consumer", insert "and producer".

Amendment No. 214, in page 4, line 1, after "consumer", insert "or producer".

Amendment No. 215, in page 4, line 3, after "consumer", insert "or producer".

Amendment No. 216, in page 4, line 9, after "consumers", insert "and producers".

Amendment No. 217, in clause 9, page 4, line 18, leave out from beginning to "section" in line 19.

Amendment No. 218, in clause 11, page 5, line 2, after "consumer", insert "or producer".

Amendment No. 219, in page 5, line 5, after "consumers", insert "or producers".

Amendment No. 10, in page 5, line 6, leave out "90" and insert "60".

Amendment No. 11, in page 5, line 13, leave out subsection (4).

Amendment No. [illegible], in page 5, line 15, after "consumer", insert "or producer".

Amendment No. 221, in page 5, line 18, after "consumers", insert "or producers".

Amendment No. 222, in page 5, line 34, at end insert—

'and—

(c) "producer" means an individual involved in the manufacture, production or sale of goods or services.'.

Mr. Waterson: Our new clause and amendments again deal with the general functions of the OFT. The hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) has also tabled amendments, and I look forward to our usual fascinating debate.

We debated the provisions of new clause 3 in Committee, and it is part of the Opposition's responsibility to make choices about the issues to which we wish to return on Report. We thought that this issue was worth debating again, because it is important and because we did not think that the Under-Secretary's response in Committee was adequate. As she has had more time to reflect on the matter, we might now make more progress. A glance at the new clause shows that it would determine the fate of fines determined under chapters I and II of the Competition Act 1998 and use them for the benefit of consumers.

Substantial income might be derived from such fines in any given year, and that money could be applied for the remedial benefit of consumers in general. The Consumers Association has publicised the case in which a car manufacturer—I forget which one—agreed to donate substantial funds to the association as part of the settlement of potential proceedings. The association undertook to use that money to inform consumers about the purchase of cars, including purchase from suppliers based on the continent. When the offence alleged is predatory pricing, the consumer will have benefited from lower prices, albeit at the longer-term loss of competition. In such cases, under current legislation consumers would be unlikely to recover damages. However, if the funds obtained were applied for the benefit of consumers in general, that would sensibly reflect the fact that there is no individual remedy.

If the Under-Secretary's reply is based on the one that she gave in Committee, I know that she will say that there are separate provisions in the Bill for funds to be applied for consumer information and education. We welcome that. However, the new clause would ensure the use of a separate stream of funding to consumers in general.

I have already given a couple of examples, and another one would arise when consumers had clearly been disadvantaged but it was impossible to identify or trace those harmed. Something may have gone on for many years across an entire market without records being kept of the people involved. In another example, many people might have lost a tiny amount as the result of a harmful practice. However, recognition should be made of the fact that there has been misdoing by the companies involved.

3 pm

The Minister was less than convincing when she addressed the problem in Committee. One of her defences was that we might encourage the OFT to operate a slash and burn policy, and go out of its way to find people so that it could produce the stream of funding. That is far-fetched. In fact our suggestion would make sensible use of the funds, unlike the alternative, which allows them to disappear into the black hole of the Treasury.

We discussed an amendment similar to amendment No. 3 in Committee, and I accused the Minister of intransigence. I had hoped that she might reconsider her case, because we need to assess the additional costs to business that will arise when the OFT exercises its functions. The Conservative party is keen to stick up for businesses, large and small, when it comes to the extra burdens and costs that are heaped on them. There is a cumulative process of placing more burdens on business, and those have a particular impact on smaller firms.

It is important to make a regular assessment of the additional cost to business of the OFT's exercise of its functions. That is eminently sensible. We debated how to assess that burden in Committee, and it is worth trying to work out whether the burdens on business are substantial, as we fear they might be, and how they stack up against the benefits to consumers. Unbelievably, the regulatory impact assessment of the Bill concluded that its provisions would impose no extra cost burden on business. We do not accept that, and it requires explanation.

In Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) gave the example of a company that started to trade in a new market. It received a letter from the Department of Trade and Industry saying that the trade was against the public interest. In effect, the Department threatened to wind up the company and prosecute the directors. The company took legal advice and was very worried. It would have cost a great deal to clear the company's name, and the matter never went to court. The director involved settled with the Department, the company was wound up and various other measures had to be taken. The company simply did not have the resources—or, perhaps, the courage—to sit out the argument with the powers that be.

We all accept that the OFT needs to be beefed up and provided with more staff and resources. I often see job advertisements for the OFT in the papers—not that I make a habit of looking through the appointments sections; I merely have a wistful curiosity about all those positions that allow people to earn more than I do. The OFT is obviously building up its staff in anticipation of the changes. When the Bill receives Royal Assent, they will be like coiled springs, waiting to leap into action. The OFT will have massive resources and deep pockets, which may not be true of the companies with which it deals.

Amendments Nos. 6 and 8 replace similar amendments tabled in Committee. The phrase

"significantly harm the legitimate business"

is important. We must carefully tie up the requirements of the investigating authorities. We want to harmonise the words used in part 1 and part 9. Our amendments would tighten the obligation for the OFT to ensure that it chooses to use its powers in a judicious way.

We debated recent dawn raids involving the Serious Fraud Office and other prosecuting authorities. Although such action might be relevant and necessary in certain cases, we want to ensure that restraints and constraints on the new authorities are included in the Bill. We do not want the new authorities, flush with new resources, responsibilities and powers, aggressively and vigorously to pursue companies that may be innocent and blameless. The disruption of a company's business and the undue publicity could have a serious effect on it.

I expect the OFT to take a more rigorous view of company raids than other authorities. Only a few weeks ago, several pharmaceutical companies were subject to a dawn raid, and it is staggering how the details of raids are often firmly in the public domain and the media before they take place. That is of great concern, especially as we still operate under the premise that people are innocent until proved guilty. Such cases are usually complex and take many months, or even years, to resolve. Although prosecutions are often not pursued or are unsuccessful, incalculable damage is inflicted in the meantime on the interests of the companies under investigation.

Amendment No. 10 deals with super-complaints. Those are an important and useful innovation, strongly supported by all the main consumer bodies. They ensure that something that is happening across the country does not have to be pursued by individual trading standards departments, but by a super-complaint brought, typically, by a consumer body. The Bill specifies, however, that the OFT should publish a response to a super-complaint within 90 days. We agree that there should be a limit on the time taken to respond, but our amendment suggests 60 days. There can be no practical objection to that. Extensions of time could always be applied for and given.

It is almost inevitable that substantial publicity will be generated, especially by the first super-complaints. They will be a novelty and probably come on the back of a substantial consumer campaign on a particular malpractice or piece of sharp trading. If such publicity is generated and it blights the activity of a company or group of companies, it is important that the period should be as short as possible. On the other side of the coin, it must surely be in the interests of consumers that such matters be resolved as speedily as possible.

The sister amendment, amendment No. 11, would remove subsection (4) from clause 11, which allows the Secretary of State to take the power to amend the time limit, presumably up or down. In Committee we debated the best intentions of this particular Secretary of State and those who advise her, but we still think that the clause should be changed.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Some 13 amendments are in my name and in those of my hon. Friends. They fall into three categories. In some, the words "and producers" is inserted after the word "consumers". There is one category where that operates in connection with the super-complaints procedure. A separate amendment seeks to keep alive section 12 of the Fair Trading Act 1973, as compared with certain aspects of this legislation where it affects producers and the public interest. I have much more sympathy with the Fair Trading Act than with some items in this Bill, even though there is much more in the Bill which deals with consumers, which is a distinct improvement.

As I said, I want to insert "and producers" after "consumers". While all of us cannot exist without being consumers, we depend on producers, and I hope that the great majority of us are producers for considerable sections of our lives. We are producing legislation on this occasion, so we are part of that procedure. Everyone is just about covered by the categories of "producer" and "consumer", but that does not mean that the way in which they operate is the same, or that they have identical interests.

Sometimes, the consumer interest may rub up against the producer interest. The cheap production of goods and services may be a consumer interest, but the people who

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

are directly producing goods—working people by hand or by brain—may not wish to have their goods sold at the cheapest possible price all the time. They may want to raise some resources for themselves, so that they themselves can begin to become effective consumers. If we put all our eggs in one basket—with the consumer—we do not seem to serve our constituents in as full and as good a way as possible. That is the reasoning behind the amendments that insert the words "and producers".

I attempted in Committee—it has already been dismissed to some extent by the Opposition Member who talked about G.D.H. Cole—to draw that distinction. I was a bit late in doing that. This is complex legislation, and the day after I found out that I had been placed on the Bill, I had to turn up at one of the meetings to try to fathom what we were dealing with.

By the time I had tabled an amendment to introduce the word "producers", it was in a rather odd position—it meant producers being involved merely in matters that were of consumer interest. That will be the case to some extent with some of these amendments, but the main intention is to say that producers will have specific producer concerns themselves. In particular, the producer provisions in connection with the super-complaints procedure in amendments Nos. 218 to 222 are meant to produce a situation in which producers, as defined in amendment No. 222, will be able to have a say and an influence, and to make representations to the OFT about their concerns and their interests, in the same way as consumers do.

It is not entirely a G.D.H. Cole measure, as the producers are not defined just as being workers by hand or by brain. They are defined as people who are involved in the productive selling and manufacturing system, so it cuts across class barriers to some extent. The Minister may have some problem in determining the weight that should be given to different sections. I want to refer to the concerns and interests of the TUC and particular trade unions in such matters.

3.15 pm

Various trade unions have pressed us on the matter. Members of the Committee received a letter from the Transport and General Workers Union's agriculture food section, in which it suggested that producers' interests should be considered as well and that we should have something about that in the Bill, presumably in line with the type of measures I am putting forward.

I saw one representation relating directly to the Bill in the *Financial Times* on the day of Second Reading. It was from Ed Sweeney, general secretary of Unifi, the financial sector trade union, who said:

> "Consideration should also be given as to whether the new 'super-complainant' procedure (that will enable certain consumer organisations to have the right to compel initial investigations by the Office of Fair Trading into specific markets) should be extended to other third parties."

That is what I am attempting to do with the amendments.

I am keen that we should progress because I am interested in the public interest provisions. I would not want to talk myself out on those, but I have an amendment that seeks to preserve section 12 of the Fair Trading Act 1973. It allows the Secretary of State to give directions to the Director General of Fair Trading on a number of issues, including prioritising in order to identify practices that may adversely affect consumers; determining priority markets requiring assessment as to whether a monopoly exists; and deciding whether to refer monopoly cases to the Competition Commission, or trade practices to the consumer protection advisory committee under part II of the Fair Trading Act.

The right to refer monopoly cases to the Competition Commission is part of the argument that I will seek to advance later when we deal more particularly with mergers and the public interest provisions, but Unifi and the wider labour movement are clearly concerned that mergers and monopoly development situations will seriously affect the well-being of people and the future of their firms, which may close. In those circumstances, producer interests in terms of earning one's livelihood are to the fore. The Secretary of State needs to be able to continue to take that into account as an interest.

If we have producer bodies and a producer's super-complaints procedure, that will provide an avenue for bringing concerns to the attention of the Director of Fair Trading. In addition, later amendments will enable such matters to be brought to the attention of the Secretary of State so that he or she can act. Amendment No. 217 is necessary to facilitate matters that appear later in the Bill. I hope that the Minister will respond favourably to the notion that producer interest can be squeezed by this sort of legislation, admirable though it is in dealing with consumer interests. There might be a need for balance if other viewpoints are to be put forward.

G.D.H. Cole suggested in his early days that Parliament should be reformed and there should not be a House of Lords and a House of Commons. He advocated that instead there should be a House of Producers and a House of Consumers. The consumers would be rather like the House of Commons because we are all consumers. The producers would be organised through guild trade unions—presumably there would be a form of indirect election—and would operate the other House. He thought that within a socialist society these bodies would not conflict with each other. However, he felt that if they were in conflict, over-riding provision should be given not to the House of Consumers but instead to the House of Producers, that being the nobler ideal.

Without going as far as G.D.H. Cole would have wanted, perhaps we can learn something from some of the things that he said.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): First, I shall respond to the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes). One suspects him of trying to introduce social revolution on the back of the Bill, that is by smuggling in Marxism through the back door. I am sure that that is not far away from the plot. In this instance, however, he seems to seek only an innocuous change of wording. Clause 6(1) states:

> "The OFT has the function of . . . making the public aware of the ways in which competition may benefit consumers".

If the amendment were agreed to, the subsection would provide that

> "competition may benefit consumers and producers."

In that event, the OFT would have a more difficult job. Some producers will not significantly enjoy any benefit of competition. In some instances, they would like no competition.

I move on to the issues raised by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), and on some I do not want to trespass. There is a sophisticated legal debate on the appropriate term for legal proceedings. That is whether it should be 90 days or 60 days. I can leave that to others.

The spirit behind the idea of using fine income to reprocess for the benefit of the consumer seems to be entirely correct. It has an element of earmarking, which is attractive. There is also the element of restitution. Presumably those who are offended will have an opportunity to contribute to the common good. It even brings in modern concepts such as hypothecation. It seems that the idea will do good.

The Minister's argument appears not to be that the idea will not do good, but that it may lead to further harm. It is suggested that the OFT will take an aggressive attitude towards charging producers that it thinks errant or wrong and accumulate money to use for other purposes that it has in mind. That is an objection in principle to many fines in many places. The same objection could be made in respect of traffic-calming measures and speed cameras, for example. It could be made also in terms of traffic wardens. There seems not to be a fundamental objection.

The wording suggested by the hon. Member for Eastbourne is surprisingly mild. It is that the OFT will consider whether any fines that are imposed under chapters 1 and 2 of the Act might be applied for any purpose. The wording does not command the OFT to do that. It merely gives a power to the office should it consider that to be an appropriate and good thing to do. The Minister might well wish to revisit this idea. Ministers are not loth to throw away powers unnecessarily offered to them. In this instance, the hon. Gentleman is offering a new power to the Government, in a sense. The OFT is not exactly the same thing as the Government, but it may find the process of administration useful in future circumstances.

I disagree with the hon. Gentleman on one issue, and it is an issue on which we disagreed in Committee. It relates to illustrating the additional costs that are incurred by business as a result of the various procedures in which the OFT will engage when investigating mergers, cartels and the like.

I share the hon. Gentleman's scepticism in that the Government are often thoroughly wrong when they talk about the effects of a piece of legislation, the red tape that will be involved and the cost to business. We have the shocking example of the Government declaring not too long ago that the effects of the increased burden on care homes would be cost neutral. I think that that is what the Government's investigation showed. Everybody accepts that the costs amount to about £300 million. If the effects of that legislation are cost neutral, care homes are behaving in an add way: they are going out of business.

There is a problem, and it was aired in Committee. An easy assessment to make is that of the costs involved in complying with a piece of legislation. The Government should get that right, and conventionally they get it wrong. However, businesses can do all sorts of things in responding to an investigation into their affairs. For example, they can hire the most expensive lawyers in the land. They can engage their top management night and day. They can inflate costs as and when they wish. In this context, they are not merely complying; they are reacting. Although I am sympathetic to the remarks of the hon. Member for Eastbourne, I see no realistic way in which business costs can be quantified in this instance. Therefore, there is no purpose in producing statistics that have little meaning, although the Government do it quite frequently.

Mr. Richard Page (South-West Hertfordshire): I shall speak specifically to amendment No. 223. I wish to reinforce the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) about the timetabling of consideration. It is ridiculous that we shall try to get through about 200 new clauses and amendments in about four and a half hours, and especially an item as important as amendment No. 223, which deals with the codes of conduct and behaviour of trade associations.

In making my short contribution, I shall worry the Minister by saying that I am broadly in favour of amendment No. 223. I welcome it, but I feel that it should go a little further. The provisions set out in the Bill needed to be amended in any event to take it into account that trade associations should properly be representative of the area of commerce or industry in which they operate, and that their finance, organisation, policies and procedures for redressing consumers' complaints should be as transparent as possible. These considerations are not taken into account in the Bill.

When the Secretary of State addressed the issue of consumer codes of practice on Second Reading, she told the House that provided they would be effective in protecting consumer interests and would meet core criteria yet to be defined, the Bill would include

> "measures to enable the OFT to give formal approval to voluntary industry codes of practice . . . and to promote the benefits of those codes to consumers and businesses."—[*Official Report*, 10 April 2002; Vol. 382, c. 49.].

We all say amen to that. I do not think that anyone would quarrel with such an outcome if it could be achieved. However, there is an issue that was not made clear on Second Reading, nor was it made clear in Committee, and the issue still remains obscure. The amendment does not make clear where the boundary will lie between the criteria that the OFT will be specifying and where the voluntary codes of practice will take effect. They will be drawn up by trade associations and others, to be submitted to the OFT for its approval.

The House, as well as consumer groups and trade associations throughout the country, will want to know where they stand before the Bill comes into effect. They will not want to await an interpretation by the OFT in the fullness of time.

I know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that you were in the House, as I was, when it passed legislation that led to the establishment of the Child Support Agency. We passed that legislation because it was absolutely right that parents who were not looking after their children should be called to account and made to contribute to looking after them. Everybody was agreed and the Bill went through Parliament in record time. However, none of us suspected that the rules and regulations that would follow, introduced by the civil service, would create a nightmare in years to come and clog our surgeries with problems for month after month. We are finally getting on top of things, but if we had known what was to come, we would have been rather more circumspect in deciding what to put into legislation.

[Mr. Richard Page]

I hope that we shall hear something helpful from the Minister. Organisations outside the House have already picked up the issue and have started to run with it. The CBI has made it clear that it wants further discussions on the framework and the principles that the OFT will be using to ensure that codes of practice will be

"fair and workable for both businesses and consumers."

Citizens advice bureaux have already commented on the likelihood that the OFT will start to receive complaints that it should not have approved some codes in some instances and should have approved codes in others, or that the codes are not working properly. Those reactions will be the inevitable result of not spelling out the core criteria to be met and failing to explain how much room trade associations have in formulating proposals for the code of practice. An outline of the thinking behind the scenes would therefore be appreciated. I am anxious that Ministers are more concerned about putting in place a framework of regulation—indeed, the Bill should have been called the enterprise regulation Bill—than about achieving a proper balance between consumers' interests and ensuring that business is free to serve customers and consumers to the best of its ability. Government amendment No. 223 is worrying because it seems to show where the Government's priorities lie.

3.30 pm

On Second Reading, in the spirit of helpfulness and co-operation that I obviously like to adopt, I made clear my concerns about the need for proper recognition of trade associations and the role that they should play in arrangements for protecting consumer interests. I have since had several discussions with trade associations and Mr. Mark Boleat, who is not only a professional consultant but has been the director general of two of the largest trade associations in the country. He served in one for quite a few years, then moved to an even bigger organisation and has now set up his own consultancy practice. He has another tremendous merit as he is a constituent of mine, which obviously gives him every possible advantage. I listened to him with great interest and am grateful to him and a number of trade associations for their advice and assistance. They emphasised the fact that it is essential that trade associations, which will effectively draft consumer codes of conduct under the Bill, should be as representative of the industry as possible. If Ministers are aware of that point, they have not given any sign of it.

I do not want to be too prescriptive, but codes of conduct should be given only to leading trade associations, which enjoy at least 50 per cent. representation of the industry; I shall not object if that representation is 60 or 70 per cent. Some years ago, I went to Japan, where I expected to see a Minister but, instead, I was ushered into the presence of the Japanese shipbuilding trade association, the most powerful body in the area, with only one company not being a member. I rapidly came to the conclusion that the association was highly instrumental in Government business and in driving forward a number of activities, including exports and Government financial measures to help the industry. I commend that example to the Minister. My constituent, Mark Boleat, wrote a book some time ago—I do not recommend it unless people suffer from insomnia and want to go to sleep—on the history of trade associations. When I read it five years ago, it covered 1,400 trade associations.

The DTI cannot possibly have enough officers to deal with so many associations. Different associations need to be brought together so that the DTI can give a focus to a sector rather than trying to deal with hundreds of warring trade associations; that can only be beneficial for the economy. I make that point in the spirit of co-operation and helpfulness which is in my nature, as everybody in the House knows.

Trade associations seeking approval from the OFT for consumer codes of practice should make available to the public their membership, finances and strategic plans both on the internet and in hard copy. Trade associations should make the public as consumers aware of the composition of their governing bodies, policies and procedures for dealing with complaints. I do not doubt that the OFT will consider that when it looks at the codes submitted to it. I do not advocate a wholesale return to the guild system of the middle ages, but it had some good points; if anyone was not up to scratch in the production of a particular service or product, they either had to get up to speed or were put out of business. Codes of conduct should have some insurance backing; trade associations should ensure that every single member of the sector has insurance cover so that if it goes bust or produces faulty work, the consumer is protected. That will make a trade association's logo meaningful; every consumer will know that if they go to a company belonging to the association they will have redress if something goes wrong. If a company goes bust, consumers will not be left with faulty products or services.

The Government amendment, which alters the regulatory mechanism, does not advance that proposal. I hope that I am pushing at an open door; nothing in my suggestion should come as a surprise to Ministers. The Department published a guide on best practice models for trade associations as long ago as 1996; since then the subject has been thoroughly investigated by the Trade Associations Forum. The criteria that trade associations and others must meet when submitting consumer codes to the OFT for approval are sufficiently important to merit much more discussion than we can give them today. The Government amendment characteristically leaves the matter to the OFT, presumably in consultation with the Department, to determine. That is not good enough; it is in no one's interest for the OFT to set out guidelines on consumer codes that are likely to raise business costs substantially or prove too bureaucratic. On the other hand, consumers need reassurance about the procedures for complaint and redress offered by trade associations, and must have confidence in the OFT's regulatory role. Those issues have been passed over, so I would be grateful if the Minister could offer me some reassurance in her reply.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): You may be relieved to have begun chairing the proceedings now, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and not to have played any part in Committee, where debate was wide-ranging. Similarly, the last three contributions have brought forth thoughts on the socialist philosopher Mr. Cole, the care home crisis and the Child Support Agency; there are no immediate comparisons among those three subjects.

I agree with much of what my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page) said. At Conservative party conferences, we are used to hearing the calls of many activists to bring back various things, but I have not yet heard of anyone going back as far as the middle ages. Perhaps we will hear other singular proposals in our debate.

I took on board my hon. Friend's claim that it would have been better to call the Bill the enterprise regulation Bill; that point is central to the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson). I acknowledge the fear that the OFT will flex its muscles too often. We must ensure that that temptation is kept to a minimum.

The key consideration is the cost to business. I am probably less sanguine than many of the professional bodies that wrote to members of the Standing Committee about the power of super-complaints. I am concerned that the self-appointed consumer champions will have far too much authority in relation to certain aspects of the Bill. There is a risk that legitimate business interests will be significantly harmed, so I hope that the Minister will give fair consideration, as she did in Committee, to the time limit for responses. A 60-day limit is sufficient. How will the Minister exercise her discretion to vary or override the current 90-day limit, a subject tackled in one of the Conservative amendments?

Miss Melanie Johnson: Our amendments Nos. 156 and 157 deal with the need to exclude any information relating to the affairs of a particular person or business

> "the publication of which would or might seriously and prejudicially affect the interests of that person"

or business. In Committee the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) rightly said that it would make enormous sense to replicate the wording in clause 235 for purposes of clarity and consistency. I agreed to consider the suggestion, and to be as helpful as I could.

As originally drafted, part 9 did not cover information obtained by the OFT under part 1. Clause 235 in its original form listed considerations to which public authorities must have regard before disclosing competition information, as defined. I shall not go into all the details, but following discussions on part 1, the Government reviewed the application of provisions in part 9, including clause 235. The upshot was the tabling of amendments that effectively render clauses 4, 5 and 6(3) redundant. Protection from unwarranted disclosure will now be provided in part 9. That will achieve the consistency throughout the Bill that Opposition Members—particularly the hon. Member for Eastbourne—wanted and which we agreed would be beneficial.

Amendment No. 223 seeks to tighten the definition of a consumer code of practice, and to ensure that the widest possible range of organisations can act as code sponsors. The hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Page), sadly, could not be with us in Committee—not everyone had that honour—but we all agreed then that the amendment would be helpful in giving the OFT clear powers to implement its new codes of practice regime, whose purpose was to help consumers to find reliable businesses. It was, I think, the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) who described this as an "enterprise regulation Bill". I trust that "regulation" in this context would include an element of self-regulation, for here we see an element that is not entirely to do with regulation in the classic sense, but which is much more akin to self-regulation.

The hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) noted that as drafted the clause would allow guidance-only codes to be approved. That was not our intention. The clause has been redrafted to make it clear that only codes regulating the behaviour of those signed up to them will be approved. To be approved, a code will have to comply with the OFT's criteria, which do indeed regulate the behaviour of members. Consumers will have the reassurance of knowing that if there is a problem, it can be put right: to obtain OFT approval, a code must contain mechanisms for both redress and compliance. Problems will be resolved, and failure to comply with the code will be dealt with.

We removed the words "relevant association" in case that was construed as limiting sponsors to trade associations. I know that the hon. Member for South–West Hertfordshire is a great fan of trade associations, but we wanted to ensure that the widest possible range of organisations would be able to act as sponsors. They might include local authority trading standards departments with good-trader schemes, or owners of shopping centres who had signed up their tenants to a code of practice.

Trade associations' redress systems will have to be transparent and compliant to meet the OFT's criteria. The whole system is voluntary. The OFT will publish criteria with which sponsors must comply to seek approval. It will all be spelled out. There has already been some consultation, in which I think the CBI has been involved.

As I said, we are not dealing with just lead trade associations. We wanted the arrangement to be as open as possible, to ensure that there were plenty of methods of entry for small businesses, which might not be members of the smaller associations. The most important thing is for organisations to meet the criteria, so that consumers have the protection that they expect from compliance with the code. Businesses will not have to belong to a trade association and pay for a full range of services to gain the right to use the logo.

3.45 pm

Mr. Page: I did not mean my remarks to apply exclusively to trade associations as such, but is there not a danger that if every small organisation—I will not say "whipstitch organisation"—qualifies, the logo will be devalued? Moreover, such organisations will not have the back-up and the managerial strength to provide the various required protections for consumer complaints. Organisations will have to be of a certain size to have any credibility in this regard.

Miss Johnson: Whoever fulfils the role will have to meet the same criteria. Obviously, that will be an issue if an organisation is too small to do so effectively, but there are a range of code sponsors that may not be small, but are not necessarily trade associations. I have mentioned local authorities, chambers of commerce and shopping centres, but registered charities could also be involved. It is not necessarily a question of scale.

What is important at the end of the day is that consumers get what they expect from the logo and the code. We believe that clause 8 will give the OFT the

[Miss Johnson]

power that it needs to run the codes regime in the way that it envisaged in its original consultation document, issued in February 2001.

New clause 3, as we know, concerns fines. I will not go into detail, but, like Opposition Members, I am keen to encourage projects or activities that benefit consumers, and clause 267 already allows the Secretary of State to do that. The consumer grants fund that it will establish could be used to give financial assistance to projects in areas where a general class of consumers has suffered harm—I gave examples in Committee—but where it is not possible for all the individual consumers concerned to be identified or to seek redress.

In that sense, clause 267 surely has a wider application than the new clause, which I think is sensible. Although one of our priorities will be to fund projects relating to the markets in which the OFT has established a breach of competition rule, the clause will ensure consideration of financial assistance for a wide range of products or other work that would benefit consumers. That will not be confined to consumers who have suffered from anti-competitive practices for which fines have been imposed under the Competition Act 1998; it will benefit consumers more widely, and will ensure that a more strategic view is taken, both of consumer issues that need to be addressed and of the funding available.

As was said in Committee, fines are by their nature unpredictable in terms of both timing and amount. Consumer benefits linked to them would also be erratic and unpredictable. Furthermore, fines can be imposed under the Competition Act only when the undertaking concerned has acted intentionally or negligently. Although such cases will frequently be those in which most damage is done to consumers, harm might also be done in other cases.

All that is, of course, in addition to our continuing ability to fund bodies such as the National Consumer Council which promote the interests of consumers.

For the reasons that I have given, I believe that clause 267 as drafted is better for consumers than the new clause and, indeed, makes it unnecessary.

Mr. Waterson: I take the Under-Secretary's point about the income stream from the source. However, is it not part of the point that the use of the money should be linked to the reasons for the fines? Will she confirm that if we do not act, the fines will simply disappear into the public purse?

Miss Johnson: There is no question of the fines disappearing into the public purse. They will be used for the projects and activities that I described.

Amendment No. 3 would require the OFT to produce a regulatory impact assessment every year. I do not have sympathy with the amendment because we could end up with regulatory impact assessments of every Act. That is a heavy bureaucratic burden. The OFT already has to consider the effects of its actions on business and it is therefore inappropriate and unnecessary to require it to quantify those effects in its annual report. We have a regulatory impact assessment of the Bill; we could argue about the detail if hon. Members wish. However, the OFT is not a legislative body and it will exercise only the powers that Parliament grants it. All the legislation that it enforces has been approved here and accompanied by an initial regulatory impact assessment. Now is the appropriate time to consider the additional costs that the new measure will impose.

There are statutory checks on the use of all the OFT's powers. For example, it cannot make a market reference unless it has reasonable grounds for suspecting that the reference criteria are satisfied. I expect that the OFT will not use its powers without good reason. The Bill increases its accountability in the system at all levels.

As I said when we considered Government amendments Nos. 156 and 157, amendments Nos. 6 and 8 have been overtaken by the deletion of clauses 4(5) and 6(3). We have therefore already dealt with those matters.

Amendments Nos. 10 and 11 cover the time allowed for the OFT to respond to super-complaints. The issue is whether 60 or 90 days are sufficient. The Opposition support the former and the Government the latter. There is not much meat in the argument, but I stick to my belief that a period of 90 days is right. We want to ensure that the OFT has sufficient time to consider super-complaints. If there is a case to answer, business will need to formulate a response and the OFT will need time to complete its analysis.

We believe that 90 days is the right period. However, if experience shows that super-complaints can be tackled properly in less than 90 days, the Secretary of State can curtail the statutory time scale by using the powers in clause 11(4). We should start with a time scale of 90 days and ascertain what happens. Amendment No. 11 would delete clause 11(4). As I said earlier, the flexibility should remain, so we cannot support the amendment.

Let us consider the points that my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) made. He tabled amendments about producers and producer interests, which we recall from discussions in Committee. Amendment No. 210 seeks to ensure that the OFT makes the public aware of the ways in which competition may benefit producers as well as consumers and the economy, by providing advice and information.

Clause 6 gives the OFT the function of promoting to the public the benefits of competition for consumers and the economy. That reference to the economy already covers any relevant, if not all, producer interests. Indeed, producers are also consumers and both sets of interests need to be balanced, as my hon. Friend acknowledged. I therefore do not believe that it is necessary or desirable to specify producer interests in the clause.

The emphasis on consumers is surely right. Consumers are often unaware of the importance of competition for lower prices, higher quality and greater choice. Strengthening consumer knowledge of the benefits of competition, which strengthens the consumer voice, has a key role in improving economic performance.

Amendments Nos. 211 to 216 seek to widen the definition of a code of practice to include bodies that safeguard or promote the interests of producers, such as trade unions or business groups. That would allow such codes to be submitted to the OFT for approval under the new codes of practice regime. If the definition were widened, it would be outside of the scope of the scheme as set out by the OFT in its consultation paper. Its focus is solely on business-to-consumer codes of practice.

I do not suggest that there is no room for codes that protect producers, and there are almost certainly several perfectly good business-to-business and business-to-producer codes that benefit those involved. There is no reason for the codes not to follow best practice by making use of the OFT's criteria, if appropriate. However, the codes would not be eligible for OFT approval under the Bill.

Again, that is because we intend to help consumers find reliable businesses. Consumers do not always have access to sufficient data about businesses to make an informed choice. Often, they do not have the knowledge and experience to help them choose, for example, a reliable garage for car repairs. Producers such as trade unions or business groups are clearly more able to find good traders and better deals. That is why the scheme is limited to consumer codes.

Amendments Nos. 218, 220 and 221 would permit producer bodies such as trade unions, as well as designated consumer bodies, to submit super-complaints. Amendments Nos. 219 and 222 would enable super-complaints to be made about market features that harm, or appear to be harming, the interests of producers, who are defined in the measure.

We have made it clear that we view the Bill as a measure for consumers, and the focus on their interests benefits everybody. After all, we are all consumers, and companies that respond to consumers' needs are successful. That is to the advantage of the people who work in those businesses and the long-term viability of the businesses. To that extent, the Bill articulates the same values as my hon. Friend's amendments.

Mr. Mark Field: The Under-Secretary rightly points out that we are all consumers. However, we must remember that that is so because we have successful businesses. We want them to thrive, which is why we tabled our amendments. Clearly, we must get the balance right, but we all rely on a thriving and successful business sector.

Miss Johnson: The Government recognise the importance of a thriving business sector, which is the basis for our economic prosperity. Indeed, everything flows from that. Money for public services ultimately derives from that prosperity.

The intention of the super-complaints provision is to alert the OFT to market failures that significantly harm the interests of consumers. Individual consumers are unlikely to have access to that information, or the relevant resources or skills to formulate complaints. The aim is to enable consumer bodies to do that on their behalf. The procedure is designed to benefit consumers, and will therefore be available only to designated consumer bodies. Producer bodies do not have as their principal raison d'etre the protection of consumer interests. Producer bodies can already put complaints about market failure or other issues to the OFT, and nothing in the Bill prevents them from continuing to do so.

I want to speak about section 12 of the Fair Trading Act 1973. Amendment No. 217 would preserve that provision. The provisions relating to the consumer protection advisory committee will become superfluous because clause 10 abolishes it. As an independent body, the OFT should be free to set its own priorities in the new regime. The existence of the powers of direction under the Fair Trading Act could inhibit that freedom.

The amendment would change the intended functions of the OFT and would, in some cases, impose unnecessary burdens and constraints on it. I do not think that there would be a benefit to consumers, businesses or producers, and I therefore hope that my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire will not press his amendment to a vote.

4 pm

Regarding my earlier answer to the hon. Member for Eastbourne on fines, I want to clarify the fact that the fines will go into the Consolidated Fund, so they will be in the public purse, but the money from the new consumer grants fund will be used for the projects that I described. That concludes my remarks on the amendments in this group.

Mr. Waterson: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for the trouble that she has taken to provide that explanation. I am pleased, not least because one of our concerns is being dealt with in a different part of the Bill; that seems to make sense. I do not want to prolong the debate about 60 days versus 90 days. We have probably beaten that argument to death, one way or another.

I was pleased that the Minister corrected what she had said earlier about fines. It is clear from the Bill that there is no mechanism for those fines to be diverted towards something useful for consumers, and that they will just go the way of all fines—that is, they will, as she has just confirmed, disappear into the Consolidated Fund.

I made it clear that we welcome the separate provision for funding for consumer information and so on, but it seems to us—alarmingly, perhaps, the Liberal Democrats seem to take a similar view—that it would be rough justice if the money could be directed towards consumers when fines were imposed. Diverting fines in that way would be particularly appropriate in cases of fines being imposed because of a particular practice or set of practices in which it was impossible to identify those who had been harmed. We therefore remain disappointed by the Minister's approach to the matter. We seem to have gone round in an enormous circle, having debated it more than once.

On business costs, I simply do not understand the problem. It would be a modest but necessary discipline on the new system if, once a year, or whatever, the Government were required to make an assessment of the costs to business of what they were doing. Otherwise, there would be no mechanism by which they could make a cost-benefit analysis of their activities. This is a modest proposal. It is all very well for the Minister to say that we would end up with regulatory impact assessments of every piece of legislation every year. If the legislation impacts directly on business, what would be wrong with that? We cannot keep on churning out pages and pages of legislation that affect business and add to its costs, without giving some thought to what it is costing the business community.

We are disappointed by the Minister's response on both those issues, but I shall not press the new clause to a Division. The matters should be further debated in another place, and I am sure that they will be. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the motion.

Motion and clause, by leave, withdrawn.

Schedule 1

THE OFFICE OF FAIR TRADING

Miss Melanie Johnson: I beg to move amendment No. 89, in page 186, line 19, at end insert—

'(2) Sub-paragraph (1) does not apply in relation to any document which is, or is to be, signed in accordance with the law of Scotland.'.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): With this it will be convenient to discuss Government amendments Nos. 90, 246, 247, 162 to 164, 284, 287 to 295, 185 to 187, 321, 322, 356 to 370, 98, 323, 188 to 190, 301, 135, 136, 192, 193, 302, 194, 137, 191, 303, 138 and 139.

Miss Johnson: This is a big group of Government amendments, and I do not propose to speak to all of them. They are minor or consequential, and cover several different areas. I shall speak briefly to amendments Nos. 321, 322, 356, 357, 359, 360 to 369 and 370.

I place on record our thanks to the City of London Law Society for its help and support in developing these exemption provisions. This is a very technical and specialised area, and, on behalf of the Department and the Government, I thank members of the society for giving so generously of their time and expertise in meeting officials and commenting on the drafting of the clauses. The amendments clarify and bring greater certainty to the exemption provisions. I shall be happy to answer any questions that hon. Members may have on the other amendments. I commend the amendment to the House.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 4

ANNUAL AND OTHER REPORTS

Amendment made: No. 156, in page 2, line 31, leave out subsection (5).—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Clause 6

PROVISION OF INFORMATION ETC. TO THE PUBLIC

Amendment made: No. 157, in page 3, line 17, leave out subsection (3).—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Clause 8

PROMOTING GOOD CONSUMER PRACTICE

Amendment made: No. 223, in page 3, line 37, leave out subsections (2) to (5) and insert—

'(2) In carrying out that function the OFT may (without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1)) make arrangements for approving consumer codes and may, in accordance with the arrangements, give its approval to or withdraw its approval from any consumer code.

(3) Any such arrangements must specify the criteria to be applied by the OFT in determining whether to give approval to or withdraw approval from a consumer code.

(4) Any such arrangements may in particular—

(a) specify descriptions of consumer code which may be the subject of an application to the OFT for approval (and any such description may be framed by reference to any feature of a consumer code, including the persons who are, or are to be, subject to the code, the manner in which it is, or is to be, operated and the persons responsible for its operation); and

(b) provide for the use in accordance with the arrangements of an official symbol intended to signify that a consumer code is approved by the OFT.

(5) The OFT shall publish any arrangements under subsection (2) in such manner it considers appropriate.

(6) In this section "consumer code" means a code of practice or other document (however described) intended, with a view to safeguarding or promoting the interests of consumers, to regulate by any means the conduct of persons engaged in the supply of goods or services to consumers (or the conduct of their employees or representatives).'.—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Clause 12

THE COMPETITION APPEAL TRIBUNAL

Mr. Lansley: I beg to move amendment No. 147, in page 6, line 5, leave out "Secretary of State" and insert "Lord Chancellor".

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government amendment No. 158.

Amendment No. 148, in schedule 2, page 188, line 12, at end insert—

'(1A) A person is not eligible for appointment as an ordinary member unless he appears to the Lord Chancellor to have appropriate experience and knowledge (whether of competition law and practice, other relevant law and practice, economic and business practice, or experience in relation to any sector of industry to which the Competition Appeal Tribunal exercises an appellate function'.

Government amendments Nos. 169 to 181.

Amendment No. 311, in clause 17, page 7, line 39, leave out "that" and insert "as to whether".

Amendment No. 312, in page 8, line 1, leave out "that" and insert "as to whether".

Amendment No. 313, in page 8, line 3, leave out "that" and insert "as to whether".

Amendment No. 314, in page 8, line 4, leave out "that" and insert "as to whether".

Government amendments Nos. 372, 159, 182 to 184, 252 to 255, 160 and 161.

Amendment No. 315, in clause 116, page 82 leave out lines 25 to 34 and insert—

'(5A) The Competition Appeal Tribunal may confirm or set aside the decision which is the subject of the appeal and may—

(a) remit the matter to the OFT, the Secretary of State or the Competition Commission as the case might be ("the original decision maker");

(b) cancel or vary any conditions or obligations imposed by the original decision maker;

(c) give such directions or take such steps as the original decision maker could have made;

(d) make any other decision which the original decision maker could have made.'.

Government amendments Nos. 256, 257, 296 and 297.

Mr. Lansley: This group of amendments relates to the Competition Appeal Tribunal. There are 29 Government amendments, which I am sure the Minister will tell us about in due course. I want to speak to amendments Nos. 147 and 148, tabled in my name, and I shall also refer to our amendments Nos. 311 to 314 and 315.

The purpose of amendment No. 147 is to change the responsibility for the appointment of ordinary members of the Competition Appeal Tribunal's panel. Hon. Members will recall that the tribunal was established under the Competition Act 1998, and consists of a president, a panel of chairmen and ordinary members. The ordinary members are appointed by the Secretary of State, as distinct from the Lord Chancellor, who is responsible for the appointment of the president and the panel of chairmen; that is carried forward into this Bill. The president and the panel of chairmen have responsibility not only for having competition law expertise but for ensuring that the tribunal behaves in a way that is consistent with the way in which a court would consider similar decisions.

As the Government have constructed the legislation, the Competition Appeal Tribunal indeed has to behave like a court in some respects, in that it applies the principles of judicial review to appeals that are made to it. It is, therefore, necessary for it to have legal expertise. For that reason, if for no other, appointment by the Lord Chancellor is to be sought after.

There is, however, a particular reason why I propose that the Lord Chancellor should also be responsible for appointing the ordinary members. Under the Competition Act, it was correctly felt that the ordinary members could be appointed by the Secretary of State because they would bring the additional expertise necessary to examine appeals on their merits, on issues relating to anti-competitive agreements or abuses of a dominant position. The cases brought before the tribunal demonstrate that experience not only of competition law but of economic analysis of competition is necessary to reach decisions on those issues. I shall come to appropriate expertise when I speak to amendment No. 148.

Other things being equal, the Secretary of State could continue to appoint the ordinary members of the tribunal, in relation to decisions on the Competition Act, without any problems. That is because the decisions that are appealable to the Competition Appeal Tribunal under the Competition Act come from decisions made by the Office of Fair Trading. Under the Bill, however, the decisions will not necessarily be made by the Office of Fair Trading or the Competition Commission. In certain circumstances, they will be made by the Secretary of State. Of course, under the Fair Trading Act 1973, such decisions used to be appealable to the High Court, so a judge would be responsible for assessing judicial review decisions made by the Secretary of State. However, the Government propose in the Bill that decisions made on judicial review grounds be appealed to a body whose members are appointed by the Secretary of State.

My primary contention in speaking to amendment No. 147 is that that is an unacceptable infringement of the proper independence of the tribunal in exercising its function. Indeed, such an independent and impartial tribunal is required by article 6 of the European convention on human rights. However, we could arrive at circumstances in which a decision made by the Secretary of State is appealed on judicial review grounds, but in which one of the members of the body to which it is referred is about to be reappointed—or not—by the Secretary of State. By the simple expedient of making the Lord Chancellor rather than the Secretary of State responsible for such appointments, we can escape that problem, so I commend the amendment to the Minister's consideration.

Amendment No. 148 is designed to extend the description of the experience that ordinary members of the Competition Appeal Tribunal should have. My reason for tabling the amendment is that it is clear that the tribunal will not only be asked to consider judicial review decisions, but be used as a body under sector-specific legislation. For those who care to look, schedule 9 gives a range of examples in which that arrangement will apply. The decisions that will be made by sector regulators, especially in respect of licence conditions, are not simply legal decisions, but relevant to economic analysis and require business experience.

That point was further brought home to me when it became clear that in the draft Communications Bill that is being scrutinised elsewhere—I am a member of its scrutiny committee—the Government intend that the Competition Appeal Tribunal be the body to which decisions made by the Secretary of State or the Office of Communications will be appealed. Those decisions will be substantive and not made simply on a judicial review basis, so general legal expertise and competition law expertise will not be sufficient for the panel in dealing with them.

To make the Bill more effective in terms of the availability of opportunities for appeals to be heard in respect of sector regulators' decisions on licence conditions, my second submission on amendment No. 148 is that the Minister should think seriously about extending the sort of business and economic analysis experience that panel members of the Competition Appeal Tribunal can bring to bear.

I want briefly to refer to amendments Nos. 311 to 314. The amendments deal with clause 17, which amends the Competition Act, and are intended to ensure that the question whether a claim for damages might be brought to the tribunal is determined not by whether the OFT has decided

"that . . . the prohibition has been infringed",

but by whether it has made a decision "as to whether" it has been infringed. The amendments do not stem only from the fertile imaginations of Opposition Members, but derive from the recommendations of the Joint Working Party on Competition Law of the Bars and Law Societies of the United Kingdom.

4.15 pm

As I understand it—I apologise if I have misunderstood the joint working party—the purpose of the provisions as things stand is that a court can entertain an application for damages by a private party in respect of infringements or argued infringements of the anti-competitive agreements or in relation to prohibitions on abuse of a dominant position. The current structure of the Bill would mean that where the OFT has decided that such an infringement existed, an application for an award of damages would go to the Competition Appeal Tribunal. However, the concern is that those who wish to argue that there is an infringement by which harm has arisen and for which damages may be claimed could still go to the court to make a private claim.

For my purposes, I will be made comfortable if the Minister can assure me that it would not be possible for a further claim to be made when the OFT decides that such

[Mr. Lansley]

an infringement has not been made. If it is possible for the matter to be taken to the court when the OFT has decided that there is no infringement and has not proceeded, that will be an additional jeopardy. It is that jeopardy that the amendments are designed to remove, so that the issue rests with the competition authorities and the Competition Appeal Tribunal, as I think the Government would have intended.

Amendment No. 315 is intended to test the issue. Its purpose, which is to make decisions on merger references appealable to the Competition Appeal Tribunal on their merits, seems on the face of it to be a step too far. However, it is important to test the Minister out, especially as I do not think that that happened in quite the same terms in Committee. The question is whether the decision by the OFT on making a merger reference is sufficient for the subsequent investigation by the Competition Commission, which is usually the determining body in this regard, to be regarded as a full appeal by an independent and impartial tribunal. I think that the answer to that question is yes in terms of mergers, but for reasons that I shall come to in speaking to a later group of amendments, I think the answer is no in so far as market investigations are concerned.

If the Minister can further assure us that the Competition Commission is the appeal body for such purposes—the independent and impartial tribunal that is needed for appeal against a substantive decision on a merger reference by the OFT—we will be sure that we have the two-stage process that is necessary to give proper reassurance to those who are affected by competition decisions.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I should like to say a few words in support of proposals that seem sensible and constructive. I am not a lawyer either and I take my cue from the Law Society, but it seems to me that some perfectly justifiable points are being raised. In particular, I refer to amendment No. 315. I think that the question that is being asked—it has been put slightly differently from the way in which the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) has put it—is about why there is a difference between the ways in which the Competition Act and the Bill work. As I understand it, the Competition Act allows a full and substantive appeal to be made on the basis of the merits involved, but the judicial review process for which the Bill provides is much more truncated. It is not obvious why the two matters should be dealt with somewhat differently, and the amendment is designed to provide not only a stronger process of appeal, but some consistency between the two measures. It would be useful to hear from the Minister the reasons why that difference is being maintained.

Miss Melanie Johnson: The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) has already covered the aims of amendments Nos. 147 and 148. On the first point, which is that the amendments would ensure that the Lord Chancellor would make all the appointments, as I explained in Committee, we are happy with the division of responsibilities that we envisage for the Lord Chancellor and the Secretary of State. I thought that the hon. Gentleman shot his own foot somewhat by pointing out that there would be a difference between the role of the chairman and president and that of the other appointees to the tribunal, as those on the panel of chairmen would have to understand what was consistent and behave as if the tribunal were a court. The tribunal is indeed a court, and it therefore makes sense that the people who are appointed have explicit qualifications. The Lord Chancellor obviously has an expertise that is at a premium in considering such questions. We believe that his involvement in those cases should ensure that we attract candidates of the highest calibre to be chairmen.

However, we believe that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is best placed to identify and select candidates with the necessary blend and breadth of experience and background to constitute ordinary members. They will not have to carry out legal roles, nor will they require legal qualifications. Such members will not necessarily be bringing specific legal expertise, but they will be expected to have expertise relevant to competition. They could be drawn from a wide range of backgrounds. The background could be legal but it could also be in economics, business, accountancy or other areas. For that reason, we believe that the right balance has been struck.

There are already measures in place to ensure that the ordinary members, chairmen and president can carry out their duties without any external influence being brought to bear. We have strengthened these measures. The only grounds for removing any member from office will be incapacity or misbehaviour. The scenario that the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire entertained briefly of a member being removed is not an issue. Also, members and chairmen will be appointed for one eight-year term with no reappointment. Previously, members were appointed for shorter terms and then reappointed, so the break that the hon. Gentleman referred to did exist.

These safeguards, and others, will ensure the integrity of the tribunal's decisions. The division of responsibilities offers the best prospect of securing the required level of legal and other expertise on the tribunal.

On the second issue, we share the desire of the hon. Gentleman—if we have understood the intention of his amendment correctly; there appears to be a negative too many—to attract ordinary members with relevant expertise. We made a commitment in the White Paper that all members should have expertise relevant to competition. However, we have deliberately not included a specific requirement in the Bill because of the difficulties in formulating such a requirement. That is a very different situation from that for the legally qualified chairmen and president, whom we require to have experience of competition law and practice. That concept is relatively easy to define.

"Expertise relevant to competition" is much broader, and could come from working in business or from having an accountancy background, for example. We need to keep our options open if we are to attract members of the calibre required, and particularly if we want to attract candidates from diverse backgrounds and from all areas of the UK. The problems of definition do not arise here, as they did in the case of those who needed experience of competition law and practice. It is for that reason that we have made the change. I am entirely sympathetic to the points made by the hon. Gentleman.

The amendment represents the sentiment of what we are trying to achieve, but it is not necessary to require it in the Bill. We could risk excluding potentially very good candidates if we were to do so. I ask the hon. Gentleman to withdraw the amendment, recognising that the needs are being met.

Amendment No. 315 seeks to give parties a right to review the substance of any decision that is taken. The subject of what could constitute the appropriate grounds for review of a decision following a merger or market investigation was discussed in Committee. As I explained then, the Bill provides for parties who are aggrieved by decisions to have them reviewed by the CAT on the same grounds as would be applied by the courts on the application for judicial review. That is the situation under the Fair Trading Act at present, where decisions of the Secretary of State are open to challenge on judicial review grounds.

We continue to believe that judicial review is the right jurisdiction for appeals against decisions taken in merger investigations. That type of review by the CAT will ensure that the procedures followed by the authorities are fair and that the parties are given the opportunity to put their case. It will allow the CAT to re-examine any decision taken by the authorities to assess whether it is reasonable.

No merger is prohibited by law from the outset. It is for the authorities to decide case by case whether any merger will lead to a substantial lessening of competition and what steps should be taken to remedy that in each case. That could mean outright prohibition, or imposing conditions as the price of clearance.

Decisions will be based on an analysis of individual cases on their specific facts and an economic analysis of those facts by the authorities, acting in accordance with their statutory duties. They will not be evaluated against a defined prohibition by reference to an existing body of substantive competition law and jurisprudence, as would be the case with decisions under the Competition Act 1998.

A considerable amount of discretion needs to be exercised. It would be difficult for the CAT to assess whether the decision that has been made is right or wrong in objective terms. In this context, we clearly need to ensure that the process followed by the authorities was fair and that the parties were given the opportunity to put their case. A judicial review type of appeal is therefore appropriate.

Such a review by the CAT will also allow decisions to be assessed more quickly than would a full appeal on its merits. We consider that resolving these disputes quickly is particularly important in a merger situation where the market environment may be changing rapidly. The mechanism for challenging decisions made in relation to merger investigation references needs to ensure that the process followed by the authorities in a merger investigation is fair and that the parties are given the opportunity to put their case.

If, applying the principles of judicial review, the CAT considers the challenge to the decision is justified, the original decision maker can be asked to look at the decision again. We think that this is the most appropriate way to deal with the type of decision that will be made under these parts of the Bill.

The hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire asked about the Competition Commission, which is not an appeal body in the way that he envisages. The two bodies separately consider the issues involved in a case, but they do not formally consider an appeal. For both markets and mergers, we are happy that we have an overall structure that offers sufficient right of appeal. The combination of the Competition Commission and the CAT offers an opportunity for consideration of all the issues.

In relation to damages, one could in principle go to court in a case where there was no infringement found, but the court would have to have regard to the result of the OFT's decision.

Amendments Nos. 311 to 314 widen the basis on which claims for damages can be brought to the CAT by enabling claims to be brought where the OFT has found that there has not been an infringement of competition law. It is hard to envisage what basis there could possibly be for bringing a damages claim with respect to anti-competitive activity where it has been established that no infringement has occurred. As it stands, amendment No. 311 will not help those who have been harmed by anti-competitive activity to bring claims for damages, which is what I think the hon. Gentleman had in mind.

With that, I hope that I can persuade the hon. Gentleman to withdraw the amendment.

Mr. Lansley: I am comforted by what the Minister said about the measures for trying to secure the independence of the CAT, and about amendment No. 147. On amendment No. 148, I agree that we are looking for the same kind of objective. Looking back at the Competition Act 1998, which is amended here, I should be interested in whether there was some way of reflecting more substantively the range of experience that is required by the CAT as it accumulates these additional responsibilities. I understand that one would not want to do so in a way that frustrated the ability to appoint people who appear to have different but highly desirable experience, but it seems to me not to be beyond the wit of Government to achieve that. I must confess that, previously, it seemed to me that the reference to experience of competition law and practice seemed rather narrow and that it would be better to try to widen it, if that could be done.

4.30 pm

I entirely understand the Minister's point about amendments Nos. 311 to 314. They could allow individuals to come to the tribunal in circumstances where the OFT decided that no infringement had occurred, but as she says, I doubt whether they would get very far. The question is, does that also mean that they would not get very far if they went to a court in such circumstances? She said that it is open to people to go to a court for a private action, but that the court would have to have regard to the OFT's decisions. Would it not be better to construct matters in such a way that people could not go to a separate court, but had instead to go to the tribunal? Given that the Government have created the tribunal as the appropriate body for hearing awards for damages, should it not also hear cases that could conceivably be brought in circumstances where an infringement had not been proved?

If I may, I shall leave the issue of appeals to be judged on its merits. I intimated my view that the two-stage merger process—involving the OFT, the Competition Commission and judicial review through the Competition Appeal Tribunal—is sufficient. However, for reasons that

[Mr. Lansley]

I shall explain later, that is not necessarily true in respect of market investigations. With those points in mind, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Clause 14

CONSTITUTION OF TRIBUNAL FOR PARTICULAR PROCEEDINGS AND ITS DECISIONS

Amendment made: No. 158, in page 6, line 31, at end insert—

'( ) This section has effect subject to paragraph 17 of Schedule 4 (consequences of a member of the Tribunal being unable to continue after the proceedings have begun to be heard).'.—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Schedule 3

THE COMPETITION SERVICE

Amendment made: No. 90, in page 190, line 36, at end insert—

'(2) Sub-paragraph (1) does not apply in relation to any document which is, or is to be, signed in accordance with the law of Scotland.'.—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Schedule 4

TRIBUNAL: PROCEDURE

Amendments made: No. 169, in page 193, line 23, at end insert—

'(4) The President shall make such arrangements for the publication of the decisions of the Tribunal as he considers appropriate.'.

No. 170, in page 193, line 25, leave out from "Tribunal" to second "in" and insert—

'is registered in England and Wales'.

No. 171, in page 193, line 33, leave out "in Scotland awards damages" and insert "awards damages, costs or".

No. 172, in page 193, line 38, leave out—

'in England and Wales or Scotland'.

No. 173, in page 194, line 3, leave out from "Tribunal" to "with" and insert—

'may be enforced in Northern Ireland'.

No. 174, in page 194, line 10, leave out from "enforcing" to end of line 11 and insert—

'in Northern Ireland a decision to award damages, costs or expenses—'.

No. 175, in page 194, line 12, leave out "or costs" and insert ", costs or expenses".

No. 176, in page 194, line 15, leave out "or costs" and insert ", costs or expenses".

No. 177, in page 194, line 20, leave out from "enforcing" to first "the" in line 21 and insert—

'in Northern Ireland a direction given as a result of a decision of the Tribunal'.

No. 178, in page 196, leave out lines 18 and 19.

No. 179, in page 196, line 28, at end insert—

'(1A) Tribunal rules may make provision enabling the Tribunal to refer any matter arising in any proceedings (other than a claim for damages under section 47A of the 1998 Act) back to the authority that made the decision to which the proceedings relate, if it appears that the matter has not been adequately investigated.'.

No. 180, in page 196, leave out lines 37 to 39 and insert—

'( ) Tribunal rules may make provision as to the consequences of a member of the Tribunal being unable to continue after part of any proceedings have been heard.

( ) The rules may allow the Tribunal to consist of the remaining members for the rest of the proceedings.

( ) The rules may enable the President, if it is the chairman of the Tribunal who is unable to continue—'.

No. 181, in page 198, line 5, at end insert—

'21A (1) Tribunal rules may make provision enabling the Tribunal to decide where to sit for the purposes of, or of any part of, any proceedings before it.

(2) Tribunal rules may make provision enabling the Tribunal to decide that any proceedings before it are to be treated, for purposes connected with—

(a) any appeal from a decision of the Tribunal made in those proceedings; and

(b) any other matter connected with those proceedings,

as proceedings in England and Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland (regardless of the decision made for the purposes of sub-paragraph (1)).

(3) For the purposes of sub-paragraph (2), Tribunal rules may provide for each claim for damages made or continued on behalf of an individual in proceedings under section 47B of the 1998 Act to be treated as separate proceedings.'.—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Clause 17

DAMAGES

Amendment made: No. 372, in page 8, line 32, at beginning insert—

'Otherwise than with the permission of the Tribunal,'.—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Clause 18

CLAIMS ON BEHALF OF CONSUMERS

Amendment made: No. 159, in page 9, leave out lines 35 to 37.—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Schedule 5

PROCEEDINGS UNDER PART 1 OF THE 1998 ACT

Amendments made: No. 182, in page 198, line 34, leave out—

'Court of Appeal or the Court of Session'

and insert "appropriate court".

No. 183, in page 199, line 7, leave out from "or" to end of line 8 and insert "the appropriate court.

(3) In this section "the appropriate court" means the Court of Appeal or, in the case of an appeal from Tribunal proceedings in Scotland, the Court of Session.".'.

No. 184, in page 199, leave out lines 28 to 30 and insert—

'(b) sub-paragraph (3)(a) shall cease to have effect; and'.—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Clause 21

DUTY TO MAKE REFERENCES IN RELATION TO COMPLETED MERGERS

Mr. Waterson: I beg to move amendment No. 18, in page 11, line 7, leave out "shall" and insert "may at its discretion".

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Amendment No. 19, in page 11, line 7, after "(3)", insert "have a discretion to".

Amendment No. 21, in page 11, leave out lines 11 and 12 and insert—

'in the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 202, in page 11, line 11, after "competition", insert—

'or substantial damage to the public interest'.

Amendment No. 22, in page 11, line 12, at end insert—

'or

(c) the creation of that situation has operated, or may be expected to operate against the public interest.'.

Government amendments Nos. 224 to 226.

Amendment No. 20, in clause 32, page 19, line 34, leave out "shall" and insert "may at its discretion".

Amendment No. 23, in page 19, line 38, leave out from "result" to end of line 40 and insert—

'in the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition is likely to be significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 203, in page 19, line 39, after "competition", insert—

'or substantial damage to the public interest'.

Amendment No. 24, in page 19, line 40, at end insert—

'or

(c) the creation of that situation has operated, or may be expected to operate against the public interest.'.

Amendment No. 56, in page 20, line 7, at end insert—

'or

(d) the enterprise which is the subject of the proposed merger will become insolvent within the immediate future; the market shares of the enterprise would in any event go to the acquiring party; and there is no less anti-competitive way of selling the company.'.

Amendment No. 204, in clause 34, page 20, line 43, after "competition". insert—

'or substantial damage to the public interest'.

Amendment No. 25, in page 20, line 45, at end insert—

'or

(c) the creation of that situation has operated, or may be expected to operate against the public interest.'.

Amendment No. 26, in page 21, line 3, leave out from "result" to "or" in line 25 and insert—

'in the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may be significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 27, in page 21, line 8, leave out from "result" to end of line 10 and insert—

'in the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may be significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 28, in page 21, line 15, leave out from "preventing" to end of line 18 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 29, in page 21, line 20, leave out from "preventing" to "and" in line 23 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 30, in page 21, line 28, leave out from "practicable" to end of line 29 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 31, in clause 35, page 22, leave out lines 5 and 6 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 205, in page 22, line 5, after "competition", insert—

'or substantial damage to the public interest'.

Amendment No. 32, in page 22, line 6, at end insert—

'or

(c) the creation of that situation has operated, or may be expected to operate against the public interest.'.

Amendment No. 33, in page 22, line 11, leave out from "preventing" to end of line 13 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 34, in page 22, line 15, leave out from "preventing" to "and" in line 17 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 35, in page 22, line 22, leave out from "practicable" to end of line 23 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Government amendment No. 227.

Amendment No. 36, in clause 40, page 25, line 37, leave out from "prevent" to "and" in line 38 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 37, in page 25, line 40, leave out from second "from" to end of line 41 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 38, in page 26, line 1, leave out from "to" to end of line 2 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 57, in page 26, line 5, at end insert—

'(6) In making a decision under subsection (2), the Commission may also have regard to whether the enterprise which is the subject of the proposed merger will become insolvent within the immediate future; the market shares of the enterprise would in any event go to the acquiring party; and there is no less anti-competitive way of selling the company.'.

Government amendments Nos. 228, 230 and 231.

Amendment No. 39, in clause 43, page 29, line 14, leave out from "in" to end of line 15 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 58, in page 29, line 28, at end insert—

'or

(g) the enterprise which is the subject of the proposed merger will become insolvent within the immediate future; the market shares of the enterprise would in any event go to the acquiring party; and there is no less anti-competitive way of selling the company.'.

Amendment No. 40, in clause 44, page 30, line 7, leave out from first "of" to "the" in line 8 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 41, in page 30, line 15, leave out from "result" to end of line 16 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 42, in page 30, line 27, leave out from "result" to end of line 29 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 43, in page 30, line 33, leave out from first "of" to end of line 36 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 44, in page 30, line 41, leave out from "in" to end of line 43 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 45, in clause 46, page 32, line 8, leave out from "in" to "and" in line 9 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 46, in page 32, line 10, leave out from "any" to "the" in line 12 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 47, in page 32, line 25, leave out from "in" to "and" in line 27 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 48, in page 32, line 28, leave out from "any" to end of line 31 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 49, in page 33, line 6, leave out from "be" to "it" in line 7 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 50, in page 33, line 11, leave out from "preventing" to end of line 14 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 51, in page 33, line 17, leave out from beginning to "and" in line 19 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 52, in page 33, line 26, leave out from "be)" to end of line 27 and insert—

'the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Amendment No. 59, in page 33, line 32, at end insert—

'(10A) The Commission may also have regard to whether the enterprise which is the subject of the proposed merger will become insolvent within the immediate future; the market shares of the enterprise would in any event go to the acquiring party; and there is no less anti-competitive way of selling the company.'.

Government amendment No. 237.

Amendment No. 53, in clause 54, page 39, line 3, leave out "substantial lessening of competition" and insert—

the creation or strengthening of a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced within any market or markets in the United Kingdom for goods or services'.

Government amendments Nos. 238 and 239.

Amendment No. 54, in clause 70, page 51, line 5, leave out "substantial lessening of competition" and insert—

'creating or strengthening a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced'.

Amendment No. 55, in page 51, line 12, leave out—

'substantial lessening of competition and any adverse effects resulting from it'

and insert—

'creating or strengthening a dominant position, as a result of which competition may have been significantly reduced'.

Government amendments Nos. 248 to 251.

Amendment No. 69, in clause 99, page 70, line 30, leave out Clause 99.

Mr. Waterson: I shall set your mind at rest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, by pointing out that this group of amendments is not as fearsome as it might first appear. I shall take the House through at least those amendments for which I claim some responsibility.

Rather than imposing an obligation, amendments Nos. 18 to 20 would give the OFT the discretion to refer completed and anticipated mergers to the Competition Commission. The idea was debated in Committee on 25 April, but it was rejected by the Government on the basic ground that a broad discretion not to refer was appropriate where there is a two-stage referral process. However, as the Director General of Fair Trading would act alone on the basis of a more focused test, there would be less room for discretion. The Minister said that the new test should not result in a greater number of references. It is important to note that, broadly speaking—it is impossible to be wholly accurate on these matters—the Government's intention is that the number of references should not rise as a result of the provisions.

However, we are not wholly convinced, which is why we have tabled similar amendments on Report. The Bill introduces a significant change of emphasis. Under the Fair Trading Act 1973, the Secretary of State had the discretion to decide whether or not to refer mergers, acting on the advice of the director general. Since October 2000, the director general's advice has normally been accepted. Taken together, the formulations set out in clauses 21 and 32 require a reference to be made in respect of proposed and completed mergers, except in certain limited circumstances.

Lest anyone think that I am cleverer than I really am, the amendments were inspired by the joint working party of the Law Society and the Bar. *[Interruption.]* I am grateful that my comment has found favour with the Government Whip. It is therefore clear that concern exists outside this place that there will be almost routine or obligatory pre-clearance for mergers—a point that we made in Committee. It is fair to say that many parties already undertake such pre-clearance, but entirely at their own discretion. We—and others who are perhaps better placed to know—believe that a dramatic shift will take place. It will make practical sense for those who are contemplating a particular merger to obtain pre-clearance, which will in itself involve a major increase in applications.

The Law Society and the Bar also pointed out that there was no consultation on this change of policy, which was not included in the White Paper. I think it fair to say—I have not checked the relevant editions of *Hansard*—that the Minister gave no reason for her assumption that the provisions will not result in an increase in references. We want to press her hard on that issue.

The other issues—public interest, and the dominant position in terms of the test that should be applied in such cases—fall into two or three categories. You will be relieved to hear, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that many of the amendments in this group make the same point. We had a good debate on these issues in Committee, but some of the arguments bear repetition. Under the 1973 Act, the public interest test was established, and it is generally accepted that that needs revisiting. Some discussion took place in Committee on the merits of the dominance test—which is favoured by the Confederation of British Industry, for example—and what is known as the "substantial lessening of competition" test. One argument in favour of the dominance test is that it is the standard for assessing mergers under the EC regime. There is real concern that businesses operating in this country might face a stiffer test here than they would face under the European regime.

In Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) pointed out graphically that, during the Standing Committee that considered the Competition Act 1998, Ministers expressed the strong view that there should be no disparity between regimes operating in Europe and in this country. Although not the most significant example, it shows how our system is in danger of drifting away from the European one.

I repeat the CBI's interesting quote concerning the Competition Act 1998:

> "The demarcation line between domestic and EU mergers is sometimes not clear cut, particularly in more complex transactions. As a result it would be fairer and more sensible for companies operating across the European Union to have to comply with one standard as opposed to two differing ones."

That is an important point in principle, and an important point in practice. Like so many of these issues, having a different test—even a subtly different one—involves extra work and extra burdens for those who are trying to make businesses profitable. We do not resile, therefore, from our support for the amendments relating to the dominant position. I shall be interested to hear the Minister justify establishing a separate test from that operating in the European regime.

The other issue, dealt with in amendments Nos. 56 to 59, is one that we tried to import into the Bill from the United States and, indeed, Europe. That is the so-called failing firm defence. In the US, for example, four things have to be shown: that the failing firm cannot meet its financial obligations; that it cannot reorganise itself in bankruptcy; that it cannot find another buyer whose purchase would pose lesser anti-competitive risks; and that in the absence of the merger its assets would exit the market.

In the EU, we have had a fascinating discussion about the case of Kali-Salz/MDK/Treuhand, which is all about potash. In that case, the Commission set out three criteria: that the company would in any event go bankrupt in the immediate future; that the market share of that company would in any case go to the merging party; and that there was a no less anti-competitive way of selling the company. There is a slight difference in approach between the US and the EU tests, but that does not matter for our purposes, because we are trying to persuade the Minister that incorporating the so-called failing firm defence would be sensible.

In fairness, the Minister has not launched a full frontal assault on our suggestion. To summarise, possibly unfairly, her reply to the discussion in Committee, she said that the prospects for a particular company would be taken into account in any event, so it was not necessary to spell that out. I do not wish to labour the point, but if such a defence is good enough for both the US and the EU regimes—albeit with slightly different tests applying—we should seriously consider including it in the Bill for application to our system.

Amendment No. 69 would remove clause 99. Our problem with that clause is that it would give the Secretary of State extremely wide powers to modify clauses 94 to 98 on the mergers regime. The power is too broad and any significant change should be a matter for primary legislation. Again, our arguments did not find favour with the Minister in Committee, but I hope that we will have better luck on Report. I commend the amendments to the House.

Mr. Barnes: I tabled amendments Nos. 202 to 205, which would place the issue of public interest back into the Bill. Amendments Nos. 304 and 305 in the next group also address that issue. The difference between the two sets is that the present ones relate to the director general of the OFT and the later ones relate to the position of the Secretary of State. My remarks about the public interest will relate to both sets of amendments, but I shall try to

[Mr. Barnes]

keep in order. I may not need to repeat my remarks when we come to the next group of amendments on the Secretary of State's role because I will have already addressed the issues in relation to the role of the director general.

When the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) moved the amendments, he said that they were not fearsome. However, I hope that my amendments will be viewed as slightly fearsome, because I am very concerned about the issue. In Committee, I explained the problems in my constituency associated with the takeover and immediate closure of Biwater, and the loss of 700 jobs. The provisions in the Fair Trading Act 1973 would have allowed that takeover to be referred to the Competition Commission on the ground of public interest, and if that had been done by the OFT or the Secretary of State, it is likely that those jobs would still exist today and that a profitable and viable firm, with its export market, would still be in operation.

4.45 pm

Since that time, I have been interested in the provision in the 1973 Act that allows such reference and why it was not acted on in the Clay Cross case. I became aware that the DTI sought to remove the provision from the legislation through a consultative document and a later White Paper. I have always pressed for the provision to be retained.

It is a modest measure. The Fair Trading Act 1973, which contains the provisions about the public interest, was introduced by the Heath Government. In 1973, I was fighting that Government on their housing finance legislation and ended up in court, with several other people, in relation to its abject provisions. It can be seen from that that I did not generally share the Heath Government's attitudes, but it is interesting that I am now seeking to defend a measure from that period against a worse proposal from this Government.

Mr. Waterson: My first task as researcher to Sally Oppenheim, who was then the Member of Parliament for Gloucester, was to assist her in her work as a member of the Committee dealing with the housing finance legislation. It was a gruelling battle by any standards, but in those days the Opposition were allowed much more licence than they are now.

Mr. Barnes: Perhaps some licence will be granted to the amendments before us now.

The Fair Trading Act 1973 provides that the Secretary of State or the director general of the OFT may refer a merger to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, which later became the Competition Commission, when it is in conflict with the public interest, which is defined to cover job losses, the loss of industry in an area, the loss of export trade and factory closures. The present Bill contains very limited provision on the public interest. Clause 57 contains an element of public interest, in that the Secretary of State may refer a bid on grounds of national security and can seek an order in the House for something that is as yet undefined but appears to be a sort of fall-back position for making a reference on the ground of public interest.

The Opposition and their friends in the CBI are running worried about clause 57, because they think that it could release all sorts of hobgoblins and create huge difficulties. The TUC and many others think that the problem is that clause 57 is just dead words. It does not mean anything and we cannot envisage any circumstances in which the provision would be used. We cannot persuade the Minister to give us any theoretical examples of the circumstances in which it would be used, so we cannot tell whether it is possible that it could be used to defend the interests of the trade unions in any way in the future.

In 1973, when the Fair Trading Act was passed, Labour was in opposition and it adopted the position that the TUC has adopted now on this issue. The Labour party wanted the public interest provisions to be extended; it did not want their virtual removal, which is the position with this Bill.

Things were somewhat different in those days. Tony Benn was shadow Secretary of State for Industry. An interesting debate took place in Standing Committee, where some interesting people moved amendments to improve and strengthen the public interest provisions. They included Bruce Millan, the then Opposition spokesman on industry and aviation, who later became a Commissioner in Europe, and the late John Golding—the Library tells me that he was then an Opposition Whip, in which case I am not sure why he was tabling amendments, but he was certainly associated with the Labour Front-Bench team. My right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West (Mr. Williams) was the industry spokesperson. They all had some interesting things to say about extending the public interest. The logic of their position would be to be aghast that we are now virtually ridding ourselves of any concern about the public interest, apart from matters of national security.

In Standing Committee B on 3 April 1973, Bruce Millan, opposing the Heath Government, introduced an amendment that would strengthen the resolve of the Fair Trading Bill. He said:

> "If the amendment were accepted, it would slow down mergers to some extent. This is one of the purposes of the amendment, and I want to make that explicit. If people involved in mergers had to prove positive good, the number of mergers going through would be reduced. That would be a good thing. I am not in favour of mergers going through unless it can be demonstrated that there is some public good arising."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 3 April 1973; c. 1078.]

Certainly, the merger that took place in Clay Cross was in every way contrary to the public interest and the public good. It is to the detriment of the former Secretary of State for Trade and Industry that he did not refer that matter to the Competition Commission—nor did the Office of Fair Trading do so.

In my amendments I am asking the [illegible] to use these provisions, hopefully in the spirit of the 1973 legislation, and not to ignore them. In the case of Biwater, the report that was issued to the Secretary of State, which said that it was okay for the takeover by Saint Gobain in France to take place, did not reveal that the Director General of Fair Trading knew that the plant would close. In fact, when I raised that matter with the Department of Trade and Industry in the House, I was told that it did not need to know that and that it was not a material consideration. It was certainly a material consideration to the people in Clay Cross and the surrounding area, where 700 people within a five-mile radius lost their jobs. Often, they were mature workers and it was very difficult for them to find any other reasonably paid employment. When Bruce Millan was speaking in 1973, the Labour party was aware of such concerns.

The late John Golding also tabled amendments to the 1973 legislation. He was not known as a left winger in the Labour party. He would in many ways seek out the left and try to contain its activities. However, we are now past that stage. The Enterprise Bill is the avenue through which we are trying to get the economy moving—to produce the dynamic economy and the free markets that are associated with it—and it follows a somewhat different pattern from the one with which many of us would normally be associated.

After the Minister had replied to John Golding, the latter replied:

> "The Minister is insensitive to the impact of mergers on the lives of these people. He is insensitive, too, in respect of the damage being done in industry at present."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee B*, 5 April 1973; c. 1098.]

Much damage is being done to manufacturing industry now, some 29 years later. I hope that the present Minister is not insensitive to those concerns and will ensure that moves are made to establish means by which the public interest could be re-established in the Bill.

At the Report stage of the 1973 legislation, my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West introduced a measure similar to the one put forward by John Golding in the Standing Committee. My right hon. Friend pointed out:

> "when a merger takes place not only the shareholder is involved. Whereas the shareholder's risk is a financial one, it is not as absolute a financial risk as that of the worker, because the average shareholder spreads his holding over eight to 12 companies."

I do not know what the figures are today, but a similar argument could be used. He continued:

> "That contrasts with the position of the worker in industry who, particularly if he is employed in one of the less-favoured areas of the country in employment terms, finds that his loss is absolute, complete and, in far too many cases, permanent. The only capital that a worker has is his skill and his job. The more specific the skills of the firm in which he works and the smaller the locality, the less likely it is that he will find an alternative outlet for his investment in industry—namely, his training and his skill."—[*Official Report*, 17 May 1973; Vol.856, c. 1817.]

As I said, that comment is certainly of great relevance to the case that brought these matters to my attention.

The TUC and major trade unions feel that there should be provisions to take account of the public interest. I am suggesting, rather moderately, that we should merely return to the position held by Ted Heath in 1973. The left wing is now defending Selsdon man against the further extension of those powers in another direction.

Mr. Waterson: Before the hon. Gentleman gets too carried away, does he agree that he and the Government are at one on the issue, even though they approach it from completely different directions? As we shall debate in more detail when we come to the next group of amendments, the Government seem to take the view that the public interest will have to be expanded and are trying to take the powers to do so, but they will not tell any of us what they have in mind.

5 pm

Mr. Barnes: I offered an answer earlier when I pointed out that the Conservatives and the CBI saw these provisions as hobgoblin arguments and believed that all sorts of evils would spring forth—as regards their interests—owing to the Secretary of State's ability to extend such powers by order, as a fallback position. However, that is not the same as the introduction of a specific enabling commitment, such as the one included in the 1973 legislation, for the Office of Fair Trading and the Secretary of State; it is certainly not as good as what the TUC really wants—a provision whereby action must be taken in the public interest in certain circumstances.

Although the current proposals would sideline the 1973 legislation, the public interest provision has not been greatly used since the early 1980s. From Thatcher's time, that has been the policy of successive Governments. However, public interest concerns have crept through in some cases. It is difficult to define them because the Secretary of State or the Office of Fair Trading do not refer matters to the Competition Commission on public interest grounds A, B, C or D. They make a submission that argues which matters should be investigated, but it is not always easy to sort out whether those are the acceptable competition grounds to which the Government have referred or the unacceptable public interest considerations.

Other bodies can take on board the public interest considerations. For example, when the MMC recommended blocking BSkyB's attempted takeover of Manchester United, it used a public interest argument as well as a couple of competition arguments. My research briefing notes:

> "Because it would tend to reinforce the wealth gap between weaker and stronger clubs, and to give BSkyB additional influence on League decision-making, the merger would 'have the adverse effect of damaging the quality of British football'."

The last Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to make direct use of the provision was my right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Margaret Beckett), the present Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. In 1997, she made a reference on public interest grounds in the PacifiCorp Energy Group plc case, where an energy supplier wanted to extend its operations in a particular sector. The MMC cleared the bid and found that it would not operate against the public interest, but the reference was made on those grounds and some interesting recommendations were made in the report in order to contain similar operations.

A case in 1995 affected my constituency. Stagecoach Holdings plc attempted to take a 20 per cent. stake in Mainline Partnership Ltd. I have regular problems with both companies, especially with Stagecoach whose buses do not turn up, or are late, or miss stops. Public inquiries were held in Mansfield and Chesterfield about aspects of its provision, including, in the Mansfield area, the collapse of certain buses which were towed away on the orders of the traffic inspector.

In that case, although the commission did not rule against the 20 per cent. stake holding, it said that it should not be extended. My research briefing notes:

> "Arguably, this is an example of a non-competition element influencing the public interest test, albeit through its effect on competition."

As I pointed out earlier, there are avenues that can be used.

[Mr. Barnes]

Further back, there are other examples. In 1988, a reference was made when the Government of Kuwait attempted to take over British Petroleum Co. plc. There was also a reference in 1982 when the Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation attempted to take over the Royal Bank of Scotland.

The measures may not have been used as they should, but that does not mean that they did not exist. They existed so that people could put pressure on their elected representatives and Governments to gain responses for their concerns.

The current political climate may be against those matters being dealt with, and the attitude that existed in the Biwater case may persist, but the climate can at least change, circumstances can alter and different pressures can be applied if the measure is in place.

The Government should be concerned with those issues, but they claim that it is very good that they are now at arm's length from them because of the measure; it keeps them out of things. However, the measure keeps the democratic process, argument and pressure away from involvement. Of course the Government should not manoeuvre, fiddle, spin and do the things that people claim they do to get their way; they should act openly and we should be able to see what is taking place.

The Government should act openly and be subject to representation and pressure from organisations. The democratic process involves not just voting at elections, but people being mobilised and organised and having rights to represent their sets of views and ideas, and the pressure group system is supposed to be part of the democratic process.

So the public interest argument has been used in various arenas, and we need to try to preserve it in the future. Even though we could ideally do with such a measure now, I would be chancing it even more if I were to move amendments to try to improve things in the way that John Golding, Bruce Millan and my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, West did way back in 1973.

I want to mention some of the support for my proposals in the trade union movement. In Committee and now on Report, the Bill has been dominated by dollops of representation and amendments from the CBI. Other amendments have come from the Consumers Association and other more acceptable avenues, but it seems as though we have just had to sit here, gritting our teeth, while all that has shot forward, normally in the shape of probing amendments, so that the CBI's view could be presented.

We have heard nothing about the TUC's view. Perhaps the TUC and some of the major trade unions should have made a greater effort to ensure that members of the Standing Committee and other hon. Members, including Labour Members, were informed of such things. Perhaps, to an extent, that shows the way the balance of forces has altered in this country. The TUC felt it needed to make formal representations and to produce documents and reports; it was not going to try to stimulate a rebellion on the Back Benches of the Labour party, so some of us have had to try to do that ourselves on this occasion.

In September 2001, the TUC produced a document in response to the White Paper that led to the Bill in which it discussed politicians' roles—the issue that I have been raising. It stated:

> "The TUC has concerns about removing Ministers from the decision-making process on mergers. While advice may usefully be given by those with expert knowledge, Ministers remain publicly accountable for their actions in a way that competition authorities are not. As argued above"—

in its earlier arguments—

> "if the competition authorities are going to take greater responsibility for decisions on mergers and other aspects of competition policy, it is essential that their accountability is also enhanced.
>
> The White Paper states that Ministers will retain a role in relation to 'exceptional public interest' issues, but gives no guidance on the circumstances in which this might be appropriate. The TUC believes that it would be useful for the Government to promote a fuller discussion of what might constitute an exceptional public interest."

We tried to promote such a discussion in Committee, but exceptional public interest is still something we know not—it will not speak its name to us.

The general secretary of the TUC wrote to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on 20 March saying:

> "As you will be aware, the TUC has consistently argued that mergers and takeovers should be regulated to operate in the public interest, and that employment effects should be taken into account alongside the impact on competition when judging a bid."

He then suggested amending the Bill to provide an avenue for written representations to be made in order that that door should be left open.

The Secretary of State replied on 9 April, repeating the points about clause 57 to which I have referred, but offering nothing else. The letter indicated that the Government were moving in a different direction. I at least hope that the Under-Secretary will be able to say that there will be a response to the general secretary's suggestion through suitable amendments in the Lords.

The argument is further pressed by Roger Lyons of the MSF section of Amicus. In its huge document on mergers, it expresses the need for ministerial answerability on these matters and for the ability to take things up. At a meeting in the House on 23 April, John Edmonds discussed these matters, and I have copies of statements of the GMB's position and its submission to the European Commission's Green Paper on merger matters.

I have letters from Unifi on the subject. I quoted its General Secretary, Ed Sweeney, earlier. In his letter to the *Financial Times*, he says:

> "Unifi's concern is that no consideration will be given to the 'social' implications of mergers. Unifi believes that the consequences of mergers do sometimes need to be considered beyond the 'economic' and that the proposed reforms do not allow a mechanism for that consideration."

I also have letters from Equity, the National Union of Journalists, the Prison Officers Association and the National Association of Educational Inspectors, Advisers and Consultants, which all stress similar points. So there is a strength of feeling in the trade union movement that there should be a response. It is only correct that that view should be expressed in this debate.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): My hon. Friend has not focused in his quite lengthy speech on what the consequences of incorporating the wording in the Bill might be. Although, with regard to the football analogy that he mentioned, I might accept that it is very boring that in Scottish football Celtic or Rangers always win, and that they have a virtual monopoly on all the trophies, I am not clear what the Government could do to arrange matters so that Scottish football became more interesting, or how other forms of dominance of various markets would be resisted in detail by my hon. Friend's amendment.

Mr. Barnes: My amendment would not do what my hon. Friend seeks. We would need other amendments and legislation to do that. However, the BSkyB case was considered because of the implications of putting Manchester United at the centre of the market. That would have had an impact on other teams and their ability to survive. However, my amendment would not lead to the transfer of resources to assist people. We would need alternative measures to do that.

5.15 pm

My amendment relates to references to the Competition Commission by appropriate bodies, particularly by the OFT. It should be able to argue its case and Ministers should be able to consider cases such as the one that occurred in Clay Cross. They should be able to assess the masses of evidence coming to them and the alternative viewpoint that might be provided by the OFT. They should grasp the nettle and be prepared to say that certain cases would have an adverse impact on an area. They should allow the Competition Commission to consider such cases. It might not necessarily produce the answers that I want, but such avenues should be open.

I know that the Government are worried about excessive intervention in the economy and about the dangers of knocking back competitive elements within it. However, surely, in an age of massive technological change in which we are moving forward to new types of industry, it is possible to approach the issue in as organised and as regulated a way as possible so that people's interests are protected as they develop new skills and are given new opportunities. We do not do that.

My attention was drawn to the Bill by an anonymous letter that I received from the British Bankers Association. *[Interruption.]* I meant not an anonymous letter, but an internal memo that was sent to me anonymously. Someone said that I might be interested in what the Bill will do. Although the British Bankers Association later claimed that the memo was an elaborate hoax, it is so detailed that it does not appear to be one. It points out that the association's members should keep quiet about the issues until the Bill slips through the House. It suggested that the Bill would not cause much bother.

When I came into the Chamber after receiving the letter, I discovered that a cosy teach-in was taking place between those on the two Opposition Front Benches and those on the Government Front Bench. No Divisions were taking place and there was not much hassle. Conservative Members obviously want much more from the Bill but they probably feel that they have done very well. The memo told the association's members to be non-committal if an MP approached them and to wait until the Bill becomes law. They would then be able to use it. The memo then described exactly what was in the Bill in terms of the hobgoblins that I have mentioned.

I hope that we can remove some of the hobgoblins and that we, at last, will have the opportunity to say that the public interest is back on the agenda. It is worth holding on to and some of us should think about promoting it in a different set of circumstances. Perhaps we could introduce legislation, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) suggested. I feel strongly about that and I am minded to divide the House if the Government cannot demonstrate that they will at least pick up on the comments made by John Golding.

Dr. Cable: The arguments are well trodden. They were made in Committee, but as important principles are at stake we need to continue to debate them at least until the Bill reaches the other place.

I have several points to make. The first relates to clause 21, which deals with the facility with which merger references can be made. Like the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson), I am struck by an apparent contradiction. The Minister said on Second Reading that she did not expect more merger references to be made. I found that difficult to square with the terms of the Bill, which clearly imply that merger references will occur almost as a matter of routine. However, that meant that I, unlike the hon. Gentleman, was pleased with the Bill, because more merger references are desirable.

There is a long history of mergers in the United Kingdom, the United States and elsewhere; the practice has been fashionable. They have been driven by management, which has a vested interest in size, and by the fee incentive for the merchant banking institutions. Invariably, as much of the economic and management literature shows, not only do mergers reduce competition to the detriment of consumers, but they do not benefit shareholders much either. An altogether more sceptical view is necessary, and that does not square with how the Minister sees the Bill rolling out. It is useful that the amendments allow us to continue to tease out what will happen.

I do not share either the geographical or the ideological stance of the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), but an important point was buried in his contribution, and we need to keep it alive. I would approach the problem in terms of accountability. I agree in general with the idea of political independence, and that there should not be routine political interference in merger references. In that sense, the Bill takes us a step forward.

However, we have lost what elected politicians bring to bear to policy issues. We are elected to take account of the public interest and there is a fear that we are throwing out the baby of public accountability with the bathwater of political interference. We need to find a way to put it back. I would prefer to do that by having much stronger political accountability.

Indeed, I argued in Committee that we need a mechanism so that the chairman and other officers of the OFT receive the political scrutiny to which the Monetary Policy Committee is subjected by the Treasury Committee. It comes before Parliament at regular intervals and MPs, through the Select Committee system, have a veto over appointments. That helps to ensure that the officials appointed by Ministers to perform a specific task are kept aware of the public interest. However, the Government are unwilling to go down that road,

[Dr. Cable]

so another way to tackle the problem is required. In that respect, the approach of the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire is helpful.

The hon. Gentleman's approach is helpful for another reason, too. Some of my colleagues and I have a vivid recollection of the Utilities Bill, which was in many ways a good piece of legislation. However, the regulator's terms of reference on competition were narrowly defined. Many problems were generated by the automatic application of the new legislation to the new electricity trading arrangements—NETA—auctioning system, which crippled the combined heat and power sector and the renewables sector. The regulator could only throw up his hands and say, "Look. Parliament hasn't given me the flexibility to take account of the public interest." It is important that we do not repeat that mistake. Some form of words—it does not necessarily have to be the form of words suggested by the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire—must be found. If it cannot be found this afternoon, I hope that it will be found in another place.

One of the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Eastbourne is right. The conflicts, or at least the incompatibilities, between British and European legislation on the competition sector as it relates to merger references, have worried us from the outset. As we have discussed the matter, it has become clear that some of the initial concerns of business were rather exaggerated. The European Commission is clearly reforming its competition practices in ways that will make them somewhat more compatible with our own legislation. None the less, there are areas in which we are proposing something fundamentally different from European practice. It seems unnecessary, particularly in the cases that the hon. Member for Eastbourne has mentioned. That could be remedied by amendment, so I commend the changes.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): I am following the lead of my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) in seeking some form of assistance and succour from those on the Front Bench on this issue, because I am desperate to vote for the Government at least once this week. Some passing phenomenon described us as "all Thatcherites now". I note that the Prime Minister denied that yesterday, but my hon. Friend has smaller ambitions: he is desperate for us all to be a bit Heathite now, and come back to some concept of the public interest. There is the potential for avoiding a vote on amendment No. 202, although I, like my hon. Friend, will call for a vote on it unless the Minister can convince us otherwise. Obviously, we would like to put that request formally to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

We want some assistance—an explanation of how the public interest is to be maintained as a result of the Bill. Clause 57 refers to the public interest being maintained for national security, but there is also a reference to public security, based on previous legislation that we have debated in the House.

I would welcome a view on whether public security means a safety regime for the general public, whether it means security of employment for the workers employed in a company, and whether it involves protection of the local environment in which a company is located, the health of the community that lives around that company's premises, and the quality of life of the work force and all those who have any relationship with the company.

If we can gain some assurances on the record tonight that public security as referred to in clause 57 encompasses all those elements, I do not think that there will be a need for a vote on amendment No. 202. However, if there is not clarity from those on the Front Bench that the public security definition within clause 57 encompasses all those, we will need to press the matter to a vote this evening, if only to ask that the other place consider restoring the public interest definition in some form. I agree with our opposite number on the Liberal Democrat Benches, the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), about that.

This may not be the exactly correct form of words, but there needs to be a form of words that reiterates that fact clearly. Why? Briefly, because as demonstrated in the post-privatisation world, respect for the public interest is needed more now than ever before. We have seen some horrendous examples of the public interest being ignored, which has had an effect on the community overall. That is why I ask for those assurances.

There will be a danger if the public interest is not clearly defined in the Bill. The Government may not want to exercise existing powers, or any powers, to protect the public interest, but the hands of future Secretaries of State, future Governments—who may not be Thatcherite, as someone described us, but may want to be more interventionist in the interests of the public overall—are being fettered.

The problem with the Bill is that there is no sense of the common good. There is no sense of the responsibility of Government to protect the common interest of the community overall. I urge those on the Front Bench at least to define clearly how they see clause 57 operating in relation to the reference to public security. If it encompasses all the elements that I have described, there is no need for the vote. If it does not, we will need to vote this evening, so that we can signal to the other place to make the appropriate amendment.

5.30 pm

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I had not intended to speak in this debate, but I was inspired by the contribution of the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) to add my voice and offer the support of Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National party to the principles that he enunciated, if there is a vote on amendment No. 202.

As we are discussing collusion, I think that there has been a degree of collusion between the occupants of both Front Benches to give the impression that the shift in competition policy from a basis of the public interest to a purely competition-based approach is somehow completely uncontroversial. It is not. It is a matter of concern. In summarising responses to the White Paper, the Department of Trade and Industry referred to

> "almost unanimous support for replacing the current public interest test with more focused competition."

Almost unanimous is not, of course, unanimous. As we have heard, there are important stakeholders who have voiced their concern and their opposition to a narrower competition-based approach.

I was interested in the Prime Minister's response to the assertion of the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) that we are all Thatcherites now. One of the Prime Minister's reasons for demurring was that Thatcherism had sought to isolate us in Europe. In this instance, we are seeing a shift to a more United States-based approach, which will hinder moves towards harmonisation of European merger policy.

I agree with the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire that clause 57 does not provide us with the assurances that we seek. Indeed, the chairman of the Competition Commission has said that he believes that there will need to be a high burden of proof to add to the exceptions of public or special public interest. I understand that it is envisaged that provisions in the draft communications Bill will be added to the list that at present contains only national security.

There is an important issue. Some of us believe that the efficient functioning of markets is not the only consideration when it comes to industrial or regional policy. Merger activity can have a distorting effect on regional economic development. We have certainly seen that in Wales, where companies that are successful and reach a certain critical mass are taken over. The headquarters are then located outside the regional economy, and that has long-term implications for the pattern of economic development. There are also wider issues in the context of economic policy.

We have heard the concerns of the trade union movement, and especially of Unifi, the financial services union, which has led the assault, as it were, from the trade unions. The financial services sector has seen a great deal of merger activity and has suffered for it, in terms both of job losses and of service provision at a very local level. That would not be covered by the terms of the Bill.

Sometimes the public interest would favour loosening some of the competition rules. We have heard of the problem with producer co-operatives in the dairy sector and the wider agricultural sector. There needs to be a public interest basis so that wider issues can be taken into account.

It should be clear, certainly to Labour Members, that mergers affect consumers and communities. The hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire is seeking to uphold the principle that applies to those who used to be referred to as stakeholders. When we make decisions on such matters, we need to take account of a wide range of interests, not only consumer interests or competition policy.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) on persevering with this issue, which goes back a few years. A merger took place in Clay Cross in his constituency, which he has raised on the Floor of the House many times; he and I also raised it in Westminster Hall. There was a lot of hand-wringing, as often happens with a lot of mergers when people get sacked; the Department gave the impression that it would love to be able to help, but could not.

The Government cannot do the things that it would like to do principally because of the climate created by the Single European Act. A few years ago Thatcher introduced it, guillotined debate in the House of Commons and shovelled it through. Now everything is wrapped up with the Common Market; that is part of the problem experienced by Governments here and elsewhere. I hope that minority parties that now say that they are sympathetic to my hon. Friend's position realise that the wonderful Common Market that they have fallen in love with is part of the problem.

The Biwater merger at Clay Cross prompted my hon. Friend to start the process that we have heard about today. Seven hundred people were told that Biwater was finished and would become part of Saint Gobain, a French firm. They were told that everything would be okay, although a few people might be shifted here and there—but within a few hours they had all lost their jobs, which is why the amendment is ultra-important.

I got the clear impression that the Government would like to resolve the problem. Next time a merger takes place, there will be a lot of hand-wringing and many people will say, "We'd love to do something, but we can't." The least the Government can do is tell my hon. Friend, "We've listened carefully to your case and we know that you've pursued it for a long time. We'll have a look at the amendment and, if necessary, deal with it in another place." As my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) has just said, if the problem is to be dealt with elsewhere, we shall be quite happy for it to fall into such an embrace.

Let us not kid ourselves; if there is a merger in future and several hundred or several thousand jobs are lost, let us not have any more hand-wringing or any more of the business of everyone feeling sorry about the problem. We could remedy the problem today if the Government agreed to the moderate suggestion made by my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire.

Dr. Pugh: Before the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) ignited our debate with an unexpected note of controversy, there was widespread agreement about the Bill's objectives. Most parties accept that an active free market that satisfies discriminating consumers is a good thing. The Bill seeks to prevent bad things, such as anti-competitive mergers, cartels, consumer rip-offs and the pitfalls of enterprise, including unnecessary insolvency.

Paradoxically, there has been cross-party, and probably international, agreement that a classic free market involves state regulation and a structured environment. Usually, free markets and state regulation are regarded as antithetical, but at the moment a third way appears to carry all before it. In Committee there was argument not about the content of the Bill but about its mechanics; Conservative Members examined in immense detail not the Government's intentions but the way in which they will deliver them. A persistent allegation was that some of the Government's methods might defeat some of their objectives. That accusation was not unreasonable, given the Government's track record of unnecessary bureaucracy.

To be fair, I must add that the CBI has similar fears. In theory, it is not in favour of cartels, consumer rip-offs or mergers that inhibit competition, because they damage trading interests as much as anything else. Nevertheless, all its submissions to the Select Committee have generated a certain image—that of worry about vexatious complaints, bureaucratic bullying, trial by the media as mergers are tested, legal confusion and lobby-group

[Dr. Pugh]

grandstanding, along with a constant commercial angst about exactly where the law is leading everyone. I am sure that that is not the Government's intention, but as Conservative Members have argued, it may be the result. It is important that that does not happen, especially if we are to bring criminal law into commercial practice.

So far the Government have not succeeded in allaying the CBI's fears, and arguably they cannot do so at this stage. Law has not become practice yet, and we have not yet seen the natural history of the Bill. Supplementary guidance has not yet arrived. It was evident in Committee, however, that significant issues already exist in relation to the clarity of the legislation—I am thinking of simple matters such as the distinction between hard-core and soft-core cartels—and coherence between this and existing English law, European law and Scots law.

The reference to mergers is crucial. My angle is different from that of the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire. There are two tests for merger references. First there is the turnover test: is a company's turnover £45 million? It must be, for the company to be of real interest. Then there is the market-share test.

The turnover test has been debated by the CBI, which suggests that the figure should be £75 million. I have a worry, which we voiced in Committee, about the market-share test. It does not seem in any way to inhibit local monopolies. My hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) pointed out that if two airlines fly to Orkney and one takes over the other, there are plenty of other airlines in a national context, but there is no other airline flying to Orkney.

I know that newspapers are a special case, but nearly every newspaper in my constituency is owned by one company. Not long ago, the one independent company was taken over. It set itself up independently and survived somehow, but what had happened was a definite merger.

It could be argued that all my constituents who wanted to place advertisements in newspapers could advertise in the Burnley Bugle or the Middlesbrough Mercury. There were plenty of newspapers around—but there were no more newspapers in that area; one newspaper had an overall monopoly. Something that is theoretically not an issue is a very big issue in practical terms. A flaw in the Bill is the fact that we fret over big national mergers, although in those cases some choice is preserved at the end of the day, while there is no facility for dealing with local mergers by which choice is abolished.

The examples I give can be replicated. Members can cite cases in their constituencies. Taxi drivers, for instance, can form a consortium; there can be just one company in a whole area. Theoretically, someone in Leicester could get a taxi in Wolverhampton or London, say—but they cannot actually do that. Effectively, people faced with a complete local monopoly have no choice.

I genuinely understand the Government's reluctance to go further than they have. If a village contains two shops and one takes over the other, it is not desirable for the villagers to suggest that the OFT should investigate. I suggest, however, that there are simple ways in which local monopolies can be dealt with as national monopolies are. The number of consumers affected might be relevant, or perhaps the support of local trading standards authorities could be required.

This is wholly in line with the spirit of the Bill. We want to enact legislation that will stop large companies snuffing out small companies locally. Small companies do not start as national companies with national shares in the product they are producing, or as international companies; they start as local companies.

I realise that there are drafting problems and problems of work overload, but it is not possible to create a national climate of enterprise without encouraging a local climate of enterprise. National considerations also apply locally. The public interest defence or the failing firms defence could be used, and compensating consumer gains could be cited. However, if anti-competitive mergers can sustain themselves locally and prevail, local citizens suffer the same ill as when that happens nationally.

Let us consider the cartel analogy. We do not specify the size or turnover of the cartel; we simply define it by its effect. That should also apply to mergers. References to the OFT should be based on a merger's effect on consumers, not some artificial decision about size or market share.

5.45 pm

Mr. McWalter: I am sad not to share the view of my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes). However, I believe that it is important to present a counter-argument. The Bill deals with fair trading and makes a substantial contribution to its development. Loading it with goals and burdens that such Bills cannot tolerate goes further than is reasonable.

My hon. Friend mentioned the boring position in Scottish football because of the domination of Celtic and Rangers. That is an interesting example because the reason for it is the wealth of both clubs compared with that of all the others in the league. They have the dominance that comes with wealth. I was keen for Manchester United not to be taken over by BSkyB because we would otherwise end up with one football club so rich that it was worth all the others put together. Absolute dominance in the market means that the consumer gets cheated and has less of the commodity to purchase and less of a service to enjoy.

The Bill tries to make it easier for small businesses to start up and consolidate so that, over time, the position of even the wealthiest and most dominant suppliers is challenged. I am a member of the all-party small business group, and the Bill's aim is laudable and important to achieve.

Sometimes the methods that large and wealthy companies use to dominate the market mean cheating workers and consumers. In Committee, I said that I was introduced to such matters when my father tendered for a small-scale contract to paint some houses in Hemel Hempstead and found that others were tendering at an extraordinarily low price. After he had lost the contract, he was told that others had stolen the paint and could therefore put in an unfair bid. That meant that those who made fair bids were put out of business and out of work.

Dominant companies and suppliers can consolidate their position through cheating their workers, not recognising trade unions, paying low wages, adulterating the environment and a host of practices that are vital components of unfair trading. The Government are not Thatcherite because they have tried to introduce measures apart from the Bill to counteract the effects of such practices through, for example, environmental protection and trade union recognition. It is not the job of this Bill to incorporate those measures, because they can be dealt with elsewhere. This Bill is about trying to provide an environment in which, if there is a dominant supplier in a particular trade, there is strong potential for the activities of that supplier to be called into question—notably, the activity of forming cartels or mergers, which are often a way of cheating workers and customers alike.

Mr. Barnes: I hope that my hon. Friend does not misunderstand my position. I have been supportive of all the measures in the Bill concerned with insolvency, establishing consumer rights, and helping small businesses. I am not opposed to the Bill in general, but there are matters relating to public interest and producer concerns that I would like to see incorporated in it. From what my hon. Friend has said, there might also have been a misunderstanding about my attitude to BSkyB. I supported the decision of the Competition Commission on that issue, because it took it partly on the ground of public interest.

Mr. McWalter: I understand where my hon. Friend is trying to get to; I am just not convinced that his amendment will get him there. That is partly because he wants there to be powers that it is difficult to imagine being operated. To return to the Scottish football example, one way of ensuring that other Scottish teams had much more say than they do now would be to impose a maximum wage on footballers, so that the benefit of certain organisations being massively rich compared with others would be counteracted by very strong regulations that made it more difficult for wealth to dominate.

Another way of achieving that aim would be to have a fantastically powerful wealth tax to appropriate huge resources from the very wealthy football clubs and redistribute them among the others. There is a variety of ways of achieving that, and perhaps this is the time to ask why those clubs have such a dominant place in the market. I also agree with the hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) when he said that local monopolies and local dominance lead to consumer and employee impoverishment. The fact remains, however, that these matters can be returned to.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire should accept that the Bill makes a contribution to addressing the problems that we face in trying to ensure that consumers have a genuine choice, and that workers have a genuine opportunity to work for companies that do not violate the environment or systematically violate workers' rights. I hope that he will not divide the House on this issue, and I look forward to working with him on this agenda on other Bills, because there is important work to be done.

Miss Melanie Johnson: In responding to what has been a lengthy and wide-ranging debate, I should like to thank hon. Members for their contributions.

I shall deal first with amendments Nos. 18, 19 and 20, which are uncontentious. They would provide the opportunity for discretion on the part of the OFT, rather than a duty to refer. The Bill already gives the OFT discretion in certain circumstances, when that is appropriate. A variety of such circumstances is listed in subsection (3) of clauses 21 and 32. Amendments Nos. 18 and 19 would extend the OFT's discretion in completed merger cases, and amendment No. 20 would do so in proposed mergers, beyond the particular circumstances set out. The Government believe that the exceptions set out in the two clauses cover all the circumstances in which discretion is appropriate, and do not anticipate any other circumstances in which such discretion will be needed. We do not believe, therefore, that the amendments have any value.

We do not believe that the number of references will increase as a result of the duty to refer. I reiterate what I said in response to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) and other hon. Members: we do not think that that duty will lead to a situation in which pre-clearance is almost obligatory. Those who have raised such concerns seem to be ignoring the fact that the OFT will apply a competition test to determine whether it has a duty to refer. Only cases that could lead to a substantial lessening of competition will be referred. That is the basis on which the OFT currently advises Secretaries of State, so we do not anticipate or accept that the incidence of references will increase because of the new arrangements. I hope, therefore, that I can persuade hon. Members not to press the relevant three amendments.

I turn now to amendment No. 21 and associated amendments that deal with the question of the substantial lessening of competition test versus the dominance test. First, the Opposition have tabled a large group of amendments on this matter, as the hon. Member for Eastbourne commented. The amendments would replace our substantial lessening of competition test with a European-style dominance test. That is a slight turn up for the books, because the Opposition are not frequently taking the European route these days.

I should like to stress at the outset that the Government have consulted carefully and extensively on the choice of competition tests for the new mergers regime. The question was first raised in our consultation document on reform of the merger regime in August 1999, and a further consultation occurred subsequently. In addition, officials have met lawyers, economists and other experts to discuss the new regime and the most appropriate competition tests to apply.

A very large majority of those who responded to the consultation favoured a substantial lessening of competition test. They believe that that represents a better economic test than the dominance test that is currently used in the European Community merger regulation. One of the responses that we received came from the City of London Law Society, whose members are obviously experts on competition. It stated:

> "The Group does not favour the adoption of a dominance test due to its inflexibility in dealing with a range of situations including oligopolistic dominance and highly leveraged acquisitions. It does not see any benefits from having the same substantive test at a national level as in the ECMR. Additionally, it should be noted that other established merger control regimes within the EC have not found it necessary to adopt the ECMR test."

Indeed, the substantial lessening of competition test comes closest to the competition analysis that is currently applied by the UK authorities. It has the key advantage of allowing the authorities to concentrate on the overall effect of a merger on competition rather than on the structures, and will allow them to act wherever there is an increase of sole, joint or collective market power resulting from a merger.

[Miss Melanie Johnson]

The key concern about the dominance test is the uncertainty about allowing the authorities to take action where a merger will not lead to one firm having a substantial market share of 40 per cent. or more, but will nevertheless increase the likelihood of firms remaining in the market and acting in an anti-competitive way. To use economic terms, there is considerable uncertainty about whether a dominance test is effective in dealing with the creation of non-collusive oligopolistic markets. European law has developed the concept of collective dominance to try to bridge the gap, but its application is uncertain and the concept strains the normal meaning of dominance.

The substantial lessening of competition test is superior in alluding to the impact of a merger on the whole market, rather than concentrating on the position of a particular market participant. It was because of concerns that the dominance test did not satisfactorily cover collective dominance cases that both Australia and New Zealand recently switched from a dominance test to a substantial lessening of competition test. That happened in Australia in 1993 and in New Zealand last year. Among our European Community colleagues, the Irish Government have recently adopted a similar test, and Spain also has such a test. It is also noteworthy that the Green Paper on reforms to the ECMR raises a substantial lessening of competition test as a possible option to replace dominance. The issue is also well understood in a number of other jurisdictions: the United States, Japan, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

I could speak at considerable length on this subject, but I will not do so, as time is of the essence. I believe for all the reasons that I have given that we have got the right test.

6 pm

I should like briefly to quote the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), who put the position well in Committee when we debated the test of choice. He said that if we had a chance of ensuring a merger control regime that was likely to provide pressures and incentives conducive to competition in general and to a greater intensity of competition in the UK than in other parts of the EU, we should take it. For all the reasons that I have given, we believe that we have the right test, and I urge that those amendments be withdrawn.

I should like now to turn to the amendments dealing with the restoration of the public interest test, which have been the subject of much debate this afternoon. The replacement of the current public interest test in the Fair Trading Act with a competition test is, of course, one of the cornerstones of the proposed new merger regime. Focusing the Bill on competition will provide better merger regulation. It will improve the clarity of the framework for decisions and the predictability of the decisions made under it. The wider the range of factors that can be taken into account, the less certain and the less predictable the outcome.

The change will also bring our statute into line with other major international jurisdictions; the US, the European Commission, France, Germany, Canada and Australia. Switching away from a public interest test to a competition test for assessing mergers has involved hard thinking and tough choices, but it is a focused policy. It means that certain factors that could previously have been taken into account—I emphasise the word "could" as opposed to "were" or "would be"—will no longer be capable of being taken into account. We think, as a matter of policy, that that is right. The reform is not just about improving the predictability of decisions or aligning the regime with others. It is necessary because we believe that, in the vast majority of cases, the economy is best served if mergers are assessed solely on the basis of their effect on competition.

Merger regulation is best aimed at safeguarding the competitive intensity in the economy. Competition provides the spur for businesses to be more productive, innovative and efficient, and better able to provide long-term sustainable employment and better products and services for consumers—my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire and I share those aspirations.

Adding additional factors to the test for mergers would create barriers to market re-structuring. We think it is wrong to create such barriers unless there are significant anti-competitive effects. Restructuring must be possible if companies and markets are to remain dynamic and competitive.

I recognise, of course, that mergers can have adverse regional and employment impacts in the short term. There are hard cases; my hon. Friends have referred to cases in their constituencies, including the Biwater case. However, I do not think the answer is to step in to block mergers.

The task for the Government—one that we are pursuing—is to make sure that the economy as a whole is strong and to help people to adapt and get new jobs. We must make sure that for every job and every business that disappears, there are new companies springing up and small companies growing. We have a vibrant, dynamic economy. We have the lowest unemployment rate since the 1970s and the lowest inflation and interest rates since the 1960s. We have record numbers of people in work, because private sector employment increased by 1.25 million over the last five years. We are, of course, the No. 1 destination for foreign direct investment into Europe.

I would like to make a further important point to set the merger regime in the context of how the existing Fair Trading Act regime has operated. In practice, competition has been the principal factor in UK merger policy for years. In 1984, the then Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, now Lord Tebbit, announced that references would be made primarily on competition grounds. That doctrine has been pursued by every subsequent Secretary of State.

We must look at why independence from political interference and involvement is important in this regard. I remind my hon. Friends that there is a direct parallel between what we are doing here and what my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer did in the legislation relating to the Bank of England in 1997. Before then, there was clearly political involvement in decisions about interest rates, decisions that were made, at the end of the day, by Ministers. As hon. Members know, such decisions are now taken by the Monetary Policy Committee, and are therefore taken at arm's length from political interference. That has not had an adverse effect; indeed, it has brought remarkable benefits. We took the right decision in that regard, and we are taking the right one here.

On the question of the Bill's providing for the Secretary of State to make an order defining public interest issues that might be taken into account in considering a merger, when such issues arise it is Ministers themselves who will take decisions about a merger. The Bill will define as public interest considerations only national and public security concerns. However, we have built in appropriate checks on Ministers intervening easily in other areas. We have stipulated that additional criteria will be defined by order, subject to affirmative resolution of both Houses of Parliament. I am aware that some Opposition Members dislike that for one reason, and some Government Members dislike it for another. However, that power provides an important safety valve for the new regime, and ensures that very exceptional cases can be dealt with appropriately. In that sense, we have got the matter entirely right.

As I said, public interest considerations must be specified in the new legislation as relating to national security. Having consulted on whether new powers are necessary, we concluded that they are not. As my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire knows, the existing power enables us to add further considerations. The process will be transparent and subject to parliamentary approval, and the Secretary of State must give reasons under the terms of clause 104(7). Safeguarding competition is just one aspect of our duty to protect the public interest. As I said, matters such as employment are dealt with through other targeted measures. My hon. Friend will acknowledge the tremendous progress that the Government have made in terms of economic growth, employment, prosperity and the provision of public services.

In the light of these changes, my hon. Friend also expressed his concern about the important issue of accountability. We have built in additional accountability elements, a long list of which I could run through. Although accountability will not be achieved through ministerial decision making, there will be additional transparency and checks and balances. For example, the OFT and the commission will have to publish their reasons for taking key decisions such as reference decisions, and for not referring.

The commission's chairman has also made a commitment to publishing during an inquiry provisional conclusions on the competition aspects of a merger or market. Decisions will not come, therefore, like a bolt from the blue. There will be open discussion of provisional findings, and of the remedies for dealing with them. The tests themselves will be focused. They will be conducted within a tighter procedural framework, and a number of institutional checks and balances will be established. For example, the OFT board will replace the Director General of Fair Trading as the pinnacle of the OFT's operation. Taken together, the measures show that we have got things right. I appreciate my hon. Friend's concerns, but I believe that adopting these measures will bring real benefits.

On failing firms, if an authority believes that a firm will in any case exit the market because it is failing, that judgment will influence the assessment of whether the merger may be expected to result in substantial lessening of competition. Another relevant consideration is whether the failing firm's market share is likely to fall to the acquiring firm in any event. It is not a question of weighing the position of a failing firm against the problems created by a substantial lessening of competition. If Opposition Members are suggesting that saving a failing firm should take priority over guarding against anti-competitive markets, I must disagree. It would not be appropriate to allow mergers to proceed that would result in a substantial lessening of competition, simply because one of the firms involved was failing.

I hope, therefore, that hon. Members will not wish to press amendment No. 69 to a vote and I urge the House to resist it. I commend, however, the technical Government amendments that are part of this group.

Mr. Waterson: When I moved amendment No. 18—it seems like half a lifetime ago—I had no idea of the great fissures that were about to open up in the modern and the not-so-modern Labour party. I hope that we will hear no more from Ministers about having plenty of time to debate the Bill, because the harsh reality that is staring us in the face—especially if we now have a Division—is that we will not even begin to debate the issues of cartels and market investigations. On any view, that is wrong. I do not wish to waste quarter of an hour by pressing our amendments to a vote. We are not happy with much of what the Minister had to say, but we have rehearsed the arguments before and I am happy to say that I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Amendment proposed: No. 202, in page 11, line 11, after "competition", insert—

'or substantial damage to the public interest'.—*[Mr. Barnes.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 39, Noes 245.

Division No. 273] **[6.11 pm**

AYES

Austin, John
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Bennett, Andrew
Cable, Dr Vincent
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cohen, Harry
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cummings, John
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Galloway, George
Gidley, Sandra
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
(Ross Skye & Inverness W)
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David
Llwyd, Elfyn
McDonnell, John
Mackinlay, Andrew
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Meale, Alan
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam
Pugh, Dr John
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sedgemore, Brian
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Vis, Dr Rudi
Wareing, Robert N
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David

Tellers for the Ayes:
John Thurso and
John Cryer.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
(Swansea E)
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Banks, Tony
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Brennan, Kevin

Brown, Rt Hon Nicholas *(Newcastle E & Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cooper, Yvette
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford & Isleworth)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marlew, Eric
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Smith, Rt Hon Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Ward, Ms Claire
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and
Derek Twigg.

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 24

EXTENSION OF TIME-LIMITS

Amendments made: No. 224, in page 14, line 37, after "with" insert—

'the receipt of a notice under subsection (7A).

(7A) The OFT shall, in connection with any notice given by it under subsection (6), by notice inform the persons carrying on the enterprises which have or may have ceased to be distinct enterprises of'.

No. 225, in page 14, line 41, leave out subsection (8) and insert—

'(8) Subject to subsections (9) and (10), where the four month period mentioned in section 23(1)(a) or (2)(b) is extended or further extended by virtue of this section in relation to a particular case, any reference to that period in section 23 or the preceding provisions of this section shall have effect in relation to that case as if it were a reference to a period equivalent to the aggregate of the period being extended and the period of the extension (whether or not those periods overlap in time).

(9) Subsection (10) applies where—

(a) the four month period mentioned in section 23(1)(a) or (2)(b) is further extended;

(b) the further extension and at least one previous extension is made under one or more of subsections (2), (4) and (6); and

(c) the same days or fractions of days are included in or comprise the further extension and are included in or comprise at least one such previous extension.

(10) In calculating the period of the further extension, any days or fractions of days of the kind mentioned in subsection (9)(c) shall be disregarded.

(11) No more than one extension is possible under subsection (1).'.—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Clause 31

SUPPLEMENTARY PROVISION FOR PURPOSES OF SECTIONS 24 AND 30

Amendment made: No. 226, in page 19, line 13, leave out "or (6)" and insert ", (6) or (7A)".—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Clause 39

SECTION 38: SUPPLEMENTARY

Amendment made: No. 227, in page 24, line 29, at end insert—

'(4A) Where a period within which a report under section 37 is to be prepared and published is extended or further extended under section 38(3) or (4), the period as extended or (as the case may be) further extended shall, subject to subsections (4B) and (4C), be calculated by taking the period being extended and adding to it the period of the extension (whether or not those periods overlap in time).

(4B) Subsection (4C) applies where—

(a) the period within which the report under section 37 is to be prepared and published is further extended;

(b) the further extension and at least one previous extension is made under section 38(4); and

(c) the same days or fractions of days are included in or comprise the further extension and are included in or comprise at least one such previous extension.

(4C) In calculating the period of the further extension, any days or fractions of days of the kind mentioned in subsection (4B)(c) shall be disregarded.'.—*[Miss Melanie Johnson.]*

Clause 41

INTERVENTION BY SECRETARY OF STATE IN CERTAIN PUBLIC INTEREST CASES

Mr. Waterson: I beg to move amendment No. 63, in page 26, line 28, leave out from "57" to end of line 29.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following: Government amendment No. 229.

Amendment No. 142, in clause 45, page 31, line 36, at end insert—

'(5A) The Secretary of State shall not make a reference under section 44(3) or (5) when a relevant public interest consideration which is mentioned in the intervention notice has not been finalised.'.

Government amendment No. 234.

Amendment No. 304, in clause 57, page 40, line 15, after "of" insert "(a)'

Amendment No. 305, in page 40, line 15, after "security" insert—

'(b) maintaining and promoting the balanced distribution of industry and employment in the United Kingdom;

(c) maintaining and promoting competitive activity in markets outside the United Kingdom on the part of producers of goods, and of suppliers of goods and services, in the United Kingdom.'.

Amendment No. 197, in page 40, line 15, at end insert—

'(1A) The interests of plurality in newspaper ownership are specified in this section.'.

Amendment No. 198, in page 40, line 18, at end insert—

'(2A) In subsection (1A) "newspaper" shall have the same meaning as in section 57(1)(a) of the 1973 Act; and in this subsection "plurality" means a diversity of ownership that is sufficient to ensure that the public have access to the accurate presentation of news and free expression of opinion.

(2B) In applying the interests specified in subsection (1A) no account should be taken of plurality in newspaper ownership if the relevant merger situation concerns the transfer of a newspaper or newspaper assets to a newspaper proprietor whose newspapers have an average circulation per day of publication amounting, together with that of the newspaper concerned in the transfer, of fewer than 500,000 copies.

(2C) In subsection (2B), "newspaper proprietor" shall have the same meaning as section 57(1)(b) of the 1973 Act; and the calculation of circulation per day shall be by such means as the OFT or (as the case may be) the Commission shall determine.'.

Amendment No. 143, in page 40, line 19, leave out subsections (3) and (4).

Government amendments Nos. 243 to 245.

Mr. Waterson: As this may be the last group of amendments that we can deal with before 7 pm under the guillotine procedure, it may be helpful if I point out that we intend to press amendment No. 63 to a Division, as we feel strongly about it. The group deals with public interest and mergers, but there will be some echoes from topics that we discussed in the debate on the previous group.

At present, the only definition of public interest appears in clause 57. The clause defines public security in the terms set out in the European merger regulations. We had a significant number of debates on these matters in Committee. Our starting point is that the provision is crucial, so it is right that it should be firmly stated in the Bill. Our approach is rather different from that of the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), and our concern is that it should not be open to the Government to add a new ground of public interest when they feel like it.

When we pressed the issue in Committee, the Minister was wedded to the power to extend the definition, but she was wholly unable to say—in fairness, she said the same this afternoon—what possible category she might have in mind to add to the definition in the Bill. Nevertheless, the Government's position seems to be that it is imperative to include the power.

The effect of amendment No. 63 would be to remove the Secretary of State's ability to consider public interest considerations not listed in the legislation. We debated a similar amendment in Committee. As the Bill stands, the Secretary of State could simply add a new public interest

[Mr. Waterson]

consideration, or more than one such consideration, in response to a specific merger or proposed merger, as it arose.

Apart from anything else, that could involve enormous uncertainty for those in the business sector. When embarking on a merger, they would not know whether the goalposts would be moved in due course by the addition of a new public interest ground because the Secretary of State had decided to change the rules. That is another good reason why any other public interest consideration—whether media plurality, which we shall come to in a moment, prudential rules or anything of that sort—should be identified in the primary legislation.

If it is not possible to identify those considerations now and they arise later, it should be possible to add them to the Act, as it will then be, by primary legislation. If something arose that was so important and so unforeseeable that no one can even imagine what it would be, any Government ought to be able, possibly with cross-party agreement and—who knows?—possibly even with the agreement of their Back Benchers, to put through the House the necessary primary legislation, and quite quickly, if needs must.

There is also a side issue. If we leave open this great loophole, it merely returns us to what I am sure the Minister would regard as the bad old days of political involvement in such matters.

I shall touch briefly on amendments Nos. 142, 197 and 198 tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), who will develop the arguments in detail. Amendment No. 142 relates to the Secretary of State's power to make merger references arising from a public interest intervention notice. My hon. Friend will develop the reasons for the amendment. Amendments Nos. 197 and 198 deal with the plurality of newspaper ownership. The effect of amendment No. 143 echoes that of amendment No. 63.

It is impossible to consider what the Government have in mind in changing the law on mergers and takeovers without considering how those matters have been dealt with up till now.

We argued in Committee—with some justification, I think—that all we are doing in the Bill is regularising what has been practice for a considerable time. Under the so-called Tebbit guidelines, there has been a kind of self-denying ordinance among successive Secretaries of State of both parties that they would look narrowly at competition issues when reaching their decisions. It is fair to say that there is an element of cross-party consensus that seeming political involvement brings the system into disrepute. The average member of the public finds it difficult to distinguish between a politician making a decision on non-political grounds and one making a decision on political grounds.

6.30 pm

Fast-forwarding from the Tebbit doctrine, we come to 26 October 2000, when the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers)—a familiar name in the House—announced that Ministers would accept the advice of the Director General of Fair Trading on takeover matters, save in exceptional circumstances.

Enter stage left the figure of Mr. Richard Desmond, whose Northern and Shell media group on 22 November of that year paid £125 million for Express Newspapers Group. Mr. Desmond had a busy week, because only four days later, on 26 November, he had a half-hour chat at No. 10 with the Prime Minister.

Mr. Desmond has forced himself into the consciousness of many of us recently through the titles of some of the magazines that he publishes, as well as through his newspaper activities. The list of publications is very long; I was going to say that it is impressive, but it is long. There are titles such as *Weird Sex Special—[Interruption.]* That is obviously familiar to the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase).

Titles include *Horny Housewives*, *Mega Boobs*, and for the real enthusiast, *The Very Best of Mega Boobs*. There is also a magazine called *Mothers-in-Law*. I could go on; I probably will. *Asian Babes* is another title that is not unfamiliar. In fairness, Mr. Desmond also publishes magazines such as *Worldwide Golf*, which as far as I can tell has nothing to it other than an interest in the game of golf.

In any event, the issue arose whether the then Secretary of State would refer the takeover of Express Newspapers. Events had moved on by that stage. During the new year celebrations of 2001, Mr. Desmond had told senior Labour figures that he was willing to offer them free advertising in the run-up to the election.

January was a busy month; Mr. Desmond's editor at *The Express* resigned, and on 7 February, the then Secretary of State announced that he would not refer the takeover of *The Express* to the Competition Commission. Only eight days later, on 15 February, it is understood that the Labour party banked Mr. Desmond's cheque for £100,000. To show that relations were particularly cordial and fraternal, Mr. Alastair Campbell attended Mr. Desmond's 50th birthday party in December.

Mr. McWalter: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that his remarks seem to be rather tenuously linked to any arguments that might encourage us to support amendment No. 63?

Mr. Waterson: That is more a matter for the Chair, although I do not accept the proposition for a moment. We are discussing public interest in mergers. The hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire, who has strong views about almost everything, although he puts his arguments with a certain charm, has strong views about whether Ministers of the Crown should be able to intervene in employment matters. He made a powerful case on that in the previous debate. However, some people and certainly some members of the Labour party have similar views about the activities of the party's donors, such as Mr. Desmond.

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that many Labour Members believe that Mr. Desmond's activities, so long as they are legal, are a matter for him and his shareholders? However, many of us would not take a penny-piece from a man who is nothing but a pornographer.

Mr. Waterson: I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman's point is. That is his description of the gentleman involved, not mine. However, the Labour party has taken £100,000 in penny-pieces.

It is interesting that when the Prime Minister was interviewed by Jeremy Paxman, who also reeled off a list of names of magazines, the Prime Minister seemed to invert the issue—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be a little more concise and address his remarks to the amendment.

Mr. Waterson: Let me bring events forward to the present day and to the revelations that appeared in *The Sunday Telegraph* last Sunday. It reported:

> "The Department of Trade and Industry conceded yesterday that there had been no scrutiny of Mr. Desmond's on-line services which allowed paying customers to ask models to perform live sex acts."

I shall not go into any more detail than that, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I am sure that you would not wish me to. However, the criteria to be applied in the case of a major takeover—for example, of a newspaper—are extremely interesting and are relevant to the competition provisions in the Bill.

We are told that the Bill will put into legislation what has become the practice and that, under the Tebbit doctrine and the position as stated most recently by the then Secretary of State in 2000, the broader issues will not be taken into account. It is important to consider what has been happening and whether the provision is necessary.

When these issues came into the public domain, the attitude of the former Secretary of State was that he had merely followed the advice of officials. I assume that that is what will happen by law if we pass these provisions in the Bill. However, when the report of the Director General of Fair Trading saw the light of day, a different picture emerged. The director general had advised the Secretary of State that, on the competition issues, he could see no reason to refer the bid, but he pointed out that what he described as the non-competition issues were a matter for the Secretary of State. That is a subtle and rather important difference from what the former Secretary of State had told us earlier.

It emerges that the Home Office had been asked to advise, as had the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, about Mr. Desmond and his activities. The Home Office tetchily concluded that, as he was not breaking the law, it had no further comment to make. However, as *The Sunday Telegraph* has now revealed, neither it nor anyone else was asked to consider the websites operated by the companies controlled by Mr. Desmond.

It is important to quote the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Chris McCafferty), who is reported as saying:

> "I am astonished. It takes my breath away that the Government failed to examine the very worst side of Desmond's empire. There should have been a thorough investigation at the time. The Government should make amends by launching a thorough investigation now."

Other Labour Members expressed similar concerns.

We must examine how the matter was dealt with, as there are major questions about how the DTI chose to conduct its investigation into the takeover of Express Newspapers. It would be, at the very least, surprising if Mr. Desmond's colourful websites were not taken into account. We need to be told the precise criteria on which the former Secretary of State based his ultimate decision not to refer the bid, especially as the decision was followed only a few days later by a large donation to the Labour party.

Miss Melanie Johnson: The hon. Gentleman is inviting me to comment on what happened. It is hard to understand the relevance of his case to amendments Nos. 197 and 198—*[Interruption.]* I am seeking Madam Deputy Speaker's guidance. In light of the hon. Gentleman's concerns about pressures on time, it is hard to understand how his argument relates to the amendments.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I have drawn the hon. Gentleman's attention to the fact that he must speak more directly to the amendments, and I do so once again.

Mr. Waterson: I have made my points on that issue. I was not aware when I gave way to the hon. Lady that she wanted to make a point of order.

It is necessary to give the provisions careful consideration. Some of the amendments are new, in particular those that relate to newspapers, on which my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire may wish to comment. Others are familiar from our deliberations in Committee.

We are worried that the Secretary of State will reserve not only powers to act in the public interest, but the power to add to the criteria as they relate to the public interest. We do not know what the Government have in mind, which is understandable because they do not know what they have in mind. We feel strongly about the matter and intend to press the amendment to a Division. If the Government have nothing in mind, and I am sure that they are being open and honest with the House, they should leave the public interest definition as it is, without the power to add to it by regulation.

Mr. Lansley: Before I comment on the amendments, I want to explain w[illegible] Mr. Desmond and the handling of his case by the then Secretary of State is relevant.

As Mr. Desmond was not a newspaper proprietor, his acquisition was not considered under the special newspaper transfer regime, as set up by the Fair Trading Act 1973. Instead, he was considered under the normal merger regime. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) made clear, the possible threat to the public interest by the acquisition of Express Newspapers by Northern and Shell could have been considered by the OFT. However, because it put competition as a primary duty, it chose to have no view and referred the problem to the Secretary of State who, although recognising that he had a responsibility, chose not to exercise it. My hon. Friend took us through the conjecture and speculation on why he chose not to consider the wider issues of public interest. We should not count out the fact that they exist, however.

The hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase) and others, including the Prime Minister, seem to suggest that what is legal is by definition okay, and what is done legally must therefore be in the public interest. There is no mention of a subset of activities in relation to the ownership of newspapers under existing legislation that are legal but could adversely affect the public interest. I am afraid that the evidence points to the opposite.

6.45 pm

In 1990, the Monopolies and Mergers Commission made a report on Mr. David Sullivan and his acquisition of the Bristol *Evening Post*. I will not quote at great length, but paragraph 6.13 of the report says:

> "Were someone of Mr. Sullivan's business background and interests"—

it may be recalled that Mr. Sullivan owned the *Sunday Sport* and other related newspapers—

> "seen to have a significant influence in their affairs",

that is, the affairs of the Bristol *Evening Post* and *Western Daily Press*,

> "their reputation could well be seen as compromised, particularly where the reporting of events with sexual aspects was involved. Were he to have acquired effective management control these effects could be expected to be more pronounced."

Essentially, the Monopolies and Mergers Commission was applying a test in relation to the accurate presentation of news and free expression of opinion.

The issue, therefore, is this. If at that time the consent to a transfer of a newspaper title was refused under the special newspaper transfer regime by reference to that test of the public interest—interestingly, we understand that the Government intend at some point to introduce a test of the public interest in relation to the plurality of newspaper ownership—surely the two things are related. The question whether the Government believe that there is a public interest in the ownership of newspapers and the consequences that flow from that for the accurate presentation of news or for free expression of opinion must be of the essence in relation to the amendments. I hope that I have demonstrated why the handling of Mr. Desmond's case is relevant to their consideration.

I shall deal first with amendments Nos. 197 and 198, which relate specifically to newspapers. On a number of occasions—interestingly, she even managed to do it earlier this afternoon—the Minister has asserted to the Committee and to the House that the Government have no intention of adding additional public interest, to be specified under clause 57. However, in paragraph 9.7.4 of the document published as a policy narrative to accompany the draft Communications Bill, the Government express their future intention in relation to that Bill, and, on newspaper ownership, state:

> "the Secretary of State will retain the power to refer transfers for wider investigation by the Competition Commission by an extension of the provisions in the Enterprise Bill dealing with 'exceptional public interest' . . . cases."

Therefore, unless the Minister tells me something to the contrary, it is clearly the Government's intention, subject to consultation and scrutiny of the Bill, to bring newspaper ownership under clause 57 by way of an additional specification of national interest, but apparently we are not to debate that at this stage.

Before the Minister intervenes to say that amendments Nos. 197 and 198 do not do all that is required, I understand that subsequently clause 66 would need to be deleted and schedule 26 concerning repeals of the 1973 Act amended. One would have to remove the existing special newspaper transfer regime, but it is important, if we are legislating for what is to be in the Bill, that we do it now and have a clear indication of the circumstances in which Ministers would wish to specify an additional public interest. Plurality of newspaper ownership is one that has been suggested.

Two sets of amendments seek to do slightly different things. That is why they are slightly testing the Minister. Amendment No. 143 would remove from the Secretary of State the ability to specify additional public interest considerations. My personal inclination is that relying on the general merger regime and competition considerations should be sufficient. I accept the argument that national security and what flows from it is an exception, but that should be the only exception. If I were pressed, I would say that amendment No. 143 should be pursued. I would similarly support amendment No. 63. It is likewise designed to remove from the Secretary of State what might otherwise become a politically motivated opportunity to inject additional public interest considerations that are not transparent in advance and not transparent to the marketplace for those who are contemplating or executing mergers.

If we are to have any additional forms of public interest, we should be told what they will be. My purpose in tabling amendments Nos. 197 and 198 is to ensure that we can know precisely, by way of the Government's response in due course—there might be one—what kind of newspaper ownership regime is contemplated. If, until now, a special newspaper transfer regime has operated on the basis of confining itself particularly to the accurate presentation of news and the protection of free expression of opinion, I believe that that is a sufficient basis upon which to undertake an examination of plurality of newspaper ownership. Those can be the factors for which we look. Is the diversity of newspaper ownership sufficient to deliver that?

To whom should that test be applied? Clearly, the merger regime has its own test in terms of market share and turnover. However, we have discovered over years past that where newspapers are concerned—I quote from the Government's "Consultation on Media Ownership Rules"—

> "This regime has imposed significant costs on the industry and yet, out of 172 cases considered by the Secretary of State since 1980, only three have been refused and five given approval subject to conditions."

It is important that we structure a regime that is more deregulatory than that which went before it. We should not merely replicate the special newspaper transfer regime in new legislation.

It is interesting that the Government's consultation goes on to state:

> "In no case has the Competition Commission found that the acquisition of purely local newspaper titles would be against the public interest on freedom of expression grounds."

Ministers and the Competition Commission have often found that quite high local concentrations of newspaper ownership are consistent with a continuing plurality of voice in the sense of free expression of opinion. To respond to customers in those areas, newspapers often find that they must be responsive in that way. The opportunities for concentration of local newspaper titles throughout the country, although that has happened in recent years, has not necessarily led to centralised editorial opinion imposed on local newspapers from the controlling interest.

One of the consequences that flow from that is that the newspaper ownership regime could be structured in a way that excluded local newspaper titles. For these purposes, as a proxy, I have adopted the threshold of a circulation of 500,000 newspapers a day. That is a limit above which transfers of newspaper titles could be considered.

Whether that approach should apply to existing newspaper proprietors or transfers of ownership in any circumstances is a difficult question. It is difficult to argue that maintaining plurality of newspaper ownership could mean that someone would be barred from the acquisition of a newspaper if he or she was not already a newspaper proprietor and there was no concentration of newspaper ownership.

The only circumstances in which that could be done would be if one were to reintroduce some test of whether someone acquiring a newspaper was a fit and proper person to do so. As the Minister said in Committee, and in her subsequent letter, it is difficult to envisage circumstances where someone could be excluded, on competition grounds, from owning a newspaper or acquiring an enterprise on the basis of whether he or she was a fit and proper person. That should be considered on the basis of disqualifications under the Companies Acts. However, with newspapers, a further question could arise about whether someone is seeking to limit the free expression of opinion or the accurate presentation of views by acquiring a newspaper. It is therefore important to find out more about what the Government are seeking to achieve by extending clause 57, contrary to their previously stated intention.

Amendment No. 143 would make competition the sole factor to be considered in the operation of merger policy, with the exception of national security. Amendment No. 142 is more technical; it will not be immediately obvious to people who are not as familiar with the Bill as Committee members that in clause 44, after the Secretary of State has given a public interest intervention notice and a reference back to him or her has been made by the Competition Commission, he or she has four options for subsequent decisions, two of which can be made in circumstances in which there is a finding of a substantial lessening of competition if a merger is completed or is being contemplated. The two remaining circumstances, given in clause 44(3) and (5), are ones in which there is no finding of a substantial lessening of competition, and the Secretary of State can take account only of public interest considerations.

Ministers have an obligation not to make a reference in or after the period of 24 weeks during which the Secretary of State is allowed to try to resolve the question of public interest by laying an order before Parliament and securing parliamentary approval; they will not make a reference after 24 weeks, and disregard any public interest consideration that has not been finalised. By contrast, the Secretary of State can make a reference before the 24 weeks have elapsed when there is a substantial lessening of competition. A loophole has therefore been created. Curiously, before the expiry of the 24-week period, there is nothing to stop the Secretary of State from making a reference to the Competition Commission on the ground that public interest considerations have not been finalised, and when there is no substantial lessening of competition.

One of the most undesirable circumstances in which a reference could be made is as follows. The Secretary of State has devised a public interest consideration, published an intervention notice, failed to come to the House to secure its approval to finalise the public interest, yet goes ahead and makes a reference to the Competition Commission. That loophole should be closed.

In addition, in clause 45, for reasons that escape me, the Government say that when making a reference during or after the 24-week period the Secretary of State should specify

> "the public consideration or considerations . . . in the intervention notice concerned which the Secretary of State is not under a duty to disregard".

Government amendment No. 234 deals with the same issue. However, if a reference is made before the end of the 24-week period and before a consideration is finalised, as outlined in clause 44(2) and (4), the Secretary of State is not required to disregard the public interest consideration; for completeness, clause 44(3) should also be specified. It is astonishing that the Minister has gone down that route.

It being Seven o'clock, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER, *pursuant to Order [this day], put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair.*

The House divided: Ayes 126, Noes 255.

Division No. 274] **[7 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, Rt Hon James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John
Barrett, John
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr Vincent
Cameron, David
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland & Melton)*
Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, Rt Hon Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Gale, Roger
Garnier, Edward
Gibb, Nick
Gidley, Sandra
Gray, James
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, Rt Hon John
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark
Horam, John
Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Key, Robert
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David
Leigh, Edward
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Maclean, Rt Hon David
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, Rt Hon Michael
Prisk, Mark
Pugh, Dr John
Redwood, Rt Hon John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew

Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(Mid-Norfolk)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Stanley, Rt Hon Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher & Walton)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, Rt Hon Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and
Mr. Laurence Robertson.

NOES

Adams, Mrs Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, Rt Hon Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale)*
Armstrong, Rt Hon Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blizzard, Bob
Brennan, Kevin
Browne, Desmond
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Dr Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, Rt Hon Tom *(Coatbridge)*
Clwyd, Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cooper, Yvette
Cox, Tom
Cranston, Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, Jim *(Cov'try S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, Rt Hon Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dobbin, Jim
Donohoe, Brian H
Dowd, Jim
Drew, David
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff
Field, Rt Hon Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Foster, Rt Hon Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foulkes, George
Gapes, Mike
George, Rt Hon Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Healey, John
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy
Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey
Hope, Phil
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N)*
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford)*
Hurst, Alan
Hutton, Rt Hon John
Iddon, Dr Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W & Hessle)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric
Keen, Alan *(Feltham & Heston)*
Kelly, Ruth
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, Jane *(Wavertree)*
Khabra, Piara S
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Lammy, David
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Luke, Iain
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, Rt Hon Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John
Marris, Rob
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Meacher, Rt Hon Michael
Meale, Alan
Merron, Gillian
Michael, Rt Hon Alun
Milburn, Rt Hon Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mudie, George
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr Doug
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pike, Peter
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam
Primarolo, Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie
Roy, Frank
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(Chester)*
Ryan, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, Rt Hon Chris *(Islington S)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Southworth, Helen
Starkey, Dr Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr Howard
Strang, Rt Hon Dr Gavin
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark
Taylor, Ms Dari *(Stockton S)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark
Touhig, Don
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr Desmond *(Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill
Vis, Dr Rudi
Ward, Ms Claire
Wareing, Robert N
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr Alan
Williams, Rt Hon Alan *(Swansea W)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike
Woodward, Shaun

Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Derek Twigg and
Mr. Nick Ainger.

Question accordingly negatived.

Remaining Government amendments agreed to.

Bill, as amended in the Standing Committee, to be further considered tomorrow.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9) (European Standing Committees),

Strategy for a future Chemicals Policy

That this House takes note of European Union Document No. 6671/01, Commission White Paper from the European Commission on a Strategy for a future Chemicals Policy; recognises the need to protect human health and the environment from hazardous chemicals including endocrine disrupters; agrees that the weaknesses of the current legislation, including the lack of data and slow progress in assessing hazards and risks from chemicals already on the market, must be addressed; welcomes the proposals to ensure transparency and improved public access to non-confidential information and that responsibility is placed on manufacturers and importers to assess hazard and exposure and perform preliminary risk assessment; endorses the Government view that requirements for animal testing must be minimised and alternatives to animal testing promoted; recognises that the proposals must take account of the implications for the competitiveness of the European Union chemical industry; and recognises that proposals must be ambitious but achievable and provide a system that is workable and cost effective with minimum regulatory burden.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to delegated legislation.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Animals

That the draft Welfare of Farmed Animals (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 1st May, be approved.

That the Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock: Laying Hens, a copy of which was laid before this House on 1st May, be approved.

That the Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Livestock: Meat Chickens and Breeding Chickens, a copy of which was laid before this House on 1st May, be approved.

Financial Services and Markets

That the draft Financial Services and Markets Act 2000 (Financial Promotion) (Amendment) (Electronic Commerce Directive) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 16th May, be approved.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made,

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 19th June, the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Mr. Robin Cook relating to House of Lords Reform (Joint Committee) not later than three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion; such Questions shall include the Questions on any Amendments selected by the Speaker which may then be moved; the Questions may be decided, though opposed, after the expiration of the time for opposed business and the Order of 28th June 2001 relating to deferred Divisions shall not apply to them.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

PETITION

City of Bath

7.15 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I wish to present a non-party political petition that has more than 12,000 signatures from people in my constituency and the support of the local chamber of commerce and many small businesses that are concerned about what they see as the deteriorating state of the city of Bath. It seeks to ensure that Bath, a world heritage site with a mayoralty dating back to 1230, but with an administrative headquarters now based outside the city in Keynsham, is restored to unitary authority status. For more than 1,000 years, Bath was in charge of its own affairs and the petitioners seek to return to that situation.

The petition states:

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House shall urge the Secretary of State . . . to consider the plight of the citizens living in the Parliamentary constituency of Bath and others devoted to the maintenance and continued well-being of the City of Bath, recognising its unique position as a World Heritage city site, to restore the city to its status as a unitary authority able to take control and govern in its own right as the City of Bath.

To lie upon the Table.

Brownfield Sites (London)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

7.16 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to bring to the House this Adjournment debate about the change in the use of planning applications for brownfield sites. I am delighted to have secured it not only because of the importance that this matter holds for my constituents, but because I understand that it is the first Adjournment debate of our new Minister, the Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), and his first outing as such in the Chamber. I should like to say how good I think he will be in his position and how important it is for those of us in suburban constituencies, especially in London, to have Ministers who understand the problems that exist in such areas. I am pleased that he is responding to the debate.

The reason why I asked for the debate is that my local authority, the London borough of Merton, has in its unitary development plan a policy suggesting that all employment sites should remain as such. On the face of it, that is not an unreasonable idea. Clearly, it is important in areas where land values are very high to have the opportunity for people to work locally and sustainably. That is the case on the surface, but when we go a bit deeper, we see the problems that the policy creates. I would like the Minister to address the issue of location of the sites and the competing housing needs in these areas.

I come to the debate not as a planner or as somebody who necessarily understands all planning law, but as a constituency Member of Parliament who has had to deal in the past five years with large numbers of complaints from local residents about industrial and employment sites that have been empty for more than five, six or even 12 years and which become magnets for fly tipping, abandoned cars, arson and illegal travellers' sites, generally making local residents miserable while remaining empty and unused because of the council's planning policies.

It strikes me that if a site is designated for employment use, some attention must be given to its location. We must ask whether it is of an appropriate size for work and business or in an area where they will go, about its transport links, and about how close it is to other residential development. In my sort of suburban area, housing is built up around employers and employment and in places where businesses no longer want to go.

Our employment problems are related not necessarily to the number of jobs available, but to the people who are available with the right skills to fill the vacancies that exist. While keeping employment land for this purpose is seen as a sustainable policy—so that one works near where one lives—it has an element of unsustainability. People in south-west London are moving further and further out because there is not enough housing. They push up the price, making it very difficult to pay for housing. We are making people travel further because we are keeping sites empty for the sake of some notion that, in future, they may be used for employment.

That is how I came to the issue. On looking at it further, I discovered a real housing dilemma in Merton's draft UDP. There is an idea that the land allocated for housing purposes will meet housing need. Clearly that is not the case, and it is self-evident that the housing department is not talking to the planning department. That may be replicated in boroughs right across London.

The housing department believes that it will need something between 600 and 900 affordable units per year. It is currently developing between 88 and 100, with 60 used by planning gain through the planning process. These figures have not hit the imagination of the planning department, which appears to believe that it is currently meeting all the necessary targets. I am sure that it is meeting current Serplan targets for owner-occupation, but not in terms of the need for social renting or the need for intermediate assistance for key workers. It is alarming that these sites remain empty, yet the draft UDP makes no mention of the need for key worker housing.

This is not an academic subject, and I wish to give the House some idea of sites on which I have worked that led to my alarm about the general policy. The first of these sites, 120-126 Lavender avenue—a mixed-use site of about 637 sq m in a heavily residential area involving social renting and owner-occupation—became empty in 1996. It was a small factory site. No developer or employer would want to go there because the site is long and narrow and would not meet today's IT requirements. There is not good parking, and the public transport situation makes it fairly inaccessible.

The site was allowed to rot for over seven years while people put in numerous planning applications for residential uses that were never allowed because the site was being kept for employment purposes. The vandals got in, the windows were broken and the building was continually set on fire—so much so that, in the end, the council required the developer to erect a fence along the front of the site so that no one could gain access.

Resulting from such antisocial behaviour and destruction are not only the misery of local residents but the hidden costs to the public purse: the costs to the council, the police and the fire service. Who benefits? Now—at last, I am glad to say—the council has finally given in and the Wandle housing association will be developing social housing there. The local residents could have told the planners for rather more than six years that that was the appropriate use for the site, but they would not listen.

The next site is 2-8 Miles road; it is a bigger site of about 3,400 sq m which was a paint factory until 1991, when it was broken up for small business purposes, such as car repairs and small joiners workshops. That site has been the biggest issue in my postbag for the last five years because, for example, of the abandoned and untaxed cars left in the area. As people made more money and improved their homes, they felt bogged down by the street scene, which was appalling. They felt frustrated that their council was not listening to them or meeting them halfway in trying to improve their environment.

I have had three or four site meetings there and have met representatives of the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and the police on one occasion when cars had to be towed away. There are hidden costs that come about as a result of the council's not being prepared to consider—for laudable reasons—changing the use of a site that is now redundant but which no longer fits in with the residential area. However, the council does not have to pick up the pieces or live with the consequences of such decisions. Again, it will be a social housing site, together with some business use. Although there will be an employment purpose, it will also be a much better site for local residents.

It is the final site that I want to mention—the UGI Smith Meters site, of which I know the Minister is aware—that prompted me to ask for this Adjournment debate. It is a six acre site on which UGI Smith Meters used to construct gas meters, until it moved production to India. Over several years, the number of employees slowly declined. The area around the factory consists of 1930s, residential, three-bedroom, family-style accommodation in which people like to live.

When the site became empty, it seemed unthinkable that it would be replaced by another factory employing the same number of people. It is inaccessible by public transport, and the nearest train station is Streatham Common, some two miles away. Such a factory simply would not fit in with the residential area that it has become. The site is long and narrow, with a very narrow frontage to the high road. Major access is via Long Thornton road, which is also a residential road.

I have no particular brief in respect of Hanson, the developers; I simply want the best use to be made of what is a very large site for the benefit of local residents. A scheme involving 60 per cent. employment and 40 per cent. residential use was developed, including provision for a nursery—child care facilities are desperately needed in the area—and a shop, which would avoid the need for local residents to travel to buy fresh fruit and vegetables, and so on. The scheme, which seemed to strike a fantastic balance, also provided for 12 B1-use units and nine live-work units.

It is clear however that local residents must have their say in the impact on their local environment. I sent out a questionnaire, to which I received 232 replies. I held a tea and coffee morning, which well in excess of 100 residents attended to ask questions. Surprisingly, the vast majority supported the application, and the residents association lobbied on its behalf. That is quite an unusual situation. We normally expect local residents to have a "not in my backyard" attitude to such matters, but they said, "No, we realise that we need some development, and we feel that this best suits what we can achieve for the local area."

In spite of public support and the provision of housing, employment, a nursery and a shop, however, the council turned down the application. Local residents found that very hard to accept, and it continues to surprise me, particularly given that there is another site less than 100 yd away—Marco's, known as 216-218 Rowan road—which comprises 0.75 hectares. That site has been empty for 12 years.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): My hon. Friend makes a very strong case. She will recall that the development not only had the overwhelming support of local residents, but the support of local Labour councillors—of which I was one—the local Labour party, the local residents association, the local Conservative party and local Liberal Democrats. In fact, far more people took part in my hon. Friend's survey than took part in the borough-wide survey for the unitary development plan. Does she agree that it is a sad state of affairs when the council itself entirely misrepresents the nature of the plan so as to justify its actions? Should it not have the confidence of its convictions and tell the truth about the development, instead of spreading misinformation?

Siobhain McDonagh: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. He refers to a recent news letter, published after today's Adjournment debate was announced, in which the planning application was portrayed as far less industrial and more residential.

David Cairns: Overwhelmingly residential.

Siobhain McDonagh: Indeed. However, that is not the case. A thriving residential area is being dragged down not only by the poor condition of this site, but by the existence of the Marco's site 100 yd up the road, which has been empty for 12 years. Successive planning applications have failed and it remains unused. To the elderly people who live nearby, it is a source of nightmares, with frequent arson and many abandoned cars—but nobody wants to listen.

When businesses in an area change their employment needs, how can we bring an element of realism to unitary development plans? How can we convince people that it should not be a matter of ideology? Just because a site was used for employment in the past, it does not have to remain designated for that purpose, especially if that will mean that it remains empty or an eyesore, or costs another council department a fortune; while at the same time horrendous housing needs go unmet.

I sat on the local authority for 16 years and I spent five years as the chair of housing, but the housing need that I see now bears no relationship to what I saw then. In the last year, Merton's housing department has let 48 three-bedroomed properties—less than one a week. We must do something to address housing need. I understand that we must strike a balance between housing and employment, but I am concerned that the present guidance does not force my local authority to consider where that balance should lie.

7.31 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): I am delighted to congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on her success in securing this crucial debate on the use of brownfield sites in London and I thank her for her characteristically generous words of welcome, for which I am enormously grateful. She spoke eloquently of the concerns and worries about the necessary balance between the need for new housing developments and the preservation of existing communities and future employment potential for local economies. She rightly highlighted the tensions that abound in an outer-London, suburban borough and the importance of a sensitive, responsive and flexible planning-led land use and development control framework.

The overall debate on housing in London perfectly illustrates the potential conflicts between assorted uses and competing demands that the planning system must seek to resolve, and my hon. Friend clearly outlined many local examples. The importance of brownfield sites in London, and the south-east in general, simply cannot be overstated. I should like to take this opportunity to

[Mr. Tony McNulty]

congratulate all local planning authorities on their work in this regard. In 1998, the Government set a target that sought to ensure that, by 2008, 60 per cent. of additional housing should be provided on previously developed land and through conversions.

The latest general figures available show that in 2000 the actual figure achieved was 60 per cent. and that in 2001 it was 61 per cent. The target has been met and that shows that local planning authorities and developers are making an immense effort to put brownfield land development ahead of greenfield sites. If we focus on London, the story is even better. Over the last few years, an average of 90 per cent. of additional housing development in London has been on brownfield sites. London leads the country in the recycling of brownfield sites and local planning authorities and developers are to be congratulated on that. However, that success does not mean that we should no longer prioritise the use of brownfield sites in London—the challenge is to maintain the rate of brownfield development, and we also need to promote higher densities with good design to ensure more efficient use of the land.

My hon. Friend mentioned specific sites in her constituency and previous planning applications, but she will understand that I cannot refer to those specifically, given the Deputy Prime Minister's quasi-judicial role in terms of planning. However, I have listened very carefully to what she has said and it will, I hope, help if I explain the Government's position on the wider issues.

The draft UDP for the London borough of Merton went on what is known as first deposit—the issuing for consultation—in September 1999, and second deposit in October 2000. A public inquiry was held over the summer of 2001 and we are expecting the full report from the inspector later this summer or early in the autumn.

Those dates are significant in that the latest draft plan pre-dates the Government's announcement of the key worker strategy, hence there is no mention of it in the plan. The plan also pre-dates much of what we have said since about affordable housing, so the inspector may well pick up on those recent developments—I urge my hon. Friend to take a good note of the inspector's report when it comes out—and the plan may well ultimately reflect those policies.

The national policy position on brownfield development, mixed-use applications, town centres and housing in general is set out in several key policy guidance documents. Planning policy guidance notes 1, 3, 6 and 13 clearly set out that the Government want to promote more sustainable locations for key land uses, such as housing, employment, retail and transport.

Through the Government offices for the regions, we ensure that the local planning authorities produce local plans that are rooted in and reflect those policy objectives. The latest regional planning guidance for London—RPG3, if we want to descend into acronyms—was published in 1996 and set out that authorities needed both to meet strategic housing needs and encourage the recycling and adaptation of existing buildings to provide more housing. That included encouraging authorities to look sympathetically towards using non-traditional sources for housing land, such as obsolete or surplus office floor space. It also encouraged the development of flats over shops, mixed uses, such as those suggested by my hon. Friend, conversion and the subdivision of existing housing stock. RPG3 also linked such opportunities to overall strategies for the regeneration of neglected parts of London.

The most recent housing policy guidance from the Government, PPG3, which was issued in 2000, took that policy context much further. Through the regional planning process, authorities are now required to undertake "urban capacity studies". Such studies help authorities to identify actual and potential brownfield land housing opportunities. They also help the regional planning body to reconcile information that it has about housing needs in a given area with the actual potential to accommodate those needs.

London has led the country in planning matters, as one would anticipate from a capital city, and it developed capacity studies long before it was required to do so by the national policy guidance. The former London planning advisory committee, of which I was a member for my sins back in the mid-1980s, undertook several comprehensive regional capacity studies in the past few decades—the most recent being published in September 2000.

To digress, my only claim to fame as a member of that committee was that I was the sole vote against the erection of the millennium wheel on the other side of the river, which has been an outstanding success. As I start my time at the Dispatch Box, I hope that my judgment has improved significantly since the mid-1980s. LPAC's work informed authorities' housing allocation in their plans and it is one of the key reasons why London has such high levels of land recycling for new development and is ahead of the curve in terms of other planning authorities.

Now, the responsibility for regional planning in London has passed to the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority. Based on reports such as the recent capacity study, the Mayor is drawing up a new regional plan for London—the spatial development strategy—and I look forward to seeing the Mayor's emerging proposals in the forthcoming draft of that document when it is published. I am sure that issues such as affordable housing, land use and the utilisation of brownfield sites on a London-wide basis will also be features of the SDS. That document and local UDPs are all about seeking to reconcile the often conflicting needs for housing, employment, commercial and other needs, as my hon. Friend said.

Planning policy guidance 3 also sought to address some of those problems. It recognised that some authorities have designations for employment uses in their plans, which cannot realistically be taken up over the life of the plan. Similarly, some of those designations were made years ago, are no longer compatible with the policy set out in the PPGs or RPGs, and should be seriously reviewed when the authority concerned critically assesses and reviews its plan, and redesignated if need be to housing or, as my hon. Friend suggested, mixed use.

I certainly endorse that approach and exhort local planning authorities to look closely at their land use and site designations through their UDP review processes and to recognise the changing needs of their boroughs, not least the transitional needs occurring in many outer-London boroughs, as my hon. Friend pointed out. The mixed-use solution is often attractive in dealing with the competing needs of employment and housing, as it can reconcile apparent opposites. Flats above shops or offices not only provide housing but can bring vibrancy, life and sustainability back to shopping centres or high streets that have been going through bad times.

For several years, PPG1 has been promoting the mixed-use route and many such schemes are being introduced throughout London. In February, the Government published a report that showed how we could get an additional 25,000 homes in London by building over commercial property such as supermarkets, car parks, shops, garages and other low-rise developments.

I agree with my hon. Friend that we must do more to exploit the potential of our high streets, be prepared to consider changes of use and seriously to reflect on using different densities in different areas. We may need to rethink previously designated light-industrial, employment or B1 uses that are close to residential areas, and to think seriously about previously unacceptable densities to assist in our quest for more housing—as long as it is done within a sensitive design context and we do not repeat the past mistakes that blight some areas. I will do all that I can, in my ministerial role, to exhort local planning authorities to be as imaginative, creative and forward-looking as possible in that regard.

The main reason that the debate is so important is the issue of affordable housing and key worker strategies—I again congratulate my hon. Friend for raising the subject. The issue is of huge significance in London, not least in my hon. Friend's constituency, and the continuing utilisation of brownfield sites will be key to any resolution of the problems faced in London's housing market and to our ability to realise and meet London's potential and needs.

The figures for housing in London speak for themselves. Need for affordable housing in London is high and will continue to be so. The Mayor's office forecasts that London needs about 20,000 units per year. Shelter suggests a figure of 26,000 per year. In 2000, 21,000 houses were built in London, of which 4,000 were in the affordable sector. Overall, the affordable housing stock is not rising with demand and the provision of affordable stock is way below what is needed.

Government policy on affordable housing is clear: it can and should be a priority, and developers and local planning authorities are aware of the need. Our recent consultation document on planning obligations has gone further, and floated the idea of requiring commercial and retail applications to contribute towards a tariff that would help resource the provision of affordable housing. The Government are adamant that that need does not go unrecognised or unresolved.

We can begin to make further progress only if the level of new development on brownfield sites for housing is either increased or, at the very least, maintained at current figures. It does not and should not follow that demand for affordable housing is met by encroaching on London's parkland, metropolitan open space or green belt.

My hon. Friend has highlighted the need to respond to the recognition of the changing nature of our communities and local economies in London; that brownfield sites are and must remain central to our ability to provide affordable housing in London; and that local planning authorities need to be forward looking and robust in their determination of the future use of each and every precious pocket of brownfield sites in our local communities—not least in the outer-London suburban context that we share. She has emphasised, too, how mixed-use developments can help that process, satisfy affordable housing needs and bring much needed economic vibrancy back to our communities. She has illustrated how the planning system is vital to so many aspects of the redevelopment and regeneration of our communities.

My hon. Friend is to be commended on raising those extremely important issues, which matter so much to her constituents and the wider community in London. The Government are fully aware of the concerns that she expresses and, as I hope to have shown, the increasing importance of brownfield sites to any solution to London's housing problem. The case for changing some aspects of the planning system, among other things, to help the process is overwhelming. We have outlined many of those plans for change in the Green Paper on planning.

The point about the overwhelming need for change is well made, and I shall ensure that the comments made by my hon. Friend and her colleague, my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns), are fed into the process as the Green Paper is, I hope, turned into law. She has certainly done an extremely important service for her constituents by raising this matter. I warmly thank her again for the welcome that she gave me at the start, and I sincerely hope that I can live up to her generous billing and expectation.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Eight o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 21 May 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Debt Relief

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Sutcliffe.]*

9.30 am

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): I am delighted to have the opportunity to discuss the important subject of debt relief. I shall set the scene. Like many hon. Members, my interest in the subject stems from personal experience, particularly my memories of a recent trip to India. When visiting Gujarat—the site of the earthquake earlier this year—we were shown the reconstruction work, and two memories stand out.

My first memory illustrates the difficulties and dangers of aid programmes. I recall having a difficult conversation with someone from a non-governmental organisation who was complaining about the problems of money reaching the ground. I was told that it was disappearing in bureaucracy, and sometimes into people's pockets. He could see the potential uses of that money, but it was not reaching the ground.

My second memory is of one the real highs of aid policy. We visited the Self-Employed Women's Association, a trade union of more than 400,000 women in Gujarat. They formed themselves into a group to cut out the middle-man—it was always a man—by providing export help, credit services and distribution for women who worked for themselves by producing clothes and growing agricultural products. By acting as a company, those women have increased their earnings by a factor of 10.

That is the hard-headed reality of aid policy. If it is sustainable, if people are given the power to control their lives and if they can create jobs for themselves, aid can have a transforming effect. That is why today's debate is so important. Aid policy needs to be scrutinised and discussed, and I hope that our debate will play a part in that. There can be no more important subject.

We live in a world in which, each day, 30,000 children face death from diseases that could be prevented. We live in a world in which 100 million children have no schooling; in which 150 million grow up malnourished; and in which 600 million people live in conditions of extreme poverty. All of us in developed countries have a moral responsibility to act. I trust that the Financial Secretary—we are delighted to see him here—will go back to the Treasury and argue the case for increased funding for the Department for International Development in the next spending review.

The goal of achieving 0.7 per cent. of gross domestic product for aid is most important. Not only will it revive people's faith in politics, but it will show that the Government can make a real difference by spending money wisely and increasing the amount that is being spent. In that respect, I pay tribute to those who have put pressure on the Government—and on Governments in all developed countries—to raise their commitment to the issue. We have all seen the effect of the work of Jubilee 2000 and of the drop the debt campaign by hundreds of churches across the country.

Mr. Tom Watson (West Bromwich, East): My hon. Friend rightly said that several aid agencies have played an important role in promoting Government policy on debt. I draw his attention to early-day motion 736, which has cross-party support and has been signed by more than 340 hon. Members. I should also draw to his attention to the Trade Justice Movement event on Wednesday 19 June, which promises to be the biggest mass lobby of Parliament. Does he agree that it is important that parliamentarians show their commitment to ending the problems of world poverty by giving that campaign their full support?

James Purnell: I wholeheartedly agree. I cannot say off the top of my head who introduced the early-day motion, although I believe that it was my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown). I was about to congratulate her and the all-party group on Jubilee 2000 on the way in which they have raised the issue in Parliament. Parliament has an important role to play, and hon. Members, among many others, have put pressure on the Government, just as constituents have put pressure on us. I thank the all-party group and its officers for their support in preparing for today's debate, and I encourage everyone to go to the lobby that my hon. Friend mentioned.

It is worth paying tribute to those who have worked from the ground up to put pressure on the Government to act on this issue, and Labour Members can be proud of the Government's record. Only last week in New York, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor yet again urged industrialised nations to take action. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has also done much work on this issue, and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made a personal commitment to Africa. We have completed the first stage, which has involved moving the issue up the agenda and demonstrating political commitment to it. The question now is how we find the money to deliver on that commitment and ensure that it is wisely spent. I shall concentrate on those issues, because how the money is spent is just as important as how much money is available.

The first issue is the heavily indebted poor country process. It is important that we place conditions on the way in which money is disbursed, because the present situation was partly caused by the cycle of unsustainable borrowing, by bad governance and, sometimes, by corruption in the countries that borrowed the money. Equally, developing countries and multilateral institutions lent to projects that were not properly researched or pro-poor.

Although I understand why the international community is creating conditions to ensure that the money will be effectively spent, such conditions will affect the pace of progress. More than 40 countries may qualify for the HIPC process, but only five have completed their journey through it. The great worry is that those who are suffering are the poorest people in the world, who could be benefiting from the money that is available.

[James Purnell]

I am glad, therefore, that moves are being made to review the HIPC process. I urge the Government to consider the issue of countries that reach completion point, but which still end up with unsustainable levels of debt. The change in commodity prices has badly affected Uganda, for example, which is coming out of the process with levels of debt that may be unsustainable in the future. There must be a review of the issue.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): My hon. Friend mentions the extra help that is needed at completion point. Does he agree that help should be levelled up at decision point if it is already clear at that stage that commodity prices have changed? We could then provide very poor countries with the help that was intended when the process started, rather than always having to wait until completion point.

James Purnell: I entirely agree. It is important to consider commodity prices and the growth rates on which the World Bank bases its work. Overall, those rates seem unduly optimistic, and they will affect calculations of the level of sustainable debt if they are cut in half or three quarters.

The second issue relates to opening markets to developing countries, which is vital. When we met the Self-Employed Women's Association, we asked what its top priority was; it was not aid, but access to EU markets and for that access to be on fair terms. Every day, £1 billion is spent on subsidising farming, hugely more than is spent on aid; that is an astounding statistic. We in the west should consider that. We have a moral duty to enable people to compete in those markets on fair terms. I know that the reform of the common agricultural policy is a difficult issue in this country. However, it is incumbent on all EU countries to take a long, hard look at the way in which the money is spent. Many of the people who suffer as a result live in the poorest countries in the world.

I want to concentrate particularly on the third issue, that of countries that are excluded from the HIPC process. Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world, but it is not included in the definition of highly indebted poor countries. I shall return later to the issue of definition. Even if we accept that categorisation, Bangladesh—half of whose 130 million people live below the poverty line—spends as much on servicing its debt as it does on health. In absolute numbers, Bangladesh has more people in poverty than any country apart from India and China, yet it does not qualify for the HIPC initiative. The incidence of malnutrition there is the highest in the world. Every day, in addition to those whose development will be stunted by malnutrition, 700 children die of diseases caused by malnutrition. Add to that the depressing regularity with which natural disasters occur there, and there is an unanswerable case that Bangladesh should be at the top of our priority list.

I have two worries about the exclusion of Bangladesh from the HIPC process. First, a direct consequence is that it does not benefit from some of the debt cancellation and rescheduling. More generally, because it is not part of the process, it is not automatically included in people's assumptions about which countries deserve the most help; it is falling down the pecking order. The problem is illustrated by the fact that south Asia receives about $10 per person in aid, compared with nearly $1,000 per person in north Africa and the middle east. My worry is that the way in which Bangladesh is defined is contributing to that process. We must examine the way in which the flow of aid and debt cancellation are organised, in order to ensure that countries such as Bangladesh, where the need is so acute, benefit.

Recently, I wrote to the Secretary of State for International Development about the matter. She was able to reassure me that Bangladesh was one of the greatest priorities for her Department and that the budget had increased. That is welcome. I was delighted to hear that we had written off all our bilateral aid debts with Bangladesh; they totalled about £1 billion when we came to power in 1997. Despite that, Bangladesh finds itself in a catch-22 position. It cannot qualify for HIPC because it is not sufficiently indebted, yet the international community is wary of further investment in the country. The Secretary of State went on to say:

> "There are substantial additional donor resources available to Bangladesh. We and other donors have made it clear to the Government of Bangladesh that we are keen to increase our expenditures in Bangladesh ... However we require the Government to put in place an appropriate policy environment in order to make such expenditures worthwhile."

That is the catch-22. Bangladesh cannot access that aid until it improves its policy framework; yet without the extra aid, it will find it difficult to address the very problems that the international community has identified.

I should like to make two appeals today. The first is to the Government of Bangladesh, to convince the international community that the country is committed to change. In particular, Bangladesh has one of the lowest rates of public revenue raising anywhere in the world; it raises only about 9 per cent. of GDP to spend on public services. I urge the Government of Bangladesh to consider ways to increase that and to ensure that as much as possible of that money can be spent on public services and help for the very poor. At present, a high proportion is spent on supporting domestic industries and it does not reach the poorest in society.

My second appeal is to the British Government and the international community to help to find a way out of the catch-22. The people who are paying for it are the poorest people in Bangladesh; the three quarters of the population who live on less than $2 a day. Unless we end the stand-off, the prospects for Bangladesh are bleak. The International Monetary Fund used to assume that Bangladesh was growing at between 6 and 8 per cent. It then revised that down to 5 per cent. Last week, it changed its forecast for 2001–02 to 3.75 per cent. For a developing country, that is a worryingly low rate of growth. As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said last week in New York, on such rates of growth Bangladesh will start to become poorer. It will not be a matter of failing to reach the millennium goals, but of falling further behind them.

I support the Government's efforts to ensure that aid is well spent. However, we should not let the best be the enemy of the good. I urge the Minister to consider the ways in which this catch-22 situation can be dealt with.

Could we consider spending money through NGOs, as these are particularly well developed in Bangladesh, which has a great history of micro-credit and self-help? Could we ensure that, if Bangladesh demonstrates a commitment to change, the money will not be withheld indefinitely until that process has been shown to succeed? There should be a route with staging posts along the way at which Bangladesh can receive the extra aid.

Finally, I shall address the definition of a heavily indebted country. Priority for international help should be based on a combination of debt payments and poverty indicators. Debt sustainability is only part of the question. According to different definitions of debt, Bangladesh has a debt stock-to-export capacity of about 180 per cent., which is much greater than the level that the World Bank considers sustainable. Even setting that to one side, the indicators used to qualify countries for the greatest aid should include their progress towards the millennium development goals and levels of absolute poverty because, as I have argued, Bangladesh is in danger not just of missing the millennium goals, but of sliding away from them.

I urge the Government of Bangladesh and the international community to break the deadlock in which the country finds itself. The tragedy is that the money is there, but cannot be released because of that deadlock. Those who are suffering are the poorest people in Bangladesh.

9.46 am

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): I congratulate the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) on securing this debate. The debate is important because Members in all parts of the House strongly support the jubilee debt campaign. We are aware that after the big push to relieve debt in 2000, it has been hard to keep the issue high up on the agenda. One of the ways in which we can demonstrate to the many thousands of people in our country who support that campaign that we have not forgotten about the issue and that we do not believe that it has gone away is by having a debate such as this, which enables us to keep the issue in the public domain.

There is no room for complacency in this area. Jubilee debt campaigners and other organisations have pushed hard for the country's attention to be focused on debt relief. Those campaigners are aware that media interest moves away very fast. Once it has gone, it becomes difficult to keep the public imagination captured by the issue. Debt relief is not something that one does once and for all. Unfortunately, it is more of a process of debt relieving, over time. In 2000, we took a snapshot of the state of indebtedness of various countries, but several months later their situation may well have deteriorated. That is why we as politicians have to keep on our toes with the current situation.

Of the £23 billion in debt owed to this country by developing countries, heavily indebted poor countries owe only £1.3 billion, so the HIPC initiative is just the tip of the iceberg. The hon. Gentleman referred to Bangladesh; there are many other countries that do not qualify and are struggling to manage their debt relief payments. That is inextricably linked to the question of overseas aid—I am sure that this argument is attractive to the Treasury—because, in a crazy situation, we pay overseas aid to Governments and they use it to pay off their debts to us. The Treasury's response to the debate is correct, but the debate must deal with the question of balance with overseas aid.

We should place on the record the success of the jubilee debt campaign in January. A poster was launched for the drop the debt campaign that highlighted the fact that only 15 per cent. of unpayable debts have been cancelled. That shows that we cannot afford to relax and that the situation has not been sorted once and for all. In fact, we are only beginning to get the moneys through to where they are intended to go. However, we should not forget the strength of support given to that campaign; no fewer than 24.3 million people signed up to the debt relief campaign. That is a remarkable achievement; indeed, it is one of the most successful political campaigns that I have seen in my short career in the House.

The hon. Gentleman is right to refer to the question of debt sustainability. I want to impress that particular point on the Minister; the heavily indebted poor countries initiative is, without question, in trouble. In fact, the jubilee debt campaigners went so far as to produce a document, the front of which read "Heavily indebted poor countries initiative is dead." That goes further than I have gone, but I certainly agree with the analysis that the initiative is in trouble. Significantly, the Canadian Foreign Minister has also said that it is not working. That is significant, because his country will host the G8 summit at which the situation will be debated.

Many criticisms have been made of the HIPC initiative, mainly related to the use of the decision point in the calculation and the analysis of what amounts to a sustainable level of debt. The hon. Gentleman referred to the World Bank and International Monetary Fund calculation of 150 per cent. as a sustainable level of debt, and said that many countries that do not qualify for HIPC fall well outside that. Since the present level of sustainability was calculated, there have been serious events and exogenous shocks. The events of 11 September had a major impact on the global economy, which is especially acute for countries with heavy burdens of debt that are dependent on cash crops for their revenue. There has been a collapse in commodity prices across the board for crops such as coffee and cocoa, and many countries utterly depend on such crops. On that basis, Mozambique and Tanzania are the only two countries in sub-Saharan Africa whose debts are sustainable, because both those countries export gold, which was one of the few commodities to increase in price after 11 September. That gives a measure of the seriousness of the situation.

I support the hon. Gentleman's point about the need to review the debt sustainability index to take account of the collapse in commodity prices. That is the position of the International Development Committee, which is calling for a recalculation that takes account of the unforeseen shock to the capacity of those countries to repay their debt on the basis previously calculated. The figure of $1 billion has been placed on that, although that may be approximate. To put that in perspective, we should note that the American Congress has recently passed a new farm Bill giving financial support for its own farmers that will cost the American taxpayer an initial $100 billion. It is important to put such figures in perspective.

[Mrs. Caroline Spelman]

On 18 April, the American Congress passed a Bill that would make a positive contribution to recalibrating the debt sustainability analysis, which called for account to be taken of the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Some countries of sub-Saharan Africa may be decimated by the infection. Some 35 per cent. of the population of Zimbabwe, for example, is infected with HIV/AIDS. Botswana is in the same position, and 21 per cent. of Malawi's population has the disease. That catastrophe not only awaits but already affects the continent of Africa, and it is bound to have an impact on countries' capacity to repay their debts.

I urge the Minister to respond to the American proposal that a new definition for countries afflicted with an HIV/AIDS epidemic should be that if more than 5 per cent. of a heavily indebted poor country's Government revenue is spent servicing the debt, that debt should be regarded as unsustainable. I should be interested to hear how the Minister responds to those proposals. The first response would take account of the collapse in commodity prices, and the other would take account of the impact of HIV/AIDS.

I do not want to speak for long on debt relief. I am conscious that Westminster Hall gives an opportunity for many Back Benchers to speak, and I may be regarded as slightly usurping that, but I feel passionately about the subject. My final point is to ask the Minister for his view on a proposal for resolving international debt crises, the jubilee framework for international insolvency. It is a new method of arbitration produced by the jubilee debt campaign that would deal with countries that struggle under their capacity to repay debt.

The framework proposes that a heavily indebted nation could file for a standstill on debt repayments, or its creditors could declare it insolvent. It also considers a new form of regulation for international capital flows, which would discipline lenders and reckless borrowers. The jubilee debt campaign rightly thinks that those who lend money are also judge and jury on the capacity for repayment, hence the call for greater independence of calculations of a country's real capacity to work its way out of debt. My party is considering those issues, so I should be interested to hear from the Minister about them.

In relation to indebtedness and the growing inequality between the richest and poorest nations, we have to face up to an awful truth. As a member of the G8, we are getting richer, and there is no question but that the G8 is getting meaner to poorer countries.

9.57 am

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): I am pleased to be able to contribute to this important debate, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) on bringing it back to our agenda.

The issue remains important for many of my constituents. Those who actively campaigned for Jubilee 2000 are well aware that it was a starting point. It raised the issues at international settings with the G8 and the World Bank, and began a process of debt cancellation. The continuing work appears to be both delayed and complex, so I welcome the opportunity to assess where we are now. Some of the issues on which we must concentrate have been clearly set out, especially that of reassessing sustainability in terms of debt in the heavily indebted poor countries, and the inclusion of counties just outside that category.

I want to use Tanzania as an example for congratulation and caution. The hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) referred to it as one of the two countries where the debt was sustainable. By comparison, that is true, but even there lessons can be learned. I want to consider what has happened a little more carefully.

Tanzania is one of the five countries with a great deal of support, and its Government worked hard to achieve its status. They got their act together in terms of governance, the first aspect of HIPC definition, and worked hard on the millennium agenda. As we have heard, it is still one of the poorest countries. Even with 54 per cent. of its debt cancelled, Tanzania still spends more on its debt servicing than on education and health put together. That situation cannot take it out of poverty in the long term.

Last November, Tanzania went on to achieve full HIPC status, and its achievements are impressive. Overall, Tanzania has made substantial progress in carrying out specific structural reforms and institutionally strengthening governance and financial management in the authorities identified at the time of the decision. In addition, important steps have been taken to improve transparency, which include publishing and disseminating the national action plan for the control of corruption. Significant progress has also been made in tax reform, improving the business climate and strengthening the performance of the utilities. In the health sector, Tanzania has successfully implemented a programme to ensure the immunisation of at least 75 per cent. of children under two against measles and diphtheria, and has implemented a national campaign against HIV/AIDS, including completion visits to three quarters of all districts.

The Government have undertaken important initiatives in co-operation with donors to improve, and to increase access to, education. The Government have launched an education initiative with the chief aim of increasing access to schools, especially in poor and under-served areas, while trying to alleviate the cost burden on householders, so progress has been achieved, especially at primary level. The budgets have been increased and school fees have been abolished, although those who have worked in the country recently say that other ways are being found to ask parents and others for money. A school mapping exercise is also under way.

Exports are improving. Gross domestic product has increased to 4 per cent. and 6 per cent. in recent years, but that still leaves Tanzania with the huge problem of paying back a debt that forms a higher percentage of its GDP than the amount it spends on education and health. In that context, we need to ask the World Bank and the G8 to reassess what is happening as a result of Tanzania nearing completion of the process. I want to emphasise the importance of the trade campaign and the need for a country such as Tanzania to see real benefits from the sale of agricultural produce, which forms about 85 per cent. of its exports. It has a developing tourist industry and some gold for export, but those are minimal by comparison with the need for fair trade for agricultural produce.

Let us briefly consider the case of coffee. I am not an economist and I do not know the detailed background, but I buy coffee and have worked in Tanzania. When I was there, the late President Nyrere told a neighbouring village that if it could double its coffee output, it would be possible to establish a clinic there. The village doubled its output and received exactly the same price on the world market that year. It was a boom year and the Americans who controlled output on to the world market were able to establish a mean price—mean in both senses of the word.

Tanzania has struggled for many years, and we are now told that the price of coffee has plummeted. Do hon. Members recognise the plummet in the price of coffee? Has the price in the shops or coffee bars gone down? No, it has not. Indeed, the prices in Starbucks or any other leading coffee shops would stun a coffee farmer in any developing country in the world. We pay more for a cup of coffee than the coffee producer will receive for the produce of many of his bushes on the small shambas, certainly in Tanzania. That is a shocking indictment. The added value, which producers of coffee in the developing world do not receive, increases while the world market price goes down, and the coffee producer gets less.

If we are not careful we will kill the goose that lays the golden eggs. The produce—the coffee—is the key element in the coffee trade, but the benefit of the boom in coffee shops in London and any other city one might go to is felt by the developed world. The developed world promotes the known fact, mentioned by the hon. Member for Meriden, that the coffee price, plummet though it may, is still increasing the added value to the richest countries, which get richer while the poorest get poorer. Even Tanzania, which has reached completion point under the HIPC initiative and has benefited from the cancellation of 54 per cent. of its debt, will get poorer unless something significant happens.

I must mention the military air traffic control system, an interesting subject from which we can learn many lessons. My recent copy of *Tanzanian Affairs*, which is produced by the Britain-Tanzania Society but gives a fair viewpoint, mentions how indignant President Mkapa is that we are still trying to interfere in Tanzania's affairs. As we know, the air traffic control system means that new debt is incurred by Tanzania while we are selling it produce and cancelling its debt. That is a vicious cycle that must be broken. I challenge what we are doing. I do not believe that we should grant an export licence. Those are issues that we must consider in great detail.

I urge the Financial Secretary to recognise that thousands in my constituency and millions throughout the country are deeply concerned at the lack of progress in reaching debt cancellation for HIPC countries, and at the complexity that surrounds such debates. There is also concern that the new campaign should urgently press the case for fair trade, which it considers a much more honourable way of ensuring that countries can enter international markets with dignity to pay their own way and no longer be truly indebted.

10.7 am

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) on securing this important debate. I am glad that at least some hon. Members are here this morning; would that there were more. I certainly think that some years ago there would have been more.

It is years on from the beginning of the debts campaign and the gatherings in Birmingham and Cologne, and we are still discussing debts. I shall state a fact that puts all our efforts into context. Christian Aid argues that if poor countries' Governments are to have sufficient resources to meet their millennium development goals and other essential expenditure needs, such as those of law and order and developing the civil service, the 42 heavily indebted poor countries cannot afford to make any debt service payments. That is a significant argument. They need not only the cancellation of their debt service payments, but $16.5 billion more in aid to meet their millennium development goals.

I look forward to the lobby on 19 June, and I hope to welcome people from Wales into this very Room. I hope that many thousands will come from Wales; certainly, there will be many thousands outside the House on that day. I shall not give too many detailed figures this morning. They are obscene, and the message that they give is clear. I am sure that several hon. Members have rehearsed the figures, and that others will rehearse them later.

I shall give a small example. In spring this year, I had the opportunity of welcoming Abdon Senne from Senegal to my constituency. He is an aid worker who works on one of Christian Aid's partner projects. He works in agricultural development and education, and uses creative methods, such as drama, in small rural communities, to get his message across. I welcomed him to my mountainous Welsh constituency during one of the wettest weeks of the year. Abdon said that Senegal is a dry and flat country. The experience was instructive for both of us.

The two populations' circumstances are generally different. The west is relatively well off while Senegal is one of the poorest countries in the world. However, Abdon's visit was very valuable. He got to see a little of how we use drama in education and the community. He also saw agricultural production and processing, and he was particularly impressed by an agricultural co-op in my constituency that is involved in meat packing. That was the nitty-gritty of his visit, and he saw how meat packing occurs—unfortunately, so did I, because I did not find it a very interesting or pleasurable experience.

I got a lot out of the visit. I met a person who is working creatively and face-to-face with people to counter poverty. I heard directly about his, and others, efforts. I learned about the conditions that are faced by people involved in agriculture in Abdon's country. I discovered that there is common ground between conditions there and the problems that are faced by marginalised and economically stricken farming communities in my constituency.

I turn to farm subsidies, and I shall highlight one argument of the many that one could choose. The hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) mentioned the current US farm Bill. That will involve huge

[Hywel Williams]

expenditure. A small part of the Bill commits the US Government to provide about $8 billion of aid to rice farmers. That money will go to people who are well off by even the standards of the west. If we consider the incomes of the poorest people on the planet, the rice farmers of the United States are fabulously wealthy. A sum of £8 billion will support agribusiness and that will undermine the economic stability of rice growers throughout the developing world. Hon. Members will have heard about the Africa campaign that was launched last week. Ghana faces a catastrophe in rice production because of the effect of imports.

The United States is giving $8 billion to support agribusiness, but the cost of cancelling debt repayments from the countries that are most heavily indebted over the next five years is $6.8 billion. These figures show the balance that we must measure when we in the west examine our priorities. Clearly, the weighting is wrong. Debt relief must go hand in hand with trade reform, especially when calamities strike, when there is overproduction or if natural disasters occur. The organisation of the world's trade hampers the efforts of people such as Abdon Senne and the hundreds of thousands of others who are using their own efforts to develop their communities. Yesterday's help is available from western Governments and non-governmental organisations, but Abdon Senne and others want and need the opportunity not only to receive, but to create a better future through their own efforts.

We must open markets in the west, but that will not provide sufficient help. Indeed, there is an argument that the effect of opening several such markets would be purely marginal, if not cosmetic. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund prevent developing countries from supporting their agricultural industries, which is fundamentally unfair. That prevents people from developing their own countries, and countries are prevented from exporting finished goods, although the arguments about that are mixed. Therefore, I hope that the Minister agrees that debt relief must go hand in hand with trade reform. It must go hand in hand with reform of the support for agriculture. That is the case with regard to all countries; the United Kingdom and the United States of America are not excluded from that.

10.14 am

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): I congratulate the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) on securing the debate. He presented a good case, and it is always heartening to see that hon. Members are interested in this subject.

Progress has been made on the debt issue in the past five years. However, we should remember that the initiative was started by the last Conservative Government. John Major and his Chancellor, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), had a great deal to do with starting the HIPC initiative, and it has been enthusiastically carried forward by the present Chancellor, the Secretary of State for International Development and the Jubilee 2000 campaign.

The UK, the USA and Canada have promised to cancel 100 per cent. of all bilateral debt for countries, once they qualify under the scheme. That is excellent news. We have also promised that the debt repayments of countries that do not have a poverty reduction scheme will be held in trust to pay for poverty relief, once they reach the qualifying point. I am slightly concerned about that; I am unsure whether I understand how it will work, and I seek clarification about that from the Financial Secretary.

Although progress has been made, the other G8 countries have not made such promises, and neither have the multilateral creditors, who are the largest creditors: 33 per cent. of debt is owed to the World bank, and 11 per cent. is owed to the International Monetary Fund. Only 23 per cent. of debt is bilateral. On top of that, there are all of the export credits, which form debt for developing countries. Therefore, there is still a long way to go.

The hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) and I helped to form the human chain that encircled the G7 meeting at Birmingham several years ago. She was accompanied by her children; they are lovely, and I envied her for having them. I remember that we spoke at meetings. There were tens of thousands of people in Birmingham on that day; it was inspirational.

Jubilee means forgiveness, and that was the great aim of Jubilee 2000. It was created to mark the millennium, and it was the idea of Professor Martin Dent of Keele university. It is a great idea, but I fear that it is turning into a damp squib, because so little progress is being made. Only 15 per cent. of the debt has been cancelled—as the hon. Lady said, in a great speech, to which I have almost nothing to add.

I share the hon. Lady's concerns about debt sustainability, and the way that it is assessed. That is a huge problem at present. Conditions move so rapidly that we must not have a fixed way of assessing it; that was also mentioned by the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde. The assessment is measured with regard to the debt export ratio, but that does not necessarily mean very much, because exports might not lead to a lot of revenue coming into a country. Therefore, that is not a fair way of assessing the situation. Even by the World Bank's criteria, many countries have unsustainable debt after they have reached the decision point of HIPC. We must do better with regard to that.

Commodity prices were mentioned by the hon. Member for Meriden and other hon. Members. That is an important issue. A fall in the price of coffee triggered the genocide in Rwanda. We must never forget that. One million people died because we ignored the importance of falling commodity prices in a poor and struggling country.

As the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde said, access to markets is extremely important. We must support the trade and justice campaign that is being started by more or less the same non-governmental organisations that combined to create the great Jubilee 2000 campaign. Developing countries must have better access to markets. Subsidies to agribusiness are having a terrible effect on the ability of developing countries to export their products, as the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) said. We must examine all those problems. Debt sustainability should be thought of as a fluid and flexible thing to be measured, and not something written in stone that stays unchanged for a decade. The hon. Member for Meriden also mentioned a Congress Bill. It is an interesting one because it appears that the USA recognises the problem. I am glad about that. The Americans are suggesting a big change to sustainability criteria.

I am still unsure whether the world realises what a problem the HIV/AIDS crisis will become. In previous generations in developing countries, scourges, plagues, epidemics and endemic illnesses have affected the weak, newborn and elderly. Like the effect of a great storm on a forest of trees, such scourges cut out the weak and unproductive members of society. That was always what happened in developing and poor countries that had no medical care. However, HIV/AIDS affects the productive members of those countries—the young, fit, active and intelligent. That is why it is such a different crisis, and why the world should take it much more seriously. It will affect the productivity of developing countries in an enormous way that is only just beginning to be felt. I hope that the Minister will accept that we must address this crucial problem.

As the hon. Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) told us, there is little point in providing countries with debt relief if they immediately fall into the greater debt of unproductive expenditure the minute that they qualify. There have been assurances that the Government have imposed a unilateral ban on export credits for unproductive expenditure, and the phrase "sustainable development" has been packed into every Bill and debate that we have had over the past few years. Why then was the air traffic control system for Tanzania approved, which will plunge that country back into debt the minute it qualifies?

I hope that the Financial Secretary will be able to clarify the issue and explain what will happen in the future. Many hon. Members feel that everything that the Government have preached in recent legislation has been completely thrown away by the single act of approving the Tanzania contract. I understand that the contract may be under review, but the Government must still carry the can for approving it.

We must always put sustainable development before any benefits that might accrue to British industry, which was the golden rule in the International Development Act 2002. We must remind ourselves of that rule. We must also exert more pressure on the international community to force greater debt relief from the World Bank and the IMF. They are not moving fast enough and the state of the poorest people in the world is becoming a world emergency that is affecting us directly. That could form the subject of another debate, so I will not go into it now.

The HIPC scheme must be reviewed again. Debt sustainability should especially be re-examined and the scheme must be widened to include more countries, as the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde said. Countries in conflict should be considered, because conflict is not the only problem faced by those countries. Bangladesh is a curious example of a country that superficially appears to be prosperous, doing well and accepted as such. However, as the hon. Gentleman said, Bangladesh has so much poverty. We must look again at the problems.

We must be careful not to make debt relief available for political purposes. I was disturbed that debt relief was recently dished out to Pakistan and I wondered what precedent that set. Given the news today, I worry even more about what effect that will have. We must think carefully before debt relief is ever used for political purposes in the future.

The point that I feel strongly about and with which I hope that the Minister will deal is that debt relief must not be paid for by a reduction in the development assistance budget. It must be funded additionally from the Treasury budget for the G8 countries. In the other place, in answer to a question from the noble Lord Williams, Lord Grocott said that, in fact, the rise in the percentage of GNP going to overseas aid—which is expected to increase to 0.036 per cent. in the next couple of years—is due mainly to the increased impact of the HIPC initiative. That smells of double counting.

We cannot trumpet, on the one hand, that we are giving more aid to developing countries because we are increasing the GNP, and trumpet, on the other hand, that we are leading the world in debt relief when we push everything into one budget, which is only one sum of money. We must be careful not to claim that we are doing more than is being done. The Government have much to be proud of, thanks mainly to the Department for International Development and the Secretary of State, helped by the Chancellor. They must not spoil things by making false claims.

10.26 am

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): I thank the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) for the tribute that she rightly paid to the former Prime Minister, John Major, and to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke). I am sure that her expressions were not motivated at all by her recent experience of the local elections in her constituency—

Dr. Tonge: A mere blip.

Mr. Chope: I accept the hon. Lady's remark in the spirit in which it was intended. She referred in passing to debt relief in Pakistan and to today's news, which is that 1 million Indian soldiers are massing on the Kashmir border, yet India has the second largest number of poor people in the world. Is it any surprise that many of us find it extremely depressing to debate such a subject, when so many of the actions taken by individual Governments and the priorities that they set for their expenditure bear no resemblance to the needs of their domestic populations?

I congratulate the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) on being lucky in the ballot and introducing the debate. He drew on his experience and expressed his worry that money did not necessarily reach the targets and said that we must ensure not only that we make a political commitment but that the money is well spent. He made a heart-felt plea for opening up European Union markets for access on fair terms to wider trade; and so say all of us.

Given the mass lobby on 19 June, I hope that the Government will spell out in specific terms exactly what progress has been achieved in reforming the common agricultural policy. The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry visited Doha with an upbeat message that was full of good intentions about delivering on that

[Mr. Chope]

important subject, but I fear—not because of reluctance on the part of the Government or the country, but because of the lack of influence that the Government have over some of the other countries in the European Union—that we are not making the progress that is fundamental to widen access to the European markets for the producers of food and agricultural products in the developing world.

The hon. Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) made the valid point, borne from her experience of Tanzania, that 85 per cent. of that country's production is in agricultural goods. It must be able to export its goods to markets. Although farmers in this country are protected against substantial falls in the market price of agricultural produce, if, as the hon. Lady points out, the world market for coffee changes dramatically from one year to the next, farmers in Tanzania, despite doubling production, may be no better off in real terms. That must be a pretty depressing prospect for farmers in Tanzania, and we congratulate them on their efforts to improve the economy in their country.

The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde discussed the definitions of heavily indebted poor countries. My hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) picked up that point and once again showed her passionate interest in the subject. I shall try to imagine the spectacle of her and her children joining hands with the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge).

Dr. Tonge: It is the sort of thing that women do.

Mr. Chope: Is it? In that case, neither I nor the Financial Secretary will be able to comment on it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Meriden made two telling points. I hope that, in what will be ample time to respond, the Financial Secretary will answer the points that have been made. It seems odd that only 15 per cent. of unpayable debts have been cancelled and that there is insufficient recognition of what happens in the event of a fall in commodity prices and of the problems encountered as a result of HIV/AIDS.

My hon. Friend asserts that the G8 are getting meaner. I am not sure—

Mrs. Spelman: That is statistically correct.

Mr. Chope: If that is so, it is sad that we, as a G8 member and one of the richest countries in the world, cannot persuade other G8 members to be equally generous in the contributions made to resolve issues relating to poverty in the developing world.

In an interesting speech, the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams) referred to Senegal. He is not in his place now, but I do not agree that opening up markets would be merely cosmetic. I thought that there was a consensus in the House that it would be a good idea to open up markets and that that would be the best long-term and sustainable way to help people in indebted and impoverished circumstances.

I am sure that the Financial Secretary will refer to what the Chancellor of the Exchequer said at the UN General Assembly held earlier this month on financing a world fit for children. Partly to steal his thunder, I quote from the Treasury press notice of 10 May, in which the Chancellor is quoted as saying:

> "We have gathered here together—governments, non-governmental organisations, parents—because of:
>
> our shared concern for all these children who live on the knife's edge of bare existence;
>
> our shared responsibility to end the senseless tragedy of young lives lost to disease and deprivation;our shared belief: that just as each and every child has a right to realise their potential we have a duty to help make it happen;
>
> and most of all, we are here because of our shared conviction that what can be achieved together by unity of purpose is far greater than what we can ever achieve acting on our own, and that is it our duty, from New York onwards, to form a partnership for children so wide, so powerful and so determined that no obstacle should be allowed to impede its path of progress."

He goes on to discuss the Zedillo report, estimating that

> "if we are to succeed in achieving these goals, an extra $50 billion will be required each year until 2015."

I agree with all those sentiments, as, I am sure, does everyone in the Chamber. However, is it not extraordinary that Mr. Robert Mugabe was welcomed at that gathering in New York? Why was he not given the cold shoulder? How can we be serious about such issues if we are not prepared to confront Mr. Mugabe, who has single-handedly done more to bring poverty and deprivation to children in Zimbabwe than any living being? He was able to attend that United Nations General Assembly special session on children and was recently elected to the 15-member United Nations Commission on Human Rights. Surely the Government should take a stand when it comes to Zimbabwe. In general, the issues that we are addressing are so enormous and of such mind-boggling complexity, but we can see that matters are regressing rapidly in Zimbabwe. That is a country in which, by virtue of historical connections, we are in a position to influence matters to a greater extent than we do.

If all our wise words and rhetoric are to add up to anything, surely they should add up to taking effective action in Zimbabwe. The country has become a recipient of United Nations food aid, and its agricultural crisis is deepening. The famine is getting worse, and we are entering a cycle in which it will need more food aid in future. The collapse of that country's agriculture is not because of drought, but because of the political corruption of the Mugabe regime. A country that once had a strategic grain reserve of 1 million tonnes now finds itself without maize or the foreign currency with which to buy it. Are we listening to the opposition parties in Zimbabwe? Earlier this month, Mr. Nyati, a leading Zimbabwean opposition parliamentarian, was in London. He said:

> "Most of the food aid is being distributed to government officials, which means it is either being sold for profit or it is going to Mugabe's supporters. I know that it is not reaching supporters of the Movement for Democratic Change in the rural areas."

He continued:

> "There seems to be confusion about what to do about Zimbabwe. The MDC's position is that until there is an agreed upon distribution network which brings in independent bodies like the Church, food aid should be withheld. If food aid is being used to legitimise Mugabe's party, it serves no useful purpose to Zimbabwe."

I hope that we shall today hear details of the action that is to be taken by our Government on Zimbabwe. We have heard a host of words; we now need some serious action. So long as we continue to bestow legitimacy on the destructive dictators who have, for so long, been at the centre of Africa's ruination, bailing them out with tranches of aid is not the answer.

James Purnell: I want to reassure the hon. Gentleman that I am not quoting from the Chancellor merely to use up the time available for the debate. The Chancellor recently said that the UK was committed to the target of raising development assistance to 0.7 per cent. of national income and that he will significantly raise the amount of our development aid in the spending review covering 2005–06. I should like to give some power to the elbow of the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) in her bids for a future Conservative spending review. Does the Conservative party also aspire to a 0.7 per cent target?

Mr. Chope: The hon. Gentleman makes a helpful intervention. Surely the issue, as he has said, is to look at time scales and to ensure that value is derived from the extra expenditure. My challenge to the Financial Secretary and his Government extends not just to third world aid. It extends to expenditure on the health service and other public expenditure programmes. More important than the total amounts of money being thrown at those topics is that we should ensure that our money is well invested.

That leads me from Zimbabwe to ask about Malawi; again, I hope that the Financial Secretary can answer me. The right hon. Gentleman may have seen an article in *The Guardian* earlier this month about the disasters occurring in Malawi. Britain has enormous influence in that country because of historical connections. I understand that Malawi is suffering serious shortages of food but, according to *The Guardian*, it seems that the crisis has been made worse because of international politics and the actions of NGOs.

The NGOs and the Malawi Government are said to have accused the International Monetary Fund and donor countries of forcing them to sell last year's food reserves for ideological and economic reasons. Malawi is under pressure to meet IMF targets and to reduce its expenditure. It costs the Malawi Government more than £3 million a year to store almost 200,000 tonnes of food, much of which was said to be deteriorating. The donor countries, backed by the IMF, said that only 60,000 tonnes was needed as a strategic reserve, but the Government sold all but 4,000 tonnes without refilling the silos. The result is that Malawi has had to borrow in order to obtain grain on the international markets.

Earlier this month, the IMF refused to allow Malawi debt relief, saying that money for food security must come from further budget cuts, although not from education or health. Is what is happening in Malawi good enough? Or, as is said privately, is the explanation that donors despair because Malawi is governed by a small elite who have tied up the economy and done little to help the very poor? I should be interested to hear the Financial Secretary's response.

Finally, what does the Financial Secretary think of the suggestion that debt relief should be extended to the poorest countries in the former Soviet Union? Does he go along with the argument that Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kurdistan, Moldova, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan should receive debt relief in order to help them become richer? If so, where does that fit in with the Government's overall policy? I should be grateful if the right hon. Gentleman would respond to that question.

I am sure that the Financial Secretary and I agree that, although the problems are enormous, the fact that individuals are unable to do much is no reason why we should not do as much as we can, whether individually or through the Government. Indeed, we are all humbled by the knowledge that, every week, many of our constituents give money to the charities, churches and other agencies that are trying to bring some relief to the people suffering in the developing countries.

10.43 am

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): This has been a good debate on an important subject. We owe a debt of gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) for enabling us to address an issue that is of real concern to many of our constituents, and of grave concern to the millions affected by the decisions made throughout the developed world on aid and debt relief that might allow developing countries better to respond to the crisis that has so many of them in its grip.

The debate has been characterised by an almost total absence of party political rancour and partisanship, and characterises the House's approach to the issue. There was one entirely characteristic fall from grace on the part of the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), but I shall gloss over it as far as I can, and look instead to the early preferment of the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman). She demonstrated a clear grasp of the subject, and has a distinguished track record. Indeed, that is true of all those who participated, and that enriched the tone and content of the debate.

It would be a mistake to present HIPC and the important initiative before us as the answer to the problems that hon. Members mentioned. The HIPC scheme makes an important contribution, but it is not the answer to poverty in a world in which so many live on so little and in such conditions. It is an important starting point on which we can build, but it was never designed to release enough resources to meet the human development needs of low-income countries. Rather, it was intended to allow heavily indebted poor countries to achieve a sustainable level of debt, and the question for us in the developed world is how we meet that objective and what more we can do in terms of development aid and trade to tackle global poverty.

The hon. Member for Meriden, referring to the Jubilee 2000 research documents, asked whether HIPC was dead, and the only fair answer is, "No, it isn't." We must, however, take steps to ensure that it delivers on its objectives. The latest IMF and World Bank analysis shows that more than half of HIPC countries will reach completion point with unsustainable debt levels. The Government acknowledge that problem, and will continue to argue that countries should exit the HIPC process with sustainable debt levels.

[Mr. Paul Boateng]

We must build on the approach taken in the Monterrey consensus, which agreed that

> "future reviews of debt sustainability should also bear in mind the impact of debt relief on progress towards the achievement of the development goals contained in the Millennium Declaration".

Those important words recognise the fact that more needs to be done, and give us some hope of developing an international response to the debt crisis.

We should not, however, overlook the fact that, in 2001–02, the scheme increased social expenditures by $1.7 billion in countries that received HIPC debt relief. That is equivalent to 1.2 per cent. of GDP. On average, health and education spending accounted for 65 per cent. of the funds made available under HIPC debt relief. Those are substantial benefits, but we know that they will not be enough of themselves.

Poor countries have a role to play in achieving macro-economic stability, improving their policy environment, prioritising poverty reduction and investments in education and health, and improving governance and accountability. To judge from what hon. Members have said, there are no illusions about what the developing nations need to do if the issue is to be addressed. Anyone who has lived in Africa, as my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) and I have, knows that good governance has to be fought for. It needs to be developed, and that can be done only when civil society is given the opportunity to contribute.

The history of the HIPC initiative shows that one of the most important developments was the way in which civil society was freed up in the countries, so that it could contribute to the development of poverty reduction strategy plans. Plans that emanate simply from us in Whitehall or the capital cities of the heavily indebted poor countries themselves are unlikely to deliver on the ground. There must be a sense of ownership and involvement from local people who live with the consequences of poverty and struggle to combat it.

Women are vital to that work. All the evidence suggests that they are the best agents of development. When women are empowered through organisations—faith groups, local community development organisations and trade unions—to contribute to the development of local poverty reduction strategy plans, those plans are more likely to deliver their aims.

The hon. Member for Christchurch mentioned Malawi. I travelled there a few months ago to participate in a Commonwealth Finance Ministers conference on HIPC. There I met representatives of civil society who had been engaged with the Government of Malawi in developing a poverty reduction plan. I was enormously heartened by their approach. Trade unionists, church people, women's and youth organisations and rural village community development associations come together to monitor what their Government are supposed to deliver with the moneys coming on-stream as a result of HIPC.

Those people took a direct and practical approach to the monitoring of the impact of poverty reduction plans. Their Government had told them that a certain sum had been spent on education, so they visited schools and villages to ask what had been received recently from the Ministry responsible for education. They would then take an inventory of what had been received. They would ask how many teachers worked in the school, and how many had been appointed recently; they would follow the flow of money to the point where it was supposed to make a difference. Then they would compile a report and share it with donor agencies and countries.

That was practical monitoring of plans. It was a hands-on engagement with the development of anti-poverty strategies, and, therefore, that much more likely to make a difference by changing the conditions under which people live in Malawi. I am heartened by that but, at the same time, deeply disappointed by the circumstances in which the current food crisis in that country has been allowed to develop. To pretend that that crisis is the result of any action taken by the IMF, the World Bank, the UK or other donor nations is beyond belief; that is simply not the case. That food crisis, I fear, has its origins in corruption and abuse of power.

Our concern about that corruption and abuse of power made it necessary to suspend direct budgetary support to Malawi. I was obliged to make clear to the Malawi Government our concerns about the way in which the crisis had developed. That has not stopped us continuing to deliver effective programmes of support to the people of Malawi where we are satisfied that that support will go directly to reduce poverty. It has not stopped us from providing the necessary support to the people of Malawi in addressing the food crisis, but there are important lessons to be learned from the experience of Malawi about how effective poverty reduction plans are formulated and put into effect, how they are monitored and how good governance should be developed and grown.

Other aspects of the situation in Malawi, including visible demonstrations of a commitment to democracy and civil society, give cause for hope for the future. It is dangerous to allow ourselves to be sucked into a vortex of defeatism and cynicism when tackling this problem.

The scale of the crisis in Africa and elsewhere in the developing world is made that much worse by HIV/AIDS, and the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) is right to draw attention to the scale of that crisis. In Malawi, I visited schools where the teaching population had been decimated by AIDS. I visited a village where one in three families was in the process of losing or had lost someone through AIDS. The response of NGOs and local people to that crisis in those countries is heartening and worthy of our support.

Mrs. Spelman: The right hon. Gentleman is talking about the signals that we send to very poor countries; the refusal to give budgetary support to Malawi is a signal of our unhappiness with the corruption in the Government there. However, does he accept that we are sending a strange signal to the people of Tanzania as a result of his Government's decision to sanction the purchase of an air defence system and the decision of the Secretary of State for International Development to withhold overseas aid from the Tanzanian people? What signal does that send?

Mr. Boateng: I am not going to go down that path, for good reasons that the hon. Lady ought to understand; not least as a result of the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West. There are serious issues there and we understand them. However, it is a mistake to confuse them with issues of good governance or with those arising from the HIPC initiative.

Much has been done, but there is still more to do. Our debate assists in that process, and we owe a debt of gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde for enabling the debate to take place.

Bovine TB

11 am

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. Before calling the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) to initiate the debate, I should point out that the Chair has received a lot of written requests to make speeches. I see that many more right hon. and hon. Members are occupying seats in the Chamber, so I remind the House that the debate will last for only 90 minutes and that the longer hon. Members take for their speeches, the less time is left for the Minister to reply and for other Front-Bench Members to speak. I should add that the more interventions that are tolerated, the longer those interventions are and the longer the time taken to respond to them, the less time is left for the rest of the debate.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): With those words in mind, I add that the subject of the debate is extremely complex and arouses various sensitivities. I intend to speak briefly, but hon. Members must forgive me if I seem to go on too long.

The Government's statistics reveal that TB is an increasing problem rather than a diminishing one. In my constituency, farmers have been struck by an enormous increase in positive testing. It has been suggested that as many as 17 farms in my constituency have been hit by TB in the past two months. The total number of new herd incidents has risen to 80 in the region since the beginning of the year, and 52 of those are considered to be new TB incidents. The figures given by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs state that the total number of confirmed new incidents in Herefordshire and Worcestershire in the whole of 2000 was 145; the results for 2001 are inconclusive.

If the increase of reactions continues at the same rate as at the start of the year to March, we shall see an enormous difference by the end of the year. Recent press reports focus on the increasing spread of the disease in Wales, which borders my constituency. North Wales' divisional veterinary manager, David Pugh, said that the situation could be as serious, if not more serious, than the foot and mouth epidemic.

In January 2001, the Agriculture Committee called for Government action in response to farmers' growing sense of despair and desperation over the continuing spread of the disease. Since then, farmers in my constituency, some of whom are here today, have had no assurance from the Government that they can expect support. Given that the industry is still shuddering from the foot and mouth epidemic, the lack of positive Government action is harsh, to say the least.

Immediate action is needed because at least three herds a day are succumbing to the disease. Areas previously free from the disease, such as West Sussex and parts of Wales, are now discovering new cases. The Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), who is responsible for animal health, said that the comments were misleading but agreed that the disease remained a serious and growing animal health problem. Although bovine TB may not have an effect on the food chain, it has a serious and potentially fatal effect on farm businesses. I wonder why Ministers have

[Mr. Bill Wiggin]

done so little to calm the fear among the farming community that the disease could have the same effect as foot and mouth.

At Question Time last week, the Secretary of State denied a greater incidence of bovine TB. The testing programme was suspended throughout the foot and mouth crisis, and she suggested that therefore

> "it is a little early to conclude that some major unforeseen development is in progress."—[*Official Report*, 16 May 2002; Vol. 385, c. 901.]

That attitude is complacent.

In the meantime, farmers in my area are hit by the enormously crippling task of working with the subsequent restrictions that come with a confirmed case of TB. The Government have made few attempts to ease the pressures facing the farming community with the eradication of the disease. Farmers whose livestock have been given inconclusive or positive reactions to testing must wait 60 days before DEFRA officials come to undertake further testing. If those second tests are clear, another 60 days must pass before the final test is taken. Only when the third test proves negative can the farmer begin to sell and buy livestock.

The Government are showing as much complacency over the issue of animal welfare as they displayed in the initial stages of the foot and mouth crisis. That attitude is setting alarm bells ringing across the farming community in Herefordshire, and I can give farmers in my constituency no assurance that they will not be treated as badly as they were over foot and mouth disease. Farmers in my constituency have been faced with restrictions only recently, but still find them financially crippling. I can only imagine what farmers are going through in other rural areas, such as Gloucestershire, where some farms have been under TB restrictions for years.

Charlotte Atkins (Staffordshire, Moorlands): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that at least the Labour Government introduced 100 per cent. compensation for destroyed animals, something that the Conservative Government failed to do?

Mr. Wiggin: I am sure that the hon. Lady is absolutely right, but the 27,000 cases awaiting testing are more of a comment on the way in which the Government are handling the disease.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Given the question of animals in need of testing, is my hon. Friend convinced that sufficient resources have been given to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to deal with the crisis and cope with the backlog of cases?

Mr. Wiggin: My hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head. That is the kernel of where the Government are going wrong. It is not necessarily fair to blame the Government's allocation of resources for research into vaccination, for example. The kernel of the problem is our whole understanding of the disease and the way in which the veterinary service is reacting to the crisis.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): Will the hon. Gentleman comment on the Krebs report? When I was elected Member of Parliament for Hereford in 1997, the Herefordshire National Farmers Union expressed concern that the Krebs report had not been published quickly enough, which had delayed the whole process of dealing with TB. Does the hon. Gentleman share that concern?

Mr. Wiggin: The hon. Gentleman was elected considerably earlier than me. Publication of the Krebs report was certainly a step in the right direction, but there is a serious problem in the hon. Gentleman's constituency—particularly in Aconbury—because the disease has passed not only between badgers and cattle, but is now appearing in cats and possibly even in deer.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): My hon. Friend might like to catch up on the history. The hon. Member for Staffordshire, Moorlands (Charlotte Atkins) claimed that what the Labour Government had done was right. However, the first thing they did when they came to power was to abandon the interim control strategy that was previously in place. In the first year of the Labour Government, the incidence of TB in cattle increased by 43 per cent. Farmers were less concerned about the level of compensation when there were fewer incidents of TB.

Mr. Wiggin: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for all that helpful factual information.

During questions last week, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs promised to keep the situation under review. Using my own constituency as an example, that seems to be a shallow promise. The last quarterly TB statistics showed that 920 tests were overdue in Herefordshire and Worcestershire alone. What resources are being allocated to facilitate the removal of the 27,000 cases awaiting a test? The backlog is enormous and there is a desperate need to sort it out.

In November 1996, Professor Krebs and the independent review team began a scientific review on behalf of the Government of the link between bovine TB and badgers. The Krebs review concluded that the evidence that badgers were a significant source of TB infection in cattle was compelling. However, there was insufficient evidence to demonstrate how much of the disease in cattle originates from badgers. The Krebs recommendations included a randomised badger culling trial to test the effectiveness of different strategies, to provide unambiguous evidence of the role of badgers in cattle TB and to aid the development of improved strategies to reduce outbreaks. The NFU claimed that the Government's delay over the badger culling trial proved disastrous to thousands of farmers.

In my discussions with Dr. Elaine King of the National Federation of Badger Groups, she said that she was not convinced that the disease could move back from badgers to cattle. Because of lack of evidence, thousands of farmers are convinced that badgers are responsible for the spread of the disease. The Under-Secretary, the Minister with responsibility for animal health, said in Westminster Hall earlier this year:

> "Badgers and TB constitute a difficult subject. It is difficult for the Government because we are lobbied on the one hand by people who believe that the case against badgers is indisputable, and on

> the other hand by people who argue equally vociferously that the case against badgers is totally unproved; and both groups ask us why are we wasting our time with the Krebs trial.
>
> However, I believe that it is a proper, sound and scientific way of examining the epidemiology of bovine TB. We need that experiment, as it will answer many of the unresolved questions that have been debated for more than 20 years."

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. Gentleman in his quote, but I must say that I entirely agree that we need evidence from which to derive any future strategy. That is what the Krebs trial represents. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, along with that essential research, there must be an increased emphasis on international research into diagnostic and vaccination techniques, both for cattle and feral species such as badgers?

Mr. Wiggin: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, and shall come to that subject later. I shall finish the quote:

> "We cannot go on like that, which is why the scheme has been restarted. The survey is currently under way—it is the closed season for the culling of badgers—and we recognise that we need to get the scheme back on track. Professor Bourne of the independent scientific group is confident that the disruption of the foot and mouth epidemic will not knock the trial off-course."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 25 March 2001; Vol. 382, c. 683WH.]

The Under-Secretary, who also deals with animal welfare, has said that the Krebs trial is the proper scientific way of examining the epidemiology of bovine TB. I agree with him that there is need for in-depth research and analysis, but I point out the increased losses experienced by farmers due to the delay in Government action during the foot and mouth epidemic last year. Time is very much of the essence for farmers affected by this latest threat to their livelihoods.

I draw hon. Members' attention once more to the feelings of my constituent, Matthew Oliver. The closed herd at Ocle court in my constituency has recently suffered a bovine TB outbreak. The herd at Ocle court were all home grown and home fed, and had no contact with other cattle, yet my constituent was left to watch and weep as his suckler cows were shot as TB reactors. Mr. Oliver told *Farmers' Weekly* recently:

> "I am definitely not anti-badger, but if cattle are not to disappear from some areas, we simply cannot afford to wait for the results of the badger trial."

Past president of the British Veterinary Association, Francis Anthony, said:

> "In Herefordshire we have cases of bovine tuberculosis coming out of our ears. It goes against every principle of disease control to cull one species and do nothing about a proven feral pool infection."

In Aconbury, as I have mentioned, the same strain of TB bacteria is being found in cattle and badgers, and has spread to cats. It is also likely that the deer in Wye valley have it. Although we all dread another food scare, I sensitively point out that the disease can be passed to human beings.

Reactors are now being found in 70 per cent. of farms tested in Herefordshire. Waiting for results of the current trial tests on badgers is no longer an acceptable step. Testing must now take place on badgers in farms where there are known reactors. Farmers will continue to link TB with the badger population, but it is right that tests are carried out to ascertain whether or not that is true. The longer and more in-depth those tests are, the more the disease will spread, the greater the number of cattle that will have to be destroyed and the more farmers that will go out of business.

How many of those badgers killed on the side of the road—an increasingly common sight in the countryside—have tested positive for tuberculosis? A vet that I spoke to in my constituency recently asserted that those badgers killed on the roadside were hit by cars because they were too sick to move quickly enough, but that is refuted by the National Federation of Badger Groups. I suggest that a greater focus on dead animals—instead of the testing and, possibly, slaughtering of cows alone—may provide us with an increased understanding of the disease and how we should deal with it.

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): While my hon. Friend is on the subject of dead badgers at the side of the road, would he agree that, even in the seven counties where independent scientific work is going on, there is insufficient publicity? When people find a dead badger, they do not necessarily know what to do with it, or to whom they should report it.

Mr. Wiggin: My hon. Friend is right. People are always sad when they see dead badgers at the side of the road. This would provide a useful extra source of information, particularly in hot spots.

I know that the Under-Secretary responsible for animal health has a soft spot for badgers because he said:

> "I have a particular interest in bovine tuberculosis and badger control. It is a major area which deserves a debate on its own. I know that it has been proposed to refer the issue to the Select Committee, which would be a welcome step forward. At this stage, the Opposition remain unconvinced that the badger culling policy is either acceptable or, indeed, effective. I know and sympathise with farmers who are facing the problem and the financial impact of the outbreak of bovine TB. Nevertheless, there are a great many anomalies in the approach to the problem. The science is really shaky, because it has not been scientifically proved that badgers cannot be infected by cattle. That needs to be considered very carefully and, at the moment, too many people have set their faces against examining it."—[*Official Report*, 13 July 1995; Vol. 263, c. 1184.]

The Under-Secretary said that in 1995, but there has been little improvement in the subsequent seven years. It appears that the disease is spreading faster. I hope that it will now be accepted that this matter must be given a higher priority.

The Minister should make it one of his first priorities to tackle the situation that is facing the state veterinary service. It is a crucial service and it has excellent vets, but they are being prevented from delivering on what they know to be good scientific practice. I am told that the Department's vets are bogged down with paperwork, and that they are struggling with inconclusive tests. They are also getting an increasingly hostile response from farmers, which is hardly surprising. Morale is falling, and although the vets are happy to do the tests, the process must be improved.

In Herefordshire, we are finding that the paperwork takes so long to do that cattle that are positive reactors are still on the farm by the time that the next test is due. If the Government are serious about bovine TB, they

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must back their vets, cut their paperwork and speed up the process. Money is always helpful, but these problems are not merely financial.

If this disease spreads only from cattle to cattle, it is crucial that the problem is sorted out faster. That will appeal to badger groups and farmers alike, and I know that the Minister is keen to appeal to those groups. In a reply that I received to a remark during the dairy debate, the Minister said that an announcement on bovine TB would be made in May. It is now 21 May, and I wish to know when the announcement will be made. I hope that it will be made today—if not, that he will make a statement to the House—and I hope that he will announce that the new gamma interferon tests will be piloted. If that is the case, I wish to know how effective the new tests will be, what will be the likelihood of false positive results and how many positive results they will miss; the tests will be different from the current skin tests, as they are blood tests. Will they be run in parallel, so that the new tests complement the current skin tests?

The Krebs report stated that it would take about 10 years to find the vaccine. For the past 20 years, everyone has been saying that. We now need to consider whether any of the existing vaccines can improve the situation. The Government have admitted that the cost of bovine TB research and control has risen from £16,100,000 in 1997 to £35,900,000 in 2000. The compensation paid for cattle has risen from £2.386 million to £7.074 million, and that is only in 2000. The cost of the disease to individual farm businesses—in particular, to the 27,000 farmers currently awaiting bovine TB tests who are trapped by movement restrictions—is rising by a similar proportion. However, only £1.4 million is spent on vaccination research. The rest of the vaccination research comes under the human medical TB research. What trials are the Government providing to see whether the current available vaccines might help to reduce the crisis? What lessons are we learning from abroad?

The Krebs report concluded that the best prospect for the control of TB in the British herd is to develop a cattle vaccine. I cannot believe that it would hurt the Government if they were to increase the £1.4 million that is spent annually on vaccine research, although I accept that money cannot buy everything.

It is essential adequately to resource the research, and to ensure that the backlog of overdue six and 12-month herd tests are dealt with. The disease itself must be focused on if we are to find a decent long-term solution to the problem. There is much debate about the spread of the disease; I have already covered the points that relate to the great badger debate. If the disease could be prevented from entering the cattle pool, we would need to worry far less about the disease carriers. It would be possible to introduce an extended and freely available biosecurity advisory service for farmers that could be operated by their own vets and targeted on high-risk TB areas.

TB breakdowns may affect entitlement to subsidy claims and the milk quota, and perhaps force majeure should be applied in such cases. TB breakdowns damage further the sensitive operation of marketing stock, and facilitating trading among businesses with the same disease status should be considered. The NFU believes that DEFRA could take several actions immediately to help to ease the immediate pressures that are imposed on producers who are under movement restrictions. That does not imply in any way that the NFU is prepared to live with the disease at its current levels.

In all probability, the long-term solution to controlling the disease may be vaccination. Cattle and badgers are the primary targets for that, and the Government must maintain full funding for research into effective vaccines. The Country Land and Business Association says that adequate resources must be provided to ensure that DEFRA's target to remove reactors from farms within two weeks is met.

Mr. Swire: Is my hon. Friend aware of the resources that have been given to collate information from other countries, especially Ireland, which has done much research? Does he think that the Government should make putting resources behind the scheme a priority?

Mr. Wiggin: That is essential. No one can afford to ignore lessons that are learned elsewhere. If we can take a step forward, I can think of no better time to do that than now. I thoroughly agree with my hon. Friend.

Flexibility must be sought when interpreting the European Union ruling that farms with an inconclusive reactor that have had a confirmed case of TB during the previous three years should be put under a movement restriction. The NFU believes that that ruling is too severe given the poor sensitivity of the skin test that is used to identify TB. Producers under the TB2 restriction who wish to claim extensification payments may multiply the number of livestock units on their holding by a coefficient of 0.8 to allow leeway on stocking densities. As a consequence of tightening stocking density requirements under the extensification payment scheme, the coefficient should be reduced to allow producers who are under restriction a greater opportunity to meet the required stocking densities.

The comprehensive TB99 questionnaire is put into use after a TB herd breakdown to investigate all possible sources of infection. The exercise assists epidemiological investigation and must be properly resourced to ensure maximum benefits from the results. The questionnaire is time consuming for farmers and vets, and the NFU suggests that DEFRA should consider introducing a shorter and improved version to ensure that the exercise is carried out.

The spread of the disease since the publication of the Krebs report has resulted in hotspots that are not included in the trial areas. That emphasises the need for an interim strategy to contain the spread of the disease. Reactive trapping, which happened in the Krebs trials, should be started immediately in known TB hot spots, allowing a suitable cordon near trial areas. In new areas in which several farms have been put under movement restriction without obvious imported infection, a wildlife survey should be carried out and trapping should be undertaken if TB is found in the wildlife.

The short-term solution to the crisis will not be a magic bullet vaccine. Sadly, even if such a vaccine could cut the disease by more than 60 per cent., it would take time to reach the market. Better diagnosis will certainly help, as will better biosecurity whereby infected reactors are removed from the farm as quickly as possible. We need better research into husbandry factors such as cropping, and we must start pulling together the policy that will halt the spread of the disease now.

Finally, and most importantly, we should give a much-needed boost to the state vets who had trouble with foot and mouth and require massive support from the Government so that they can make the improvements happen and work.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Right hon. and hon. Members who were present at the start of the debate will recall the admonition that I gave at that time. I add to that advice that in this Chamber it is customary to start the first of the three wind-up speeches from the Front Benches 30 minutes before the conclusion of the debate. Therefore, we have about 36 minutes for debate before that point.

11.24 am

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin). Let me start with a confession. His area has real problems, and we in Nottinghamshire are fortunate that that scale of problem does not exist there. I note the increasing incidence of TB in cattle and draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to Cumbria, in particular, and Scotland, where new cases have developed out of the blue. That raises questions about the link that many farmers have made between badgers and TB.

Although the problem is enormous, we must put it in context. My impression is that about 9,000 cattle are infected in a national herd of about 8 million. The incidence rate is, therefore, less than one tenth of 1 per cent. Nevertheless, I agree that the incidence seems to be rising. We must examine the figures carefully. The veterinary service effectively faces a two-year backlog of work that must be carried out in just one year. No doubt it has targeted resources on the worst affected areas. It is not surprising that current figures show a peak that may not reflect the underlying trend.

I accept that it is hard to find consensus and common ground. In introducing the debate, the hon. Gentleman referred to the views of farmers and the NFU. Jan Rowe, vice-chairman of the NFU, recently said:

> "The case is well proven that the badger is responsible. I think there is absolutely no doubt"

about that. I contrast that with the remarks of Dr. Elaine King, chief executive of the National Federation of Badger Groups, who said that this

> "ridiculous campaign has no basis in science or logic. Calling for badger culling is no better than calling for witch burning."

Given such comments, it is hard to see a consensus on the way forward, as the hon. Gentleman recognised in his opening remarks.

The Krebs trial gives us a basis for going forward. I strongly believe that we must examine the science to try to find solutions. I caution against those who call for greater culling now. It is important that the Krebs trials are given a chance to deliver the goods.

How long will the delay caused by foot and mouth disease delay Sir John Bourne's work? My impression is that the delay will not be great. I hope that we shall receive his report by 2005. In the meantime, there will be real problems. However, given the strength of argument and feeling, it is important to try to establish the science and not be taken in or taken down a false road by siren voices.

As the hon. Gentleman said, it is also important to build on the gamma interferon test. I regard it as an additional and supplementary test, but it seems to be a useful step forward. Does the Department intend to use it more widely in the Krebs trial?

The ultimate solution must be to move towards vaccination. I have followed the debate for 20 years, and, as the hon. Gentleman said, vaccination is always 10 years in the future. However, I feel that we may now be getting somewhere. I note the work of several partners in developing the M. bovis genome sequence. That may be the breakthrough—not an immediate one, but one that will take us forward. It is an important piece of work.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the need to invest in vaccine research—10 years is too long to wait. I question his figures on the amount spent on research. My own information is that approximately £9 million is being spent on vaccine research, however, I join him in pressing the Minister to increase that amount and to develop the tests.

We must find consensus on the way forward—to build on the science, develop and get the results of the Krebs test, use the new testing and, most importantly, to develop the vaccine. At the end of the day, we cannot be blown from the course that has been adopted. Everyone has welcomed Krebs, although it is hard. Farmers will not like me saying that the important thing is to see the research through in its entirety. It will give us a springboard for the future.

11.30 am

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) on securing this important debate.

We should put the quote from the north Wales vet in its context. The hon. Gentleman quoted him as saying that the problem was as important or worse than foot and mouth for the individual farm. That is an important point to make in reply to the hon. Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping), who suggested that it was not such a great problem because few cattle had been affected. It is not a question of the cattle that are affected, but the herds and, therefore, the farms.

When the hon. Gentleman quoted the numbers affected, I had a quick look at DEFRA's website, which shows that 2 per cent. of herds in Wales were affected by TB last year. Unfortunately, that figure has increased considerably this year. We had 128 new incidents in Wales last year but, in the first three months of 2002, there have been 127. Not all have yet been confirmed, but it would suggest a two to three times increase in the incidence of TB in herds in Wales. Undoubtedly, an animal health problem is waiting to explode in Wales.

Considering Wales has approximately 20 per cent. as many herds as England, one wonders why 40 per cent have been slaughtered because they are reactors to TB.

[Mr. Simon Thomas]

It suggests that the likelihood of TB in cattle in Wales is twice that in England. There is also the problem of hot spots within Wales. Of the 1,467 cattle slaughtered last year in Wales, 1,044 were in Dyfed. Unfortunately, the figures are not broken down between the new counties, but Dyfed is one of the milk-producing area of Wales and includes areas such as Caernarfonshire and Ceredigion—my own constituency—the south of which has recently experienced an alarming number of so far isolated TB outbreaks. I fear that a hot spot could develop in Ceredigion in the near future.

Dealing with the TB and brucellosis outbreaks is one of the few animal health matters devolved to the National Assembly for Wales. However, we cannot get the full picture because the Assembly can work only with the state veterinary service—a non-devolved service—and therefore works only with the concordat of DEFRA. The state veterinary service is under strain and stress in Wales. Nearly 5,400 TB tests are outstanding in Wales, which is having a huge impact on farmers and animal welfare. As the hon. Member for Leominster said, if one cannot move the cattle off the farm within a maximum of three days, there is potential for infection and a breakdown in hygiene. Perhaps that is one reason why hot spots are not being eliminated and TB is being recycled.

There are no Krebs trials in Wales. Although that is not significant in itself, it is important to know that those that are taking place—some 30 throughout England—are in areas that reflect the topography of Wales. In his winding-speech, will the Minister confirm that the Krebs trials will be applicable to Wales?

Mr. Swire: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Thomas: I will not give way, because I must conclude my remarks.

We have a good area in Wales for trialling the new gamma interferon blood tests. Because most of Dyfed was not affected by foot and mouth, it has been put to me by the farming unions that if the Government are looking for an area to trial gamma interferon blood tests outside of the Krebs trial area, Dyfed would be ideal. I met both farming unions in my constituency yesterday and I want to put some of their questions to the Minister, one of which concerned the testing of road-kill badgers. It is unfortunate, but many badgers are killed on the roads. I apportion blame for that to the speed of cars, not the speed of badgers; nevertheless why are the badgers not tested for TB? That is outside the Krebs testing areas.

Will the Minister say more about vaccination? As the hon. Member for Sherwood said, we have always been told that such matters are for 10 or 15 years hence, but we must know that the Government are working properly on such a strategy. What about flexibility and trading between restricted farms, particularly pedigree stock? The current state veterinary service is under extreme pressure, and that is exacerbated because skin testing is inconclusive in so many cases. The testing and clear-up rates must be improved and we may need some additional farm hygiene measures. The key message from Wales is that there is an increasing prevalence of TB within the bovine population; that incidence rate is increasing and it must be urgently dealt with by the Minister and the National Assembly if we are not to see a serious outbreak of hot spots of TB in areas such as Ceredigion.

11.36 am

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): We would do well to remember that, according to the siren voices that sounded in the foot and mouth outbreak, science is crucial to the provision of advice during the development of our policy. Quantitative epidemiology provided a sound scientific basis for decision making. Operational research provided the means to assess the logistics of performing tasks. Regular meetings of scientists, the Departments and the foot and mouth science group kept the advice up to date throughout the epidemic. Some say the development of the science saved the Government's skin. There was a dramatic change in policy; they took the science by the scruff of the neck and asked, "What can it tell us and what can't it tell us?" The Government's action was a success.

Epidemiology looks at causation, transmission and control of disease within populations of horse species. That is a key discipline in the bovine TB studies that are being undertaken. People argue that the disease is getting out of control and reaching the same level as foot and mouth. I do not agree. I accept that there are problems and that multiple drug-resisting strains are developing, but that happens with any organism. It always tries to cheat humanity; there is always a battle, at which point science comes in and gets ahead of the game.

Many arguments are beset by dogma. The data is not good enough, which is why I welcome the Krebs development of badger experimentation. TB may be in other organisms in other countries and other wildlife developments—who knows? For example, in New Zealand, possums carry the TB bug. There is no doubt that there is a correlation between the development of TB in badgers and in cattle. Whether or not they are the same bug, much has to be done. Few tests have been carried out on live badgers; many have been carried out on dead badgers and there is no doubt that tuberculosis bacillus can be found in badgers in every county in the United Kingdom.

We cannot just say that vaccines are the answer, but there have been dramatic changes in vaccination and its development in this country. There has been a huge influx of money from the Government into vaccination right across the board, from humans to cattle. It is difficult to predict what kind of vaccine will emerge, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) said, there have been dramatic results in the last few months, which were announced at the end of March. The mycobacterium bovis found in cattle and the mycobacterium tuberculosis found in human beings are 99.9 per cent. similar in their DNA. That means that a whole body of research into human vaccine production, which has been successful in eliminating tuberculosis, will now be applicable to the bovine situation.

I do not think that the development of a vaccine is years away; we may yet get a shock and find that comes about within six to 18 months. People are working extremely hard to develop that vaccine and with the new developments in the production of vaccines—including peptide technologies—emanating from the molecular biology in which we are pre-eminent in this country, who knows what will happen? We should be much more positive about that area.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Despite the undoubted potential of the vaccine, did not the Select Committee on Agriculture point to a flaw in the Krebs report, in that it did not spend sufficient time on the potential for improved husbandry? The Government responded to that by saying that they would initiate a report, but they have not done so. Does my hon. Friend hope that the Minister will say something about improved husbandry?

Dr. Gibson: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend and was moving on to that subject. Vaccines on their own will not be enough. We cannot sit back and wait for a vaccine to appear, whether tomorrow, next week or whenever. That has been confirmed by an independent scientific group.

There are many other kinds of research going on. A recent meeting in docklands, at which the Food Standards Agency considered the incidence of the bacteria in particular milk herds, brought Government activity into this arena on all fronts. Such a level of activity is bound to lead to a breakthrough in vaccine research.

There are major questions relating to factors influencing the prevalence and persistence of the disease in cattle and wildlife. On animal husbandry it is argued that, because of the way in which they treat animals, some farms are predisposed to tubercular infections. Some suspect husbandry goes on in this country and that is being investigated.

There are many other areas of research dealing with the transmission routes and the pathogenesis of the species, and others that deal with how the mycobacterium infects and how it moves among cattle. There is a huge arena of activity. I put my trust in science and I hope that other Members will.

Charlotte Atkins: In a research context, does my hon. Friend support the testing of badger roadside casualties, not just in Gloucestershire but nationwide?

Dr. Gibson: That is an amazing project. I hope that people are applying to do that through the grant-giving system. The technology is there, and we could examine the particular species of the tubercle bacillus that is present in badgers and correlate it with that found in humans. There is a huge argument about how humans got tuberculosis and whether they gave it to badgers or vice versa. That affects the debate about the origins of the different species. That may be a little academic in relation to the current situation and farmers' plight, but research into that would add to our knowledge and develop vaccination procedures that could eliminate the disease from our herds and our farming communities.

I am pleased to have had a chance to speak in this debate and to say that I believe and have confidence that science will provide the answers much sooner than many of us think.

11.43 am

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I want to be brief and simply to add a point that has not yet come out in the debate. I apologise to my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) for having missed the first seven minutes of his speech.

The dairy farmers in my constituency are—I do not think that this is hyperbole—on the brink of extinction, as I have pointed out to the Minister and to his predecessors on several occasions. However, the situation has merely moved from bad to worse. The possibility of a serious national level of bovine TB is not merely or mainly a problem for farmers, as it will have ricochet effects on the customer. Under the present conditions of near hysteria about food and its quality, it is all too likely that the killer blow to the dairy industry in West Dorset and large parts of Britain could come from that source, even if the scale of the outbreak were much more limited than would justify such a disaster.

Everything that has been said today should be attended to in a different way from how DEFRA and its predecessor frequently acted in the past, which was with care and diligence, but a certain leisure. I hope that that is not unduly uncharitable. There should be a certain urgency, and I profoundly hope that there will be early vaccination. We all have much to be hopeful about.

In the meantime, our farms and farmers are showing reactors, as has been increasingly reflected in other contributions. Many of the dairy farmers who suffer from that and the restrictions that it entails are on the brink of going out of business, and will almost certainly be driven out of business if no interim action is taken. It is on that action that I want to press the Minister. I asked the local branch of the National Farmers Union to produce a wish list of actions, on which there are 16 items. I will not trouble hon. Members by referring to all 16, but shall pick five. I would be happy to send the Minister the full list, but am sure that he will have received representations directly from the NFU on the subject.

First, we could introduce a system to allow easier movement of stock between farms under restriction. Secondly, we could have a much better and quicker updating of the information available for my farmers. Many of their farms are relatively small, with many farmers who are not expert on the science, unlike the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson). We would like the booklet entitled "Dealing with TB in your herd" to be updated more regularly. Thirdly, a specific TB helpline could be set up for those under restriction, so that they could get through to a specialist quickly. Fourthly, arrangements could be made for store cattle markets from farms under restriction, with sales only to finishers under restriction or who are guaranteed not to move the cattle on. Fifthly, priority could be given to the slaughter of reactive cattle, with removal from the farm within three days, my correspondent suggests. I do not insist on the three-day limit, but removal is clearly dilatory at the moment.

I give those as examples. I hope that the Minister will explain that DEFRA will attend urgently to the interim problem of farmers in West Dorset and elsewhere who are likely to go out of business, not because of the national scale of the outbreak, but because they have been affected and because no interim measure sufficient to relieve the pressure on them has yet been taken.

11.48 am

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): I shall be brief. I made a speech on the subject two years ago, so I have cut out a significant amount of what I was going to say so as not to repeat it.

My key message is for a commitment to the science. The hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) was right that the prospects for fulfilling at least the promises of the 10-year success, if not his much more optimistic expectation, are better than for many years. Commitment to the Krebs trials is important, as they should provide a better scientific basis for understanding the relationship between TB in badgers and cattle.

Two years ago, I suggested a number of additional steps. The first was to increase the frequency and scope of testing for TB. That has a straightforward resource implication, and I support the hon. Gentleman in highlighting the need for additional veterinary resources. We must put more effort into identifying and, as several hon. Members have said, removing the source of TB as rapidly as possible. Those are reasonable proposals.

Secondly, as hon. Members have suggested, we should widen the scope of the road traffic accident tests on badgers. It should be possible to find out whether badgers that are knocked down on the side of the road are carrying TB, and that would provide useful intelligence. Restrictions have been placed on the number of counties covered by RTA tests, but we should broaden their scope.

Thirdly, I still believe that it would be wise to increase the level of compensation to farmers who face restrictions as a result of a TB outbreak. That is partly because the 100 per cent. value compensation is insufficient to meet the economic effects on farmers, and we should be concerned about that. There are, however, also straightforward practical reasons. We expect a high level of co-operation from farmers on other measures that will be required in their areas. It is reasonable to recognise that such co-operation will be necessary for the control measures that we seek to put in place. Discussions are under way on how to assist farmers affected by TB with their income flows, and I would be open to suggestions other than simply increasing compensation, although that is probably the simplest step.

Finally, we must support further the measures to improve husbandry and bio-security. The Department took quite a long time to produce its helpful leaflet on the subject, but simply producing a leaflet is not enough. It is reasonably clear that costly measures are sometimes necessary to improve bio-security in high-risk areas, and we should be prepared to fund an increase in our armoury of appropriate measures so that we can reduce the potential spread of the disease.

The implications of not taking action have been spelled out in personal terms, and are obvious. We shall, however, face a major national problem if we are affected by a further animal disease, and the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) rightly said that the impact on consumer perceptions is important. Much more significant, however, will be the impact on UK trade. We are resuming trading in the world, and a further animal health restriction would put off export customers and persuade them to place further restrictions on us. That can only be negative.

11.49 am

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): I draw hon. Members' attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests and to my interests in agriculture. I congratulate the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) on obtaining the debate. It is said in my constituency that all the good farmers in Herefordshire originated in Brecon and Radnorshire. That illustrates that this issue transcends local authority and even national borders, and huge commitment will be needed if we are to get to grips with it.

It is a tragedy that this country's terrific reputation for animal health has been afflicted by a series of problems, which have brought it almost to an all-time low. In previous years, Britain exported pedigree stock throughout the world, but now, because of our problems with BSE, foot and mouth, TB and sheep scab, those exports are non-existent and show little likelihood of being resumed.

However, Britain has proved that when it is committed to eliminating a disease, when it makes full use of all the scientific and technical information at its disposal, it is capable of eliminating such diseases. I am sure that we could eliminate TB if we committed ourselves to making the effort, but the farming community fears that such commitment and effort are lacking.

The hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) said that certain differences in management could mitigate the problems faced by farmers under restriction, and I am sure that we would all support that. Mention has also been made of the gamma interferon test and improved diagnoses, but doubts have been expressed about that. However, if it was integrated with a skin test, we might be more certain about the status of infection of various animals.

I want to focus on the key to addressing the issue, which is the state of the veterinary service in Great Britain in both the private and the public sectors. It is a sad fact that the falling profitability of the livestock sector has led to a fall in the profitability of the large animal veterinary service. That has happened to such an extent that places in Wales are finding it very difficult to get a veterinary surgeon to attend farm animals in emergencies such as calvings or accidents, because large veterinary practices have gone out of business or do not attend outside office hours.

The Minister may wish to write to hon. Members if he cannot answer now, but it has been suggested that the Government might tender for the provision of routine testing for brucellosis and TB rather than allowing the farmers' veterinary surgeons to undertake it. If so, the service could be provided not only by people from outside the area but from other countries. That would be disastrous for our veterinary practices. If the Minister could assure us on that point, it would give some comfort to our veterinary practices.

The state veterinary service has been under enormous pressure for a considerable time, and under Governments of both parties. The number of veterinary surgeons employed by the state veterinary service has declined. It was once a local service provided by local vets, but it has now become centralised. Indeed, it could be called the central veterinary service. That has not added to its effectiveness or to its reputation among farming people.

Finally, we must commit ourselves to science, but we need a commitment from the Government as well. The feeling among the farming community is that the Government are denying the science because they will otherwise be faced with difficult decisions.

11.58 am

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) on securing this debate. He represents a border constituency similar to mine, which was recently similarly affected by TB. It is what one might call a hot spot, but it was not included in the Krebs trials, as there are no Krebs trial areas in Wales.

There has been a serious outbreak of bovine TB in the Raglan and Llantrisant areas of my constituency and in the Usk valley. In the past, those areas had a thriving dairy industry, but it has sadly diminished during the past 20 years. Some farmers have had their stock culled as a result of TB, and others are either unable to trade or face serious movement restrictions on their livestock. One of my constituents, Mr. Colin Pritchard of Llantrisant, has had his herd destroyed; Mr. John Biggs of Raglan has been under movement restrictions for two years; and Ms Carol Jones of Hardwick farm in Abergavenny wrote to me to say that although her herd of pedigree Fresians had been clean for over thirty years, a third of the stock had been slaughtered as a result of TB.

I recently addressed the Raglan farmers association, where I was given a warm reception. The dominant issue in discussions was TB in cattle. I understand that the Minister for Rural Affairs in the Welsh Assembly, Carwyn Jones, also attended that meeting. Mr. Alastair Mitchell, a veterinary surgeon in my constituency, is clear that, whereas Monmouthshire was virtually TB free in the early 1990s, the problem has now become very serious. He says:

> "I am concerned that TB in cattle in this area has risen to epidemic proportions."

I have written to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about the matter, enclosing Mr. Mitchell's letter, and I am grateful for the reply that I have received. I urge my right hon. Friend the Minister to continue to work with the National Assembly for Wales and the Ministry for Rural Affairs in Wales to do all that can possibly be done to overcome the problem—to support the farmers who have been affected by ensuring that they are compensated for the hardship that they have experienced; to speed up testing, especially the gamma interferon test; to continue research into live testing on badgers; to develop a vaccine for cattle and, if possible, for badgers as well, and to ensure that the Krebs trials are completed as soon as possible and that the results are made available.

12 noon

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I hope very much that the hon. Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) is right that science has an answer just round the corner, but we have been being assured of that for a long time and I am not as optimistic as he is. We need to consider what can be done now. A number of hon. Members have put forward proposals to deal with testing. However, two matters have not been raised. The first is the frequency of testing. The hon. Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) referred to the debate two years ago in which I advocated moving to annual testing, certainly in the parts of the country that I term the frontier counties, into which the disease is spreading, in order to curtail its spread—that remains important.

The second relates to the developments since foot and mouth. In the last seven or eight months, we have seen a vast movement of breeding stock around the country while farmers have restocked. The hon. Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) referred to outbreaks that occur for no apparent reason. I would lay a lot of money on there being a reason: the movement of stock around the country. There are no prizes in politics for saying "I told you so," but I did advocate two years ago that all stock should be tested within three months of movement. I hope that the Minister will, in today's conclusion and beyond, address the matter of the spread of disease through the country due to cattle movement. It has happened more often in the past few months and I am convinced that it is a major reason for further outbreaks.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): I and fellow occupants of the Chair are very disappointed that other hon. Members who were keen to speak have not been able to participate in the debate.

12.3 pm

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall): This has been a useful debate and there is broad agreement in all parties. We have sympathy for all farmers who have been afflicted by the misery and morale sapping that disease brings, let alone the financial cost. The issue is becoming topical in all farming groups. I have a Krebs trial triplet in my constituency, and there are others in the south-west. Confidence in the value of the Krebs trials is diminishing, not least since foot and mouth. If we are to have the sound science that will drive future policy, it is essential for the trials to be able to continue, for them to be monitored and for us to receive the right information. Unfortunately, there is a lot of worry in the areas where they are being conducted as to whether sabotage—on both sides—might have an inordinate effect on the results.

Clearly, current policies are failing to control the spread of the disease—we have heard that from many quarters—and, having heard about post-foot and mouth restocking incidents, we know that areas that have been free of TB for many years are now experiencing it, which is a huge shame.

Will the Minister comment on the current state of the Krebs trials? Is additional research being collated, or will we be entirely dependent on those trials and on the vaccine research when formulating policy in a couple of years' time?

We may need a meeting between those who conduct the Krebs trials and hon. Members who are interested in the issue. I attended two meetings that were held by the

[Mr. Colin Breed]

Minister's former colleague, Baroness Hayman. She brought along Professor Bourne, and we discussed what was happening. I hope that the Minister will consider holding such meetings so that hon. Members with TB problems in their constituencies can discuss the value of the Krebs trials and their current status.

As the hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) said, we must consider relaxing the movement restrictions, although without compromising disease control. The restrictions have huge financial implications for all farms, and I would not like dairy farmers who have got through foot and mouth to be torpedoed by TB.

Additional resources will clearly be necessary if we are to reduce the backlog of overdue six and 12-month herd tests. We must get on top of that issue, particularly given the problem of postponements during foot and mouth.

As with foot and mouth, we need regular reports and detailed statistics to be published. We had such reports throughout the period of the problem with foot and mouth, and bovine TB, too, is important. It may not be quite as significant as foot and mouth, as has been said, but it is a growing feature, and statistics should be published regularly so that we can see exactly what is happening.

We certainly need an interim strategy to contain the spread of the disease during the period of the Krebs trials, and the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) mentioned a buffer zone. We need a buffer zone so that we can detect, almost farm by farm, who is likely to be in the next round of TB. Plotting such things is not rocket science.

In the light of the problems with foot and mouth and low milk prices, I urge the Minister to consider consequential loss compensation. As has been said, compensation is not simply a matter of the value of the animals. Problems can have a huge effect on the financial operation of many farms, a lot of which are only now recovering from foot and mouth.

Mr. Heath: There are examples of huge personal problems that can derive from delays in the testing process. A constituent from Aller is trying to dispose of his farm and his herd for pressing personal reasons. As a result of two testers, however—one was okay, but the other must be repeated—disposal has been delayed, which could have a crucial impact on his future well-being and prosperity. The Ministry must deal with such issues.

Mr. Breed: That scenario could probably be repeated in several places. People are even prevented from undertaking diversification plans that have been approved and for which grants have been made available. Suddenly, because of a reactor, everything is held in abeyance, and people can do nothing.

Finally, only 8,000 animals out of about a million have been affected, but, as has been said, it is herds that are important in retaining this country's disease-free status. It has been suggested that the national herd is getting perilously close to losing its TB-free status. Will the Minister comment on these issues?

12.8 pm

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): Like other hon. Members, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) on raising this important issue. I also extend our sympathies to those farmers and their families who have been directly affected by it. The hon. Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) said that there may not be a national crisis, but, as several hon. Members have said, particular families face a crisis. There is a danger that the phrase "Crisis? What Crisis?" may rebound on us all in a few months' time. I do not intend to rehearse all the points made by hon. Members. The debate has been an excellent one, attended by 20 hon. Members of whom some 11 or 12 have made speeches. Clearly, hon. Members recognise the seriousness of the problem.

I want briefly to tease out one aspect of the problem. Having read the reports of the old Agriculture Committee—now the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee—and answers to parliamentary questions, I cautiously suggest that the Government have a problem giving a definitive answer to many of our questions. That problem was epitomised yesterday, when Lord Whitty attempted to answer a number of questions put to him in the other place. He often failed to give any answer, or he gave answers that simply raised more questions. For example, Lord Whitty said:

> "Approximately 10 per cent. of all cattle herds have been affected. The total number of individual cattle affected thus far is quite low—some 9,000 in a national herd of 8 million—but the incidence of the disease is growing in a worrying way."

Why is it growing? The Government do not know.

In the same exchange, Lord Whitty admitted:

> "It appears that the growth in the incidence of TB in cattle has been greater here than in other European countries."

Why should that be so? Do we have any knowledge? He further stated that

> "there is a correlation between the growth in the number of badgers and the growth in bovine TB, but not area by area. Correlation does not mean cause."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 20 May 2002; Vol. 635, c. 515-17.]

What does it mean, in that case?

Concern has been expressed in both Houses and by the farming community over delays in veterinary testing caused by the priority given to controlling foot and mouth disease. I urge the Minister to consider the resources available in his Department. The Secretary of State may have to press the Chancellor on the matter, because the problem seems to be one of resources as much as anything else. The position of the state veterinary service has been raised in the debate by several hon. Members. Given what has happened with animal health in the past five to 10 years, it may be wise to assume that we will face an outbreak of another animal health problem, which could mean that bovine TB testing must again go on the back burner. Therefore, I urge the Minister to consider the problem.

I shall not discuss the problems facing the farming community, as vividly described by hon. Members, but I shall address a crucial issue that was raised here and in the Select Committee. The Government have installed a long-term scientific strategy that may or may not produce the required results, but there is no plan B, in the words of the old Select Committee. There is no interim strategy, in the words of my hon. Friend the

Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), and there is no short-term strategy to deal with the immediate problems that appear to be escalating. I urge the Minister to state clearly and categorically what the short-term strategy might be.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) put it to the Secretary of State during last weeks parliamentary questions that although the long-term strategy is scientifically based and stately as a galleon, it may be overtaken by the increasing spread of bovine TB. That is not an easy question for the Department to handle, but if the Department does not develop a short-term strategy it will not only be overcome by events but lose the confidence of the farming community and the consumer.

Finally, I urge the Minister to answer our questions. I realise that he does not have enough time for that in the debate, but perhaps he will write to hon. Members. Will he and his hon. Friends consider making a statement on the current state of bovine TB? Many hon. Members feel that getting information out of the Department is like pulling teeth. I am waiting for a reply from the Secretary of State. I have given up telephoning her private office. A piece of statistical information was promised to me by this morning, but I have given up on it now. Such delays must be even more frustrating for members of the farming community.

I urge the Minister to issue an interim report in the next few weeks to establish the current facts and to admit, where possible, that there are problems. We all understand that this is not an easy issue. Perhaps we should do what has been suggested by the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed), who speaks on behalf of the Liberal Democrats, and update the statistical information. If the Minister did that, he would draw out the fire from the criticisms made not only by those outside Parliament, but by many of us present.

12.15 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): In the short time available, I shall do my best to do justice to an excellent and wide-ranging debate on a topic that the hon. Member for Leominster (Mr. Wiggin) rightly described as difficult and complex.

I should say to the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) that it is difficult to come up with simple answers unless such simple answers exist. We need to be more politically mature in our approach to difficult issues than to seek to pluck answers from the air, especially as the complexity of the issue has been made evident in today's debate. As he and the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) suggested, I shall write if, in view of the time available, I am not able to cover all the topics raised in the debate.

I appreciate that the hon. Member for Mid-Norfolk may still be experiencing delays in some of his correspondence with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. It is difficult for anyone who has not been involved to understand just how bad the correspondence situation was in DEFRA, but I assure him that it is continuing to improve dramatically. I can offer him hope for the future.

Mr. Simpson: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Minister is not giving way.

Alun Michael: As my noble Friend Lord Whitty said yesterday in the House of Lords, tuberculosis in cattle is one of the most difficult animal health problems that we face. The increase in its incidence continues to give rise to considerable concerns. The Government are seeking to proceed on the basis of sound science drawn from independent scientific and veterinary experts. That is very much the approach argued for by my hon. Friends the Members for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping), for South Derbyshire (Mr. Todd) and for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson).

The causes of the disease are complex, but there is evidence to suggest that the badger plays a role in bovine tuberculosis. The badger field trial is designed to identify and quantify any such role and, if it exists, to find out whether culling badgers has a part to play in controlling the disease. That was the focus of discussion in the other place yesterday, and I hope to have time to return to that subject.

My hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North referred to badgers found dead on roadsides. They are being collected from seven counties, and the results of the post-mortem examination of those carcases is being validated against the more representative results obtained by examining badgers killed in the Krebs trial. Interim results of the trial are not yet available. My hon. Friend also referred to developing a vaccine and the importance of animal husbandry, and I echo his remarks.

I should also mention the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards). A potentially promising candidate auxiliary test is that known as the gamma interferon test. Only last week, the UK voted in favour of that test being given recognition in the European Union. We hope to begin testing its applications more extensively in limited trial areas this year.

The hon. Member for Leominster quoted views put forward by the National Farmers Union and the Country Land and Business Association. It is worth mentioning that both organisations are fully involved in discussions with DEFRA to tackle the problem. Officials do meet industry representatives; I believe that a meeting to discuss proposals put forward by both organisations and the National Beef Association and other representatives is imminent. The hon. Gentleman suggested that restrictions are crippling. Farms that are under restriction may not move cattle from one farm to another. However, cattle may be moved direct for slaughter under licence. Additionally, the state veterinary service will consider other licensed movements, such as to summer grazing, on a case-by-case basis.

The hon. Gentleman also suggested that the 60-day period between tests is too long. That period is required to ensure that cattle respond properly to skin tests because shorter periods cause cattle to be desensitised to the tests. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman shares my concern that the test should be carried out in circumstances that give certainty to the outcome of the tests and ensure the quality of the results.

[Alun Michael]

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) rightly set the remarks of a Welsh vet in context. It is right that attention should be focused on the tragedy of individual farmers and their families rather than on exaggerating industry-wide implications of the disease. I shall not stray on to issues on which the Welsh Assembly takes the lead, but DEFRA and the Assembly's officials are working closely, and I commend the co-operation that is taking place to deal with the matter.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned overdue tests in Wales and the role of the state veterinary service, as did the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire. The number of overdue tests in April this year was 4,300. A total of 1,204 tests were cleared in April, and 567 more overdue tests were added. Hon. Members can appreciate the way in which the backlog is reducing—I shall return to the figures for England in a moment. We should maintain the testing effort throughout the summer period, which will require farmers' co-operation while cattle are at summer pasture. I hope that such co-operation will be forthcoming.

The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) mentioned the need to avoid the spread of TB after foot and mouth disease and he rightly referred to the risks that are associated with cattle movement. Steps have been taken to prevent the spread of TB following FMD. Movement restrictions were imposed on several high-risk herds and additional TB testing of restocked herds after FMD is being undertaken. That testing has successfully identified 122 incidences, which has reduced the risk of spread. The hon. Gentleman rightly drew attention to that, and I hope that although I have illustrated the point that he graphically made, he is reassured.

The hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) queried statistics. Statistics are published monthly on the internet, and the April figures will be available there early next week, I hope.

Ministers certainly share worries about the rising incidence of bovine TB in the south and west of England and south Wales over the past 20 years or more. The high numbers of herds, and cattle within herds, that have tested positive to the tuberculin skin test since the resumption of testing in December 2001 especially worries DEFRA and Ministers in the Welsh Assembly.

There are two reasons why those high figures should be treated with caution. First, in many herds, the state veterinary service is effectively doing two seasons' testing in one. If testing had occurred a year ago, rather than being precluded by foot and mouth disease, infected animals might have been identified at that stage and removed. Therefore, the spread of infected animals might have been curtailed. In such circumstances, it would have been odd if current testing had not discovered higher numbers of infected animals.

Secondly, the restart of testing was specifically targeted at herds that were suspected of having a higher risk of infection. Both factors tend artificially to raise the number of incidents disclosed. Therefore, it is too early to say whether the suspension of TB testing under foot and mouth disease controls to reduce the risk of bringing the disease on to farms has caused a step-change in the annual increase in the incidence of bovine TB, or is simply a continuation of the previous trend.

Mr. Breed: Surely you are not trying to suggest, with regard to all the animals that have been slaughtered under the foot and mouth scheme—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am not trying to suggest anything.

Mr. Breed: I am sorry. Surely the Minister is not trying to suggest that animals that were slaughtered under the foot and mouth scheme were unlikely to have bovine TB. That is the corollary of what he is saying.

Alun Michael: No, I was not referring to animals slaughtered as a result of foot and mouth disease; nor was Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The trend was already running at 22 per cent. per year throughout the 1990s. Although the initial base was small, the size of those annual increases is worrying and unacceptable. The suspension of testing left a backlog of 27,000 overdue TB tests. That is being reduced; at the end of April, the backlog had fallen to 22,500. That is a tribute to the hard work and dedication of the state veterinary service and its local veterinary inspectors. I have indicated why it is unsurprising that those numbers are high at present.

It must be remembered that, if infection is detected more tests are triggered, because testing of the herd, and in the vicinity of the herd, is conducted more frequently. The reduction of the backlog will continue as quickly as is possible, and that will be helped if farmers co-operate with the proposals that have been agreed with industry representatives to continue testing throughout the summer, even though the cattle will have to be called in from pasture for the tests to take place. I appreciate that that will involve additional work, but I hope that the industry will accept that it is important to undertake the tests, for the reasons that have been raised in this debate.

There is little agreement between the various groups on the causes behind the increased incidence of bovine TB in cattle. The public debate on the role that badgers play in the spread of bovine TB in cattle is emotional and polarised. Many farmers and vets are convinced that wildlife—in particular, the badger—plays a significant role in the transmission of bovine TB to cattle. Many of them are also convinced that killing badgers represents the best method of limiting the spread of the disease.

However, badger ecologists and animal welfare and wildlife groups are equally convinced that the badger plays little or no role in the transmission of the disease. They believe that the badger has been unfairly targeted in the past, and that that continues to be the case today. They hold that cattle-to-cattle transmission plays a far larger role, and that that has not been given due recognition.

It has proved difficult to find common ground between those two groups, and to find scientific research that is acceptable to both of them. However, dialogue is being actively encouraged through the TB forum. DEFRA is putting a lot of effort into trying to find common ground between groups that have differing views on a variety of issues.

After the badger culling policy of gassing was deemed to be inhumane, it became clear that the badger culling strategies of the 1980s and 1990s were failing to control the spread of bovine TB. That is why, in 1997, we declared a moratorium on the use of badger culling as a general bovine TB control tool.

Since then, the Government have not stood idly by. We have sought to put in place research that will deliver the sound scientific base that is so desperately needed to avoid the circular arguments on how TB is spread from continuing for another twenty or so years. This scientific research makes up three of the five points of the Government's five point plan for tackling bovine TB: the development of a TB vaccine; the carrying out of research into how TB is spread; and the carrying out of research involving limited badger culling in trial areas.

The independent scientific group on bovine tuberculosis, under the chairmanship of Professor John Bourne, has taken a leading role in overseeing the badger culling research trial, which is also known as the Krebs trial. The badger culling trial took longer than expected to set up, and it was affected by the foot and mouth outbreak, but it is important to note that Professor Bourne has stated that neither of those delays has compromised its statistical integrity. He has advised Ministers that it is likely that results from the trial will be put back by about four months, and that he expects to be able to put advice before them in 2004–05. In the meantime, we are actively pursuing the final two points of the Government's five-point strategy—protecting human health and strengthening controls.

Current hygiene controls on milk and meat have recently been reviewed by the Food Standards Agency, which accepted that current controls on milk—the most likely route of transmission of bovine TB to humans—are satisfactory, and that the risk of transmission from meat is very low. It is important to note that human cases of bovine TB do not mirror the geographical spread of bovine TB in cattle.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry, but time is up.

Suez Veterans

12.30 pm

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): One of the most moving experiences of my life took place several years ago when I stood on a beach in Normandy with my father. It was the beach where he had fought his way ashore when he took part in the D-day landings. As I stood there, I could see it all and imagine what he and thousands of others went through. It is what I now think of when I remember my Dad. That experience changed my thinking about war, and I realised fully what it meant to serve one's country—to risk or give one's life as a member of Her Majesty's armed forces.

Men such as my father did not get much by way of reward, and most returned to modest livelihoods. They were, however, awarded a medal or two, which is important. For most of his life, my father never talked about the war or his part in it. Like many others, I suspect, when he retired and looked back at his life, his contribution to that war was his most important achievement. That is why medals mean so much to veterans. Medals recognise their courage, the service that they gave and the sacrifice that they made, which is why they wear them with pride, as my father did.

A group of veterans who did all the things that constitute serving their country, however, have no medal to wear—veterans of the Suez canal campaign from 1951 to 1954. It is a disgrace that those men have been so treated. Although Suez was not D-day, any objective assessment would conclude that a medal should be awarded, and that the overwhelming majority of ordinary people in this country would want one to be given.

The Suez canal zone operation began in October 1951 and, soon afterwards, the garrison was increased from 20,000 to approximately 80,000 troops and stayed at that size. It was no small operation. October and November saw the swiftest build up of the British Army outside a major war. Cabinet minutes of November 1951 declared that it was "active service". As they landed in Egypt, many troops reported that they had been advised to make wills.

The operation involved the use of artillery, including a set-piece battle at the police barracks in Ismailia on 21 January 1952 that involved a tank. Sir Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, is recorded in *Hansard* in January 1952 as referring to the conflict as "war".

Grimly and sadly, we often measure the scale and significance of a conflict by its death toll. An official memo from the British middle east office to the Foreign Office, dated 10 June 1954, provided information for a parliamentary question. It confirms the number of service men killed from 16 October 1951 to 1 June 1954 as 47, with seven missing presumed dead—a total of 54 fatalities. Many more service men have been recorded as having died, and were buried in Egyptian graveyards between 1951 and 54, giving a total of more than 300. I am told that that is the basis on which the Ministry of Defence has counted the death toll relating to similar operations since the second world war.

The conditions that the men suffered were clearly harsh. It is a matter of record that General Sir Brian Robertson, Commander in Chief of the Middle East

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forces, applied for a general service medal to be awarded on 18 January 1952. It is not hard to see why. As he said in his letter,

> "we have got beyond the stage where our clashes with armed Egyptian thugs and police can be classed as incidents and it has become necessary to mount properly coordinated operations to deal with organized attacks on our troops and installations".

Indeed, individual awards for service in Suez were given out of the military ration in the Queen's birthday honours, and others were published separately for gallantry, including a George medal. Yet no campaign medal or general service medal clasp has ever been issued. That is staggering and upsetting, especially when comparisons are made with other campaigns in which our armed forces have been involved since world war two.

I asked the Library to look into the matter. The research paper that I was given states that

> "the absence of such an award appears somewhat anomalous given that bars were awarded for related end of colony campaigns, such as Palestine and Cyprus. Moreover, a bar was affixed to the later Campaign Service Medal for service in the Multinational Force in Lebanon ... an operation in which not a single British serviceman was killed nor was the force the subject of hostile fire."

The comparative facts are neatly summed up in a report issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence in November 2000, when he announced that a monument would be built to all our service men who have fallen in conflict since 1945. Each of the 16 conflicts listed, except that in Sierra Leone, which still continues, attracted a campaign medal, except Egypt 1951-54—the Suez veterans.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on not only having secured the debate, but on the campaign that he is waging on the issue, with which I entirely agree. As he knows, my brother served in Suez during the period, so I have a personal as well as a constituency interest. Does he believe that the peculiarity that has given rise to the anomaly is subsequent events in Suez, in 1956, which were embarrassing for the then Government, who did not want to know?

Mr. Blizzard: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. I know that all the veterans involved in the campaign will appreciate his support.

Grimly, when we consider the league table of deaths in those 16 conflicts, Egypt comes in eighth highest.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): One of my colleagues at Stonyhurst was killed at Suez, and my father was killed in the last war. I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the debate with another Member whose father was involved in those wars.

In debating awarding medals, the real question is, did those involved not do just as much as anyone in any other war? It is not their fault if the politicians got something wrong. It is therefore essential that my constituent, Mr. Collier, of Cheadle, should, like the other distinguished gentlemen, receive a medal in recognition of service. It was not their fault that things went wrong.

Mr. Blizzard: I entirely agree. Our case is overwhelming. In light of those grim fatalities, it is incredible that Suez has missed out on recognition.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) is present. One of the arguments advanced by the then Minister of State for the Armed Forces, my right hon. Friend the Member for Warley (Mr. Spellar), in a debate on 14 March 2001 was that

> "the case must be considered against the standards of the time. Policy on medals changes over the years, and it is for each generation to consider whom it should honour."—*[Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 14 March 2001; Vol. 365, c. 300WH.]

Let us consider other so-called anti-terrorist operations that took place in the 1950s. In Palestine, 233 people died; in Malaya, 340; in Cyprus, 79; and in Kenya, 12. Medals were issued for all those campaigns. Medals were later awarded to those who served in not only Lebanon but Rhodesia and 17 United Nations operations in which no one died.

Given the evidence, any fair-minded person would conclude that Suez vets deserve a medal. It is a double injustice that none was ever awarded and that 50 years later the mistake has not been rectified.

Why has that happened? Justice seems to have become locked up in procedure. What went wrong in the early 1950s was either cock-up or conspiracy. I believe that the former was more likely, which gives us more cause to put things right. It has never been entirely clear what exactly happened after General Robertson requested on 18 January 1952 that a medal be granted.

At various times down the years, the Ministry of Defence has made several assertions. First, it said that the Army council considered the matter in 1952 and rejected the claim, but I have seen no evidence of that. That assertion was made on the basis of unsigned and undated handwritten short notes. Proper documents that appeared finally in 1999 show that those notes refer to applications for individual awards also requested by General Robertson.

It has also been asserted that the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals—the HD committee—considered the matter in 1956. The evidence is that it did not examine the case. That is because the proposal to institute such a medal came from a member of the public. The HD committee was unable to act on it because it can only consider formal submissions from Government Departments, not members of the public.

It is clear from all the evidence that the matter was not properly dealt with at the time and that full consideration has never been given to the case for a medal. Why has the matter not been sorted out since then and why cannot we correct it today? We are told that authorities cannot second guess a decision that should have been made in the early 1950s. I contend, however, that the MOD has repeatedly attempted to second guess what happened procedurally in 1952 and 1956 on the basis of unclear evidence. For example, it was claimed in 1956 when a member of the public suggested an award—a suggestion that the committee could not act on—that the committee

> "had ample opportunity to take the hint and to prepare a case for a medal ... should they have considered it to be justified. Presumably they did not feel it to be necessary."

Those are words of a letter from a MOD official. If that is not a classic case of second guessing, I do not know what is. It is trying to maintain years later what was in the minds of the committee. It is really saying that the committee was always right and that it could never get anything wrong.

We are told that the committee now has a policy of no retrospection and that that is an iron rule. Who made that policy? No one seems to know. Did the committee make the policy? In a matter of such import, should such a committee be making its own policy in a modern democracy? Who sets the policies for the HD committee? To whom is the committee accountable? The House of Commons Library said:

> "There appears to be no legal impediment to the retrospective creation of a campaign medal or the addition of a particular bar to an award."

Does the HD committee stand above the law? Even criminal justice cases can be reopened as we have recently seen. Both Australia and Canada have created retrospective awards for prescribed operations between 1945 and 1975. I have said that the matter seems to be locked in procedure; in fact, it seems to be locked in arcane procedure. The Library said that

> "this process was not necessarily logical and is sometimes bureaucratic."

It has been claimed that there is a five-year rule beyond which retrospection cannot occur. It was said that King George VI decided that rule, although it has now been conceded that there is no proof that he did. Indeed, an HD committee official admitted in a letter last year that

> "we do not have any record of the Committee's initial formal agreement to operate this rule".

Interestingly, I have been told that there are two instances when retrospective awards have been approved by the committee, although not actually made by it. They involve a Russian award that was made to British service men in 1985 and an award from Malta in 1995. The HD committee allows those medals to be worn.

Since the campaign for a medal started, the MOD has carried out reviews. It continues to say that it will look at new evidence. I ask the Under-Secretary to publish full details of all hitherto reviews so that we know what evidence has been looked at and what has not. Such matters need to be looked at again. In 1991, Sir David Ramsbotham, a member of one of the previous review teams, put in writing that the issue should be re-examined and that natural justice must be allowed to prevail. It has now been referred to Sir Richard Wilson, the head of the civil service, who is chairman of the HD committee. I am glad that he wrote at the beginning of this year that

> "the issue is indeed still alive."

I hope that he has asked to find a way forward and I hope that it will be confirmed this morning that the MOD supports that aim.

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Will my hon. Friend accept that it is important for Sir Richard to make a decision before he retires, rather than leaving the matter as a hot potato for his successor?

Mr. Blizzard: That is absolutely right. Will my hon. Friend the Member for Wansdyke (Dan Norris) clarify exactly what Sir Richard has been asked to do? All that my inquiries revealed was that he was to consider all representations from the campaign by Suez veterans and from veterans involved in other campaigns where the non-award of a medal was an issue, and that he would report in due course to the Prime Minister and the Queen but that no report would be published. I am told that he will see a group of Suez veterans in the next month. Such a report should be published, and so should the minutes of the HD committee, as it should be accountable.

For too long, Suez veterans have been denied by procedure. People should not hide behind procedure, and we should not let it stand in the way of applying fairness and the basic human need to right a wrong. We do not ask that history be rewritten, but that it be properly acknowledged. I sense that the authorities are worried about opening the floodgates of retrospective awards with the case, but that is the worst of arguments, because cases should be decided on their own merits. The case has never considered properly, and the Government have a duty to ensure that proper action is taken and that mistakes are corrected. If no procedure exists to put matters right, such procedure should be established.

I acknowledge Mr. David Podd, a constituent of mine who brought the matter to my attention, as well as Mr. Charles Golder and Lt. Col. Ashley Tinson for the information and material that they have provided. They are serving the Suez veterans' campaign well.

The campaign will not go away. This is the third Adjournment debate on the subject in 15 months. There have been early-day motions, and a petition with 20,000 signatures was handed to a Defence Minister. The campaign would go away only if all the veterans died before justice was done, which would be a disgrace. The veterans march to the Cenotaph, but they have no medal to wear. Why do we deny them that? What do we have to lose?

This year, we celebrate the Queen's golden jubilee. The occasion is a rare opportunity that should be taken to rectify the injustice, and it would be a fitting tribute to all those who served their country in the Suez from 1951 to 1954.

12.47 pm

Dan Norris (Wansdyke): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) on securing the debate. He will be aware that this is the second debate on the subject this year, the previous one having taken place on 16 January. I think that I am right to say that it is the fourth Adjournment debate on the subject since 2000, so it has been well debated.

In the January debate. my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence said that he could add little to what had been said in previous debates. I must offer the same apology, as I am in the same position. He is not here today, as he is on Government business in north America, but he will be keen to read *Hansard* and discuss the debate with me on his return.

The disturbance in the Suez canal zone in the early 1950s lasted more than two and a half years, with about 64,000 troops stationed there at the peak of the troubles. The men were on declared active service and 40 were

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killed as a result of terrorist action. Why, then, was no campaign medal awarded at the time, and why have successive Governments resisted demands for one?

Recommendations on the institution of medals are made to the Queen by the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals, known for brevity as the HD committee. The committee is interdepartmental and is chaired by the Cabinet Secretary. Since the end of the second world war, the HD committee has maintained a policy that it will not consider the institution of awards and medals for service given many years earlier. Specifically, it will not consider operations that ended more than five years previously.

There are reasons for the policy. The committee is not qualified so long after the event to say that those who were in a position to submit a case but did not do so were wrong, if no contemporary claim were made. If a claim were made but rejected at the time, either by a Department or by the committee itself, those who rejected it would have had access to the full facts and their judgment would have been based on contemporary understanding of the situation. That is the policy governing this issue. Nevertheless, veterans continue to ask whether a case was made at the time and if not, why not?

Mr. Cash: Does the hon. Gentleman appreciate what complete rubbish he has just enunciated? One does not need a comprehension of what he has described as a policy in order to know that people who went on active service, or were involved in a "disturbance", as he called it, have put their lives on the line for their country. It seems inconceivable that this policy can be pursued.

Dan Norris: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I do not accept the tone in which he made it, but perhaps points that I make later will deal with the issues that he is concerned about.

Veterans continue to ask whether a case was made at the time, and [illegible] not, why not? If a case were made, was it properly considered? Why was it rejected? It is no secret that little documentary evidence on these matters has survived from the 1950s. We know that the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East Land Forces wrote to the Military Secretary in January 1952, some three months after the troubles started, asking about the award of operational gallantry decorations. Unfortunately, the letter has not survived and we do not know whether he also mentioned a campaign medal.

We do know that when the Military Secretary replied, he said he would sound out the Adjutant-General about the possibility, so it is a reasonable supposition that the Commander-in-Chief had raised the question. It has been claimed that the Military Secretary did not in fact mention a campaign medal to the Adjutant-General, and that the matter was not discussed by the Army council. In the absence of documentary evidence, the case cannot be proved either way. There is no mention of a campaign medal in the minutes of the Army council, but consideration would not necessarily have been in a formal meeting, where minutes would have been taken.

There is no doubt that the Army council was well aware of conditions and circumstances in the canal zone; it was, after all, the largest British forces base in the eastern Mediterranean and middle east. The Secretary of State for War had visited the area and spoke about it at a meeting of the council. We know that the council considered operational gallantry awards and decided that the scale and scope of the operations did not justify them. That conclusion may well have weighed against the question of a campaign medal being taken further.

Having been told that the Adjutant-General would be sounded out about a campaign medal, the Commander-in-Chief would obviously want to know the outcome. Again, documentation is unfortunately lacking, but no evidence has been found and it has never been suggested that the Commander-in-Chief ever raised the matter again. The obvious conclusion is that he accepted that it had been dealt with properly and conclusively. A few years later, consideration of a clasp to the general service medal for the 1956 Suez operation provided an opportunity to re-open the question within the period governed by the HD committee's five-year retrospection rule, but nobody took up that option.

I have suggested what seems the most likely reason for no case being taken forward; that the scale of operations was not considered to be great enough. It should be remembered that, at the time, the second world war was a recent memory. During the period since that war, internal security operations in Palestine had resulted in about 260 servicemen being killed over a three-year period, compared with 40 in the canal zone. I should mention that much higher death figures are quoted for the canal zone, but the figures that I have given are for deaths from terrorist action only. They do not cover death from other causes, or death of non-military personnel.

The Korean war was still going on, with far more intensive military operations and a much heavier loss of life. It is true that service in the canal zone was unpleasant and at times dangerous, but that was very often the lot of British troops stationed overseas during that period. I should admit to an interest in that my uncle, Brian Norris, was stationed in the canal zone in 1954, so I have had personal discussions about the conditions that prevailed then.

Mr. Blizzard: Will my hon. Friend say where the figure for deaths, which was quoted in a previous debate by the Under-Secretary, comes from? I have seen the memo from the middle eastern office, which referred to 54 deaths. If that is a mistake, the Ministry should publish the evidence that shows that the figure is 40, because an official document states that it is 54.

Dan Norris: I understand why my hon. Friend would raise that point if there appeared to be a discrepancy. As I understand it, the figures are worked out carefully from all the documentation that has been made available in previous reviews of the matter, and they are robust, so we should be able to rely on the figure of 40. However, I shall look into the matter and ensure that my hon. Friend receives a written response regarding the figure of 54.

It is also true that active service had been declared, but that in itself is no argument for a medal. Declarations of active service are made when, for example, it is necessary to increase disciplinary powers. The declaration of the General Officer Commanding in Egypt emphasised that it was

> "a purely administrative decision in order that the status of troops regarding Courts Martial shall remain unchanged."

In other words, it was the legal status that was important.

Other reasons have been suggested. A wish to avoid embarrassment is often mentioned. It is claimed that the War Office would have been embarrassed by the institution of a medal, which would have drawn attention to what was happening in the canal zone. However, that was public knowledge at the time. Opinions varied about the British role there, but whatever view might have been taken, there was nothing dishonourable about what the troops were doing. They were there to ensure the safe passage of shipping and to protect a limited British presence, which existed in accordance with the treaty with the Egyptians. In the best tradition of the British services, the troops carried out their duties successfully and with minimal force.

Mr. Cash: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dan Norris: I shall not because time is of the essence.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Order. I hope that hon. Members will appreciate that the hon. Gentleman has some ground to cover yet in this important debate.

Dan Norris: It has been alleged many times over the years that the Foreign Office anticipated the likelihood of embarrassment, and therefore interfered to block a medal-awarding process before a case could be put before the HD committee. There are two suggestions about what the potential embarrassment might have been. One is that the award of a medal could have constituted an admission that we were, in effect, at war, and would thus have jeopardised delicate negotiations with the Egyptians.

The other is that the award of a medal would have pleased the Egyptians by elevating the status of their actions from terrorism to a military operation. Both cannot be true. In fact, there is no reason to believe that either consideration carried any weight. Such issues clearly did not prevent the award of medals for other security operations at about that time, such as in Palestine and Malaya. No evidence whatsoever has been found to suggest that there was any consultation between the War Office and the Foreign Office, or that the Foreign Office intervened formally or informally.

Leaving aside the factors that may or may not have affected the decisions of fifty years ago, many canal zone veterans argue that a medal is justified by comparison with subsequent military deployments, including those of the present day. The claim is often made that the canal zone was the only action after the second world war for which a medal or clasp was not awarded. That is not correct. During the period from the end of the war to the mid-1950s, there were more than a dozen internal security deployments for which no medal or clasp was issued, such as Libya in 1945, Burma from 1945 to 1948, Singapore in 1950 and Hong Kong in 1956. Comparison with the present day is not relevant. Policy on medals changes with the times. For example, three medals were awarded for the first world war, but 10 were awarded for the second world war.

Notwithstanding the non-retrospection rule, and despite continual accusations to the contrary, the Ministry of Defence has kept an open mind on this subject. The claim for a medal was effectively launched in 1974, and its supporters have been especially active since about 1990. During the latter period, there have been several reviews by successive Adjutants-General, and two Chiefs of the General Staff have also looked into the matter. In 1998, the then Under-Secretary of State for Defence set up a full review of all available documents, including those held by the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Public Record Office. The following year, some papers dating from 1952 came to light.

Canal zone veterans have been assiduous in searching old records, and anything brought to the Department's notice receives appropriate study. Nothing, however, has given us any reason to think that the matter was dealt with insufficiently or improperly in the early 1950s. We remain willing to consider anything new that offers a different slant, and an undertaking to that effect was given as recently as the Adjournment debate on this subject in January 2002.

At the outset, I said that there was not much new to say. However, I can add something. In reply to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Wentworth (John Healey), the Prime Minister said that he would make sure that the HD committee carefully considered any further representations, including the one made to him at that time. I can confirm that the HD committee is indeed reviewing the question. I would not wish to anticipate what the outcome of that review might be, but I hope that, in due course, it will satisfy all concerned that the subject has received full, fair and conclusive consideration.

In closing, I want to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney for putting his case so clearly and congratulate him on securing the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the authorities will have heard the comments made by hon. Members during the debate.

Illegal Immigration (Channel Tunnel)

1 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to draw to the Government's attention once again my constituents' concerns over the level of illegal immigration through the channel tunnel. The English terminal of the tunnel is situated in Cheriton in my constituency. The facilities for the freight terminal are situated at Dollonds moor, also in my constituency. As my constituents know only too well, the situation is now completely out of control. It is the gravest possible indictment of the Government that they have failed totally to get to grips with the problem.

It is worth reminding ourselves of what the situation was in 1997. As a result of a combination of measures taken by the previous Government, when I was Home Secretary, the number of people seeking asylum in this country had fallen by 40 per cent. The backlog of outstanding asylum applications was coming down fast. There was in place an agreement between France and the United Kingdom, under which France agreed to take back those who came from France to apply for asylum here. There was no camp at Sangatte. There were no stories of people seeking nightly to break into trains coming through the tunnel in order to get to this country.

Five years on, there is no agreement with France. There is a camp at Sangatte, which exists simply and solely as a staging post for those who seek illegal entry into the United Kingdom. There are nightly reports of people breaking into the trains coming through the channel tunnel, endangering their own safety and the safety of others by doing so. The number of people seeking asylum in this country has tripled during that time. The situation is completely out of control.

Nothing that I say today bears upon the entitlement to asylum of those fleeing persecution. That principle was certainly adhered to throughout the period in office of the last Conservative Government. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that the Minister for Asylum and Immigration, Lord Rooker, said last week that only one in 10 of those who apply for asylum in this country are entitled to it and get it. Indeed, if any of those seeking to enter this country illegally through the channel tunnel are fleeing persecution, there is no reason whatever why they could not apply for asylum in France, or in any of the other countries that they have to travel through to get to the United Kingdom.

The reason they are here, as they told me when I visited Sangatte just over a year ago—apart from the English language, about which I accept the Government can do nothing—is that they think that they can get more money and better accommodation in this country than in any other country in Europe. That is doubtless why the number of people seeking asylum in this country has, in the lifetime of the present Government, exceeded those seeking asylum in any other European country. Given our geography, and the lengths that people have to go to in order to get into Britain to claim asylum, that statistic is truly astonishing.

It is worth examining in some detail the Government's lamentable record in dealing with the problem. Instead of pursuing the benefit policies that had, in part, contributed to the reduction in the number seeking asylum in this country prior to 1997, they refused to do so. Indeed, they did nothing at all for three years until the Home Secretary's predecessor introduced his ill-fated and wholly unsuccessful legislation, now entirely disowned by the present Home Secretary.

Less than two years after those measures were introduced the present Home Secretary acknowledged that they had not worked. He is introducing his own measures to deal with the problem; the signs are that they will be no more successful than those introduced by his predecessor.

To cap it all—almost incredibly—we hear reports that the Government have agreed to surrender their veto on European Union decisions relating to asylum. Those reports emanate not from a statement to this House, nor from an answer to a parliamentary question, but from a speech made by the Foreign Secretary to Dutch dignitaries and politicians in The Hague on 21 February. He called for the national veto to be scrapped in some key areas such as asylum and immigration, arguing that majority voting by EU countries would speed decision making. The sheer irresponsibility of that argument beggars belief. It means that decisions could be taken, against the opposition of the Government of the United Kingdom, that had far-reaching consequences for communities in our country.

The Government will have rendered themselves powerless to deal with one of the most serious problems we face. Let us examine some of the consequences of that extraordinary capitulation. It has always been accepted, at least in principle, that those who claim to be fleeing persecution should seek asylum in the first safe country that they enter. In the EU, that has meant applying for asylum in the first member state in which they find themselves.

That was the principle underlying the Dublin convention, agreed as long ago as 1990. I entirely accept that the convention, which did not come into force until summer 1997, after the general election, has not worked well in practice, but at least it was based on the right principle.

What if, now, a majority of member states of the European Union decided to agree a different principle? What if they decided that asylum seekers should have complete freedom to choose in which country to make their claim? We know that more of them want to come to this country than to any other, for reasons that I have already given. If the Government surrender their veto, we will be powerless to resist such a change.

What if a majority of members of the European Union decided to realise the long-standing ambition of many of them to introduce a quota system for dealing with claims for asylum, and that quota system was grossly unfair to the United Kingdom? The Government of the United Kingdom will be powerless to resist.

I cannot recall a more irresponsible, unnecessary and wanton surrender of power than that. I cannot imagine what possessed the Government to contemplate taking that step. I hope that the Minister, in his reply, will deal fully with that astonishing decision, which remains wholly unexplained, and give Parliament, for the first time, a full account of why the shift in the Government's position has occurred.

Meanwhile, on the ground, things go from bad to worse. The number of freight trains operated by English, Welsh and Scottish Railway Limited continues to fall. That means that more goods have to be carried by lorries on our roads, adding to the congestion and the environmental detriment that we all wish to avoid. The future of EWS as a going concern has been called into question. It faces great uncertainty; the number of trains that it can run through the tunnel has been severely reduced and the basis of its operations is uncertain. The number of asylum seekers on the freight trains that they operate has reached unprecedented heights, and approached 200 in one week last month. Those are the ones who were caught.

I pay tribute to my constituents. Fortunately, my constituency has not witnessed a significant number of difficulties or incidents of trouble between asylum seekers and local residents, and I hope that that continues. However, my constituents feel considerable and mounting frustration, as they see evidence all around of a situation that is wholly out of control.

It is clear what the Government should do. They should reconsider some of the measures that make this country a relatively attractive place for asylum seekers. They should reinstate the bilateral agreement with France, which was so helpful in dealing with the problem before 1997. They should persuade the French Government to close the camp at Sangatte, and urge them to instruct French railways—which, after all, remains a nationalised company—to put in place at Fréthun the security arrangements that it has promised for the past two years.

The Government pretend—I hope that the Minister will not persist in this pretence—that they cannot reinstate the bilateral agreement with France because the Dublin convention has come into force. The convention was signed in 1990, when asylum was much less of a problem in this country. It is true that it has not worked as effectively as it could and should have done. As I said, its underlying principle is that asylum seekers should apply for asylum in the first European Union member state in which they find themselves. If that principle were respected, the problem facing this country and my constituents would be much less severe.

There is nothing in the convention to prevent a bilateral agreement from being concluded. Germany and Denmark are both signatories, and have put in place an agreement that is similar to that which I negotiated with the French before 1997, when I was Home Secretary; so much for the Government's paper-thin excuses.

The Government are constantly telling us what wonderful relations they have with our European partners. If they are only half as good as the Government say they are, it is about time that they used them. It should not be too difficult to put in place arrangements similar to those that I have precisely identified.

The truth is that the political will is lacking. I have no great hopes of the Minister's reply, although I shall leave him ample time to deal with all the points that I have raised. Against all expectations, my constituents are looking for a belated indication that the Government are not as lacking in political will as their record on this issue demonstrates.

1.13 pm

The Minister for Police, Courts and Drugs (Mr. John Denham): I congratulate the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) on securing this Adjournment debate and on raising a series of serious issues on which he has invited me to reply. He outlined four issues that I should seek to address. The first is the question of the bilateral agreement with France, the second the issue of Sangatte, the third that of security at Fréthun and the fourth the objectives of Government policy with regard to co-operation in the European Union on issues of asylum.

I should like to start with the bilateral agreement, or so-called gentleman's agreement. That agreement, to which the right hon. and learned Gentleman so often refers, allowed for returns of asylum seekers to France only in limited circumstances. It covered arrangements for the return of asylum seekers, refused passengers and illegal entrants arriving at the channel ports or via the channel tunnel.

The agreement was always going to be superseded by the Dublin convention once the latter was implemented. The first paragraph of the agreement on the bilateral arrangements with France, reached when the right hon. and learned Gentleman's party was in power, states:

> "it shall be superseded by the relevant provisions of the Dublin Convention once that convention has entered into force."

In other words, the ending of the bilateral agreement was planned for and put in place by the previous Conservative Administration. It makes no sense to suggest that it is simply a matter of political will that the agreement is no longer in place.

Having reached a gentleman's agreement, the previous Administration at the same time ensured that it would cease to operate when the Dublin convention came into force. That means that the agreement was effectively in operation for only a short period of time. When it was first in place in 1996, between 150 and 200 people were returned to France. It gives a wholly misleading impression of what the bilateral agreement did to suggest that the return of between 150 and 200 people is the answer to the challenges that we face with asylum. The issues are serious and they require serious responses. It does not help the debate to suggest that an agreement that returned between 150 and 200 people in an entire year somehow holds the key.

The following year, the total number of people returned under the agreement reached 516. That was it. By that stage, the system was becoming bogged down in the process of judicial review, by which asylum seekers who did not wish to be returned could thwart the system.

Mr. Howard: Does the Minister not understand that the deterrent effect of the agreement was wholly disproportionate to the numbers to which he referred? If people knew that they were going to be returned to France from this country, they did not bother to make the efforts that they are now making in order to get into this country. The Minister must face up to the fact that on the ground, the situation before 1997 was nothing like what it is now. The agreement was not the only factor, but was one of the most important factors that led to that completely different state of affairs.

[Mr. Howard]

Does the Minister not also appreciate that although it is true that the agreement was to come to an end when the Dublin convention came into force—everyone hoping that the Dublin convention would be effective—the existence of the Dublin convention has not prevented Germany and Denmark, who are both signatories to the convention, from reaching an agreement similar to the one that existed between Britain and France? Why cannot we do the same?

Mr. Denham: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is wriggling in the face of the fact that he has made claims for the impact of the bilateral agreement that are not justified by the facts. With regard to the agreement between Denmark and Germany, my understanding is that that is an agreement for the facilitation of the Dublin convention, not as an alternative to it or a provision separate from it.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Denham: I will, but I am aware that the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe asked a number of questions.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Order. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will be very brief.

Mr. Swire: Will the Minister reverse up a bit and address the point made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard)? What is important is not that the bilateral agreement got between 150 and 200 people back to France, but that it sent out a message that Britain is not a soft underbelly on immigration and that we had agreements in force that meant that we would be harder to approach across the channel. The issue is the positive signals that we give out.

Mr. Denham: I do not believe that there was the impact that was claimed. The substantial numbers of people who seek asylum throughout Europe reflect developments in the wider world rather than the existence, or otherwise, of the agreement. It was clear that people soon realised that its effect—I do not say that it had no value—could be thwarted through judicial review.

I turn to the situation at Fréthun. We are worried about the disruption to train services and the number of illegal immigrants who come through the tunnel. We have repeatedly stressed to SNCF and all levels of the French Government the need for rapid security improvements. We are aware of the serious effect on UK business that has been caused by the disruption to freight services through the tunnel. That is why we will continue to monitor the situation and we will take further concerted action until the overall policing and security levels are adequate.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary told the House that he will begin immediate discussions with the French Government on the situation in northern France when the French elections have finished in June and a new Administration is formed. He has spoken with Nicolas Sarkozy, who is the new French Minister of the Interior. I understand that they had a constructive discussion last week that especially focused on the problem of clandestine immigration in the Calais region.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe discussed the continuing problems at the SNCF freight yard at Fréthun with the French ambassador last week. He made it clear that the situation is intolerable. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport has raised the issue with his new French counterpart, and contacts have been made at official level. In response to our representations, the French Government have agreed to increase police cover at Fréthun. Since March, an additional gendarme squad of 50 men who are dedicated to the security of Fréthun has been in place at the freight yard.

It is essential to restore a viable rail freight service and to deter would-be stowaways. We continue to press SNCF to complete the physical security improvements to its freight yard. We welcome last week's announcement by the head of SNCF that the company is to spend 7.5 million euro on improved security measures at Fréthun. They will include greatly improved fencing with razor wire, detection equipment, improved lighting and closed circuit television monitoring. We welcome even more his statement that the measures, some of which have been promised for more than a year, will be put in place over the next two months. The improvements should reduce the likelihood of the site being overrun by clandestines as occurred in the past.

However, at the same time, it is essential that the level of police cover is maintained. Recent newspaper reports that the French police were pulling out of Fréthun were untrue. Regrettably, one squadron of gendarmes was temporarily assigned to other duties and replaced only several days later. The new French Minister of the Interior gave my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary his personal assurance that that will not happen again.

We are grateful for the French Government's efforts on improving security in the Calais area. We know that a combination of effective anti-intrusion measures and effective policing works. For example, the measures taken by Eurotunnel at its Coquelles terminal reduced the number of clandestine entrants arriving in freight shuttle trains from 808 in July 2001 to seven in April 2002. That shows that it is feasible to implement effective measures to deter would-be illegal immigrants. We are also grateful that the French Government have assured us that there has been no change to their overall policing policy at Fréthun. However, during all our contacts with the French authorities we will continue to stress the need for the police presence at Fréthun to be continuous—all day, every day.

The civil penalty and carriers' liability regimes are important and successful elements of our border controls and they will remain important parts of our strategy to prevent illegal entry. Prior to their introduction, the number of clandestine entrants being dealt with at Dover increased at a rate in excess of 170 per cent. a year. That upward trend has been halted and reversed, and the number of entrants detected at Dover in 2001 was down 27 per cent. from the previous year.

We believe that it is the fundamental right of any nation to require those who enter it to say what goods or people they are carrying, and to bear responsibility for goods or people that they should not be carrying. Although we welcome the Court of Appeal's recent findings that this important regime is lawful and valid, it is our intention to modify the civil penalty regime to ensure that it is fully compatible with the European convention on human rights. In order to comply with the Roth ruling and maintain the strength of our borders, a new system of variable penalties for carriers and hauliers will be introduced. The revised regime will retain all the important elements of the existing one and will be tough but fair.

The United Kingdom is also deploying new technologies to good effect in strengthening us in our fight against illegal immigration. Various forms of sophisticated detection equipment are already in use at our ports, and we are in local discussions with the French authorities about partnerships to share our expertise and equipment.

Addressing cross-channel illegal immigration, and the unsatisfactory case of Sangatte in particular, is a priority for the Government. The existence and location of the Red Cross centre in Sangatte is clearly not helpful. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has made no secret of his wish that it should, ultimately, be closed down. We also recognise the social impact of the 1,500 migrants in the area. Together with French colleagues, we are considering solutions to the problem of large numbers of would-be illegal immigrants congregating in northern France.

Those issues will be at the top of the Home Secretary's agenda when he speaks to the new French Minister of the Interior after the elections in France. He will make it clear, as he has done before, that we are keen to work closely with the French to combat the flow through the channel tunnel and to help to create conditions in northern France that would render the centre unnecessary. I do not suggest that that will be easy, particularly as many of the immigrants are not returnable to their country of origin at present, but we are determined to find ways of alleviating the problem. A key concern is ensuring that any arrangements between the UK and France do not result in attracting even more immigrants to northern France.

As well as considering specific bilateral solutions, an important part of the process will be co-operation within the European Union. Sangatte is a symptom of a shared European problem of people-smuggling and illegal immigration. The occupants of the Sangatte centre must have crossed several of the European Union member states to reach northern France. We need to work with our European partners to strengthen the EU's borders, to address the root causes of illegal immigration, and to return those who do not, or no longer, have a right of residence in the EU.

The comprehensive plan on illegal immigration and people-trafficking in the EU was adopted by Ministers at the Joint Home Affairs Council on 28 February. It covered several matters that are to be implemented by February 2003 in the short term, and by February 2005 in the medium term. The UK considers all the issues to be important but is particularly keen to make progress on the subjects of return and operational co-operation on the EU's current and future external borders.

We think that there is a strong need to work with the border services of member states to combat illegal immigration into the EU. The UK-led initiative to assist the state border service of Bosnia-Herzegovina is an excellent example of what that type of co-operation can achieve.

Mr. Howard: I hope that the Minister will deal with the veto.

Mr. Denham: I intend to set out the practical measures that we would like to agree with our European partners and have in place to deal with the problems that we are debating. It is important that the EU continues its work with source countries of illegal immigration. We have to address the root causes of illegal immigration. We support the continued strengthening of the approach of the high-level working group on asylum and migration. It is important to stress the strong lead that the UK is taking in pushing the issues forward; it has asked that they be included on the agenda for the Seville European Council.

Last week, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister wrote to the Spanish Prime Minister, José Maria Aznar, to underline the need for the EU to redouble its efforts on speeding up progress on asylum measures and on joint work on returns, and on taking rapid action to strengthen the EU's external frontiers. It has been well publicised that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister met the Spanish Prime Minister yesterday to discuss these matters and to underline the importance that we attach to them.

There are other issues about which I will write to the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

Mr. Howard: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am unsure whether it will be a point of order, but I shall give the right hon. and learned Gentleman an opportunity to speak.

Mr. Howard: I seek your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as to whether it is in order—especially when the Member who has initiated a debate of this sort has taken less time than the allotted 15 minutes—for the Minister completely to ignore in his reply one of the most substantive points—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I must ask the right hon. and learned Gentleman to resume his seat. The Minister's response is his responsibility; As the Chair, I am not responsible for it.

Consumer Protection (Holidays)

1.30 pm

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): I welcome the opportunity to initiate this debate on consumer protection and the sale of holidays.

For most of us, the purchase of a foreign holiday is our largest annual financial outlay. These holidays are eagerly looked forward to, and, frequently, carefully saved for. Most of us dream that, in our retirement, we will be able to take more frequent breaks at the time of our choosing, because we will be free from the constraints of work. Foreign holidays account for 30 per cent. of the holidays that are taken each year; the annual worth of that business is £29 billion.

The vast majority of those foreign holidays are booked with reputable companies, which provide a first-class product, to the satisfaction of their consumers. However, the growth of the foreign holiday market has led to practices that can only be described as unscrupulous—and, in some cases, downright fraudulent.

One sector that earned such a reputation was the sale of timeshare holidays. Following much publicity and complaint, regulations were enacted by European institutions, and they were added to by the Timeshare Act 1992 and by timeshare regulations in April 1997. They have rightly given consumers protection, and they have done much to clean up a sector that had a bad reputation.

The issue that I wish to highlight in this debate is the sale of holidays through what are known as holiday clubs. Many of the techniques that are used to sell membership of such clubs are identical to the worst sales techniques of the bad days of timeshare selling. Though many holiday clubs are selling access to timeshare accommodation, they are not covered by current legislation governing such sales. One could come to the conclusion that the sale of membership of holiday clubs is a new way for those involved in the more disreputable end of the timeshare market to avoid the regulations that now govern the timeshare industry.

To highlight the problems, I wish to draw attention to a company called On-Line Vacations, which has been operating in north-east England. However, as I will explain, that is just one of the names that that company trades under. It has left many of my constituents feeling dissatisfied, and out of pocket by many thousands of pounds.

On-Line Vacations first appeared in the north-east, where it traded as G M Leisure from an office in Monkwearmouth in Sunderland. It then moved to Vermont house in Washington in Tyne and Wear, and its name was changed to On-Line Vacations. After having disappeared without explanation at the beginning of this year, the company is now based at 2 Deemouth centre, South Esplanade, east Aberdeen where it is trading as Dream Vacations Ltd.

Although the company has often changed its name, it is one and the same company; the common individual throughout is a director, Mr. William Millar. The company's product is membership of a holiday club. For a fee of between £1,950 and £4,800, customers receive a PIN number that gives them exclusive access to an agency website offering discount accommodation in "holiday exchange properties"—a new name for timeshare accommodation, I am reliably informed. The accommodation itself was not provided directly by On-Line Vacations but by a company ironically called either Qualycon or Qualyeurope. Again, the name changes throughout the saga depending on the company with which one is dealing.

As I said earlier, many of the techniques used to sell membership are reminiscent of the worst techniques used in the sale of timeshares that resulted in legislation. One such method is to cold call individuals by telephone using the classic bait and trap tactic—individuals are offered a free holiday in return for attending a company's presentation. Once at the presentation, all who have complained to me state that the technique was hard sell. Mr. Martin Alexander and his wife of Seaham, County Durham attended a sales session. They said that

"the pressure was unrelenting, at no time did a member of their staff leave you alone during the three hour session.

Mr. Alexander and his wife signed an agreement with the company in order to be allowed to leave the room. Very wisely, they did not hand over any money, saying that they wished to have time to think about what was on offer.

On further investigation, Mr. Alexander discovered information that questioned the legitimacy of what was offered. Although the company claimed to be long established, the consumer credit licence was only five days old. Also, no mention was made of the fact that On-Line Vacations was acting as an agent for Qualyeurope. On making inquiries, Mr. Alexander found that the trading standards department in Durham county council had received numerous complaints about the company's activities.

Mr. Alexander wrote to the company declining to take the matter further and what followed over the next few months can be described only as a heavy-handed and threatening approach. Threatening letters and telephone calls stated that the bailiffs would be instructed if the Alexanders did not pay £3,500 to On-Line Vacations. All credit to the Alexanders, they stood their ground and, with the help of their solicitor, did not give in.

Alas, some of my constituents have not been so fortunate. Mr. and Mrs. Cooper, of Chester-le-Street, attended a presentation in May 2000 at On-Line Vacations' Washington offices, following an invitation sent to them by post promising a free holiday in return for attending. They paid £4,000 to On-Line Vacations for the unique PIN number that enabled them to book discount accommodation. The sales person stressed that it was not timeshare accommodation. They received the PIN number but could not access the website, so they went to the company's offices in Washington to try and book their free holiday, only to be told by a member of staff that there were problems with the computer, so it was not possible.

To date, Mr. and Mrs. Cooper have received nothing in return for their £4,000 some two years after being signed up by the company, which was called GM Leisure at the time. They were left to pay off the loan that they had taken out to pay their joining fee. That is one of many cases reported to Durham county council's trading standards department. I pay tribute to its representatives, especially Sue Constable, for their persistence in trying to unravel the web of dishonesty that surrounds the activities of that company in Durham.

Clearly, the activities of On-Line Vacations has left many honest, hardworking people in the north-east out of pocket and feeling that they have been victims of a sophisticated con. That does not stop at those who have purchased membership. A constituent who has a holiday cottage in the village of Plawsworth in north Durham is owed outstanding rent from On-Line Vacations, which used the cottage to house staff while operating in the north-east.

The web of companies involved in the operation of On-Line Vacations is complex. On the face of it, it appears that those involved are avoiding their responsibilities. The main director, Mr. Millar, signed a trust deed on 10 April 2000, effectively signing his assets to a trust deed to be realised in favour of his creditors. The only problem for those owed money by On-Line Vacations is that they do not appear as creditors, despite Mr. Millar's numerous promises that they would receive their money back in full. The trading standards department of Durham county council told me that Douglas Cooke, who was involved in On-Line Vacations, is now running a similar operation in Coventry. The other director, Ronald Mathews, is still in the north-east. It is ironic that, as of yesterday, the website of On-Line Vacations was still up and running, and giving a local telephone number for people to contact.

This week, I have again written to Durham police asking them to look into the case of On-Line Vacations. To date, both they and Northumbria police have considered it a civil matter, but clearly the work undertaken by the trading standards department of Durham county council raises serious questions about whether the operation was not an elaborate fraud from the start. Will the Minister's Department investigate, as a matter of urgency, the operation of the company? One question needs to be answered: why was a credit licence issued to the company by the Office of Fair Trading, despite objections from the trading standards department of Sunderland city council?

At present, the activities of holiday club operations such as On-Line Vacations seem to fall outside the law or regulations. They are not covered by the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992 because they are not package holidays as defined under the regulations. Likewise, although in many cases such operations trade in timeshare accommodation, they are not covered by the Timeshare Act 1992 or the Timeshare Regulations 1997. To the credit of the trading standards department of Durham county council, it alerted the Office of Fair Trading in April 2001 to the fact that no appropriate OFT code covers that type of holiday club.

The Department of Trade and Industry has produced a leaflet warning that holiday clubs are not cancellable agreements and has consulted on proposed changes in the law. Clearly, the case of On-Line Vacations demonstrates the urgent need for laws or regulations to protect consumers. Regulation of the timeshare industry has done much to clear up its reputation. It seems that holiday clubs have been used as a way in which to avoid such regulations. It is interesting that one of the companies supplying accommodation to On-Line Vacations, Tim[illegible]linx.com, is based in Spain, an area that was notorious for the mis-selling of timeshare accommodation in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Will the Minister consider the points that I have raised in today's debate and ensure that legislation or regulations are brought forward urgently to prevent more hardworking, honest people such as my constituents from being defrauded of money that they can ill afford to lose?

1.44 pm

The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions (Alan Johnson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones) on securing a debate on such an important issue, which is of great worry to his constituents, especially Mr. and Mrs. Alexander and Mr. and Mrs. Cooper. The cases that he outlined are extremely distressing and show the fraudsters' guile in trying to bypass consumer protection legislation. I shall start by describing existing legislation.

The Timeshare Act 1992 regulates the timeshare market in the UK, while the timeshare directive of 1994 ensures that consumers throughout Europe are protected. The legislation gives consumers important protections at the point of sale, when they are often most vulnerable. It insists on a 14-day cooling-off period in which to cancel the contract. In the rest of Europe, the period is a minimum of 10 days. It also insists on a ban on timeshare sellers asking for or taking deposits during the cooling-off period, and on the right to a brochure and written contract with basic information on the timeshare property in the consumer's own language.

The legislation has been very successful. In a way, the emergence of new scams designed to avoid the law is testimony to how successful it has been. It has greatly helped to tackle the unscrupulous practices that have tarnished the timeshare industry in the past. However, the Department of Trade and Industry has been made aware of several new products that have been introduced to the market that have similar characteristics to timeshare but are often not covered by timeshare legislation. In many cases, as my hon. Friend said, they seem to have been deliberately designed to get round the legislation.

In the case of holiday clubs, the schemes involve consumers purchasing what amounts to a promise by the club to provide them with holidays for a long period into the future—sometimes a lifetime. As membership of the club does not give rights to purchasers for a particular property, it is not covered by timeshare legislation. Indeed, as my hon. Friend said, many companies use the fact that the product is not timeshare as a selling ploy.

Although the products are not covered under timeshare legislation, they may be covered by other consumer legislation. The Trade Descriptions Act 1968 and the Unfair Terms in Consumer Contracts Regulations 1999 also provide protection. Indeed, consumers have successfully pursued court cases against holiday club companies using the Property Misdescriptions Act 1991. Protections are also provided for sales promotions that take place in hotels away from a company's business premises under the doorstep selling regulations.

[Alan Johnson]

My Department issued a consultation paper in April 2000 to find out more about how the timeshare legislation had worked and the extent of any problems experienced in the sector. The European Commission recently announced that it will review and amend the timeshare directive by 2003 to ensure that consumers are fully protected.

Extending the scope of existing timeshare legislation to cover holiday club products is best done at EU level. British consumers are often targeted while on holiday in Europe, or the company is registered in Spain. My Department will work closely with the Commission during the review to ensure that British consumers are better protected, as my hon. Friend suggests.

The Government are also asking for more rigorous enforcement by the Spanish authorities of timeshare and other relevant legislation, such as the misleading advertising directive. As my hon. Friend said, part of the problem is tracking down people who set up different companies in different countries.

Officials from the Office of Fair Trading recently returned from Madrid, where they presented evidence to the police on the perceived fraudulent activities of certain Spanish companies involved in the sale of holiday clubs and timeshare resale. Working closely with their Spanish counterparts, the police authorities in Spain and Interpol, the OFT is trying to protect UK consumers who choose to purchase timeshare products, and to improve consumer confidence in the market through the eradication of unlawful practices.

Under the gloriously named Stop Now Orders (EC Directive) Regulations 2001, which came into effect on 1 June 2001, the Office of Fair Trading has the power to apply for orders to stop traders in the United Kingdom and other member states infringing legislation implementing 10 specific European Community consumer protection directives, including distance selling, doorstep selling and timeshare if the collective interests of UK consumers are harmed. That gives the OFT even more power to crack down on fraudulent companies targeting UK consumers.

Some of the more disreputable companies that engage in fraud will be covered under criminal law. Company investigations in my Department are also able to investigate companies under the powers of the Companies Act 1985 if fraud or misconduct is suspected. If the public are at risk, the Secretary of State may ask the court to stop a company trading at once by appointing a provisional liquidator. If there is evidence of misconduct by a company's directors, the Secretary of State can also ask the courts to disqualify them. In other cases, my Department may use the information that it has obtained to prosecute offenders, or it can pass the information to the Crown Prosecution Service for further consideration. The DTI has recently wound up other holiday clubs, such as Diamond VSI Ltd, Somerville Leisure plc, Hever Worldwide Properties plc and Expanding Horizons Ltd.

I urge my hon. Friend to forward any details or information that he has about such companies for my Department's further consideration. My hon. Friend the Minister with responsibility for consumers, competition and markets will look carefully at the points raised in today's debate. However, my hon. Friend will appreciate that investigations conducted by my Department are strictly confidential and are never disclosed to any party except for the statutory purposes provided under the Act, such as for the institution of civil or criminal proceedings. It is departmental policy not to confirm or deny that such investigations are taking or have taken place, for the obvious reason that a company under investigation might be found innocent.

My hon. Friend also raises the question of consumer credit licences, and he cites a situation in his area. I emphasise that licences are awarded by the Office of Fair Trading if it is satisfied that the trader is a fit person to engage in the activities covered by the licence. The OFT can refuse or take away a licence if a trader is considered unfit. It is entirely a matter for the OFT, and I am unable to disclose details of particular cases.

I am sure that my hon. Friend will agree that prevention is always better than cure. Well-informed consumers are the best means of tackling bad practice and of preventing problems before they arise. Last June, the Government relaunched the leaflet "Timeshare—Making the Right Choice". That leaflet informed consumers about developments in the market and the undesirable practices at the margins of the industry, some of which have been mentioned today. The leaflet was distributed with the help of the industry, and it is included in UK holidaymakers' airline ticket wallets in order to draw such scams to their attention. The responsible timeshare industry is working hard on developing robust codes of practice. Holiday clubs, vacation packs and sellers of timeshare points who belong to the main trade association voluntarily provide consumers with the same protections afforded under the timeshare directive.

I am sure that my hon. Friend appreciates that rogue traders will always seek ways to avoid legislation in order to exploit the unwary consumer. The Government will be working closely with the European Commission on its forthcoming review of the timeshare directive in order to ensure that a future definition of timeshare encompasses new products such as holiday clubs. The DTI will also continue to work with the Office of Fair Trading and other enforcement bodies to ensure better enforcement of existing legislation. It will also continue to encourage the industry to develop more effective self-regulation, and to work in partnership with the industry in order to improve information and publicity for consumers on their rights under the law.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 22 May 2002

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Euthanasia

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

9.30 am

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): I am delighted to have been given the opportunity to introduce a debate on such a crucial issue, but let there be no doubt that the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) has taken a clear lead in this area. He is undoubtedly responsible for bringing social care policies and euthanasia to the forefront of our debate, and I pay warm tribute to his work and action. I very much hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that he is able to catch your eye.

All Members of Parliament are sent here to legislate in a way that affects people's lives, so there can be no doubt that Members of Parliament believe that life is the most important matter that we have to consider. That said, for as long as I have been a Member there has been argument about the difficult subject of life itself. I particularly wanted to have the debate because there is an opportunity for Parliament to reclaim its power in this area. There is no doubt that, by stealth, decisions that affect all our lives are increasingly being taken outside Parliament, and I much regret that.

All Members of Parliament will have constituency cases involving loved ones who are injured in some way and then kept alive through food and fluid, but to start referring to food and fluid as medical treatment is absolutely crazy. Unless one eats and drinks, no matter what brain injury or illness one is suffering from, one cannot live. That is why I am concerned about the General Medical Council document, "Withholding and Withdrawing Life-Prolonging Treatment: Good Practice in Decision Making".

That publication is not good for patients or doctors. It contains a contradiction between the premise that it is unlawful and unethical intentionally to end a patient's life and the practice of deliberately withholding or withdrawing food and fluid from the non-dying when nursing or medical assistance is required. Such withdrawal could follow if the doctor judged the continuance of food and fluid to be of no benefit. However, as it would lead directly to a slow and painful death, it is hard to see how it might benefit the patient. Is someone to make the judgment that the patient's continuing life is of no benefit to them?

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): Does the hon. Gentleman appreciate that in these days of medical advances, eating might sometimes be hard to describe as the same activity as being fed through a tube in the stomach? What is his view of someone in such a situation who has made a living will and has made it clear throughout their life that they would not want food and fluid to be given to them should they get into such a situation? Does he believe that the medical establishment should override that patient's wishes, and possibly those of their family?

Mr. Amess: I certainly understand the first point. Later, I shall mention a constituency case in which a child goes to school normally and is fed through the stomach, without which the child would die. I am not dodging the issue of living wills; I shall come to it shortly.

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to hon. Members because other parliamentary duties mean that I am unable to stay for the whole debate.

I have a particular interest in this issue as chairman of the all-party parliamentary hospice group. Other hon. Members will share my great sympathy for Diane Pretty, who recently died, and for her family. It has been claimed that she experienced all of which she was most frightened—pain, breathlessness and choking—as she was dying. Does my hon. Friend agree that those claims have been contradicted by the Luton hospice, where she died and which I recently visited? Its announcement made it clear that her death was peaceful and painless, but the BBC in particular gave prominence to the former claims and said little about the hospice's statement.

Mr. Amess: I understand my hon. Friend's point, and I have been fully briefed by the Motor Neurone Disease Association. I do not wish to seem churlish, but I have made it clear to the association that the debate is not about the awful, tragic circumstances of Diane Pretty's death, and that I want to concentrate on general matters. That said, I know of my hon. Friend's work in support of the hospice movement. Dame Cicely Saunders is a marvellous woman whose work is experienced throughout the country. It allows people to die with dignity, and to be treated to the best standards.

I want to dwell on the withdrawal of food and fluids. The advice in the GMC document is that withdrawal should happen only if agreed to by a second doctor, but that puts doctors in an awful, invidious position. Doctors who do not go along with their team's decisions are told—the Minister will understand this—to report to their employers. Doctors already face challenges in the national health service, and this puts them in an even more difficult position.

To return to the issue that my hon. Friend perhaps wants me to discuss, the GMC document sits uncomfortably with article 2 of the European convention on human rights, which states:

> "Everyone's right to life shall be protected by law."

The fact that that means what it says has been reaffirmed by Mrs. Pretty's case. No one should be intentionally deprived of their life, least of all by doctors and by means of slow dehydration.

There is always pressure on the House, and it is clear from *Hansard* that we have not spent a huge amount of time discussing euthanasia. My hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) introduced a Bill in 2000, but there have been few big debates otherwise.

[Mr. Amess]

I am totally opposed to euthanasia, although some people might smile because they can think of a few individuals whom they would like to see off. The lead given since 1999 by the British Medical Association, and now by the GMC, means that judgments are being made for those who are not always in a position to make them for themselves.

As a result of the guidelines and the subsequent judgments, the treatment of some vulnerable patients has subtly changed. Organisations and individuals have inundated me with examples of what goes on in hospitals, and the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East will be familiar with them. I do not want the Minister to think, "My goodness, he's trying to undermine the national health service." I am simply saying that the debate has prompted umpteen relatives of loved ones to give me chapter and verse on what has happened in particular wards, although I am in no position to judge such things.

I pay tribute to Alert, which presents its argument peacefully, forcefully and constructively. In this week edition of *The House Magazine*, there is an advertisement for SOS-NHS Patients in Danger. The organisation claims that attempts to deprive

> "elderly and vulnerable patients of food and water with the sole intention of causing their death is supported"

by a 2001 Government directive to doctors. The Minister may throw some light on how she regards that matter.

To describe food and fluid as medical treatment is to change the vocabulary, and it is beginning to affect attitudes among health care workers and to change the viewpoint from which important matters are handled. Total nursing care includes the administration of food and fluids by feeding through tubes, if necessary. I gave the hon. Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) the example of a little boy being fed through a tube, and there are many more examples of that practice, which we all regard as wonderful, in fact.

Use of the naso-gastric tube has routinely involved nurses, although some patients have learned to use it by themselves. Stroke patients with swallowing difficulties have often left hospital with feeding tubes in situ until they can swallow again. Premature babies have been routinely fed through tubes until they can suckle. Other children, as I say, go to school wearing tubes.

As a result of what I consider to be an improper use of words, such methods are referred to in guidance documents as medical treatment or artificial hydration and nutrition. That is absolute nonsense. Where is the authority for that change of language? Parliament has never been given a real opportunity to consider the matter. If I have not simply been inundated with spoof calls, the practice seems to be occurring throughout the country. I often receive calls from relatives who have seen something happen that they think is wrong. The Minister has had a tough year, but will she consider giving us an opportunity to debate the repercussions of the directive, perhaps in the new Session when we have more time?

The change of language is already encompassed in an established framework of medical decision making. Thus, the necessities of life can be denied to dependent and vulnerable people on the basis that they are non-beneficial, unduly invasive or contrary to their supposed best interests. Who is going to make the decision? Will it be the two doctors or the relatives? The person is often unable to make the decision for himself or herself. That is a profound issue, which Parliament is entitled to debate, and Parliament can sometimes debate such subjects well. We need to hear the arguments for and against the practice.

The reasoning usually advanced for such fatal or lethal decisions is often based on the so-called quality of life considerations, as judged not by the patient, but by the health care team or relatives. Unfortunately, such people may not always have the best interests of the patient at heart. The quiet acceptance of futile case policies will put on a more formal basis decisions that are, in effect, about whether a person's life is worth continuing. What the goodness are we doing, coming to Parliament and making laws, if we cannot spend time considering such an important matter? We should debate the point at which relatives and doctors say, "We can't do that any more—that's it. Finito." Such decisions have been made without Parliament being given a proper opportunity to discuss the issue.

Those decisions would necessarily be subject to arbitrary and changing criteria, such as resource availability and burdens on others. Ultimately, with the pressures that the national health service is under, they would depend on utilitarian considerations. In view of those pressures, the Minister will understand what I am alluding to. We could end the sanctity of life principle under which, hitherto, all lives have been judged to be of equal value, and equal before the law. Many would add that they are equal in the eyes of God.

I am glad to see my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton in her place, because she introduced a Bill on the subject in 2000. I am sharing with the House my view that Parliament has not been allowed enough time to debate such an important and serious issue.

How can it ever be right to deprive a person who is not dying of the necessities of life? It is not acceptable that food and fluid should be described as medical treatment; that is absolute nonsense. Who has given people the authority to say that food and fluid is medical treatment? That is ridiculous. A further practice that occurs too often is the inappropriate and excessive use of sedatives, which render patients dependent and, often, unable to swallow.

We all know of the case of Tony Bland, the poor gentleman who was in a persistent vegetative state. I have dear friends whose son was knocked off a bike. He ended up in a vegetative state at the British Home and Hospital for Incurables, and I spent a great deal of time visiting him. I lived through that traumatic time with his loved ones and they wanted their son to be kept alive—that was their decision. At the risk of becoming boring, I must repeat that it is not acceptable to allow such decisions to be taken through a directive; it is wrong. Perhaps the Minister can provide clarification.

It was said that Mr. Bland's brain was dead. I have no expertise in such matters, but I am advised that at his autopsy it weighed 1,000 g and the normal weight of a brain is 1,400 g. It was certainly not a watery mass, as was stated at the time. The late Cardinal Hume, for whom I had the highest regard, tried to raise the matter with the president of the family division, but he did not receive a satisfactory response. It is too late to argue about it, but the Bland judgment was desperately important.

Ms Drown: I am waiting for the hon. Gentleman to come to living wills. Perhaps Tony Bland should have made a living will, but he was too young to have thought about it. At the time of the case, all his relatives wanted to finish his life, although they had not done so initially. Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the wish of those relatives should have been overridden?

Mr. Amess: The hon. Lady is very sharp in not letting me get away with missing her point. Until Parliament has been given a proper opportunity to debate what is involved, I shall not be satisfied with living wills as I understand them. I have grave concerns.

I end with a plea to the Minister. She has a huge work load, and every issue that she is confronted with is the most important of that day, but we are talking about life. In hospitals throughout the country, people are lying in beds and the medical teams around them are faced with such decisions. It is not good enough that Parliament has not had the opportunity to debate who should be given the onerous task of deciding who should live and who should die. Giving a patient food and fluid is not medical treatment; it is what every human being is entitled to. I am totally opposed to euthanasia and I totally respect the sanctity of life. I hope that all hon. Members do so.

9.49 am

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) for introducing this important debate. Many hon. Members are concerned that policy decisions in this area are being made outside the House. Although euthanasia, with all its ramifications, is a difficult subject, we should be debating it in both Houses of Parliament to try to reach a consensus.

Voluntary euthanasia—a third person ending the life of another with consent—has been legalised in some parts of the world, including the Netherlands and, last week, Belgium, as well as the state of Oregon in the United States. We are in danger of euthanasia creeping up on us without parliamentary decisions being made. I shall set out the legal background to the debate to show that the legal profession, aided by the medical profession, is driving policy in this area.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): The hon. Gentleman is a member of the Science and Technology Committee. As I am sure he remembers, we took evidence from the former chairman of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority only a few weeks ago. We discussed difficult issues of the beginning and end of life, and she informed the Committee that she thinks it right for decisions on such issues to be kept away from Parliament. She also said that, as emotive, complex and sensitive issues are involved, they are best decided by people other than politicians. She showed total contempt for the House and felt that we should be protected from having to make those difficult decisions, but people outside the House are in favour of the democratic process and they want those who are accountable to them to take the decisions. Does the hon. Gentleman recall that event?

Dr. Iddon: I do, and I agree with the hon. Gentleman that those decisions should be made by Parliament and that the debate should be held here.

Had I been an MP at the time, I would have supported the Suicide Act 1961, but there have been several landmark judgments since then. Reference has already been made to the 1993 Law Lords judgment in the Airedale NHS Trust *v.* Bland case. That was a critical moment in the history of the debate because, for the first time, doctors were given the legal ability to remove artificial feeding and hydration from patients.

Many doctors were worried about that judgment, and they lobbied the GMC and the BMA. The Government published several reports, and the Law Commission published a report in 1995. In October 1999, the Government's consultation resulted in the publication of "Making Decisions", and recent press reports emanating from the Lord Chancellor's office suggest that legislation is likely to be included in the Queen's Speech in November. In April, a consultation document on "Making Decisions"—it is extremely difficult to get hold of—was published. I should point out that euthanasia is a devolved issue, and legislation has been passed in Scotland, so the law in Scotland is already different from that in England and Wales.

Yesterday, the GMC put its draft document to the council for agreement. The BMA has been publishing guidelines, which are used in hospitals, without any reference to Parliament, or at least to the elected body of Parliament. It may have consulted the Government, but the rest of us certainly have not been consulted. As the hon. Member for Southend, West said, the important difference in the medical profession now—we cannot underline it enough—is that doctors regard artificial hydration and feeding as medical treatment. When that announcement was made, it really got up my nose. That is why I strongly supported the Winterton Bill in Parliament, which was unfortunately lost.

Following the Government's implementation of the Human Rights Act 1998 in October 2000 for use in the British courts, the BMA guidelines were revised, but they have not changed greatly. The Winterton Bill accepted the right of a patient with mental capacity not to accept treatment, particularly if it was burdensome, and we should underline that fact, too. Members of Parliament were divided on the issue then, just as they will be today. When the Bill was debated, I was rather surprised to find that Age Concern had lobbied against it, despite being worried about the appearance of terms such as "DNR" and "Do not ring 555" on patient notes. Hon. Members will remember the great publicity that that gained in the press.

Following the Bland judgment, a second landmark decision was made on 25 October 2000 by Dame Elizabeth Butler-Sloss, president of the family division of the High Court. It was about the lives of two women, Mrs. M, aged 49, and Mrs. H, aged 36, both said to have been in a permanent vegetative state, the former for more than three years and the latter for about nine months. The case of Mrs. M was non-urgent, as it was estimated that she could have lived for another 10 to

[Dr. Iddon]

20 years. Those cases were brought to court to test whether the Human Rights Act had any bearing on the decision made in the Tony Bland case. Article 2 of the European convention on human rights, of course, refers to the right to life.

Amazingly, Dame Butler-Sloss ruled that the Human Rights Act had no effect on verdicts of that kind. That was an extremely important decision. I object not only to the decision, but to the fact that it was made by one person. I accept that she must have consulted, but she made the judgment in the name of only one person. Even the Pinochet case went first to three Law Lords and eventually to five, so why do we let one person in the family division make landmark judgments of that kind?

Dame Butler-Sloss has said some remarkable things since. For example, she believes that permanent vegetative state patients are insensate. Doctors are divided on that issue, but many believe that even patients in deep comas have sensations, so we would dispute her opinion. On 20 July 2000, she told the GMC:

> "Hospitals may also need to consider the issue of resources, however distasteful that may seem, and consider whether resources should be directed to patients who have no hope of receiving any benefit from that treatment".

That is an astonishing statement from someone who makes such landmark decisions.

This year, Dame Butler-Sloss handed down another landmark judgment in the case of a single middle-aged woman patient who has become known as Miss B and who had been kept alive for some time by ventilation. That judgment allowed a medical team to sedate the patient and turn off the ventilator. The patient has since died in another hospital, because the people in the first hospital, who saved Miss B's life, could not find it in themselves to turn off the ventilator. I think that Miss B had the right to ask for that ventilator to be turned off, and I have no objection to that landmark decision. Miss B was a thinking person; she was not in a coma and she had thought about the decision. To her, the ventilator had become burdensome. That was the point that I made about the Winterton Bill.

The Dutch Parliament legalised physician-assisted suicide and voluntary euthanasia in April 2000, and Belgium has followed suit. Since 1984, when voluntary euthanasia was decriminalised, there have been 50,000 such deaths in the Netherlands. Significantly, in one study, 85 per cent. of Dutch patients withdrew their request for euthanasia after receiving better symptom control.

I support the hospice movement, which does a great job. No matter how seriously ill a patient is, hospices have learned to cope and to relieve pain in some terrible circumstances. In Holland, some people carry passports to live, and the organisation Right to Life in Britain has proposed allowing people here to carry human rights cards, so that if they find themselves in such circumstances doctors will be aware of the patient's wishes.

The debate should be entitled "Futile care policies and euthanasia". I would like to discuss futile care policies—a euphemism for involuntary euthanasia. Futile care policies are implemented so quietly that no one knows their extent. Although a patient may want life-sustaining treatment, if the doctor believes that their quality of life does not justify the cost of care in the health care system, he may refuse further treatment, other than comfort care.

Many hospitals in the United States of America have developed futile care policies designed to thwart legal action by the patient or their relatives. The Cambridge Review surveyed 26 Californian hospitals, 24 of which were found to have futile care policies. Only seven permitted patients or their representatives to make submissions before a decision is made to implement those policies.

Futile care policies are a descent from a health care system based on the Hippocratic oath and the Geneva declaration. They discriminate against the elderly, the chronically sick—dying or otherwise—and the disabled, who are expensive to care for. Do we want that sort of health care rationing in Britain? It has arrived.

A programme transmitted on 14 February 2002 by Channel 4 as part of its "Trust" series was filmed at Queen's hospital, Nottingham. It showed medical staff making subjective decisions about their elderly patients' quality of life that led to death by starvation and dehydration. Futile care policies now operate in the national health service in Britain. Who gave doctors the right to carry out futile care policies in this country? Doctors first sedate the patient so that they are unable to communicate or, usually, to swallow, as the swallowing reflex disappears. Opiates are usually used to sedate the patient, and they are left to starve to death or to dehydrate.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): One method by which such policies are implemented in geriatric wards in our national health hospitals is for someone to enter a ward of elderly and frail people who are lying in bed and unable to sit up unaided and to place food, such as bowls of soup, on tables over the bed. The patients are incapable of accessing that soup on their own, but 10 minutes later a different member of staff comes through the ward and says, "Oh, don't you want that?" and removes it. That is an insidious way to cut off food. Food is ostensibly provided, but it never—

Mr. Bill O'Brien (in the Chair): Order. Interventions must be brief.

Dr. Iddon: I have some sympathy with that point of view, and I have seen that in action. However, I do not accuse national health service staff—auxiliaries and nurses—of carrying it out as a futile care policy. There are simply not enough people on the wards to sit with patients who need feeding one to one. Will the Minister comment on the view expressed by the hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson)?

We urgently need a full debate in the House, not merely a 90-minute debate in Westminster Hall. Although people take notice of such debates, they do not have the same impact as those in the main Chamber. I hope that the Minister agrees and that the Government enable us to have a much longer discussion. The subject was chosen by Mr. Speaker, and I am grateful to him for allowing us to discuss it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Bill O'Brien (in the Chair): Order. Four hon. Members wish to speak and we have 24 minutes left, so

I would be grateful if Members show self-discipline and speak for only six minutes. I intend to call the winding-up speeches at 10.30.

10.5 am

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): I must preface my remarks by saying that I am not a relative of anyone involved in unfortunate cases, such as those of Tony Bland and Diane Pretty. If I were, no doubt I would have other things to say. It is difficult to extrapolate from specific cases. I just want to submit a general argument against legislative or regulative change. We seem to fear that the law will be changed to allow medical practitioners or other people to assist a person to die—in other words, effectively to kill another individual under the remit of the national health service.

The matter raises the huge moral minefields of consent and intent. There will still be the issue of whether moral or social pressure has been brought to bear to secure consent. There will always be an argument about the state of mind of the person giving consent—both at the time that he agrees and when he is asked to reiterate that choice. At the point when euthanasia may be implemented or foreseen, the person may not be in a position to reiterate his initial choice or living will.

The issue of intent concerns whether the state should allow certain people, as a deliberate act of intent, to end a person's life. If those people are doctors, there will be conflict with the Hippocratic oath and the possible fear that such activity may be extended beyond cases when consent is given to other cases in which the person's condition is judged to be futile.

There are two arguments for change. First, there is a general argument that euthanasia would alleviate suffering. Secondly, euthanasia would allow the patient to choose the moment of his death. I shall deal with the second argument first. We all have the right to end our life. If the state tries to forbid us from so doing, it will be futile. However, that is not what we are discussing; the issue is whether someone else should assist in that process. That raises a nest of issues concerning who that person would be; with what authority he would act; how he would act and at what moment he would act. The state or medical practitioners do want to trespass in such a minefield without being aware of the dangers that they face.

I accept that the stronger argument in favour of euthanasia is based on the alleviation of suffering. The general view is that an easeful death is a good death, and I am sure that everyone in the Chamber agrees with that. We would all wish our loved ones to die an easeful death. There is a moral imperative to secure that, and few people deserve anything different. It is a known fact that methods of alleviating suffering can bring forward the moment of death and, by that, I do not mean the withdrawal of food and water. If engaged in seriously, the alleviation of suffering can shorten the period in which a person suffers and bring forward the moment of death.

There is a mediaeval principle called the double effect. If a medical practitioner engages in a form of medication that eases suffering and coincidentally brings forward the moment of death, that is a radically different choice from his deciding to terminate a person's life. In the past, the Catholic Church supported therapeutic abortion, the object of which was to save a mother's life by removing the baby from her womb. The clear difference between that and abortion was that the object was not to end the baby's life. Were the baby to survive at the end of the process, everyone would be much happier.

If the possibility of an easeful death exists for individuals, why is there a need to change the medical role? Why is there a need to confront medical practitioners with awful medical dilemmas? My argument would fall absolutely if someone could prove that it is impossible to ease a death and forfend suffering—that medical science, even in its current advanced state, necessarily cannot avail dying people who are suffering intensely. I do not believe that. It is certainly untrue with regard to a few cases; I am thinking of a friend of mine who died of motor neurone disease.

If my argument is true with regard to a few cases, medical science can address them. Therefore, there is no need radically to change medical practice, the authority of medical practitioners and the nature of their task.

10.10 am

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): First, I declare an interest. I was appointed to the General Medical Council in October 1999, one of three Members of Parliament to be nominated lay members of that body. Therefore, I have been involved in the council's debate on the guidance. Indeed, the council discussed it again yesterday.

The document "Withholding and Withdrawing Life-Prolonging Treatment" is a good practice guide for decision makers in the clinical field. It is not about euthanasia. The guidance begins with a statement that euthanasia is against the law and the ethics of medicine. It is about making decisions when providing care at the end of people's lives. It does not provide answers; that is impossible, as every patient is an individual and their circumstances vary. It sets out a framework for decision making to guide clinicians in the field.

The GMC has consulted widely. A broad range of views were expressed to it, and it has carefully considered them. I first attended a GMC meeting in November 1999. It discussed the issue for the first time then, and one matter that it debated was whether guidelines should be sought, because it is clear that care for people in this state varies between hospitals. That cannot be denied, and the GMC, as the regulatory body for doctors, believed that it was its right and responsibility to provide guidelines, if at all possible.

Therefore, a working group of the standards committee was set up, and people from outside the GMC who have legal and other expertise were co-opted as members. The first draft of a report was produced 12 months later, in November 2000. In 2001, a written consultation was conducted for 10 weeks, between May and July. More than 730 responses were received from a wide range of organisations, and from many doctors and members of public. The process culminated in a consultation conference in London on 20 July 2001, and everyone with an interest in the issue was invited to attend.

Mrs. Ann Winterton (Congleton): It sends shivers of fear down my spine when I am told that the great and

[Mrs. Ann Winterton]

the good consult and come forward with decisions, such as that made by the GMC. Does the right hon. Gentleman believe in the supremacy of Parliament? He is an experienced Member. Is he concerned that such decisions are being made outside the parliamentary and democratic system by people who ought not to be making them?

Mr. Barron: The GMC is a statutory body that was set up by Parliament to give advice to doctors. In part, it is self-regulating. However, I am a lay member, and there are 23 others. Parliament gives it the right to issue guidelines in this field. The people who have been leading in it, and those in the GMC who have been involved in drawing the guidelines up, are not members of the great and the good. The hon. Lady laughs, but those people deal with the matter almost daily in hospitals throughout the country. That is not being done by the great and the good sitting in London. The consultation process took place on the basis of trying to get advice from, and guidelines to, practitioners in the field who have to handle the situation.

We have obtained extensive legal advice from the Official Solicitor. When the guidance was discussed yesterday, several amendments from the Official Solicitor were made. The guidance states the principles established in the core guidance of good medical practice, which is effectively the clinician's bible, but it considers the primacy of patients' interests, respect for patients' autonomy and the duty to provide a good standard of practical care. It applies those principles in this difficult area of practice.

I do not think that anyone in this Room would disagree for one minute that the area in question is a difficult one for people to work in. The guidance cannot accord with all points of view, and I am sure that everyone in this Room accepts that. The GMC believes that the draft guidance reflects broad agreement so far established with the profession and the public on what can be regarded as good practice in decision making in this area.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) issued a press release on Monday, inviting the council to consider aspects of the issue. The council looked at those aspects. I want to go into one or two areas mentioned in Monday's press release that were also discussed. The first is whether artificial nutrition and hydration can be non-beneficial. In fact, the words "no benefit" were removed yesterday in drafting changes, and they will be replaced. I do not know exactly whether the phrase "net benefit" or other words were used at that time. Also, and it is right, fair and proper that people commented on it, the council said that it would reiterate the general guidance, in paragraph 55, on consulting the health care team, families and others. Our broader consultation will take place before decisions are taken on that.

Another part of Monday's press release was covered by Dr. Anthony Cole of the Medical Ethics Alliance. He was concerned about junior doctors, and said that those

> "who could not in conscience agree to the withdrawal or withholding of food and fluid, should not have to take responsibility for finding another doctor to do what they could not do themselves."

Should junior doctors have to find someone to cover for them if they withdraw from the care of a patient because of a conscientious objection? That is, I assume, what was alluded to on Monday. The council has agreed to introduce amendments to make it clear that it is the junior doctor's responsibility to inform the senior clinician responsible for the patient's care. The senior clinician must then make arrangements to find a replacement.

I shall briefly discuss advance directives, which were mentioned in my hon. Friend's press release by Dr. Jacqueline Laing. The issue is covered by the guidance in paragraphs 10, 28 and 39, as well as in the glossary that deals with advance directives and advance refusals of treatment. The council makes it clear that advance refusals are valid if they are clearly applicable to the patient's current circumstances and when there is no reason to believe that the patient has changed his or her mind. Paragraph 39 gives further guidance on taking into account advances in treatment made since the directive was issued.

After yesterday's debate, I took the issue up with Sir Cyril Chantler and Professor David Hatch, who have been leading on the guidance document in the GMC. To paraphrase what I believe to be the outcome of that, it is clear that someone who gave an advance directive years ago and who may have changed their mind should assume that they could and perhaps would have to go through that process again. That was not written on tablets of stone, but the gist of the discussion was that the GMC intends to issue guidelines to doctors working in the field.

Dr. Iddon: The point made by Dr. Jacqueline Laing at the Alert meeting on Monday, from which the press release emanated, is that people who make advance directives should be aware that they may put themselves in an even more difficult position by refusing treatment as a patient. In other words, they could become disabled by refusing treatment.

Mr. Barron: It is believed that the guidance that has been drawn up and that will, at some stage, be sent to all doctors—certainly those working in the field—takes everything into account. The advance directives, which I read yesterday, go into great detail, but I shall not bore the Chamber with that now. Doctors must have confidence that decisions made a long time ago still stand in all circumstances, however, although a decision made 10 years ago would not be ignored in a current situation. That is my understanding, although 10 years refers to my timetable, not that of others.

I shall finish, because we are pressed for time. I do not disagree that the House should discuss such matters, as it is for us to regulate doctors up and down the land who work in hospitals, primary care and so on. The House has given responsibility to the GMC, however, and in my view, based on the years that I have been a lay GMC member, it takes its responsibility seriously. It is clear that there are no guidelines in this sensitive area for people who work in our hospitals and other places, but we need guidance and a debate about it.

Let me emphasise that the GMC recognises that euthanasia is wrong and that it is against the law and medical ethics of this country. No one is saying that it should happen. At some stage, we in Parliament may be called on to pass laws on it, but that is not related to the guidance.

Mrs. Winterton: We all agree that euthanasia is illegal in this country, but is not it disingenuous for that organisation to say that? It advocates the withdrawal of food and fluids from certain patients. Is not that promoting euthanasia by stealth?

Mr. Bill O'Brien (in the Chair): I trust that the right hon. Gentleman is bringing his comments to a close.

Mr. Barron: The answer to the hon. Lady's question, in all circumstances, is certainly not. I do not think that that is euthanasia by stealth. In some rare cancers, nutrition and hydration speed up the patient's metabolism, hastening death and increasing suffering. It is best that clinicians make the decisions in those cases, not us sitting here this morning.

10.22 am

Mr. Harold Best (Leeds, North-West): I am fairly certain that everyone in the Chamber is, to say the least, well motivated, interested in the subject—it is an appropriate subject for the House to deal with—and eager to take decisions and come to conclusions that the freedom that allows us to gather here makes possible.

When I was very small, I went to the local cinema with my parents and we saw on the flickering black-and-white screen the smiling faces of children who were being carefully led off to be dispatched by a Nazi regime. They were people whom the doctors thought a waste of the state's resources. I remember my parents saying to me, "You must never forget this." I did not understand why, but they said that I would.

I began to understand what it meant. Culturally and racially, I am part Irish, part Catholic, part Church of England, mixed Methodist, part Jewish Russian immigrant. Any of those things could make one likely to be a target of someone who disapproves of one part or another of one's history or culture, and one can easily become the victim. People do not set out with malice aforethought; it is the way the machine rolls, and we should be careful that it does not become irresistible.

It is important that we in Parliament understand our role. My right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) made a good argument, but I do not share his certainty in the GMC's capacity to make judgments—or in its right to make those judgments. Parliament is for ever changing, as are its ideological constructs, and whatever decisions Parliament took to empower the GMC to take decisions—decisions that are now being used to justify my right hon. Friend's observations—we may later wish to say that we were not right and that we should reconsider the matter. I believe that now is the time to do so.

The idea that the state should take on the role of moral guardian is interesting. In our lifetimes—at least, in mine—we have experienced not only Nazism but Stalinism, when the state did only what was in its own interests. I and others decided that we could not support that. Indeed, as a socialist it seemed to be an obscenity; it was nothing to do with the struggle of the people in whom I was interested. In my view, the state is not always benign.

We should acknowledge that individuals and families, too, are not always benign; for all kinds of reasons, they can be interested in the outcome of an illness, although for most, the outcome is a matter for sincere, deep regret. We are all familiar with our family doctors, but when they become involved in the care of someone who is terminally ill they will want to relieve pain and suffering. As the hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) said, it is generally accepted that the relief of pain can speed up the process of death, but there is a duty on all of us to ensure that suffering is minimised. The line that we draw between the relief of pain being appropriate and morally right and the fact that it may bring about a speedier death will therefore always be very narrow. The decision will always be burdensome, and it always involves the careful balancing of responsibilities.

The state and the judicial system together can make the ending of suffering lawful, and we might eventually want to subscribe to that case if it means simply a gentle release from pain. My fear is that if we empower people to take such decisions without their being constantly checked through the people's democratic involvement, we shall be leading ourselves into serious danger. We should bear in mind Churchill's observation. He said that when one first starts on the slippery slope, the downward descent is not too difficult or precipitous; when one begins to accelerate, however, one finds oneself on the way to this pit of hell—he was referring to the Nazi regime. We should be mindful of what steps we take, and we should be ever mindful of the need to review what we have done.

We must never repeat the horrors of the late 1930s and early 1940s, no matter how well motivated people say they are. If we reopen that door—if we revisit that period of horror—we shall have no one to blame but ourselves. Generations to come may well look back on us and ask, "Did they learn nothing from that period that they lived through? Are there no lessons that we can be sure of, ever? Does it have to be repeated over and over again?" I think that the idea of relief of suffering meets with the approval of everyone in this Chamber and in the House. However, we must be very mindful of what that could lead us to, and I am absolutely opposed to euthanasia.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (in the Chair): I call Jim Dobbin. Two minutes.

10.30 am

Jim Dobbin (Heywood and Middleton): Thank you, Mr. O'Brien, for allowing me to speak. It is an important time for this debate, because the House of Lords report on making decisions is out for consultation. I wanted to speak for more than two minutes on that, but it looks as though I am to be cut short. I do not want to spend so little time on that report—it is far too important for that—so I shall wait to hear what the Minister has to say. I hope that there will be an opportunity at a later date, if she would be so kind, for Parliament to debate this important issue properly.

10.31 am

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Heywood and Middleton (Jim Dobbin) for giving us those two minutes back, because

[Mr. Paul Burstow]

the debate is important. I am also grateful to the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) for securing it. I understand that it has been sought for some time, and the luck of the draw led him rather than the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) to introduce it. The debate is timely, not least because the GMC considered these matters only yesterday.

The hon. Members for Southend, West and for Bolton, South-East are right to assert Parliament's right to debate and set the framework in which decisions on the care of people who lack the capacity to decide for themselves are made. That is very important, but I do not accept the criticism that is being laid at the door of the GMC for coming forward with guidance. The blame for that lies with the House and those who manage our business and set time aside for us to deliberate on such matters. We have not been given time to consider them, but we should be. That is the clearest and most powerful message that should come from the debate.

For Liberal Democrats, the moral, legal and ethical issues surrounding euthanasia are matters of conscience and therefore would be subject to a free vote, if there were ever such a vote in the House. I oppose the intentional taking of life, whether at the request of the individual or out of some sense of mercy. When the House considered the Medical Treatment (Prevention of Euthanasia) Bill in 2000, I voted for it on Second Reading to reaffirm my opposition to euthanasia. Several other Members voted for the principle of the Bill on that basis.

In preparing for the debate, I examined the report of the House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Ethics, which considered the issues carefully in 1994. It offers a clear view and I was particularly struck by paragraph 237 in part III, which sums up the Committee's recommendations:

> "Ultimately, however, we do not believe that these arguments are sufficient reason to weaken society's prohibition of intentional killing. That prohibition is the cornerstone of law and social relationships. It protects each one of us impartially, embodying the belief that all are equal. We do not wish that protection to be diminished and we therefore recommend that there should be no change in the law to permit euthanasia."

I support that view.

Policy and practice should rest on the foundation of respect for human rights—the right to autonomy, the right to be oneself—but as things stand, we are not all equal. The law denies legal rights to people who are judged by others to lack the mental capacity to make decisions for themselves. They are not only denied proper legal status as autonomous individuals in their own right, but many of them, in some areas of law, are simply ignored. There, they do not exist; they are non-people.

Who has the authority? How is capacity defined? How can people with mental or physical impairments be enabled to participate in decisions that affect their lives? The current all-or-nothing approach, whereby authority is passed to those claiming power of attorney or professionals giving medical or legal advice will not do. Common law recognises that third parties must act with a person's best interest in mind, but an incapacitated person's best interest is about more than managing money or rationing services to meet their care needs. It is about ensuring that they have a decent quality of life, can express their needs and emotions and are treated with respect.

I therefore regret that the publication of "Making Decisions" a few years ago has not led to a legislative debate or to decisions in the House. The Government have shied away from reform, despite promising legislation year after year. I am interested in the reading by the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East of the signals emanating from the Lord Chancellor's Department, because it contradicts what I have gleaned from Ministers in that Department. There seems to be a fear that reform of the law on mental incapacity will be hijacked and portrayed as a move down the road toward euthanasia. That fear is misplaced, but it is becoming an obstacle to legislating. It is appropriate for the House to make such legislation a candidate for pre-legislative scrutiny so that we can reach a broad consensus. We should take evidence and opinions from outside the House, and introduce an agreed Bill. I hope that the Minister discusses with her colleagues in the Lord Chancellor's Department the issues that have been raised today. In a way, a Minister from that Department should respond to the debate, because the issues are broader than health care.

Living wills, or advance directives, are one area of law that would benefit from being placed on a clear statutory footing. Although the courts have developed a body of case law that recognises the standing of such directives, I strongly believe that Parliament should provide a clear legal framework, with safeguards, in which people can exercise their right to give informed consent or to refuse treatment. Patients have the right to refuse treatment beforehand or at the time, if they have capacity, but no one has the right to require another person to assist with or to hasten their death.

When the House of Lords Select Committee on Medical Ethics considered euthanasia in 1994, it compared the UK and the Netherlands and found that there was almost no hospice movement in the Netherlands. Several Members have mentioned the movement, which plays an important part in our health care system. The development of the science of pain relief has made a real difference to the quality of life of thousands of terminally ill people. Quite simply, a hospice and good palliative care can make all the difference between a good death and a bad one, but what priority do the Government attach to the work of hospices? The independent charitable sector provides seven out of 10 in-patient hospice places. Over the past five years, state funding of hospice care has fallen from 35 to 28 per cent. What funding will be available in future? Hospices are already scaling back their activities and cutting the number of beds that they provide.

Extra Government funding to implement the cancer plan and to develop palliative care has not got to hospices, where it matters. They welcome the fact that the Government have made at least some concessions on NHS charges for ambulances, drugs, and laboratory and imaging services. Such charges are only the tip of the iceberg, however, and the payroll is the major cost for hospices. They must also compete with the NHS, and it would be useful if the Minister told us how the Government will help the hospice movement to bridge the £60 million gap that confronts it.

The guiding principle for care policies must be the individual's best interests. Their right to decide should be paramount, but that does not confer a right to ask someone else to help them to die. I am concerned that the issue of incapacity remains unresolved in England and Wales. Legislation has been passed in Scotland, and it is for the Scottish Parliament to decide whether it is the right legislation. People in this country are left in limbo and denied the right to be treated as individuals. Law reform on capacity is an essential bulwark against any back-door moves towards euthanasia.

I hope that the Minister has heard loud and clear the message that Parliament should debate and decide on such matters. Time should be made available to allow us to do so thoughtfully, deliberatively and without taking the scaremongering tone that sometimes enters such debates. Today's, however, has been thoughtful, rather than scaremongering.

10.39 am

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): We have had a good debate, but it has been a debate about a debate. We all agree that we need further discussion, and we have only scratched the surface. None the less, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) on securing the debate and the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) on putting him up to it. The subject is difficult to deal with. It is topical because of the cases of Diane Pretty and Miss B and because of the judgment by Dame Elizabeth Butler-Sloss, although this is the first time that I have heard her judgment compared to the General Pinochet case.

We have been debating problems of science and advances in medicine compared with matters of ethics and public conscience, in which Parliament has a vital role to play. However, as many Members said, the agenda seems to be moving ahead without proper parliamentary scrutiny. A theme common to all the contributions made this morning is that policy on euthanasia is moving ahead by stealth and that we in Parliament must reclaim that territory, because this is where the decisions should be made.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Mrs. Winterton) on her attempts, whether one agrees with them or not, to bring the issue before Parliament in a private Member's Bill. Although that Bill failed, it was a good start to the process. She is sorry that she cannot be present for the winding-up speeches, but she has a dental appointment, which I hope will not be terminal.

As the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East said, the debate on euthanasia is taking place around the world. Holland became the first country to legalise euthanasia, the practice of giving terminally ill patients the right to end their lives. Doctors in Holland will no longer face prosecution under strict conditions, and regional review committees of legal, medical and ethical experts will carefully judge each patient's request.

As the hon. Gentleman said, Belgium has become the second country to allow euthanasia. There, patients who wish to end their lives must be conscious when the demand is made and must repeat their requests for euthanasia. They must be under constant and unbearable physical or psychological pain. There have been similar moves in South Korea, and the hon. Gentleman mentioned Oregon and the changes made by the Scottish Parliament. The United Nations Human Rights Committee has taken a close interest in the moves in the Netherlands, criticising that country for its controversial new law. The committee rapporteur, Eckart Klein, said that

> "the growing number of assisted suicides could lead to them becoming routine. The main worry is not only the actual practice, but also the fact that this new law could create precedents that dilute the importance and trivialise this act . . . The practitioner could become practically insensitive and the act trivialised."

The committee is worried by figures supplied by that Government, which show that more than 2,000 cases of euthanasia were carried out last year. It is also concerned about reports that medical personnel have ended the lives of newborn handicapped babies.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the human rights aspect and referred to the fact that many human rights tests did not apply or were found wanting in the case of Diane Pretty, and had other implications in the case of Miss B. He also mentioned futile care policies, and I remember the programme about the Queen's medical centre in Nottingham and the subjective judgments that were made. We must be aware of all that to have a say in what happens and to formulate a proper approach.

Dame Butler-Sloss's judgment has implications for hospital resources, which is a worrying aspect of the decisions that are being taken. The hon. Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best) raised a similar point in his thoughtful contribution when he mentioned his lifelong memory of a film about children in Nazi Germany. The state has the power of life and death over its citizens, and as the hon. Gentleman said, it is not always used in a benign way. It certainly was not then.

There is great concern around the world about the developments that are taking place. The Conservative party remains opposed to euthanasia, as we said in our manifesto, although we recognise the right of patients to withdraw from treatment if they choose. Then the debate becomes complicated and fraught with problems of definition. As my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West rightly said, there are concerns about the medicalisation of the vocabulary in this area, which is beginning to affect attitudes among health care workers.

Feeding is now referred to in guidance documents as medical treatment or artificial hydration and nutrition. The BMA guidance on withdrawing and withholding treatment in certain cases raises many questions. In June 2001, the BMA produced guidelines. Dr. Wilks of the BMA said:

> "Our guidance on withdrawing and withholding treatment is intended to help doctors make compassionate decisions about treatment at the end of life for patients with no prospect of recovery. It is emphatically not about euthanasia, to which the BMA remains firmly opposed."

He continued:

> "The primary goal of medicine is to benefit the patient. If a medical treatment can no longer benefit the patient, then ethically, the doctor must start to consider whether it should be withdrawn. This must be done carefully and thoughtfully, in consultation with relatives, in close discussion with the whole team of people involved in the care of the patient".

However, he added:

> "We share the view of the courts that artificial nutrition and hydration is a part of medical treatment and could therefore potentially be withdrawn if it is not benefiting a patient. However

[Tim Loughton]

we also recognise that not everyone shares this view and that special safeguards need to be taken in this difficult area of decision making."

Absolutely right. That point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West. We have heard about the experience of the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron). The GMC plans to introduce guidelines outlining when it believes it right to withhold life-prolonging treatment. That will raise complex issues. The meeting yesterday to take legal advice was important in that process, but most people do not know about that. The GMC has, effectively, a licence from Parliament to get on with its duty. However, that does not mean that Parliament can abrogate its responsibility to be actively involved in making decisions and recommendations.

Mr. Barron *rose—*

Tim Loughton: I shall carry on, if I may, because we are short of time.

It is right that medical professionals should tackle the issue, but Parliament needs to engage fully in the process, and, for the sake of clarity and consistency, to give strong guidance and validation to whatever position is agreed. We must then consider the huge moral minefield, which is how the hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) described definitions of stages of voluntary euthanasia, physician-assisted suicide, life-prolonging treatments and active and passive euthanasia. What is the difference between performing one act—for example, giving a lethal injection—with a particular outcome and failing to perform another, perhaps life-saving treatment, with an identical outcome?

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned the problems of social pressures being brought to bear on families to secure consent. People are made to feel that they are too much of a burden on their families. We dealt briefly—I shall not go into it in detail—with the difficult issue of advance directives or living wills. I agree that we need guidance from the Lord Chancellor's Department, but only after we have had a debate in Parliament. The Lord Chancellor must give a lead, but he should not issue contradictory or slightly insidious directives behind the scenes that nobody knows about.

The problem is increasing with the ageing of the population. In 1951, there were 300 people over the age of 100, most of them probably in Worthing. In 2031, it is expected that the monarch will send 36,000 telegrams. There are 1,162,000 people over the age of 85. I conclude by looking on the bright side. My hon. Friend the Member for Broxbourne (Mrs. Roe) referred to her work with the all-party hospice group, there have been interesting developments in Holland on passports to live, which have been introduced as a reaction to some innovations there, and a number of people have changed their minds, as people do.

Advances in palliative care could eventually rule out one of the arguments made in favour of euthanasia—that it should be an option for patients whose quality of life is negligible. Whereas euthanasia aims to end suffering, palliative care aims to alleviate it. Specialists working in the field say that modern palliative care is changing the face of medicine as it seeks to relieve the effects of illness rather than to cure the disease. If doctors could guarantee a high quality of life up to the moment of natural death, euthanasia campaigners would lose their central argument. The case of Diane Pretty was interesting, and I declare an interest as a patron of St. Barnabas Hospice (Worthing) Limited, which does fantastic work, as, I am sure, do the local hospices of many hon. Members.

I reiterate the questions to the Minister on the Government's commitment to increased funding for hospices, which have been particularly badly hit by national insurance increases. However, I appreciate that she has made some announcements about the standardisation of provision of free national health services to hospices. The subject is very difficult, but we should not duck it. Parliament must keep up with the scientists and medical professionals and must engage in a proper debate, otherwise we shall continue to have high-profile cases that cause enormous pain, anguish and confusion for individuals and their families and that leave doctors in difficult positions.

I hope that today's debate leads to a wider discussion of the more substantial basis of the subject, as the role of Parliament is to foster debate, make difficult decisions and give a lead. As my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West said, Parliament has an opportunity to reclaim its power and to take the initiative on the matter. I hope that it does so.

10.49 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) on securing a debate on such an important subject, on which many in the House and throughout the country have strong views. The debate has been well-informed and expert, with speeches from my hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon), who has extensive interest in the subject and has studied it in great detail, and from my right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron), who has participated in many discussions with the General Medical Council and has considered the extensive consultation that it undertook.

Let us be clear from the beginning; euthanasia is illegal. The intentional taking of life, whether at the patient's request or from a merciful motive, is illegal in this country. The Government support that position and do not plan to change the law.

The legal position has been reinforced by the difficult case of Diane Pretty, which went to the European Court of Human Rights. United Kingdom court law was clear that there are no circumstances in which active intervention can be legitimately undertaken to bring about someone's death, even at that person's request. In 1993, the House of Lords Select Committee considered the matter in detail and decided against support for legalising euthanasia, for fear that vulnerable people might feel pressure, whether real or imagined, to request an early death.

None of that should detract from the real moral and ethical difficulties raised by the case of Diane Pretty. I am sure that all hon. Members would want to offer sympathies to her family and pay tribute to its bravery in difficult circumstances. We should recognise that while many in this House and throughout the country consider the law too relaxed, others support the views of Diane Pretty, and other people who think like her, that the law should change in the other direction. The Government do not support changing the law, other than in particular areas of decision-making.

Hon. Members have raised a series of concerns, and I shall address as many as I can in the available time. The possibility that elderly people are receiving inadequate care is unacceptable in the national health service. We have drawn up a national service framework for older people to raise the quality of care, and made it clear that age discrimination is unacceptable in the NHS, but we should recognise the hard work of staff in the NHS who strive to provide the highest quality of care to elderly people in hospitals, the community and in nursing homes. It is also unacceptable to exclude from decisions on treatment those who are able to consent.

We strongly support, too, the work of hospices, which are world leaders in the provision of palliative care. Hospices are showing increases in their resources from the NHS and fund-raising, which is a good thing. We are increasing resources for hospices, and need to continue to do so.

Concerns were raised about the possibility of "euthanasia by stealth"—to quote some hon. Members. We should be clear that people have a right to refuse treatment; they may choose to have treatment withdrawn. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolton, South-East raised the case of Miss B, whose wish it was that her treatment, including being maintained on a ventilator, be withdrawn. The medical team considered that other options, such as rehabilitative treatment, should be pursued. Eventually, the case came to court. The court made it clear that under the law people have the right to consent to the giving or withholding of treatment, except in particular circumstances such as those set out in the Mental Health Act 1983. The law requires consent to be obtained from adults who are able to give that before the provision of medical treatment.

A health professional who gives treatment without consent could be guilty of both battery and negligence. If a patient has validly withdrawn consent to treatment, provision of such treatment against the patient's wishes constitutes a battery or, in more everyday terms, an assault. In the case of Miss B, the court decided that she was capable of making a fully informed decision on that issue. The underlying principle is that a competent adult has the right to consent to, or to decline, medical treatment, and can decline such treatment even if the decision would result in death.

More difficult questions arise if people are unable to consent or choose themselves. English law distinguishes between those who made their views clear when they had the capacity to do so and those who did not. The law provides that if an advance refusal is valid and applicable to the circumstances, it must be respected.

If people have not set out their views in an advance directive, the law provides that they must be treated in their best interests. Best interest should not be confused with purely medical interest because it represents a holistic view that takes account of people's wishes and preferences when they were competent, including their psychological health, their well-being, their quality of life, and their medical condition. It should not be assumed that treatment is always in a person's best interest. Treatment itself can impose burdens through either the means of delivery, such as drips and tubes, or side effects.

Hon. Members mentioned the Tony Bland case, and in the judgment on the case in the House of Lords, Lord Goff stated:

> "To presume that the incompetent person must always be subjected to what many rational and intelligent persons may decline is to downgrade the status of the incompetent person by placing a lesser value on his intrinsic worth and vitality."

If treatment is not in the best interest of a person—perhaps because the burdens that it would impose outweigh the benefits that it could bring—it cannot be lawfully continued. Continuing such treatment would be an assault on the person. That is true even if the person would die from his or her underlying condition.

Hon. Members raised points about artificial nutrition and hydration. In the Tony Bland case, the court set out that artificial systems for delivering nutrition form part of the medical treatment or care of the patient. That reflects the fact that artificial systems can place burdens on patients and, as a result, patients in hospital sometimes try to pull such tubes out. Under current case law, if artificial nutrition and hydration is agreed to be not in the best interest of a patient, continuing that is unlawful. If any patient is capable of taking nutrition, withdrawal of fluids and food is illegal. However, it is important to understand the law on the subject.

I understand the concern that Parliament should discuss that matter, and I agree that it is important to have full discussions in debates such as this. Our unwritten constitution includes traditions of both case law and parliamentary sovereignty, and nothing is new about this issue compared with any other. Decisions on the best interest of a patient should be taken on an individual, rather than a parliamentary, basis. It would be wrong for Parliament to try to pronounce on the basis of individual cases. We should ask what is the right legal framework within which such individual decisions may be taken, whether they are taken by the patients themselves or, if patients are not capable of doing that, by health professionals in discussion with relatives or, if necessary, even by the courts.

Dr. Pugh: Will the Minister give way?

Yvette Cooper: Time is extremely tight, and I am trying to respond to final points. If I can give way, I shall.

The Government do not believe that there is a case for changing the law. The Lord Chancellor's Department set out points on "Making Decisions", and we shall legislate when parliamentary time permits. However, we do not think that it is necessary for Parliament to change the law on best interests, decision making and euthanasia. Clearly, there will be debate on the subject, but we should recognise that there is no consensus on an alternative to current law. There is no simple alternative that we can roll out to which Parliament will sign up. We need to follow the debate, which will continue. When necessary, the Government will consider issues raised, but this is a difficult subject, about which people will inevitably have very strong, conflicting views. I think that our legal framework strikes the right balance.

Renewable Energy

11 am

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas (Harrow, West): I am grateful that Mr. Speaker has again shown excellent judgment by allowing this brief debate on renewable energy.

On 10 January 2000, I was lucky enough to secure an Adjournment debate on renewable energy. At that time, the mood in the renewables community was one of considerable frustration. Planning difficulties were immense, and despite words of encouragement from Energy Ministers, funding and even sustained cross-Government commitment was lacking, insufficient or beset with difficulties. Being a renewables developer then was a little like knowing that there was a party that one was supposed to attend, but not having the invitation to get across the threshold.

The real dinosaurs in the energy world still viewed the advocate for renewables with suspicion, and thought, "He might be wearing a suit and tie, but at weekends he probably gets out the kaftan and the open-toed sandals before looking for his tin of lentils." Serious energy people, it seemed, were into gas, nuclear power, or even coal. The mood music in the renewables industry is now very different. There is an extra £200 million plus in capital grants, the renewables obligation is now in force and the community renewables initiative and new solar, biomass and wave programmes have been launched. Offshore wind sites are earmarked, too.

There is genuine cross-governmental interest. There has been an energy review, which prioritised renewables, and some serious Select Committee investigations into renewable energy. New trade associations such as the Business Council for Sustainable Energy have emerged, blinking, into the light to champion renewables. There has been much progress since 2000, and genuine tribute should be paid to Ministers in the Department of Trade and Industry and other Departments. Thanks are particularly due to those in the business world who stayed the distance and stuck to the task.

However, an awful lot more could still be done. An even stronger policy environment for renewable energy would offer a series of massive prizes: serious cuts in carbon dioxide emissions; much greater domestic energy security, and significant new income streams and employment opportunities for the rural economy and the manufacturing and marine technology industries, to give just a few examples. Although long-term signals are important—I shall touch on targets beyond 2010—the more immediate question is how we can deliver our 2010 target of obtaining 10 per cent. of electricity from renewables. There is also the immediate task of trying to produce 5 per cent. of our electricity from renewables by 2005.

According to the Library, in 1997 just 1.9 per cent. of all electricity generated came from renewables—a dismal performance of which the Conservative party should be suitably ashamed. By 2000, that figure had risen to 2.5 per cent. I am told that there was a slight drop in 2001 to 2.2 per cent. because of a reduction in the amount of electricity generated by hydro. Despite having far and away the best potential for wind power in Europe, just 0.38 per cent. of electricity is produced from wind in this country. A new framework, the renewables obligation, has been in place for only two months.

I regret that there is still timidity about renewables policy, a sense that we are dipping our toes into the water and that the dead hand of the renewables sceptics—the Bernard Inghams, for example—is holding back development. Why, for example, is there any doubt about the 20 per cent. target that was recommended for 2020 in the energy review? The consultation document that was launched just 10 days ago in advance of the energy White Paper seems to backtrack from that target. The document asks what contribution we can realistically expect renewables to make by that date, and—worse than that—it questions whether the Government should set a target for 2020 at this stage. A decision not to endorse that 20 per cent. target would send a powerful signal that Britain is not serious about renewables beyond 2010, and that would damage the fragile momentum that is beginning to build behind the development of a British renewables industry. Instead of pondering a subject on which the performance and innovation unit spent many hours, we should address the institutional and financial barriers that still hold back the development and deployment of renewables in the United Kingdom.

Funding remains a key barrier. The PIU report rightly highlighted a tenfold decline in UK public sector research and development over the past 15 years, and a much lower spend on energy research in Britain than in the countries that are our main trading partners. The chief scientific advisor flagged up the need for new research on bringing down the cost of renewables. Additional funding is also needed for a solar roof programme, to help us catch up with Germany and Japan. That was stated as an aim by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, in a speech she gave at the Institute for Public Policy Research's low carbon economy conference in December. The solar roof programme that has been announced is welcome, but it will help us to have only 5,000 roofs with solar panels by 2005, whereas Germany is likely to have 140,000, and Japan will have 370,000. Should we not seriously consider offering premium tariffs for solar energy, low interest loans, enhanced capital allowances and solar net metering?

With regard to the bulk of the extra £200 million in capital grants that was made available, the wind industry is the most likely immediate beneficiary, not least because of the huge potential of offshore wind. However, there are significant grid connection and transmission issues. If we are to take advantage of sites in especially deep waters, Government money will be needed to lever in private sector investment, so that such issues can be sorted out.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way, and I congratulate him on securing this important debate at such a significant time for the development of energy policy.

My hon. Friend rightly referred to transmission. Does he agree that it is particularly important to address transmission capacity along the west coast of Scotland? If the full benefits of Scotland's geographical position with regard to wind and wave energy are to be fully utilised, those potential sources of energy must be connected to the national grid. Does he agree that that should be a priority for the Scottish Executive and the UK Government?

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: I agree with my hon. Friend. He has made an excellent point, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry will inform us how that matter, and the other funding issues that I have raised, will be tackled as part of her Department's bid in the comprehensive spending review.

There is a series of institutional problems, not least, the planning system. According to the Renewable Power Association, less than 25 per cent. of non-fossil fuel obligation wind power projects that were contracted for had been commissioned by September 2001; for biomass, that figure is 28 per cent., which is only slightly better.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Does my hon. Friend agree that planning has been the biggest obstacle to the development of renewable energy? In the UK, the pattern of planning applications is patchy. For some reason, planning applications are 10 times more likely to be given assent in Scotland than in England and Wales. England has by far the worst record. Does not something need to be done about that, especially as it would not necessarily cost anything?

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: I do not entirely agree with my hon. Friend, but I accept his broad point that the planning system has been the biggest single factor in delaying renewable energy projects. A more than sevenfold acceleration is needed if we are to meet our 2010 target for sorting out the planning system in England and Wales and making sure that it does not become worse in Scotland. When can we expect clear planning policy guidance to be issued to local planning authorities to help to resolve the issue?

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): The hon. Gentleman is a powerful advocate for wind energy, with which we have much sympathy. While advocating guidance on wind energy, presumably he is a strong advocate for allowing local residents a large say in it. I do not suppose that the good burghers of Harrow on the Hill would be chuffed at the prospect of having a wind farm on top of the hill.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: The good burghers of Harrow on the Hill and of Harrow, West have a sophisticated understanding of such issues. Planning difficulties would not be a factor in Harrow. The hon. Gentleman made a fair point that local residents need to be consulted. However, we must speed up the process and still make sure that people have their say. As for offshore wind sites, only 18 have been identified despite the considerable potential for more. Business interest in offshore wind has been much higher than expected—higher even than the excellent British Wind Energy Association predicted.

Even though the consents process has been compressed for offshore wind, each site is still likely to take more than 12 months to secure full planning consent. The process needs speeding up further. It assumes that the Ministry of Defence has not objected to those particular wind farm sites. A key feature of our approach to sites for turbines has been to leave developers to find suitable sites themselves. The Ministry is understandably worried about the impact on radar and, if a technical solution cannot be found, surely the Government need to be more active in earmarking suitable offshore and onshore sites for wind farms.

Given the number of wind farm sites to which the MOD objects, the renewable industry's most paranoid minds have been wondering whether Don Quixote has not been reincarnated as Colonel Blimp, and whether the planning system has replaced Sancho Panza as the new modern weapon of war against windmills.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Does the hon. Gentleman share my worry about the sites that the MOD is now opposing? Its recent decision to oppose offshore as well as onshore wind farms and the fact that they cannot be constructed in areas of outstanding natural beauty or in national parks leaves little suitable wind-speed areas left. That means an overdevelopment of sites in areas such as mid-Wales, which is disproportionate to the amount of sites that should be placed there.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: The potential disruption of radar is a serious issue. It is not a problem that can be taken lightly. Will my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary say what progress has been made in finding a technical solution? Either way, is it not time that the MOD had much better engagement with developers of renewables, so that we can stop the significant costs and wasted effort that an MOD objection late in the day to a wind farm proposal can cause?

I have been lucky enough to chair the parliamentary renewables group for several years. In March, some of us visited Germany to examine the reasons for the success of its renewables programme. In Schleswig-Holstein, where wind turbines are an accepted feature of the landscape, 1 per cent. of the state area has been specifically prioritised as wind farm sites. Only wind farms can be erected on them. Early identification of sites has stopped the planning blight that we have come to expect in Britain

Another reason for a less hands-off approach to site selection for offshore wind is that substantial wind farms will need to be located in much deeper waters, require more complex technology and, possibly, legislative time, and will certainly cost more initially. As I mentioned earlier, there will also be significant grid connection issues. In the light of our experience with onshore wind, a much more proactive approach to offshore wind farm sites is now needed. Perhaps my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary can tell us when we might expect a strategy for offshore wind farm sites.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I also was on the trip to Germany. I remind my hon. Friend that we were told in Schleswig-Holstein that the wind farms were a major tourism industry. There have been concerns about the effect on the landscape of both onshore and offshore wind farms, but people in

[Joan Ruddock]

Germany said that they provide clean energy and chime well with environmental concerns, and that tourism has increased.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. It is interesting that she makes that point. To allude to the intervention made by the hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall), the people of Swaffham initially objected strongly to a very large turbine that was put up there. It is now an accepted and popular feature of the landscape and has helped to stimulate tourism in the area.

Mr. Lazarowicz: On that point, I do not know whether my hon. Friend is aware of the report produced by the central research unit of the Scottish Executive in August 2000 on public attitudes to wind farms in Scotland. The research found that respondents were generally positive about wind farms. Indeed, those who lived nearest to wind farms were actually more positive about them than those who lived farther away. Most interesting, although 40 per cent. of respondents anticipated problems prior to the development, only 9 per cent. remained concerned after the wind farms were put in place. In other words, the fears were not proven.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. That survey offers genuine hope that the Bernard Inghams and others in the flat-earth brigade who oppose wind farms are losing the battle.

Another key institutional barrier for many smaller and medium-sized renewables developers has been the new electricity trading arrangements. I believe that it is now accepted that NETA has had a positive effect in reducing electricity prices overall, but its effect on intermittent generators such as wind power has been very serious, reducing significantly the income to those generators, stalling new development and increasing the risk identified by bankers for those wanting to invest in renewable energy.

To the DTI's credit, the former Energy Minister recognised the damage that NETA was about to do prior to its launch and asked Ofgem to carry out a review, which was published in September last year. It showed that there had been a huge drop in output of renewables plant. Carbon emissions were on the increase, as coal plant had replaced more environmentally benign plant, and not even the skilled operators of companies such as BP have been able to find a way through the new risk that Ofgem has unleashed in the energy market. In hindsight, it seems that NETA has been designed in glorious isolation from the Government's environmental goals—a classic case of unsustainable development and progress.

The PIU energy review recommended a series of transitional arrangements over and above those already under way to help small generators. They are to be implemented by January 2003. A concern that I flagged up in last week's debate on the preparations for Johannesburg is that, according to the Combined Heat and Power Association, which met with Mr. McCarthy and his officials a few days ago, Ofgem still does not seem to have any clear idea on the way forward. I hope that Ministers will give Ofgem a very clear steer that it has to sort out the problem.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy announced that the new electricity trading arrangements are to be extended to Scotland at the same time as the Scottish Executive is rolling out major plans for wind turbines in Scotland. We need assurances that NETA's problems in England and Wales are not going to hamper the Scottish Executive's efforts to roll out its programme for wind. Given that there is a vacancy on the Ofgem board, it and the Government can help by making sure that someone who understands renewable energy, rather than the traditional lawyer, accountant or dry economist, is appointed.

The final institutional barrier that needs urgently to be addressed is the way in which local distribution networks are organised and financed, because embedded generation has traditionally had difficulties in securing access to the grid without incurring huge additional costs. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will be able to say something about how the recommendations of the embedded generation working group have been taken forward. That working group was an example of joined-up, cross-governmental work in which officials from the DTI and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs worked alongside industry representatives.

The PIU recommended an extension of such cross-departmental working through the creation of a sustainable energy unit. That would not be as good as a sustainable energy agency, but is, nevertheless, a significant step forward. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will be able to say how progress is being made in establishing such a body.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on securing the debate, and agree with the case that he is making. Does he agree, however, that the Government should seek to support those who are promoting hydro-generation and that we should maximise all renewable sources of energy?

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: The hon. Gentleman is right. As I mentioned in my comments about funding, perhaps hydro sources will be included in a possible bid to the comprehensive spending review? I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can enlighten us about that.

Lastly, I welcome the creation of Renewables UK, which is based in Aberdeen, to promote the British renewables industry. I hope that its brief can be extended to include other sustainable energy technologies such as combined heat and power. I hope that we will continue to see high-profile ministerial effort to encourage both national and international energy businesses to locate renewable energy plant, and in particular manufacturing plant, in the UK. At the moment, we have only one small wind turbine manufacturing plant, which has just been set up. Clearly there is massive potential for more plants of that sort.

In summary, renewable energy has massive potential in both our country and internationally to help tackle the problems of climate change, to increase the diversity and security of our domestic energy supply and to be the engine for new green business opportunities. We need to be more ambitious if we are to seize the opportunities available to us. Although Ministers have taken a series of important steps, much more needs to be done.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (in the Chair): Members should note that we intend to start the winding-up speeches at 12 o'clock.

11.23 am

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on securing this important debate. I apologise to him for missing the first minute of his speech; that was because I was with Mr. Speaker. At school, the best excuse for missing the start of a lesson was to say that one was with the headmaster.

I want to draw Members' attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests. I recently attended the fourth inter-parliamentary meeting of the European Forum for Renewable Energy Sources at Santiago de Compostela in Galicia. I want to take this opportunity to learn one or two lessons from the expansion of renewable energy in Galicia. Those lessons will be apposite to another small, wet, green, hilly country on the west coast of Europe, namely Wales. What we saw in Galicia applies to the difficulties in expanding renewable energy in Wales, which, as the hon. Member for Harrow, West said, relate to planning and wind energy.

One of the first things to say in this regard is that 70 per cent. of wind energy expansion in Galicia has been funded, manufactured and maintained by local Galician businesses. That contrasts strongly with what the hon. Member for Harrow, West said about the very small manufacturing and maintenance industry for wind energy in the United Kingdom at the moment. There is a huge gap between the potential for an area such as Wales in expanding wind energy and biomass, which I will touch on later, and the manufacturing capability and the ability of our local businesses to benefit directly from that. If there were a better fit between the two, some of the public objections to the expansion of renewable energy, and wind energy in particular, could be overcome.

There were three main problems facing the expansion of wind energy in Galicia. The first was the question of interconnectivity and the reliability of the grid. That is a problem that we undoubtedly face in this country. Galicia overcame that by working hard with distribution companies. We still have to overcome that in the United Kingdom because there is a problem with NETA. I am concerned that we have not yet seen the environmental guidelines that were supposed to be issued to Ofgem, which would perhaps give them a better steer around some of those issues.

When we took evidence from the director general of Ofgem in the Environmental Audit Committee, it was clear that its view on the needs of future customers was a very narrow, commercial and market-led view that did not take into account the future needs of the customer base as a whole. One of the problems is that Ofgem has no environmental guidelines. The DTI has been preparing such guidelines, and I hope that the Under-Secretary will tell us when they are issued.

The second issue that Galicia faced was that of environmental impact assessments for wind farms. It was particularly necessary to work out how they would be applied to local communities. That has been worked out, and the people there now have a model for environmental impact assessments. I think that it would be useful if we could learn from places such as Galicia and Germany—I also visited Germany during the Environmental Audit Committee investigation into renewables—which also faced up to planning issues.

In my constituency, where the DTI has just approved the application for the largest wind farm in England and Wales, one of the complaints that I receive is that wind turbines are noisy. I was interested in that, and we visited a test site in Galicia for a new set of wind turbines, including one of similar size to those that will be constructed at Cefn Croes in Ceredigion. I took a quick film with a digital camera of the wind turbine turning so I could know how noisy it was. I could then put the film on the website and invite people in my constituency to log on and see how noisy the turbine was. However, that was not possible; the coach in which we had come up to the top of the mountain to view the turbine still had its engine running, and all I could hear was the engine of the coach. I could not hear the wind turbine, and I had to ask the driver to turn the engine off. Even after that, it was not noisy enough to register on a digital camera. There is a lot of misinformation about what a modern wind turbine is like. The more people who see them, visit them and have experience of them, the less some of the opposition will be.

The third issue faced in Galicia was that of local planning difficulties. That had been a very real problem, which was only overcome—as it was in Germany—by joint planning work by the local xunta in Galicia and the national Government in identifying upfront sites that would be suitable for wind farms. That is so different from the approach that we take in this country where we just open up the field and decide on a hit-and-miss basis whether a wind farm can go here or cannot go there. In the case of the Kielder forest development, we were waiting for more than eight years, until the Ministry of Defence objections on tactical training areas suddenly overturned the largest wind farm application in England. That brings into disrepute the Government's central strategy of meeting renewable targets.

In their review of the planning process, the Government have to consider how planning processes can be meshed at a local level so that local people have their say in the choosing of the site, but once those sites have been identified the process should flow more freely and openly. The success in Galicia means not only that 70 per cent. of their wind energy is funded and maintained by local businesses, but that they have 30 per cent. of Spain's complete, installed renewable energy wind capacity. As a region, Galicia itself ranks third or fourth in the world. The potential for Wales is along those lines.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: Was the hon. Gentleman's experience in Galicia that the local political parties supported renewable energy and wind farms, or that they supported them only in principle—in a wider national sense—while opposing local developments for electoral advantage?

Mr. Simon Thomas: That is the hon. Gentleman's tangential way of asking whether I talked to Liberal Democrats in Galicia. The political parties that I spoke to were united in agreeing with the process that was

[Mr. Simon Thomas]

being undertaken. I could contrast that with the behaviour of political parties in Wales, where, with regard to Cefn Croes, they have tried to jump on the party political bandwagon, even though they espouse renewable energy policies nationally.

Wales clearly has the potential to contribute as a nation in the UK set-up. Galicia expects that, by 2010, 89 per cent. of its energy will be produced from renewables, together with biomass and solar energy. That would meet Spain's 12 per cent. renewable target, and Galicia is keen to meet the Spanish EU obligations by itself. It knows the benefit that that would bring to Galician business and to the region's economy.

It is worth noting that Galicia also has an expanding tourist economy, and the point made by the hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) is relevant. I hope that the Under-Secretary will say what work the Government will undertake to ensure that the expansion of wind energy and renewables does not affect tourism. I hope that the Government are considering the issue, so that they can disprove the myths that are around.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that renewable energy is not an end in itself? The purpose of pursuing renewable strategies and initiatives is to moderate or eliminate climate change, and thereby protect wildlife diversity and landscapes. It is important that we ensure that renewable projects to do not destroy the features that we are keen to preserve.

Mr. Simon Thomas: I agree, with the major caveat that I would not put landscape in the same category as biodiversity. A wind turbine can be easily dismantled so that it does not greatly affect the landscape. The hon. Gentleman may be aware of a big project to build on the mountains between Tregaron and Abergwesyn, and I was concerned about one of the landscape considerations. There is a Neolithic cairn in the area, and some landscape experts said that we should preserve the landscape as Neolithic man would have seen it. That is absolute nonsense, because we need the landscape to work for the benefit of local people. People in Tregaron remember the living, working landscape, on which there were many small farms and sheep, before the conifers came. The hon. Gentleman will know what I mean from his own experience in Powys. We must therefore be careful not to put landscape considerations above climate change considerations.

I agree that biodiversity is important, but I have seen no significant effect on biodiversity from renewables projects. I specifically asked about bird strikes at the wind test site in Galicia, and I was told that there had not been one verifiable bird strike on the whole test range. There are many myths about the effect of wind energy and wind farm development on biodiversity.

I shall conclude with a few words on biofuels. On 21 May, I, and other members of European Standing Committee A, discussed two draft directives on biofuels. The targets directive dealt with the promotion of biofuels for transport, and the second directive dealt with the possibility of a reduced rate of excise duty on certain biofuels. I hope that the Under-Secretary will have something to say about them. The targets directive is important, and I support it.

However, we need mandatory targets rather than indicative ones; the second directive, on the rate of biofuel tax, is potentially very damaging to biofuels in this country. It would link the rate that the member state was allowed to levy on biofuels to the duty rates for mineral fuels, mainly oil. That would be damaging. We have a high diesel levy. If we linked our biodiesel levy to that, it could damage expansion of biofuels in the UK.

I visited a bioethanol plant that was about to open in Galicia. There, when it was decided to make such a major investment, it was also decided to have a 0 per cent. rate on biofuels. The directive would make a 0 per cent. levy on biofuels illegal in European law; it would have to be a minimum of 50 per cent. of the conventional rate on fuels, and that would be destructive to biofuels in the UK.

I hope that the Under-Secretary will say something about the recent announcement of new money for biomass power stations for the United Kingdom. I declare an interest, as a chair of the working group on biomass in Ceredigion. A small CHP has opened for the Llandysul leisure centre, but I would welcome the ability to open a real power station, perhaps in the Aberystwyth area, powered by crops grown by local farmers and giving electricity and light to the people of the district. I hope that the Under-Secretary will say something about the opportunities opened up by recent announcements.

11.36 am

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on securing the debate, who is so actively interested in renewables. In contributing to this debate, I want to refer to something different because he has, as I knew that he would, given a comprehensive review of renewables and of what is required.

I want to concentrate on people who suffer a great energy deficit; those in developing countries. I recommend to everybody the consultation document "Energy for the Poor", issued by the Department for International Development, from which I am going to quote. The countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, according to the most recent survey, consumed 54 per cent. of commercial primary energy, compared with 12 per cent. in transitional countries, 11 per cent. in China and 23 per cent. in other developing countries. Slightly more than 1 billion people in industrialised countries consumed about 54 per cent. of total conventional energy supply, whereas 5 billion others consumed the remaining 46 per cent. To meet the basic cooking needs of the 2 million people who are not served by modern fuels would take no more than 1 per cent. of global conventional energy consumption.

The fact that poor people have to spend a substantial part of their income to meet any energy needs at all means that even small changes in the price of fuel can put people into or out of poverty. Particularly in remote areas, switching to local energy supplies can reduce costs for the poor. They could also benefit from lower energy costs if new, clean energy technologies were to be encouraged worldwide. If we were to move to the larger volumes of manufacture that we, in the developed world, also need, we could bring down the cost of that technology. That would be of enormous advantage to people in developing countries.

In order to warrant increased volume of manufacture, the demand for such technologies needs to be increased here, as my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West has indicated. The G8 renewable energy task force recognises that the fastest way in which to increase demand and deployment of the renewable energy technologies is to increase their use in developed countries, thus bringing down the cost and making them more affordable. However, other mechanisms are equally important, particularly so as we prepare for the summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg.

In my brief speech, I want to focus on the role of export credit agencies, which are the main public financiers of energy projects that contribute to climate change. Such projects often result in environmental devastation and destruction of local communities worldwide. ECAs remain a clear case of lack of coherence between trade and environmental policies throughout the European Union. EU export credits benefit but a few large multinational companies while fostering unsustainable development outside EU borders. The United Kingdom Export Credits Guarantee Department is, I am sorry to say, no exception.

I refer hon. Members to early-day motion 1299, which calls for action for clean energy at the world summit on sustainable development. It

> "supports the Choose Positive Energy Campaign spearheaded by The Body Shop International and Greenpeace, which aims to secure a commitment"—

from world leaders at the Johannesburg summit—

> "to deliver clean, renewable energy to two billion people in the world without access to electricity services, within 10 years".

The early-day motion

> "further notes that the Export Credit Guarantee Department has facilitated the construction of fossil fuel projects in the developing world that cumulatively contribute 13.3 million tonnes of carbon to the earth's atmosphere every year."

Clearly, change is necessary. It is also a duty. I refer to a briefing from the international co-ordinator of Friends of the Earth's climate change campaign, which says:

> "As part of the Marrakech accords, adopted at the 7th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change last November, governments agreed that export credit agencies specifically should support the global transfer of climate-friendly technologies."

The ECGD should already be acting in accordance with that framework convention on climate change.

Energy modellers say that reducing emissions to a level that would avoid dangerous climate change without relying on the widespread use of nuclear power would require that energy efficiency be maximised and renewable energy account for at least 40 per cent. of global energy consumption by 2050, and 80 per cent. by 2100. The deployment of sustainable energy technologies such as renewable energy and energy efficiency is desperately needed to avoid further accumulation of the devastating environmental and social impacts already associated with fossil fuels, large dams and nuclear power.

However, this has not yet impacted on the strategy of our ECGD or other ECAs throughout Europe. Predictions by the International Energy Agency suggest that renewable energy will represent only 3 per cent. of global primary energy mix by 2020 if the business-as-usual investment trends continue. Again, it is obvious that change must come. In that context, organisations such as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth and WWF are all bringing pressure to bear on ECAs to change their means of operation. They have recently sent a letter requiring that ECAs should allocate 20 per cent. of their energy portfolios to the support of sustainable energy.

Globe UK, of which I am the chair, and Globe Europe have been more modest in demanding 10 per cent. Whether the target is 10 or 20 per cent.—I hope that we support the larger target—it is apparent that a strategy needs to be developed if we are to help developing countries out of their dire poverty, of which energy is an essential part, and devise sustainable means of energy use for them.

Friends of the Earth International, Greenpeace and the World Wildlife Fund have specifically called for the funding of fossil fuels, large dams and nuclear power to be phased out, starting with an immediate cessation of all funding for export-oriented fossil fuel extraction projects, nuclear power and dams that do not meet the standards of the World Commission on Dams, as well as any other projects that do not receive prior informed consent from local communities in developing countries.

It has been suggested that taking such a "dark green" attitude is a means of imposing western values on developing countries that are desperately poor in energy. However, I would suggest that we are trying to give the developing world the best of our technology to increase production of that technology and therefore lower its cost in such a way that people in developing countries will have real choice and be able to choose the sustainable energy sources and production that are most relevant to their own needs.

That view is echoed in the 2001 report of the G8 renewable energy taskforce. The report called upon export credit agencies to identify criteria to assess the local and global environmental impacts of energy projects and establish minimum standards of energy efficiency and carbon intensity. The report noted that simply supporting renewable energy is not enough; subsidies for conventional energy must be reduced simultaneously.

I appreciate that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary does not have a direct responsibility for this area. However, I would press on her the need for Government thinking, as we have so often said, to be joined-up. There is a real connection between our need in the developed world to tackle the most critical environmental question of climate change and the needs of developing countries to emerge from poverty and to have fuel sources appropriate to their needs. There are also the needs of our own manufacturing industry. All of those can be brought together in a win-win situation. I ask the Under-Secretary to discuss with her colleagues in DFID how overseas development money should be spent, and with the ECGD what support should be given to the export of energy sources.

11.47 am

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on securing the debate. The subject is significant and will become even more so in the years to come. I acknowledge, too, that he has been a long-standing supporter of renewable energy, even when it was much less fashionable than it is today.

I like to think that the hon. Gentleman may have received some encouragement for his view when he was, in the previous Parliament, a member of the Environmental Audit Committee, of which I have the honour to be the Chairman. He would be interested to know, if I can give a short promo for the Committee's work, that we are about to produce a report on renewable energy, with all the trenchancy, realism and action-oriented values that I am sure Conservative Members would acknowledge are characteristic of that Committee. I am sure that he will support that report and ask for a debate on it when it is published.

He is right to say, as other hon. Members have said, that the prime driver for an interest in the expansion of renewable energy is climate change. A report brought out today by the United Nations and introduced by Mr. Klaus Topfer, the executive director of the United Nations environment programme, reinforces the point about climate change. It predicts a surge in the incidence of wars, famine and other catastrophes linked to humanity's over-exploitation of nature. The report is apparently rather apocalyptic in tone; I have not yet seen it, as it came out only this morning. It considers what has been achieved in the past 30 years—not very much—and offers a look at the 30 years ahead. It also includes the global environmental outlook that is produced every year, and clearly shows that we should be cautious about the way in which we are developing our economic policies.

Clearly, the second main driver is the run-down in our own sources of energy. For example, nuclear power produces 25 per cent. of our energy resources but is predicted to provide only 3 per cent. by 2020. That is a huge reduction in an emissions-free source of energy. As we know, production of oil and gas is beginning to decline, and the United Kingdom—having been a big exporter of those commodities—will become a major importer over the next 20 years. Coal is now a minor player. Whatever view one takes of the role of nuclear power, a huge gap is undoubtedly opening up in the energy market. Renewables will be an essential means of filling it.

Thirdly, we should sensibly exploit our own resources. As the hon. Member for Harrow, West and others said, we have the largest resources for renewables of any nation in western Europe; many times larger than those of other countries. It would be foolish to ignore that in a future energy scenario. I am not overly convinced by arguments about security of supply, because countries such as Japan, Germany and even the USA are heavily dependent on outside sources of energy. However, we have an opportunity to exploit our resources sensibly.

Finally, we should consider the question of technological advance. The Environmental Audit Committee recently had the opportunity to talk to the ecology committee of the Russian Duma. The Russians are in a sensitive position because now that America has pulled out of Kyoto, they are a key element in getting worldwide ratification. If they do not ratify, the treaty will probably not be ratified by the world as a whole. They are in a lynchpin position.

The Russians find the question of climate change debatable; perhaps because they have a large country and can afford to take a more phlegmatic view than smaller countries such as Galicia or Wales. They asked us what point there was to the renewables proposals if no account was taken of climate change, and we suggested that renewables and the precautionary approach to climate change could create a good business situation. It could be a win-win situation from a technology point of view. A country such as Russia needs to take account of the obvious technological gains that countries such as Denmark and Germany are making because of their positive attitude to renewable energy.

Those are the four key reasons why it is right to take a strong approach to renewable energy. As the hon. Member for Harrow, West candidly admitted, the Government are taking a timid approach to the opportunity. They have not satisfactorily addressed the planning situation, which hon. Members acknowledge is crucial and could be a major stumbling block. As we discovered from the EAC visit to Germany, there is a possibility of a different approach, given careful Government analysis. There are parts of the United Kingdom that would welcome wind farms, whereas other parts would not. As a Member representing London, I know that it would be difficult to get planning permission for wind farms in my constituency, but in other parts of the country they might contribute to the economy without unnecessarily damaging the environment. Some Government steer would be in order to help the problem along.

There is also the problem of the new electricity trading arrangements—NETA—which the Government have not yet tackled. As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, NETA has had a favourable effect on price and eliminated inefficient producers, but it has also had a devastating effect on investment. That is a serious problem for small renewable producers. We do not want in this country a situation similar to that which occurred in California, whereby investment is so devastated that we are short of power and suffer blackouts as a consequence. NETA needs to be considered, after the short period in which it has run fully.

There is also the question of picking winners. The Government seem extraordinarily reluctant to take a view, but if they do not pick winners they may end up picking losers by default. Finally, the PIU report was disappointing. It was trumpeted as a major and significant review of this important matter, but it was bland, stated obvious facts that we all knew and was complacent. I fear that the Government may be reacting complacently and I urge them to look at the need for action during the next 12 months when many issues will come together, including the NETA review planning. They should look at their own plans in the light of the comprehensive spending review, and I echo the hon. Member for Harrow, West in wanting to see serious action-oriented policy during the next six months.

11.55 am

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I am delighted to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam), who has great expertise—much greater than I have—in the matter. I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on securing this important debate, which would have been the preserve of the beards and sandals brigade 10 or 15 years ago. I may have retained the beard, but I am now shod more appropriately. The fact that the subject is now discussed seriously shows its importance.

Our energy policy has been guided by various factors: initially economic, but increasingly environmental and social, including the alleviation of fuel poverty. My hon. Friend the Member for Orpington also referred to security of supply. We are more aware of climate change and global warming and we must address the problem seriously. With reference to the flat earth brigade, whenever there is a cold snap, someone says, "Global warming; what global warming? It's a load of rubbish. Winters are colder or wetter" and so on. That is a short-term view, and it is becoming increasingly well established that climate change is a serious problem, although some people still deny its existence.

One of the problems—if it can be called a problem—is that competition in the energy market has resulted in increased consumption, and I have noticed that even in my family. When I was a young lad, I was always being told to switch off lights and so on, but there seems to be less awareness of that now. That results from price rather than awareness of the need to use less energy. The Home Energy Conservation Bill, which is currently going through Parliament, now includes targets—I hope the Government will allow those targets to remain in the Bill—and will have a positive effect.

Another problem that has been mentioned, particularly by the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), is that there are many urban myths, as well as rural myths, about renewable energy. It is not 100 per cent. environmentally friendly and it would be foolish to say that it is. I was pleased to hear about the experience of bird strikes in Galicia. Some hon. Members have a great interest in biodiversity, and particularly birds, although the matter is not clear cut.

I was also pleased to hear about Galicia, where the bull has been taken by the horns—that may be the wrong phrase to use in a Spanish context—and there have been some achievements. All political parties there have taken the matter on board. It is vital that all interest groups, including political parties, put aside ideological and short-term interests. My comments to my neighbour, the hon. Member for Harrow, West about Harrow on the Hill—I can see the spire from my home—may have been flippant, but, understandably, there will always be some nimbyism, of which we are all sometimes guilty. However, we must put those interests aside in a genuine effort to identify a strategy that is on balance likely to deliver the greatest benefits overall. That will be achieved only by political commitment at the highest levels sustained over a period of time. I believe that not only hon. Members but an increasing number of our constituents expect that from the Government.

12 noon

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): I congratulate the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on his work not only for the debate but over several years in promoting renewable energy and bringing it to the forefront of thinking in Parliament and elsewhere. He left some interesting and powerful challenges and questions for the Under-Secretary, and I want to leave enough time for her to respond. I hope that if she finds some of his questions too difficult to answer today, she will supply answers subsequently to hon. Members.

Energy policy is pivotal to the future prosperity of the UK economy and to the sustainability of the UK environment. That is why it is so important to develop a strong renewable energy industry to respond to our energy needs.

There are two key arguments. A successful modern economy needs access to reliable and affordable power in the long term. The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) mentioned conservation and switching off lights. Although much work needs to be done to promote the efficient use of the energy that is available, the production of energy from a renewable source is extremely important.

We need to ensure that the power that we produce is sustainable not only economically, with the right price over the right interval of time, but environmentally. The hon. Member for Harrow, West and others pointed out the opportunities and difficulties that exist for the UK. Hon. Members will agree that he gave an informed and realistic critique of the issues that we face. The entire debate so far has been commendably free of motherhood and apple pie, even though it relates to a matter that was until a little while ago a fringe activity.

There seems to be a gap in the Government's thinking and planning: they have their own energy gap, between the talk and the action. I hope that the Under-Secretary will assure us that they are determined to bridge it.

The Government garnered a great deal of praise because of their leading role in developing the Kyoto agreement. Indeed, they almost boasted about it. Yet in parallel they introduced a gas moratorium. They have taken the credit for getting rid of the non-fossil fuel obligation and substituting the climate change levy, yet we have had the NETA and their impact on the combined heat and power industry.

The Government talk about the need for social and environmental guidelines to inform how the energy market is run. In November, I was told that such guidelines were likely to be issued in January. I have not asked recently, but it may be next January. Meanwhile, Ofgem resists applying any implied social or environmental guidelines and is rigidly stuck on a strict market interpretation of its role and functions. I have challenged its director on several occasions. He makes the point that if the Government wanted him to apply social and environmental guidelines, they would issue them. I therefore hope that we shall hear that those are in the post to Ofgem even as I speak.

We have had the PIU's energy review, which has been dismissed this morning as bland and stating the obvious. It may have stated the obvious for many of us participating in the debate, but for many people outside, its conclusions were not necessarily obvious. It points in the right direction. It could have been bolder, more succinct or more determined in its recommendations. However, I criticise not the PIU report but what flowed from it—the key issues for consultation, which were issued a couple of weeks ago. On close reading, I find

[Mr. Andrew Stunell]

that they include basically every question that was in the PIU review, unqualified by any opinion, additional fact or perspective on where we might go next.

The consultation period is commendably long compared with all the other consultations, which are issued on 1 August and we have to reply by 31 August. However, it is so open-ended that one fears that yet another innovative project has been put on the back-burner, and that little more will be heard of it. Again, the talk is strong, and the action weak.

The renewables obligation has been delivered to us. I was delighted when it came before the House as a statutory instrument, but I was not delighted that the proposals for the renewables obligation to be an escalator beyond 2010 were not accepted, as that would have made a lot of sense. Although we have an escalating requirement for the use of renewables, it stops at 2010. The hon. Member for Harrow, West made a good point about the need to extend those targets beyond that date not because they are a threat to industry, but because they provide a framework for future investment. If we wait until 2005, 2006 or 2007 to set those targets, investment will never catch up.

Like the hon. Members for Harrow, West and for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock), I went on the trip to Germany. We discovered that although we have installed 60 MW of wind power in the past year, Germany has installed 2000 MW. It has designated offshore areas, and has taken a route that enables development to take place, rather than one that prevents it. The UK has a small number of photovoltaics. We shall have perhaps 5,000 by 2005; Germany will have 140,000.

The Government's talk about renewable energy being a vital issue with top priority can be somewhat discounted when we realise that there have been four different Energy Ministers in the past five years and that four Departments—DTI, DEFRA, the Treasury and DTLR—have responsibility for different fragments. There is talk of vigorous expansion, but there is a muddle about making onshore and offshore developments. We cannot even agree about net metering, although many countries in Europe and across the Atlantic are doing it as a matter of course.

Ministers have talked the talk, and today we would like to hear the Under-Secretary say that she intends to walk the walk. Could we have some co-ordination, put a sustainable energy policy in place, rescue CHP and get wind power going properly? Will the Government also invest in energy conservation? It is possible to prepare the UK to meet not just our 2010 targets but sensible targets beyond then. As soon as they are announced, industry can start to provide the investment that can deliver not only the targets but access to the expanding international market for renewables. There is deep frustration—and an overheated planet—out there; I hope that the Under-Secretary will respond to that.

12.8 pm

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): I echo the congratulations to the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas), who has been in the forefront of such debates. I have always thought of him as a rather forward-looking person, but there were moments in his speech when I thought that I was facing a hybrid creature—a cross between a dinosaur, an ostrich and Mr. Angry—across Westminster Hall. I am sure that he will take that in the spirit in which it is intended.

The hon. Gentleman can be forgiven a little party political taunting, but it was the Government of my noble Friend Lady Thatcher that funded the research that discovered the hole in the ozone layer in the first place. It was her Government, and that of my former right hon. Friend John Major, that led the way to Rio and all that followed. It is ridiculous to make the assertion that he made; as if anyone would believe it. May we have less Millbank spin, please?

Of course we are not ashamed of what we achieved. If there had not been the liberalisation of markets that began under the Thatcher Government, we would not be in our current position of leading all European countries in the energy market and energy consumerism. It is important to recognise that, when we consider renewables, we should take it for granted that we are all in favour of them because their first objective is to tackle climate change and carbon emissions. That straightforward objective is sometimes mixed, to say the least.

The hon. Member for Harrow, West talked about NETA. I was interested that he believes that no lawyers, accountants or dry economists should have anything to do with renewable energy; I am a dry economist, I suppose. We should be more realistic about the problems, and I shall concentrate my remarks on practical impact.

As several hon. Members said, the Government are pepper-potting or adopting a scattergun approach on renewables and carbon emissions. We must firmly focus on carbon emissions. Neither the United Kingdom nor the European Union are single-mindedly dedicated to reducing carbon emissions. The processes and tax structures in place throughout the European Union are a strange mixture. That is, however, a bit wide of the mark for this debate.

It is important to reinforce the point made by the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) that the Government are in a bit of a muddle. The recent consultation paper adds to that muddle and to the sense of confusion. We do not believe that the Government know what they are doing when they publish a consultation paper that is a list of more than 100 questions that arise from the previous PIU report, which was only an internal report to the Government. It is scandalous that the Government have not made time available for a debate on the Floor of the House on this important issue. How are we to reflect the wide range of views of our constituents and organisations if we cannot have such a debate? I hope that we shall not have to wait for that debate until January next year when the White Paper will be launched; that date has slipped from the autumn.

The consultation paper is the latest in a long line of papers that raise an enormous number of issues, and summarises questions from the PIU report. However, we should discuss the strategies that the Government must put in place. Doing nothing or dithering is not an option because that would delay important investment decisions that should be taken now.

Perhaps the most important decision to be taken about renewable energy is on security of supply, which is a huge problem. Intermittent generation is inevitable and we must react to that problem positively. NETA has not done that; it is part of the problem, not part of the solution. I sympathise with the criticism of Ofgem; the director is doing his job and the Government have not told him to do it any differently.

Different approaches to the security of supply of existing renewables occur throughout the world. Last year, the regulator in New Zealand had to deal with a substantial drop in water levels. The previous winter had been very dry and the supply squeeze was greater than that in California during the previous year. The market was allowed to work in New Zealand. Price signals were sent to consumers, demand decreased and there were no blackouts. Lake levels have now recovered and, consequently, prices have fallen. Such market flexibility must exist.

Many trading tactics that worsened the supply crisis in California were a consequence of the exploitation of regulatory interventions by market participants. Many interventions such as capacity requirements and congestion payments were designed to protect the security of supply but, ultimately, they had the opposite effect. If the interventions had not existed, the crisis would have been less severe. Security of supply is best achieved by allowing markets to work and intervening only if there is clear market failure and if the cost of that failure outweighs the cost of regulatory fixes.

Many people who are involved in renewables remain worried about the renewables obligation. They believe that we can work our way through it, but the current potential for renewable generation is the real problem. It is limited. I should love to join those who are absolutely determined that, come what may, we will achieve our 2005, 2010 and 2020 targets. However, we must be realistic and note the advice from those who have to produce the technology, such as turbines for wind power. I have been told by a serious source that we would have to construct two wind turbines a day for 20 years to achieve such targets. That is a long shot. The British Wind Energy Association is doing a tremendous promotion job. I was interested to read a comment from Nick Goodall of the BWEA. He said that NETA

> "has, as predicted, shown itself to be a profoundly flawed system . . . that does little to create confidence in intermittent, distributed and small-scale generation."

He is right. Like so many people, he said that planning is one of the main problems.

I wish to concentrate on some of the problems that we are facing. It is not really fair, because the matter is not the Under-Secretary's particular remit; will she be kind enough to write to me about the point that I am about to make? Yesterday, the Minister for Industry and Energy issued a press release from the Scottish islands about crofting law and the impact on crofting of wind energy. He said:

> "If crofting law did not exist in the Highlands and Islands then it would have to be invented for this purpose. Crofting communities are entitled by law to half the development value of projects which take place on their land. That is a principle which could usefully be applied throughout the UK if we are serious about winning acceptance for renewable projects . . . It is a message which should not be lost on the industry, or indeed on landowners elsewhere in the country. If they want support for their projects, they should offer something in return."

If that is a new statement of the Government's policy, it needs clarifying quickly.

In terms of landowners, the current rate of return for royalties is put at about 2 per cent. of gross revenue. It is a standard figure that perhaps the Duchy of Cornwall would expect if wind farms were constructed on its sites. However, if the Minister for Industry and Energy is seriously proposing that the figure should increase to 50 per cent., he will kill stone dead most wind energy and renewables projects. I should be grateful to receive clarification of whether the press release represents a new policy of the Government or a new approach from the Department of Trade and Industry.

Communities feel strongly about such issues. It is no good calling them nimbys. They are not. Ordinary people are seeking straightforward answers to difficult questions. Let us consider the Isle of Arran, in the constituency of the Minister for Industry and Energy. I have had an interesting flow of e-mails and telephone calls with its community. A pyrolysis plant has been proposed for the island. It has received outline planning permission, but there is a dearth of information about it. The Minister has made some inflammatory comments to his constituents about the bubonic plague being imported to the island. Nevertheless, genuine questions have been asked. If we want communities to accept pyrolysis plants or wind farms, we need upfront information and straightforward facts so that fears can be put to rest.

Another problem area is the Cefn Croes farm in the constituency of the Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas). A planted question on today's Order Paper from the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) asks when the Secretary of State

> "will take her decision on the application to build a windfarm at Cefn Croes".

I am sure that such a decision has been made. It has been a hugely controversial problem for the hon. Member for Ceredigion.

There are other areas in which the Government could do more, one of which is geothermal heating. This concerns the interesting matter of building loops that incorporate heat rejecters and boilers to dissipate excess heat and to add heat respectively in extreme conditions. It is more efficient than conventional air conditioning and heating installations. There is also the ground source heat pump when the ground, lake or sea is used as a heat source or a heat sink to eliminate the need for a heat rejecter and boiler. Heat can be extracted efficiently via the heat pump from ground temperatures as low as minus 4 deg C. Such technologies exist. The heat pump technology is up and running in Chesterfield, and Chesterfield borough council has taken a lead in that at the Dunston innovation centre, a three-storey office complex.

There are questions to be asked about roof installations. Powertech Solar Ltd. in Ferndown wants to know why, although we are talking about £20 million of funding for the solar power initiative, the solar energy system does not attract support. Those are different kinds of energy; solar power is photovoltaic, but solar energy is panels on roofs. I could offer further examples. For instance, the Association of Coal Mine Methane Operators is worried because the industry is so tightly restricted.

[Mr. Robert Key]

Progress is being made, but it is piecemeal. That is the problem. If we have to wait for another six months before we have a White Paper, and only then move to legislation, that will be too long; it would lead to the postponement of investment decisions that need to be taken now.

We wish the Government well, but we want to ensure that they go faster and further, and that they are better informed and take people with them on this great quest that—it is important to remember—has the objective of cutting down carbon emissions to stem global climate change.

12.21 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): The debate is taking place at a turning point in the development of renewable energy in this country. At present, less than 3 per cent. of electricity that is generated in the UK comes from renewable sources. Much of it comes from traditional large hydro, despite a growing contribution from other sources, such as wind, biomass and small-scale hydro.

We are now implementing a policy that will advance renewable energy much more quickly than in the past, make a significant renewables contribution to our energy supplies in the coming decade and beyond, and contribute to meeting our Kyoto targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

The centrepiece of our policy is the renewables obligation. It came into force on 1 April 2002. It requires electricity suppliers in England, Wales and Scotland to provide a specified proportion of their sales from renewable sources each year for 25 years. That proportion rises each year until 2010, and our target is that 10 per cent. of sales will come from eligible sources by that year.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) on securing the debate. There is much interest in the subject, and the Government welcome the opportunity to address it.

The 10 per cent. target that we have set is challenging. There is long way to go—and we need to get there quickly—but we believe that the target is achievable through the strategy that we have developed. We expect that renewables will contribute more than 10 per cent. a year after 2010. The PIU review suggested that the targets for beyond 2010 should be considered after progress on the obligation has been examined in 2005–06. The figure of 20 per cent. for 2010 is important because of the impact of the cost of electricity to the consumer.

Mr. Horam: Will the Under-Secretary give way?

Miss Johnson: No. I am sorry, but I have only eight minutes left in which to respond to a lengthy debate, in which many points were raised.

Planning is always regarded as the bugbear of renewables projects—and of wind farms in particular—and it has much concerned hon. Members in the debate. Renewables generally have had about the same success rate as other planning applications in the past decade or so, although the success rate has decreased recently, and is varied by technology.

Achieving our renewables targets means that more renewables generators will be built, and it is not good enough simply to pay lip service to the environment, and oppose sensible action that would help to tackle its problems. There is bound to be some impact on the countryside but, as always, a balance must be struck, and the key is to get public opinion on our side. I agree with the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) that that is important.

Sensitive design can make a great difference to a proposed project's reception. Developers know the public's main objections by now, and they can go a long way towards ameliorating matters through their designs. That may not be the whole answer, but it is certainly an important aspect that developers need to take into account. The public are hugely supportive of renewable energy in principle—several hon. Members made that point—and we need to harness that support in practice.

The Government will produce revised planning guidance for renewables, and a draft is expected to be ready for consultation in the next few months. The equivalent guidelines for Scotland have already been revised, and we shall certainly consider them as a model for the future. We are also allocating £2.5 million to support planners and local decision makers on renewables, and we have allocated £10 million to support community-based renewables.

Applications to build larger-scale projects over 50 MW in England and Wales are approved by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. Many such projects, are in the consents process in Scotland, where such consents are devolved, and in England and Wales. In all, large-scale projects with a total capacity of about 800 MW are seeking consent. Many are wind energy projects, and about half the applications are in Scotland. That gives a good idea of how the introduction of the renewables obligation and the other support that we have introduced is accelerating the drive towards cleaner energy.

I wish to deal with some of the points on planning guidance issues that my hon. Friend and others raised. The Government's national planning policy in England on renewable energy is set out in PPG22, which gives local planning authorities guidance on the issues that affect the siting of all renewable energy projects. Work has already started to revise PPG22. The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions aims to finalise the consultation draft during the summer and to publish a final version next spring. It will underline the key role that planning must play in supporting renewable energy targets.

As several hon. Members mentioned, planning is a significant issue, and a major hurdle for many projects, but regional resources estimates, supported by the Government, suggest that though challenging, our target is achievable. The key is to get public opinion on our side, and developers have a major role. We have also allocated additional funds to achieve further support.

On the DTI bid for renewables in the comprehensive spending review, I am sure that my hon. Friend and other hon. Members appreciate that it is not appropriate to reveal figures when in the middle of discussions with the Treasury. However, the Department gives a high priority to renewables, and we are discussing with the Treasury how that should be reflected in future allocations. We have already increased the budget substantially, including an extra £10 million for blue skies research only last year. We have agreed that more money is needed for photovoltaics in the longer term, and we have just launched the first phase of the DTI major photovoltaics demonstration programme, which is worth £20 million in the next three years. We are also working with the industry on an offshore deployment strategy, but we are not clear that grid connection is the right way forward. I may briefly come back to that later.

On other support measures, renewables are exempt from the climate change levy and, by 2010, the market for ROCs—renewable obligation certificates—will be about £1 billion a year. If we add the value of the electricity itself, including that outside the scope of the obligation, and the value of the climate change levy exemption, we anticipate a total market value for renewable energy of somewhere between £1.5 billion and £2 billion a year by 2010. That is a significant step change for renewables and a massive opportunity for British industry and investors.

The Government recognise the different rates of development of renewable energy technologies. The most commercial technologies will benefit significantly from the renewables obligation, while those that are at the demonstration stage—for example, offshore wind, energy crops and solar photovoltaics—need additional support to bring them to market. Other technologies such as wave and tidal energy need more research and development and prototype testing to work through any remaining engineering problems.

In all, the Government are providing more than £260 million in the next three years through grants and research and development support. That substantial support will bring forward the next generation of renewable energy technologies. I agree with hon. Members that we need to deal with the matter energetically.

I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks that we are at a turning point. By that, I meant that we are moving into a new phase of deployment of renewable energy, with the emphasis now very much on the industry taking forward its plans and utilising all the Government support available. We are pleased to say that the industry is responding well to our initiatives. A good example is offshore wind energy. My hon. Friend the Minister for Industry and Energy announced only a few weeks ago consent for a 76 MW capacity offshore wind farm off the coast at Great Yarmouth. This will be the UK's largest wind farm so far.

He also announced the establishment of Renewables UK, a business support team based in Aberdeen, to maximise UK potential in the supply chain. We now have 19 offshore wind energy projects that have obtained leases of the seabed from the Crown estate, which is the first step in taking forward such projects. The offshore wind energy capital grants scheme is twice oversubscribed. We have received bids for more than 2,000 MW of capacity offshore, which seek some £160 million of grant support. That compares with the £74 million available from the DTI and the new opportunities fund. We agreed that grant provision from the two complementary programmes will be closely co-ordinated and that there will be a single point of access to the process.

The Government's role is to ensure that interest and momentum are maintained and that ambitions can be fulfilled. For offshore wind farms, we need a vision of how larger offshore developments than those envisaged could progress over the next few years.

Mr. John Cummings (in the Chair): Order. We must move on to the next debate.

Political Parties (Funding)

12.30 pm

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak on this subject. I shall begin with a few observations about the state of politics, and particularly party politics in Britain today.

By general agreement there is a crisis of trust in politicians and of respect for parties. In a MORI poll published today, 85 per cent. of the British people say that they do not trust a Minister to tell the truth. Lest hon. Members think that I am making a partisan point, the figures are scarcely better for the Conservative and Liberal Democrat spokesmen. Trust in political parties is also at rock bottom. In 1974, 39 per cent. of people trusted Governments to put the interests of the nation above the party. According to a long-running survey of British social attitudes, which has asked the same question every couple of years since 1974, the figure has now fallen to 16 per cent.

My first observation about the loss of trust makes my second observation particularly ironic. During my five years as an MP, I have come to the conclusion that, contrary to public perception, it would be difficult to find a group of 659 people more dedicated and less corrupt than my fellow MPs. I doubt that any country in the world is less corruptly served by its elected politicians.

My subsequent observations will try to explain the paradox of the first two. The behaviour of parties, particularly the way in which they fund themselves, is a major cause of mistrust in politics. Allocations of cash for favours predate the election of Labour, but the latest rash has been especially severe: Bernie Ecclestone with his £1 million donation; the Mittal scandal; the Hinduja affair; the Enron donation; and now, PowderJect and Richard Desmond.

Then there is the trafficking of honours, which we all know is happening. Perhaps the Conservatives were at it too, but I thought that Labour was going to clean it up, that is until their lordships Bragg, Gavron, Haskins and the rest collected their red cloaks—all are big Labour donors. No wonder that the public think that politics stinks; perhaps it does.

One reason why the parties need to find money, and why the stench has got stronger, is that the once broad base of party funding from individual membership is collapsing. Mass parties are dying. In their 1950s heyday, 4 million people made an annual sub to one of the major parties, and that excluded subs paid through unions. Today, the number is 400,000, which is one tenth. The plain fact is that the major parties are bust, skint and in debt. Both businesses and individuals have simply stopped giving to, or even joining, parties.

I am led to several broad conclusions. First, British party politics, as we have known it—based on mass party activism and having a broad funding base—is history. Both the major parties, but particularly Labour, have to scrape around in unsavoury barrels to make ends meet. Accepting tainted donations has put a stench into the nostrils of the electorate. Party politics simply cannot carry on in that way. We must clean up our act.

I am saying nothing new, although I have not heard our respective party leaders making these points so starkly. None the less, both the previous Conservative Government and the Labour Government have tried to do something about it. They have responded in the same way with two sorts of measure.

First, they have introduced more transparency of donations, the so-called shareholder requirements for corporate donations and the disclosure provisions. Secondly, they have sought to bolster public confidence in politicians by creating respectable, independent-minded, sleaze-busting committees. There is a long list: Downey gave way to Filkin; Nolan gave way to Neill; and we now have Wicks. There is also the Electoral Commission. The trouble, which is not commonly perceived, is that all those initiatives are making the problem worse.

Taking the disclosure provisions first, it is often said that sunlight is the best disinfectant, but in this case disinfectant is killing the patient. Very few public companies even try to obtain shareholder approval for a donation to a political party, so that source of funds is drying up. That leaves parties in the hands a very few, rich, individual donors, which takes us back to Bernie Ecclestone, Mittal and all the rest. Is any hon. Member here prepared to stand up and say that those donations were wholly altruistic? No. So why on earth do we expect the public to believe that they were?

As for the sleazebusters, they certainly constitute a thoughtful, worthy and well-intentioned crew. That is what Britain does well—the best of the good and the great in action. Their problem is that, far from assuaging public concern, everything they say tends only to inflame it. That is not their fault. They make balanced comments and produce considered and worthy reports, but if they so much as hint at a problem with party funding and so on, the press have a feeding frenzy and the public's perception of politics declines further. Far from being part of the solution, the sleazebusters are part of the problem.

What is to be done? I shall not try to cut the canker out of the body politic in five minutes flat and I shall leave the sleazebuster problem, which is particularly difficult, for another day. However, we can do something about the funding of political parties, and we must act decisively to quench the impression that parties can be bought and that influence in government is for sale. Several basic measures are needed.

First, big donations, whether from rich individuals, their companies or trade unions, should be banned entirely. Institutional funding, as it is called, should be ended. I would put a cap on individual donations of £1,000—some say that it should be more and perhaps we could wear £5,000, but it should be low.

Secondly, parties need cash because that measure would remove the last remaining source of funds. A matching funding scheme is the best way forward. I suggest that state funding should provide that by matching donations from individual members of political parties up to a specific limit.

An alternative, which many countries have, is a scheme based on the number of votes cast at the previous election. It looks reasonable, but a severe drawback is readily apparent when looking at the way in which politics operate on the continent. It would almost certainly lead to further centralisation in the selection of Members of Parliament and, therefore, the erosion of that endangered species, the independent Back Bencher.

An even more presidential style of politics would result and I do not like that. We already have a system of government that is too centralised and a system of politics that is too presidential. Payments made by the state on the basis of votes cast would only make the situation worse.

There are objections of principle to state funding, and I shall go through one or two very briefly. They are well rehearsed, and they are almost entirely bogus. The first is the argument that it forces people to give money to causes in which they do not believe. That is a complete straw man. We do not exempt pacifists from tax, even though we know that it is used partly to fund defence spending. In any case, and I think this is a much more important knock-down point, state funding is already here in a big way. About 40 per cent. of the cost of political parties between elections comes in cash or kind from the state already. About 60 per cent. of the cost of fighting general election campaigns is also state-funded one way or another. Those figures may strike some people as surprisingly high. I will put a couple of tables that I have prepared showing how I arrived at those figures in the Library and give them to the Lobby and the Minister after my speech.

What is at stake is not the principle of state funding, but the degree. There is another purist argument against state funding, which is that it would snuff out private civic engagement in the political process and ossify the party structure, turning parties into a unique form of nationalised industry. That is the best rhetoric I can find to justify that argument because I think rhetoric is all that it is, for several reasons. First, the public are already disengaged from party politics. That is the 4 million to 400,000 point with which I began.

Secondly, broader civic engagement is thriving in Britain. Let us look at the vibrancy of pressure groups. There is a huge amount of political activity going on in Britain today, but it is not channelled through the traditional system of party politics. It is mainly boring old politicians such as us, and institutions such as Parliament that find the fact that there is so much of this novel, unusual form of politics going on so concerning. They might be giving us the bird, but people are more informed and attentive to political life in Britain in the widest sense than they have ever been. I am particularly struck when I go to schools in my constituency and find how well informed young people are about politics today, and that they are often already engaged in interest groups. That is quite the opposite from the rhetoric that comes from the main parties about how sad it is that we cannot get the young to vote. The young are deeply engaged in politics, but not the form that we would like them to be engaged in.

The third reason why I think that the purist argument against state funding—that it would lead to civil disengagement—is nonsense is that we are where we are. At least, matching funding will encourage parties to increase their membership and that might revive just a little the type of civic engagement that many want to see. Of course, matching funding will not assuage the public's mistrust of politics and parties at a stroke. State funding has not spared several continental countries from scandals of their own. However, I am confident that we cannot stay as we are.

Politics cannot function without parties, and parties cannot be forever struggling to find the cash to enable them to perform essential functions while struggling to fend off allegations of improper funds brought to them from sources that they would rather not know about. That cannot go on. It will carry on eroding the public's trust in the body politic itself unless we take action. Action is available—the sooner we take it, the better.

12.43 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Dr. Alan Whitehead): I congratulate the hon. Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) on securing a debate on a topical issue—the funding of political parties. I commend him on a thoughtful and carefully reasoned contribution to the debate, which the Government welcome. Equally, we do recognise that at the moment there is no consensus on the issue. Indeed, that is reflected by the fact that I suspect that the hon. Gentleman's contributions are, for the present at least, at odds with the leadership of his party in Parliament and the country.

The hon. Gentleman is right to reflect on a conundrum in public perceptions. Hon. Members on all sides of the party divide—they are represented in the Chamber—have entirely honourable intentions, although they may not agree about how to implement them. In that regard, I share the hon. Gentleman's view of our colleagues, which certainly reflects my overwhelming impression after five years in Parliament.

It is also a conundrum that many members of the public may take a low view of MPs, but a high view of their MP. The way in which they think about their MP differs from the way in which they think about Parliament and MPs in general, because they know him, what he does, how he got there and what his aims and intentions are.

To respond to the hon. Gentleman's points, it would be wrong not to recognise that a carefully developed and robust regime is already in place to deal with the funding of political parties, and the hon. Gentleman mentioned sleazebusters. The Government did not dream up that regime to suit their own ends, and it flows directly from the recommendations in the fifth report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life. The Committee discussed the funding of political parties in the United Kingdom, and was chaired by Lord Neill of Bladen. The policies and practices that the Government follow today are square with its recommendations. The hon. Member for Chichester said that that might be part of the problem when it comes to dealing with the longer-term consequences of any changes, but it is important to recognise the Government's position.

The core values of the existing regime are openness and transparency. When the Neill Committee reported in 1998, it took the view that it would be wrong to limit the amount that any individual company or institution could contribute to a political party, and there were clear arguments in support of that view. It was argued to the Committee that limits on the expenditure of political parties would tend to lessen the need for large donations, and prevent parties from becoming too dependent on a narrow income basis. The Committee felt, however, that that argument was outweighed by the

[Dr. Alan Whitehead]

threat that such restrictions would represent to individuals' freedom to contribute to parties, which is an essential feature of a healthy democracy. At the same time, the recommendation for limits on campaign expenditure would have a regulating effect on levels of donations.

Equally, the Committee saw that openness and transparency were central to ensuring that the public had confidence in politicians and to the effective operation of any democracy. Openness and transparency were seen as the best way of tackling concerns that undue influence on government decision making might arise from donations to political parties. The Committee therefore recommended introducing a requirement to disclose any donation of £5,000 or more, to remove illegitimate pressure and suspicions that improper influence or access might be gained by making substantial donations.

The Committee noted that further transparency would be obtained by requiring a company to obtain the agreement of its shareholders before making donations, and the hon. Gentleman mentioned one practical outcome of that requirement. Reforms that were introduced in 1984 had already made it a requirement for trade unions to gain their membership's approval for donations, so the new requirement levelled the playing field.

It has been Labour party practice since 1995 to record donations in its annual report, so the Government welcomed the Neill Committee recommendations. Parliament then legislated for such a regime in the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, and new rules on declaring and registering donations have been in place since 16 February 2001.

The Neill Committee did not, however, examine what should happen as regards donations in isolation. It concluded that donations to political parties, if properly regulated, were a vital element in ensuring a buoyant political party system. However, it also considered—this is the nub of the hon. Gentleman's point—whether there was a case for the state funding of parties, either partially or wholly. It considered the arguments both for and against state funding, many of which were mentioned by the hon. Gentleman this morning. As he said, we already have a strong starting point for state funding in the Short money that is provided to enable opposition parties to conduct their business in Parliament. New money will soon be made available by the Electoral Commission and, although it is not generally recognised, there is substantial underwriting of the expenses incurred in taking part in a general election, such as postage in sending out election addresses. I was interested that the hon. Gentleman made a precise calculation of the extent to which state funding already plays a part in our system.

In favour of state funding, the Neill Committee emphasised that it might have a purifying effect, as large donations would no longer be needed; it would allow parties to perform their essential tasks more fully and effectively; and, in some countries, where donations from individuals are matched by state funding—that is a form of the proposal that the hon. Gentleman put before us today—overall party funding has increased because the state funding and donations from individuals run side by side.

The Neill Committee also set out some arguments against state funding: taxpayers should not be compelled to contribute to supporting parties with whose policies they may strongly disagree; it is difficult to justify such expenditure against other calls on public expenditure; there is a possibility of parties ossifying and not allowing new blood in. The hon. Gentleman also referred to funding elsewhere in Europe, where, one can argue, the way in which parties are funded means that they exist on the basis of that funding and do not necessarily rise or fall as a result of the more natural processes of their appeal to the public on the basis of their policies.

The arguments are finely balanced, as the Committee on Standards in Public Life recognised. It said that there might be circumstances in which the need for more state funding became imperative, but it was firm in the view that that time might never come and certainly had not arrived in 1998 when its report was published. The hon. Gentleman's arguments may suggest that that debate has already moved on somewhat.

The Committee concluded that no new system should be introduced whereby the state was obliged to provide financial support for political parties for the indefinite future. At the time, the Government agreed with that conclusion.

In conclusion, I want to emphasise two points.

Mr. Tyrie: I wonder whether the Minister would clarify one point. As I recall, although I do not have a copy of it in front of me, in the Labour party's submission to the Neill Committee, the main objection to the argument that a more comprehensive system of state funding should be developed was that the Labour party could think of better ways to spend the money. It was not an objection of principle but of practicality. Is that still the Labour party's principal objection to the Neill Committee's findings?

Dr. Whitehead: It would be difficult for me to speak authoritatively for the whole Labour party on that matter, but the point was made at the time—I have already alluded to it as one of the arguments against state funding that was considered by the Neill Committee—that any substantial expenditure, such as a block grant to the major political parties, might need to be justified against other calls on the public purse for pressing matters of public investment and expenditure. It might be difficult to say that a block grant should go in one direction rather than another that is seen to be a matter of pressing public concern. That argument should be taken seriously. It is interesting, in terms of the recent conduct of the debate, that hon. Members, not just the hon. Member for Chichester, have been considering different ways in which a block grant might be cast—perhaps by using matching funding on membership or on votes cast—and a recent article in *The Times* by an hon. Member suggested that it might be possible for people to tick a box on their tax returns. Various devices might overcome that objection. Nevertheless, it is a substantial concern that must be addressed if hon. Members are thinking about how to make progress where state funding of political parties is concerned.

Mr. Tyrie: I apologise for having intervened twice and I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. It is a political fact that the Labour party is getting hit at the moment, not the Conservative party. We hear one allegation after another. I am not debating any particular case—that is not the issue. It is the public perception that concerns us today. Does the Minister concede that if we are to alter public perceptions, the Government must give a strong lead? It is not enough to hope and to wait for other political parties to weigh in behind.

Dr. Whitehead: My immediate thought is that the lack of consensus among political parties about the way forward has an effect on the extent to which any governing party can declare that it wishes to go down a certain route and expect that to be taken as a valid starting point to a debate. The Government of the day—of any day—is the focus of the spotlight on donations. A unilateral decision about what to do might be seen as the Government's attempt to extricate themselves from a perceived position. It is therefore important that any debate should be conducted in terms of a consensus about what should be done for the health of the body politic, rather than for perceived party advantage.

Mr. Tyrie: I will be very brief. It is a question of saying not "This is what we are going to do" but "This is a direction in which we would like to go". I am not getting that sense of direction from the Minister. I know that he does not want to change party policy right now, but if we are to make progress, there must be a desire to change direction; otherwise, nothing will happen.

Dr. Whitehead: I think that the hon. Gentleman would be surprised if a sudden announcement were made about the future of state funding for political parties during an Adjournment debate in Westminster Hall. I have attempted to set out a number of relevant matters for consideration, and I welcome the fact that the hon. Gentleman has raised his issues in such a thoughtful and careful way.

Stories about donations and whether they have or have not had influence seem to be flavour of the month. No evidence has been produced to indicate that any donations have resulted in their donors receiving improper or preferential treatment, nor is it the case that the Government have closed their ears to any debate on the issue; we welcome the current debate.

Four years have elapsed since the Committee made its recommendations and over a year since the provisions of the 2000 Act came into force. The Electoral Commission has begun a review that will assess the case for a cap on political donations and state funding, and the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions has announced that it proposes to look into the matter. The Government look forward to studying both reports.

Mr. John Cummings (in the Chair): Order.

Drugs Misuse (South Wales)

1 pm

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): I am delighted to be able to kick off in this debate, not least because it has fortuitously ended up on a day when the subject of drugs and drugs misuse is so topical. I have been trying to secure the debate every week for the past six months because on my first day of canvassing in the general election campaign that ended last June, the first door on which I knocked was that of a family in Treorchy. When I asked the man whether he would be voting Labour, he said that he definitely would be. I asked whether he was interested in any particular issues and he told me that his son had died of a heroin overdose some six weeks earlier. I was introduced early on in my campaign in the Rhondda to problems that many people tell me are new in valleys communities. They have arisen in the last five to 10 years in relation to heroin.

It is difficult to obtain accurate figures for drug-related deaths, but there have been about 14 in my constituency in the last year—that is, more than one per month. In small communities, where everybody knows and belongs to everybody, that is a potent symbol of the state of the community and of the lives of, particularly, young men.

I also wanted to have the debate because I spent last Friday night out with the police in the Rhondda. They were very disappointed because it rained all night, so it was very quiet—rain being the policeman's greatest friend—and they said that I should not go away with the impression that there should be fewer police officers in the Rhondda. What was striking was that the police officers told me that of the six cells in Ton Pentre police station, five are normally full and all those five people are likely to need the visit of a doctor in order to prescribe methodone, because they will have a drug dependency problem. That clearly suggests that the vast majority of acquisitive crime and of violent crime—the kinds of crime that might lead to somebody being in the cells—is related directly in valleys communities to drugs and drugs misuse, especially that of heroin. Crack cocaine does not seem to have arrived in large measure in my community; heroin has.

Over the past eight years, there have been more than 1,100 drug-related deaths in Wales, but it has only been in the last two or three years that the drug that has led to most of those deaths has been heroin rather than paracetamols or anti-depressants. There is a changing face to drug misuse in valleys communities and, I would suggest, in the whole of Wales.

In all the surveys that have been done and all the statistics that have been put together, Wales falls behind the rest of the United Kingdom. I say that not to minimise the issues that we face in Wales, but to put them in context. Wales was the only region in the UK where, when the Home Office surveyed 16 to 29-year-olds last autumn to see how many of them had used controlled substances during the last year, the percentage was less than 1 per cent. We are therefore considering a problem that is small but extremely significant—not only because it leads to deaths and to crime, but because it leads, certainly on the evidence of my surgery, to the vast majority of antisocial behaviour issues that come to my door month in, month out.

[Mr. Chris Bryant]

I should say, in parenthesis, that alcohol is still by far the worst besetting sin of all the drugs that affect our communities. I say that with some feeling, as the child of an alcoholic mother who died of alcoholism. Every Friday and Saturday night the police deal with the effects of alcohol, whether it is fights outside or inside pubs and clubs or the battles that go on back at home between husband and wife. That is to say nothing of the problems that alcohol causes with health and social well-being.

Some issues are specific to the valleys of south Wales. When the last of the mines closed and it felt to many people as though the heart had been taken out of former mining constituencies and the Conservative Government had turned their back on mining and the tradition of south Wales valleys, a generation of young people grew up who felt, in hundreds of different ways, that there was no hope for the community in which they lived. They felt that there was no hope of employment, a decent social life or a strong community. They felt that there was no hope of the community becoming a good place for young people to be and to spend their lives and that it would just decline and become older. There was no hope that the rest of the world would look at the Rhondda with pride.

However, many of those aspects of life in the Rhondda are beginning to turn around now. I constantly shock people by asking them what they think the unemployment level is in the Rhondda. It is currently 4.2 per cent. That the figure should be so low is to many people profoundly shocking. Of course, that masks all sorts of problems with people who are unable to present for work for a series of health reasons, many of which are related to stress. However, our valleys communities are beginning to turn round economically. We are beginning to see major regeneration, thanks to a series of projects devised by the Government and by the Assembly.

However, there are still families with second-generation and third-generation unemployment or drug dependency. For those families, a family is not just mum, dad and two kids. Everybody knows that in the valleys of south Wales a family is an extended concept—a matter of belonging. In many such extended families, where the people belong to one another, there is a sense that there is no hope. If there is a single thing that I would hope a Labour Government could turn around, it is that sense.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): My hon. Friend knows that my family comes from the Rhondda valley. In that extended family that he was describing, consisting of people who are not necessarily blood relations but are felt to belong, I know people involved in drugs. There is enormous concern and anxiety among their friends and family about what will happen, because they know of two or three cases of boys of that generation who have died. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is time for us to treat heroin users as a health problem rather than a crime problem and to start prescribing the drug, thereby destroying the drug dealers' market incentive to create addicts?

Mr. Bryant: I thank my hon. Friend. I know of his connections—he is a Rhondda boy—and of his family in Maerdy. A few weeks ago, we had a specific and frightening problem involving a young lad who had died from a heroin overdose. The dealer who had supplied him during the past year turned up to the funeral. Understandably, the community was in semi-riot and the police had to come out with tear gas.

The reclassification of drugs as proposed in the Select Committee report today will make no difference to what happens in the Rhondda. That proposal rather misses the point. I agree with my hon. Friend that a drug addict is always somebody's brother, sister, father or child and that those people need to be treated as human beings, because that is the only way to rescue them. There is, however, also a major set of criminal problems, including acquisitive crime and the fact that people deliberately set about dealing in communities that are not their own, which affords them a degree of protection. We must deal with those issues in a tough way.

We have a specific problem in the Rhondda, because housing is extremely cheap. It is not difficult for a private landlord to buy a house for £10,000, £11,000 or £12,000, although it will be in extremely poor condition. He will need to do nothing to make it a decent place in which to live, because no checks will be made, and he will receive between £4,000 and £4,500 in housing benefit as soon as he puts someone in it. We should seriously consider telling local authorities that they cannot pay housing benefit until they have checked that homes are habitable. Social services reckoned that 33 children in the Rhondda were at risk, and 19 of them were in one small area, Clydach Vale. That is because it is cheap to buy houses there, and landlords have deliberately set about buying properties so that they have a reliable, steady stream of income from the state, rather than from individuals. The result is that heroin ghettos are created in particular areas.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I understand the sincerity of the hon. Gentleman's position, but I want briefly to return to the point made by the hon. Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones). Heroin was prescribed for about 40 years, until about 1965. Would it not be worth while to revisit that experience to see whether lessons can be learned from it? On reclassification, there are fears in the south Wales valleys that ecstasy may act as a gateway to cocaine, because they have the same classification, even though they have different health consequences.

Mr. Bryant: I disagree as regards ecstasy, because classification is not the issue. Alcohol is classified in such a way that it is a freely available legal drug of choice, but that has not removed the criminality element or resolved the behavioural issues. I am unconvinced that it would be possible to determine what is a safe dose of ecstasy, and many people have had major health problems because of the drug. We do not know its long-term effects.

To move on, prevention is by far the best cure in this regard. Since becoming involved in the issue in the Rhondda, I have supported the Drugs Awareness Resistance Education programme, which is run in primary schools in the upper Rhondda fawr. I would dearly love to see the programme rolled out across the whole of the Rhondda and, indeed, throughout the country. Unless we give very young children the facts and the personal skills and ability to use them to take a strong personal decision that is right for them, we shall have failed them. I do not want to make many party political points, but Rhondda Cynon Taff, which is run by Plaid Cymru, still refuses to provide support to DARE, and that is a mistake.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Could my hon. Friend give an example of any anti-drugs education programme in this country or any other, in this century or any other, that has led to a reduction in drug use?

Mr. Bryant: I have not been around in many other centuries, so that might be a bit difficult. The single biggest problem for many kids in the Rhondda when they get to the ages of 10, 11 or 12 is that they have a manifest lack of self-confidence. Drugs education should not be primarily about showing people terrible images of what drugs might do to them, but about building children's self-confidence so that they can take good health decisions on a range of issues, including what they eat. The project in the Rhondda is working, and there are two measures. One is whether it has cut numbers; the other is whether it has prevented an increase, which is, of course, impossible to determine.

Another problem that we face in the Rhondda is the minimal provision of rehabilitation services. We have no residential rehabilitation unit or beds in either the Rhondda or Bro Taf health authority, which is a significant problem. Residential detoxification and rehabilitation is not right for everybody, but is certainly right for some, and we must make sure that it is available. Some 36 beds are available in Carmarthenshire, but there are none in Bro Taf.

The queue for the community drugs and alcohol team, which is based in Church village and covers the whole of Rhondda Cynon Taff, consists of 95 people who wait for 12 months before they see a nurse on the team. If we employed one extra nurse we would be able to cut that waiting list to three months, and if we employed two such nurses one of them could be based in the Rhondda. Every disincentive that we put in the way of somebody with a drug-dependency problem's getting themselves sorted out must be counterproductive, so we need to build better services.

At the moment, there are some excellent services in Merthyr, including probably the best home detoxification service in the country, which is the kind of service on which we need to build. Such services should not be patchy in the valley communities. I worry that when we change the structure of the health service in Wales next year we may lose sight of these issues, and we need to ensure that that does not happen.

There are major issues surrounding the police. Because it is so easy for somebody to come and live in the Rhondda, which is a relatively cheap area, people bring the problem from Bristol to the Rhondda with impunity. The police have argued—I find this very persuasive—that they are short on numbers. I know that the overall level of crime in the Rhondda is low, which is why we do not have as large a police force as in the past. Many police officers are doing excellent work in different departments, many of which are based in Cardiff and Bridgend, but it is difficult to carry out proactive policing around the issue unless one has enough police officers to do the job.

Perhaps the single most difficult thing for the Government to do is to get people with drug-dependency problems into work. Anybody can write the script explaining why that is difficult. Many employers would not want to take on such people and one must face the issue of those people's motivation. It is extremely expensive to take somebody from drug dependency through to work. Unless one can do that, however, one is effectively condemning a section of society to the scrap heap. I welcome the Employment Service's pathfinder project, "progress to work", which has been going for only five weeks. One project area is based around Rhondda Cynon Taff, and I hope that we shall see a significant effect on which we can build before rolling out the project across the country.

Some people would say—one of my constituents rang up and said this to me on the radio this morning—that money spent on these issues is just money wasted on druggies. It is actually money well spent because it tackles social disorder, crime, the destruction of families and the corrosion of tightly knit communities. It is vital that we make the investment to put these issues right.

Finally, many different projects are going on, which is entirely commendable. Sometimes, however, they do not gel together. Different agencies are not good at working together because of the silo mentality that such bodies always have, and their professional pride. Sometimes it is difficult to make the different funding streams from the Home Office, the Department for Work and Pensions and the Assembly work together, and that is a test for devolution. Will the Minister consider whether there might be value in creating a specific post or team to address the particular issues of the valleys communities in south Wales? Such a team would co-ordinate the work of the Assembly, Westminster and the different agencies in the field to allow us to achieve better value for money for every extra pound that we invest.

1.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales (Mr. Don Touhig): We have been given the opportunity this afternoon to highlight the problems of drug misuse in Welsh valley communities. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) on his persistence and on at last securing the debate. We all take the issue of substance misuse extremely seriously; as a member of the informal ministerial committee on drugs, I can tell hon. Members that the Government do so too.

Police intelligence suggests that south Wales, especially the valleys, is being flooded with heroin. In Wales in 2000, 44 deaths were attributed to either heroin or morphine. The impact of drug misuse on our communities is an important factor to bear in mind.

I saw evidence of that impact for myself when, a few months ago, I spent a day as a fly on the wall with someone who works for Drugaid in Merthyr, meeting that person's clients and speaking to people whose lives had been blighted because they had become involved with drugs, particularly heroin. I was impressed by one chap who had become involved with drugs about eight years ago. He is now off heroin and evangelical against drugs. He lives three doors away from the local drugs dealer, so he is under temptation 24 hours a day.

[Mr. Don Touhig]

I admire the fact that he has got himself together. He managed to do so with the support of Drugaid, an organisation based in Merthyr, which has become his lifeline. I cannot speak highly enough of organisations such as Drugaid, which have become beacons of hope to many in our valley communities whose lives are blighted by the use of drink and drugs. Drugaid's director, Stephanie Hoffman, tells me that it has about 200 referrals a year. In 2000–01, 24 per cent. of those were heroin users. That shows the extent of the problem.

The crime reduction director for Wales, David A'Herne, has said that there are signs that organised crime from outside south Wales is flooding the area with drugs and regarding it as a market opportunity.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: I thank the Minister for giving way in this short debate. He praises Drugaid. Did its staff speak to him about what it believes that the Government should be doing? It believes that the Government's policy of simply getting tough on various drugs is insufficient, and that they should be considering other policies.

Mr. Touhig: Certainly. Indeed, I witnessed some of what Drugaid was doing to put in place policies relating to a broader range of initiatives to combat drug misuse, as I shall discuss in a moment.

As I said, David A'Herne, the crime reduction director for Wales, warned us that south Wales was being flooded by organised crime and people from outside pushing heroin. When he recently met Members of Parliament who represent Wales, he said that the next blight after heroin would be crack cocaine—a violence drug. The police are aware of that emerging issue and are considering the best approaches to tackling it.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): Like me, the Minister has spent his life in the south Wales valleys. If someone had suggested to him 20 years ago that the big problem in the valleys would be heroin, one would have questioned their sanity. I do not know whether there are links between drug use and the breakdown of communities, but at one time in the valleys, the one thing that we had going for us was communities, which have broken up quickly in recent years.

Several agencies are involved. Last financial year, the police received additional resources. Has the Minister done any work to find out whether that additional money has helped the police in performing their role?

Mr. Touhig: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We need resources for the police service, which means extra bobbies on the beat, and to ensure that initiatives are introduced. I know that in Gwent and south Wales there have been several initiatives in which the police, with a number of agencies and voluntary groups, have organised blitzes to tackle drug-related crime and the blight that it causes communities. He will know Pantside, which is not far from where he lives. I recently chaired a meeting there to which 300 people turned up as a result of their concern about drug misuse in the area.

Drug misuse is also a factor in rising crime, because people are committing crime to fund their habit. We need to tackle the supply of drugs. Colleagues will know that drug pushers are parasites on our communities. They distort the face of our valley communities and prey on our young people. I welcome legislation that will allow us to seize the assets of convicted drug dealers, but that is just one weapon in the armoury needed to combat drug misuse. If we do not face up to the problem, we will not recognise our grandchildren's generation.

My hon. Friend mentioned how our valley communities have changed in recent years and how there is less of a community feel. That community will be further undermined if we do not ensure that we put every effort into combating drug misuse.

Paul Flynn: Does my hon. Friend support the proposal in the Select Committee report for experimental shooting galleries, which have been operating in Australia, Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands, and which have reduced crime and saved lives?

Mr. Touhig: The Select Committee report has made an important contribution to our widespread debate on drugs. In due course, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will respond to it and give the Government's view. As I have said, the Home Secretary has responsibility for setting policing priorities. I welcome the publication of the report, because it is produced in response to the Home Secretary's challenge to all of us last October to have a sensible, adult debate on how to tackle drug misuse in the UK. However, I cannot give the same welcome to the Committee's proposals for reclassifying ecstasy, but that is a matter for wider debate, and we shall have such a debate in due course.

In south Wales, the police have the latest technology. They are working with police forces in Gwent and Dyfed-Powys and with national agencies on initiatives to combat the misuse of drugs in our valleys. We need to tackle the demand for drugs. In my view, demand can be reduced by a multi-agency approach. I do not particularly care for the phrase "joined-up", but it means a linking of various agencies and Departments, so that we involve the Government, the Assembly, local authorities, the education service, the health service and the voluntary sector—a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda mentioned prevention, which I think is important. Education plays an important role. I spent part of my time with Drugaid in a classroom with young students who were going through a series of seven lessons. The tutors were people from Drugaid. I was interested to see how the class's discussion developed. When I talked to the young people afterwards, I learned that they thought that the knowledge that they gained from attending the classes had armed them, and that they now felt well equipped to argue against peer pressure to abuse drugs. I was encouraged by that, as I think that education is an important element.

One of the four key aims in the strategy put together by my colleagues in the Assembly is to help children, young people and adults to resist substance misuse. We have to start doing that much earlier. My local rotary club organises an annual event in which 1,000 youngsters go to the miners' institute in Blackwood, where four or five performances of a play relating to drug misuse are staged. The play warns them of the difficulties that they will encounter if they misuse drugs.

My hon. Friend also mentioned DARE. I am sorry that his local council, Rhondda Cynon Taff, is not helping out financially. I hope that if DARE applies to the council again, it will give more favourable consideration to the matter. He also mentions the need for resources. I can tell him that more resources have been put into the police service throughout south Wales.

We have to bear in mind that many factors are causing the misuse of drugs in our communities, which suffer from deprivation, poverty and great difficulties. As my hon. Friend said, it is important to pull the multiple agencies together. David A'Herne, the crime reduction director for Wales, is making an important contribution to that. We will tackle the problem only if we all get on board and say that we have to do something about the blight of drug misuse in our society.

Several arguments will rage as a result of today's report. We must all engage in the debate whatever our views on drug use. If we do not do that, we will face a society that most of us will not recognise in the years ahead. We can tackle the problem only by pulling together.

Recycling (Cornwall)

1.30 pm

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): I am pleased to secure this important debate. I welcome the fact that the Minister for the Environment is here to respond. He has a good record on campaigning in the Government for stronger environmental measures, and I suspect that he and I would not disagree about the need to tackle waste and improve recycling and reuse. If his reported comments were accurate, we would not disagree about concerns about incineration compared with other waste-to-energy techniques that are being developed. I do not think that we shall disagree on the basic issues.

I requested the debate because Cornwall has plans that I believe fulfil all the Minister's objectives. All that we need from him and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is the go-ahead. I shall make the case for that and outline our disappointment—at least our disappointment in the Minister's officials; it remains to be seen whether that disappointment lies with the Minister—that there has not been a positive decision, which we expected some time ago.

Looking at the specific needs of Cornwall and our current recycling performance, it is clear that action is needed. The availability of landfill is rapidly diminishing, although the Minister and I share the worry that we should avoid unnecessary landfill. In Cornwall, 94 per cent. of waste goes to landfill. Cornwall has a poor recycling rate of 9.5 per cent. County targets for 2005 are 12 per cent. and national targets for 2005 are 25 per cent. of household waste. We are clearly a long way off those targets. However, there are reasons for that. The rates are not untypical of similar rural counties, and I do not want to be unfair to those in county hall or County Environmental Services, which is the main company that deals with the county's waste. However, we do not have a good record, we do not beat the averages and we are a long way from meeting the Government's national targets.

We have the additional problem that, in pure environmental terms, it is important that we meet the need for increased recycling and reuse and do so in the most environmentally friendly way. Cornwall is very far from established markets for recycled materials. Penzance is more than 75 miles from Plymouth, more than 200 miles from Bristol and more than 300 miles from London. However, if one examines the established markets, the figures are even worse. Paper processing occurs 350 miles away from Cornwall and sites for metal processing are further away. Glass and plastic processing occurs 400 miles away.

Significant distances must be covered to tackle the problem, which is why we believe that it makes sense not only to develop the ability to collect and separate materials, but—this is the key to the private finance initiative proposal—to make use of the materials locally. That would greatly improve the economics and environmental factors of recycling, keeping traffic off the roads and creating more jobs. The scheme works very well in terms of joined-up government. It fits in with objective 1, the process of economic regeneration in the country's poorest county, and it meets the Government's environmental targets.

[Matthew Taylor]

Money is needed not only to establish the markets and the processing facilities, but to improve collection services in Cornwall. Like most rural areas, it is difficult to collect for recycling because the communities are spread out, which makes such a process much more costly. Cornwall is both heavily populated and widely dispersed. Compared with Devon, it does not have wide-open spaces, but village after village. We do not have a Plymouth or Exeter where the collection schemes for recycling are a little easier to establish. The population density is lower than any other south-west county and only 30 per cent. of the Cornish population live in towns of more than 10,000. The figure nationally is 80 per cent.

The other good aspect of the project is that it has brought together the districts and the county in a consortium that works together towards achieving the Government's targets. In an area without a unitary authority, that is difficult to achieve because districts have different priorities for collecting the waste from the county that is responsible for it. All six locally elected district authorities and the county are in partnership, but the delay in gaining approval is putting strain on that partnership. All the authorities have Government-set targets to meet in respect of improving their services and they are becoming increasingly nervous that, without a decision being made, they will be left stranded and criticised for falling far short of what the Government demanded of them.

The scheme is receiving receive strong support from the population in Cornwall. Much campaigning has taken place, and the one matter on which all the campaigners are united is the need to improve recycling and reuse. Whereas what happens with the waste-to-energy scheme may be controversial, the bid for the scheme to improve recycling and reuse has total support. Hopefully, it will minimise the need for a waste-to-energy scheme, although some form of one will be needed. I hope and strongly believe in a campaign, not in an incinerator. I think that the Minister may share my view.

Andrew George (St. Ives): On a waste-to-energy scheme, does my hon. Friend agree that, in Cornwall, technology is very much at the cutting edge in the sense that more energy is being generated proportionately through geothermal sources? We have a higher level of wind energy in proportion to population and land mass than elsewhere in the country. The proposal has at its base the fact that Cornwall is more receptive to acceptable waste-to-energy techniques than many other places.

Matthew Taylor: I agree with my hon. Friend. It is worth bearing in mind that the PFI bid is purely for recycling and reuse, which is stage 1 of the process. I am glad that stage 2 has not revolved around an incinerator. It covers a waste-to-energy scheme, but alternative technologies are being explored actively. The key aspect of the bid is that it will put back the need for waste-to-energy schemes for some years, because it will be possible to start meeting the Government's targets on reuse and recycling and minimise the use of landfill. It will allow the pyrolysis and gasification scheme that the county is examining to be proven as technology. As the Minister will be aware, the manufacturers of such technologies are making big claims about them. I hope that they are right but, as yet, in this country they are relatively unproven. The bid will allow that better scheme to come forward.

It is worth saying that one of the core themes of objective 1 is to build on the environmental technology base in Cornwall and the perception of high environmental quality. The scheme will help to build the cutting edge in Cornwall's development of the new technologies for not only waste, but energy. The scheme fits in with objective 1 status. It is not reliant on objective 1 funding because the area would allow that to be received. That is why we need the Government's approval for the PFI. It ties solidly into the themes of the objective 1 programme.

As I said, the proposal has received much support from the local population. In Chacewater, we have a pilot scheme, by a company called Rag and Bone, to create a one-stop shop for all recycling. It has received huge local support that goes well beyond the target that was set.

I turn to the most crucial point. I have said that it is necessary to meet the Government's recycling targets in the waste strategy of 2000. If the bid is approved, the recycling rates will jump from 9.5 per cent. at present to 35 per cent. by 2008, which is in excess of the Government's target of 33 per cent. by 2015, and well ahead of their time scale, even with regard to the interim target of 2010. If the bid is not approved, and even if best practice is employed, the conclusions of the consultants that the county has taken on and the analysis that has been conducted by its own staff suggest that we could achieve recycling rates of only 18 per cent. by 2005, when Government targets demand 25 per cent. of household recycling by then.

That shows the difference between taking the lead and exceeding the Government's targets, and inevitably falling behind them because of our geography and our relative position with regard to other markets. The sooner that this project is approved, the more likely it will be that the targets are met. The original bid was based on the assumption that, by now, we would be in the early days of making that happen, but we are already, in effect, up to a year or more late. If the project is approved, that will help investment, the economy, jobs, transport and the environment.

As I have said, it is a two-stage plan. Stage 1 involves the PFI bid that is before the Minister and his officials, which allocates £25 million solely for investment in enhanced waste recycling and recovery, along with the target of 35 per cent. by 2008–09. It includes improved civic amenities, kerbside collections, new composting through an on-farm composting network processed and used on the farms to minimise transportation, and the development of Glasphalt schemes with quarries to surface roads. All seven local authorities support giving financial assistance to the ReMaDe scheme, which is prioritising materials to be recycled even before markets can be found. It covers all waste streams, and it can bring huge benefits. It meets the criteria for everything that the Minister is concerned with. Also, every aspect of it will lead to more jobs in the county, and creating jobs is another Government target. We all welcome that, so we want to see it put into practice.

I turn to stage two. Originally, the county was asked to put together a bid for the entire scheme. Then it was told that the amount of money was cut, and that the whole issue of waste-to-energy was not included. There is a stage 2, but it is not committed to mass burn incineration, which the Government rightly appear to be moving away from. Instead, it is committed to looking at emerging technologies and matching them to the county's needs; depending on the success of stage one.

We will see how much we can achieve through recycling and reuse before we even examine waste-to-energy; when we come to address that, it will be the new technologies, rather than the incineration technologies, that we look to. I understand that plans with regard to that matter will come forward shortly, but that is not what is up for consideration here; the scheme is aimed entirely at increasing recycling. The Minister may be aware that the Waste Strategy 2000 includes levels of waste reduction that can be achieved only through extensive mass burn, but that is not part of this plan.

I will finish by addressing the more negative matters; only because I want the Minister to understand the process that we have been through from our side. I have no doubt that, from the point of view of officials and the Department, that process may have seemed rather different.

In June 2000, Government officials suggested to the county that it might wish to consider a waste management PFI application. The county was very keen to take Cornwall to the cutting edge with regard to this technology, and it quickly set out to meet the Government's timetable. It hired PricewaterhouseCoopers, Eversheds and Arthur Andersen as consultants to its bid; blue chip consultants at the highest level. By September 2001, it was possible to put forward an outline business case.

However, the county council was advised that it should hold back to meet new criteria that would come into effect from the end of September, the key element of which was the reduction of the ceiling from £50 million to £25 million. Splitting the application into two stages, given the uncertainty over waste-to-energy policy, has actually been very good for the project and very helpful to the Minister in approving the bid.

We originally expected a decision in early 2001 but, at Easter, the Government questioned the role of the waste company operating in the county, County Environmental Services, and asked the waste applicant to produce a public sector comparator. It was an odd request, because at that stage it would have been illegal to deal with waste in that way. However, the county produced one. Still we heard nothing.

Three civil servants have taken the lead in the relationship with the county. A new manager on the project said that the application was in the Minister's box and that there would be a reply by Christmas. Hopes were very high, and I was told that an announcement was expected at any minute. However, nothing happened. A third civil servant is now taking the lead on the matter, which we understand is in the final stages. We last heard that the application was about to go to the Minister. The debate may have affected the process somewhat, because the Minister will have been briefed on the matter. We understand that it is now—once again, at any moment—likely to reach the Minister.

Meanwhile, the county council put the PFI bid together back in October 2000. It had a dedicated waste management team working on the project. It has spent £150,000 preparing the outline business case at a time when, as the Minister is well aware, all local authorities face very challenging budget restrictions. A huge amount of hard work has been done in-house and by the consultants. There was a lot of popular support, and we really felt that we were doing everything that the Government had asked of us.

I wrote on 27 November, expecting an imminent response. I had an acknowledgment of my letter but still have not had a reply from the Minister. I chased that up with a parliamentary question on 25 January and wrote again on 12 April, but we still have received nothing but a holding reply to the parliamentary question. As far as we can tell, there is good will at the Minister's end and at our end, but the process has come off the rails.

We really need a response from the Minister. The project is good news, and the Minister will have huge support and our gratitude if it gets the go-ahead. Frankly, we cannot understand why it has taken so long.

1.47 pm

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): Waste management is undoubtedly a key issue faced by the country; it is certainly one of the biggest environmental issues. As I would have expected, the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) made his case extremely well. One of the great advantages of debates such as this is that I get an insight into how a situation looks from the other side; hitherto I have not seen it in quite that way.

I have been given a note about submissions made to me. The general application of the waste management strategy is an ongoing matter with the Department, but I assure the hon. Gentleman that, as far as I am concerned, this is the first time that I have been asked to take a specific decision on the application. He is quite right that it is now nearing the decision point. I understand his view that it has taken a long time and I apologise for that.

Cornwall's proposals raise several difficult issues relating to the changes that we must make to our current waste management practices. I was stunned to hear that the landfilling of municipal household waste in Cornwall is 94 per cent; that is quite extraordinary. However, I would like to say a few words about the overall approach.

As the hon. Gentleman rightly said, the waste strategy was published in May 2000 and I am pleased to hear that officials in Cornwall responded to it extremely quickly. The main requirements of that strategy are to tackle the continuing growth of waste—not least by finding innovative ways of minimising its creation—to maximise the amount of value that we recover from waste through recycling and reuse and to improve the very low levels of recycling that, unfortunately, have been traditional in England and Wales.

[Mr. Michael Meacher]

Our strategy sets statutory performance standards for local authority recycling. Local government as a whole must double the amount of recycling within three years and triple it within five years. That is pretty testing, given the past record, but it is achievable with the extremely low starting point. The national level of recycling was 2 per cent. in 1992 and 6 per cent. in 1997; it is now 11 or 12 per cent.

Cornwall county council must achieve 12 per cent. recycling by 2003–04 and 18 per cent. by 2005–06. I am sure that the county, given the readiness with which it is facing the problem, is already taking action to deliver the first of those standards, independent of its proposals for the longer term, as the hon. Gentleman implied.

We have provided significant extra resources, although budgets are tight. In the 2000 spending review, there was an increase of £1.1 billion in the relevant standard spending assessment block over the three years covered by the review. We have also created a new £140 million ring-fenced fund that supplements the general grant provision. I understand that local authorities, including Caradon and North Cornwall councils, are currently applying for money from that fund. We have also put new money into a new programme: the waste and resources action programme—WRAP—to tackle market issues and particularly to open up new markets for recyclates. We have provided £220 million of private finance initiative resources specifically for waste management projects. When local authorities acquire a capital asset, they may choose whether to borrow the money or use PFI money. Central Government can provide revenue support towards the cost of repaying interest and capital on the loan by credit approvals and through special grant for PFI schemes.

Turning to Cornwall's proposals on waste and the decision-making process involved, in addition to the value-for-money appraisal, there is a policy assessment for waste PFI proposals. The hon. Gentleman referred to the fact that in September 2000 we published criteria for waste PFI projects that reflected the Government's strategy on waste. The hon. Gentleman was at pains to say that Cornwall met those criteria, which made it clear that waste recycling and composting lie at the heart of the solutions to local authorities' waste management problems. I am very keen that we maximise reuse, recycling, recovery and composting, and that mass burn or, preferably, alternatives are used only when absolutely necessary.

It is particularly relevant to Cornwall that the criteria also require proposals, including incineration, to demonstrate that all opportunities for recycling have been considered first and—this is demanding—that there is no barrier to the future development of recycling. I do not want proposals to be agreed if they could undermine future possibilities for recycling. We also stipulated that schemes should include proposals for combined heat and power, which should be appropriately sized—I think that is a code word for relatively small—and that they should include CHP where possible.

Cornwall first submitted its outline business case to us in October 2000, which was fairly quick off the mark. That was just one month after the criteria for waste projects were revised in the way that I described. The county's proposals have changed over time, as the hon. Gentleman indicated. That is not particularly surprising as they were originally drawn up when the criteria for waste PFI projects were far less demanding than they are today. There has been considerable ongoing dialogue between officials in my Department. On our side, that has achieved a variation that I had not realised before. The dialogue has taken place because we recognise the considerable challenge that the county faces on landfill and the tight time scale that it has in which to draw up alternatives.

The proposals do, as the hon. Gentleman made very clear, have several positive aspects including an innovative proposal for composting green waste on site and on the county's own farms, and substantial work on waste minimisation. I am very keen on that. There is also a strong commitment to the project from all the local authorities. The proposals on energy from waste include combined heat and power as a strong option.

Matthew Taylor: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Meacher: I am anxious to get on, and I think that the hon. Gentleman will be pleased if he allows me to finish.

Less compelling is the ambition to improve recycling in the county and to provide new incineration capacity. The hon. Gentleman did say that that was not a foregone conclusion. As I have indicated, we insist that incineration proposals are appropriately sized, that such proposals do not crowd out recycling and that the potential for recycling has been fully explored. Officials have highlighted to Cornwall that its headline recycling rate of 35 per cent. over the long term is low in comparison with most of the other PFI proposals that are being put to us. Many of these are planning for recycling rates of between 50 per cent. and 60 per cent. in the long term.

Before the hon. Gentleman leaps to his feet to tell me this, I recognise the county council's awareness that its case is not as compelling as others. It has said that 50 to 60 per cent. recycling rates are not, in its view, achievable in Cornwall even in the long term for geographical and economic reasons. In particular, Cornwall is sparsely populated and remote from the existing recycling materials processors, and the gross domestic product per capita in Cornwall is only 70 per cent. of the United Kingdom average.

As a part of its response, Cornwall county council has proposed to adopt a two-stage approach that will test the recycling rates. I think that that is helpful. Bidders will be asked to achieve a minimum 35 per cent. recycling rate and would be offered financial incentives to achieve higher recycling rates. However, I am not yet convinced that the recycling ambition in the county's proposals is sufficient. I am not convinced that the proposed approach on financial incentives will prevent the crowding out of recycling in future. I do not say that I am not persuadable, but, on the evidence that I have seen, I am not yet convinced. Nor am I convinced—this is my real problem—that the proposals for an incineration capacity, or possible alternative, of 200,000 tonnes is the minimum that is required.

Obviously, I look much more favourably on pyrolysis and gasification, but my understanding is that incineration was not ruled out in the proposal made to us. To feed that kind of level of incineration, pyrolysis or gasification would require waste streams being pre-empted, which could undermine the recycling targets.

I fully recognise that Cornwall faces challenges in developing sustainable waste solutions given the economic position in the county and the nature of the area. However, the very nature of Cornwall means that we must be extra vigilant in ensuring that the recycling options are fully explored and that the absolute minimum requirement for incineration is put in place. I am conscious that we may not have been fully able to explore the issues in the course of 15 minutes talking to each other. I am aware that the hon. Gentleman previously wrote to me suggesting a meeting. I would, therefore, like to meet him and a delegation from the county council before reaching a final conclusion, if there are further points that he would like me to consider.

I would, of course, be especially interested in the way in which the people of Cornwall have been consulted on the county's ambitions on recycling and the new incineration capacity that may be required. Getting the support, not only of the agencies and the authorities, but the people of Cornwall, who in the end will face the consequences, is important. Subject to that meeting, I will issue a decision on Cornwall's proposals shortly, but hope to meet the hon. Gentleman before.

It being Two o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 23 May 2002

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

United Nations

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

2.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Denis MacShane): I cannot think of a more appropriate time to discuss the role of the United Nations: we have only to think of the conflicts around the world and the UN's achievements during the 50-plus years since its founding.

The debate was initiated by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The Foreign Secretary feels strongly that parliamentary time should be given to such important foreign affairs matters. It was requested also by my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) who, with other hon. Members, visited the United Nations last year; she has been involved in many interesting discussions on the subject, and I look forward to hearing their contributions to the debate. I promise that copies of the debate will be forwarded to our excellent diplomatic mission in New York and the UN's other missions around the world, so that they will know what British Members of Parliament think of it.

History has been made this week. My fellow Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), has just returned from East Timor, where he attended the independence celebrations earlier this week. As soon as East Timor became independent, it immediately announced that it wanted to be the next member of the United Nations. With Switzerland voting to join only a few months ago, the UN will soon have 191 members. East Timor chose to join as soon as it became an independent state, but Switzerland spent more than 50 years thinking about it. Switzerland saw a remarkable campaign of public diplomacy. A distinguished former ambassador to Britain, Mr. François Nordman, made an important contribution; his speeches and writing on the subject helped to persuade the Swiss to break with their tradition of non-involvement in the UN and other international organisations. The UN continues to be central to the identity of those two countries.

East Timor owes its existence to the UN. Without the commitment of UN peacekeepers and administrators over the past two and a half years, there would be no East Timor. The UN has helped to build a nation out of nothing. The UN will stay in East Timor in order to help it develop. It is not simply a matter of sending troops to monitor security, important though that is; it is an exercise to bring together international expertise and resources to create a new administration, a new judiciary and a new police force. That is the sort of challenge that faces the UN; too many countries have for too long been the victims of neglect and conflict.

Angus Robertson (Moray): I am pleased that the Government share the view of the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru that countries small and large should take their place in the international community as normal, independent member states. Will the Minister outline what steps the Government will be taking to help the newest member of the United Nations over the months and years to come?

Mr. MacShane: This debate is broadly on the United Nations, not East Timor. If the hon. Gentleman writes to me, I will list in encyclopaedic detail the contribution that Britain has made, is making and will make to East Timor.

A huge challenge is posed by Afghanistan, where the UN is at the centre of efforts to rebuild the country. Under the Bonn agreement, the UN is working with the interim Administration on an immediate transitional assistance programme for the Afghan people. The programme contains UN and non-governmental organisation projects focused on urgent humanitarian needs, immediate recovery projects and longer-term reconstruction and governance support.

Let us segue to Kosovo, where the UN has effectively provided the key functions of government since 1999. It is responsible for police, justice and civil administration, as well as other major services. We want the Kosovan people—the Albanians and the Serbs—to take responsibility for their own nation, but in the interim the UN is doing a good job.

Sierra Leone is a similar example. Only two years ago, the rebel forces appeared to be closing in on Freetown, and everyone was appalled at their brutal behaviour. However, last week, for the first time since 1996, Sierra Leone held free elections in which its people could vote without fear. That would not have been possible without the UN and the decisive military support of the United Kingdom. In partnership, the UK and the UN played a key role in creating a secure environment in which elections could take place peacefully. The UN's work in peacekeeping and rebuilding states, and in restoring and maintaining international peace and security is crucial, but that focus tells only part of the UN story.

The UN is also concerned with improving the lives of people wherever they live. We should not ignore the work of UN specialised agencies such as the International Labour Organisation, which enables trade unions, employers and Governments to meet and discuss the key improvements that the ILO makes to international labour standards. The World Health Organisation set a target of eradicating smallpox and polio. It has made giant strides with regard to smallpox and is on the way to eradicating polio. The work of the International Civil Aviation Organisation is important as well. As we fly around the globe, it is vital to know that a UN agency links the civil aviation organisations from different countries and ensures that air safety is maintained throughout the world.

The General Assembly carries on its work each September in New York and plays an important role in setting standards for social and economic policy worldwide. One example is the adoption of the millennium development goals at the millennium summit. I would like those goals to be put up in every school classroom. They include halving poverty by 2015, achieving universal primary education and reducing by two thirds the mortality rate for children under five.

[Mr. MacShane]

Once announced and declared at the conference, those goals must be put into practice. Each year, the UN secretariat must produce a snapshot of where we are and how much further there is to go. I hope that those millennium development goals will be at the heart of international policy making until 2015.

More than 50 years ago, the UN General Assembly adopted the universal declaration of human rights as a bulwark against oppression and discrimination. That declaration was a landmark achievement. It represented the first international recognition that human rights and fundamental freedoms applied to every person. I worked in South Africa and communist Poland and Czechoslovakia, and I remember how much that declaration meant to people there struggling for their freedom. In many parts of the world, we would still find that it counted as the standard by which Governments should be judged on the organisation of the governance of their people.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): As my hon. Friend has made that point, does he agree that the recent decision by the Israeli Government to refuse admission to a UN-sponsored commission of inquiry into allegations of human rights abuses in Jenin has fundamentally undermined the authority of the Secretary-General of the UN and the institution itself?

Mr. MacShane: No, because Governments do not weaken the UN or the Secretary-General every time they refuse to comply with a UN resolution. In the eyes of the international community, such a refusal simply diminishes the right of a Government to claim that they are speaking and acting according to the highest international standards. However, I shall develop some further points on Jenin later, if my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) will be patient.

I move from political rights, enshrined in the universal declaration of human rights, to material rights. A person with an empty stomach does not have the time to worry about the finer points of constitutional democracy. The recent UN conference on financing for development was an important landmark and generated an additional £12 billion a year in development aid from 2006. Ministers are working hard to ensure that the forthcoming world summit on sustainable development agrees to an action plan for the productive use of these funds through tackling the millennium development goals.

Achieving our objectives is not easy. In an organisation that now consists of 191 members it is inevitable that we will not reach consensus. Often after weeks of late night negotiations, the outcome does not match our ambitions.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): Some people believe that the UN work to which the Minister refers is often duplicated by organisations such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Do the Government have a view on that?

Mr. MacShane: Organisationitis is not unknown to this Government and this country. There are times when duplication means reinforcement and times when it means making two speeches when one will do. Discussion and analysis of the international financial architecture are on the international agenda.

With 191 members, it is difficult to reach agreement on every issue. The recent UN General Assembly special session on children was an important opportunity to address the rights and needs of the world's children and adolescents. Its objectives were to review the progress made since the world summit on children in 1990 and to make a renewed commitment and pledge to specific actions for the coming decade by developing a plan of action. I pay tribute to the United Kingdom negotiators, politicians and diplomats who fought hard to secure positive language on child rights, child labour, reproductive health and the death penalty.

We worked with key non-governmental organisations and sponsored two young people to attend the session as part of a United Kingdom delegation. However, the negotiations were difficult. There were bitter fights, particularly over reproductive health and the death penalty. The language agreed was satisfactory, but not what we would have liked ideally. However, negotiation involves compromise, which should not be considered as a defeat. Getting 191 countries to the same point is no mean achievement, and on that basis we can take the argument forward.

The other criticism sometimes levelled at the UN, which has been mentioned already in the debate, is that it is powerless. The United Nations does not consist of a group of Harry Potters taking on one single Lord Voldemort. It does not have a magic wand, but that does not mean that it has failed. These issues were brought into focus when we examined the UN's role in the middle east. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley suggested, the Israeli refusal to accept a UN fact-finding mission to investigate what happened in Jenin seemed to underline the organisation's irrelevance. The Government have made their position clear, and hon. Members have heard the Foreign Secretary's statements in the House. We share the serious humanitarian concerns about Israeli actions and about allegations of violations of international law. We have confidence in Kofi Annan, and believe that a fact-finding mission would have been balanced and could have provided the answers. We look forward to the Secretary-General producing a thorough and balanced report in due course from the available evidence. We hope that the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority will co-operate with him, and we will press them to do so.

The Jenin incident does not mean that the UN is irrelevant to the conflict. After all, the essential framework for a settlement in the middle east is enshrined in UN Security Council resolutions, which express the clear will of the international community for a two-state solution. That vision was recently reaffirmed in three important resolutions, all of which were, crucially, adopted with United States support. How many of us, over the years, have seen vetoes from one side or another prevent resolutions from being adopted? Today's resolutions speak of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in secure and recognised borders. They also call for an Israeli withdrawal from Palestinian cities, and for a ceasefire. That will remain the framework for future attempts to resolve the conflict.

As we look with concern at the conflict that is looming on the horizon in Kashmir, where two nuclear-armed powers are facing off against each other, the need for a body such as the United Nations becomes ever clearer. I am sure that the whole House wishes my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary all the best as he goes to New Delhi and Islamabad. Even if, as I expect, the UN has to become involved in finding a solution to the Kashmir conflict, we should not forget the words that Dag Hammarskjold wrote more than 40 years ago:

> "The legislative process of the United Nations is not a substitute for diplomacy. It serves its purpose only when it helps diplomacy to arrive at agreements between the national states concerned."

Diplomacy, not speeches or votes, will continue to have the last word in peacemaking. I hope that the diplomatic efforts of our Foreign Secretary, as well as those of American and European officials, can help the Governments of India and Pakistan to find a solution to their dispute before it is too late.

I want briefly to look to the UN's future. What more would we like it to do? We want a modern UN, and a Security Council that reflects the contemporary world. We want a structure that provides an efficient service that is appropriate to its important tasks. In short, we want modernisation, reform and a new UN. Many have said as much, but few have delivered, and there is now an opportunity to do so. For a start, Kofi Annan is committed to reform. As a former UN budget director, he is more aware than most of the need for reform, and his reform programme, which has been in place since 1997, has taken the UN a long way.

One problem, however, is that we keep asking the UN to do more; we must therefore focus on rationalising our priorities. The UN is at last engaged in a major reform initiative in that regard. The aim is to make the most of the funds at its disposal by cutting waste and duplication, which my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) mentioned. We are contributing to that exercise, along with our EU partners, because it provides an excellent opportunity to ensure the long-term viability of the UN and the achievement of the objectives that the international community has set it. We must, however, go further. We must link resources and objectives. The UN must ask itself why it needs a printing press in Manhattan. Why are the specialised agencies in Geneva incapable of pooling their administrative burdens? Why is each a little empire unto itself?

We have pushed hard for reform in the areas of peacekeeping, with good results. The Brahimi report, which was issued in August 2000, has been a catalyst for a range of peacekeeping reforms, which the Government and the Prime Minister in particular have played an active part in driving forward. We want focused and realistic mandates for peacekeeping missions, we want to improve the capacity of the UN to deal with the administration, management and strategy on current and future peacekeeping operations, and we want more consistent standards for the training and equipping of countries that contribute troops.

We also need to consider the reform of the Security Council to make it more representative of the modern world and to ensure that it reflects today's world, not that of 1945.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk) *rose—*

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) *rose—*

Mr. MacShane: I give way to the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb).

Norman Lamb: The Minister referred to the importance of reforming the Security Council, which has been talked about for a long time. Clear commitments were made to reform in 2000, but nothing has actually happened. What confidence does the Minister have that reform will actually take place to make the council more representative of the modern world?

Mr. MacShane: May I respond to the intervention of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) as well? I was going to cover that matter later in my remarks, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The hon. Member for North Norfolk jumped in on top of me just as I was about to open my mouth.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The Minister cannot presume to know what the next intervention will be, so I suggest that he take them one at a time.

Mr. Duncan: Perhaps as the Minister reaches the appropriate point in his remarks he will tell the House whether he ever envisages a reformed Security Council including representation for the EU as a bloc.

Mr. MacShane: That is not on the agenda in this country or, to my knowledge, anywhere else in the world. There might be some obscure broom cupboard in Brussels where those matters are considered to be highly important.

We believe that a small increase in the size of the Security Council would be an acceptable price to pay for the big increase in its credibility that would result from a more representative membership. In the industrialised world, Germany and Japan make increasingly valuable contributions to maintaining international peace and security. They have proved themselves eligible, and worthy of permanent seats. However, to be truly representative of the modern world, developing countries must have better representation on the Security Council, too. We would like there to be new permanent seats for Africa, Asia and Latin America.

To answer the intervention of the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton, there is no agreement among the UN membership on the size and shape of a reformed Security Council. Regional rivalries and the legitimate claims of different large countries to be the automatic candidate have made it difficult to make progress. That is no reason to give up trying, and Britain will continue to be at the forefront of that important debate.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I am a little disappointed that the Minister's only reference to sustainable development and the environment so far has been a tangential reference to the world summit in Johannesburg. Does he accept that encouraging sustainable development is a new task that the UN has

[Mr. Simon Thomas]

taken on board during the past 10 years, although it is not referred to in article 1 of the UN's constitution? The UN has huge influence in moving the world towards sustainable development. In that context, does the Minister agree that international co-operation is essential, and that the decision of the United States Government not to involve themselves in the Kyoto protocol in particular is undermining the UN's work in that respect?

Mr. MacShane: The hon. Gentleman clearly did not listen to the part of my speech in which I referred to the millennium development goals, which are the best benchmarking process for sustainable development, the movement towards which he rightly identified as an important task for the UN.

The Kyoto protocol is not a UN process as such. The Government have clearly and repeatedly stated that they would have preferred the United States to embrace the protocol and sign up for the International Criminal Court and the whole panoply of international law that has been gently put in place. At some stage in the future, the United States, a country based on rule of law, not rule of men, will come to understand that the rule of law must apply internationally, as well as within national borders. Looking to the future, Savimbi's death in Angola presents an important opportunity. The UN Secretary-General has visited Angola to assess the situation, and we want to see if the UN can finally bring a definitive peace to that troubled part of Africa.

Last week on Iraq, a new UN Security Council resolution was adopted, based on a British initiative, which significantly changes the arrangements for UN sanctions in Iraq. It maintains a tight control on military goods but lifts controls on civilian-only humanitarian goods. It removes Saddam's spurious excuses for the suffering that he inflicts on the Iraqi people and puts more pressure on the regime. It will also bring a significant reduction in UN bureaucracy to allow swifter delivery of goods to Iraq under the Oil for Food programme, and it will underline, once again, that the Security Council has only ever had a problem with the Iraqi regime, not the Iraqi people. We remain under no illusions that Iraq continues to pose a threat to the international community. The goods review list will maintain strict controls on items that might be used in Iraq's weapons of mass destruction programme or other military programmes.

On terrorism, one of the UN Security Council's recent achievements was the adoption of a resolution obliging all members to take measures to stop the financing of terrorist groups and to deny safe haven to terrorists. The actions that states are taking to fulfil their obligations are being closely scrutinised by the Security Council's counter-terrorism committee, chaired by our ambassador there, Sir Jeremy Greenstock, and I pay tribute to his leadership and the work of our mission and diplomatic team in New York.

Norman Lamb: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. MacShane: One last time, because many colleagues want to speak.

Norman Lamb: On the work of that committee, the UN website indicates that about 45 countries still have not responded to the initiatives to counter terrorism, although they were supposed to have done so by the end of December. Is that a concern, and what steps are being taken to address it?

Mr. MacShane: Of course it is a concern. Whenever I visit countries that are part of my portfolio and have not signed up, I make it clear to Heads of Government and my opposite numbers that the whole point of the measures is to protect their citizens from the scourge of terrorism.

Last year, Kofi Annan was awarded the Nobel peace prize, a magnificent tribute to the man and his organisation's achievements. There are many other unsung achievements. The international atomic energy inspections have reduced the risk of nuclear war. The UN has led international efforts to clear land mines worldwide, and the World Metereological Organisation's early-warning system has spared millions from the calamitous effects of natural disasters. The International Telecommunication Union has co-ordinated the use of the radio spectrum and the positioning of stationary satellites and has set standards for international communications so that there is an unfettered flow of information around the globe.

We live in an interdependent world. Issues such as development, the environment, HIV/AIDS and smallpox can only be tackled together. There will be issues on which we have differences, and issues of peace and security on which we need to work together. There will be continued pressure for us to move together, sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly, to set new standards of decent behaviour. For all those aims, although it is not Tennyson's parliament of the world and it is not perfect, the UN still remains our best hope on earth.

2.58 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Hon. Members will be grateful to the Minister for calling this debate today. We should not forget the importance of organisations such as the UN in our ever more interconnected world, where dialogue and discussion between countries are vital if we are to achieve stability and peaceful relations [illegible] the 21st century. It is right that we should debate the changing role of the UN in a fast-changing world.

Since its foundation in 1945, in the aftermath of world turmoil, the UN has proved to be an important forum for dialogue, communication and, most importantly, for international consensus and conflict resolution. The tragic events of 11 September proved a wake-up call to the world. Gone were the old, cold war certainties of two super-powers and attendant blocs balancing one another. Instead, we are faced with a new fluidity; threats come not from established states in an age-old pattern but from ruthless terrorists, from rogue states with weapons of mass destruction, from poverty, disease and a lack of education in some countries and—perhaps most importantly—from a lack of understanding and tolerance between nations and people.

The UN charter encompasses in its aspirations the wish to tackle those ills. It aspires to save people from the scourge of war, to establish conditions under which justice, human rights and respect for international obligations can be maintained, to

"promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom",

and to encourage people to practise tolerance and to live together as good neighbours.

Those are worthy objectives. They are still worthy today, over 50 years after they were written. We must ensure that they are effectively translated into modern action and international consensus in the decades ahead. Britain, with its permanent seat on the Security Council and the United Nations Commission on Human Rights, has a responsibility and a central role to play in defining the UN's role in the coming decades and ensuring that it is effective in fulfilling it. It is important for us to be active in that role, recognising that, with our permanence on the Security Council—which we see no reason to alter—we must take a long-term view of what the UN needs in order to function better.

In any consideration of the UN's role, we must be clear that it and other international organisations can never replace the sovereign nation state as the main building block of international affairs and governance. However, the UN has an important role as a scrutineer and arbiter of actions and international disputes.

The UN is seen by many, on a moral level, as above the day-to-day diplomatic wrangles of states, and its humanitarian work justifiably enjoys the respect and support of millions across the globe. Figures such as Mary Robinson and Kofi Annan rightly enjoy the respect of the world as people untainted by national self-interest. However, despite this record of success, there are also failures. As with any organisation, there is much room for improvement and adaptation to changing circumstances.

I would like to highlight some areas in which the UN functions effectively and others that could, perhaps, benefit from reforms. A consistent picture will emerge. When the UN has full international backing, as in Afghanistan, it can be a most effective organisation. When it is ignored, undermined or sidestepped by key international players, its ability to do what those who formed it intended is dramatically reduced. In short, the UN can operate only by the consent of its member countries; its success and legitimacy rest on that international consent and recognition.

In Afghanistan, we have seen the centripetal role that the UN can play in ensuring peace and security in the most difficult circumstances. Not only has the UN given international credibility to the international coalition in the war on terrorism, it has proved instrumental in providing a road map for future security in the region, and in helping to co-ordinate the vital life-saving, humanitarian aid effort since the fall of the Taliban. We have seen the UN working at its best, forging international consensus, helping to deliver aid and to rebuild a smashed country, and, with Mr. Brahimi's work in Bonn, helping to forge agreements for the interim Government, and taking a lead on future conflict prevention.

Similarly, the UN has played a strong role in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Angola, and should be commended in an unqualified way for that. That work can prevent future costly and bloody conflicts.

Peacekeeping is another of the most visible aspects of the UN's role. There is an increasingly important debate about where the line should be drawn between peacekeeping and peacemaking. It is not an easy question to tackle. The recent report by Lakhdar Brahimi addresses the peacekeeping aspect of the UN's role, and makes important recommendations with the intention of improving the UN's ability to fulfil its peacekeeping obligations effectively.

I am not suggesting that we address today all the points made by Mr. Brahimi, or that we should accept them without further consideration. However, I want to make a few observations on some of the points raised by the report, which the Minister mentioned in his opening remarks. He makes the important point that there is a growing need for more closely defined mandates in UN operations, with clear statements of what is required within a realistic time scale. Another suggestion is that there should be a far shorter delay between the authorisation of UN operations at a political level and implementation at a military level, at least on the ground. Such delays allow situations to deteriorate and further complicate any mission that is defined.

Money, staffing and organisational capacity are always central to UN operations. I am pleased that the United States paid its contribution to the UN, importantly before 11 September. Member states must always bear in mind the fact that the success of the UN depends on the political and financial support of the United States. I hope that the British Government will note these recommendations in the report, and give it their most serious consideration.

I welcome the report's justified praise of the UN for its peacekeeping work, and the staff involved. We should be prepared to examine the recommendations in detail. However, I want to sound a brief note of caution. When we consider the Brahimi report and peacekeeping in general, we must always be wary of the worrying precedent of nation building that some people have advanced. It is important that we help nations to rebuild themselves rather than impose models, which is where the UN can successfully prevent conflict. It can assist and guide nations in taking the necessary steps to rebuild themselves, rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all model or some western template that we believe is better but may not suit them.

Mr. Love: The hon. Gentleman mentioned his concern about the nation state. The Secretary-General suggested that the UN should be able to intervene if there have been massive human rights violations, such as in Rwanda. Does the hon. Gentleman agree?

Mr. Duncan: That is happening already. The UN is bound to be drawn into messy conflicts in the dispute between Rwanda and Burundi. There is no hard and fast rule. The golden rule in foreign policy and international relations is that situations are never easy to define: there is no black and white or right and wrong. There is always a difficult moral choice between different shades of grey, and that is true of countries that are abusing

[Mr. Duncan]

human rights and where there are conflicts over boundaries and competing areas. We must be careful not to be simplistic when we draw up rules about how we should behave. Every case deserves analysis on its own merits.

I touched on the UN's role in the war on terrorism. That role is far from over. In conflicts that have been widely cited as central to that war—for example, in the middle east and Iraq—UN resolutions set an important yardstick against which we can judge the conduct of nations. I recently went to Jenin, as did the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd), who beat me to it and saw what is happening there a week before I did. She provided graphic reports of what she witnessed, which I subsequently saw, and it will be interesting to hear her analysis. What I saw was more of a mess and an impending humanitarian crisis than a massacre. As the Minister said, it is a shame that international UN observers could not enter promptly. Much idle and unhelpful speculation could have been avoided if the facts had been ascertained earlier. That was damaging to the UN's role. If democratic nations show such hostility to its work, it sets a precedent that damages the ability of the international community to make national Governments accountable. Empty commitments to United Nations' resolutions add to that damage. In the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, undermining the United Nations has serious consequences for peace. The Palestinian Authority's failure to clamp down on violence and Israel's continued development of settlements and unacceptable interlinking of highways directly contravene commitments given under UN resolutions 242 and 338 which, if only they could see it, hold a road map to peace.

Elsewhere in the globe, the recent increase in tension and violence in Kashmir is deeply worrying. I do not presume to offer a detailed prescription to end the dispute to the satisfaction of all—any such solution must emerge from talks between the two parties—but the UN can play an important facilitating role in helping to bring the two sides together. Once again, there must be a commitment to the acceptance of any UN resolutions, and in return the UN must be careful to craft resolutions in such a way as to make them credible and realistic, so that they have an optimum chance of effective implementation.

The more that countries turn a blind eye to UN resolutions, the less chance there is of a bright future for the people caught up in these conflicts. It is the job of the international community to make both sides realise that, and to press for a political settlement. That goes to the crux of the issue.

UN resolutions rest on consensus and on the will of the international community, but to be effective they must be abided by, and the flouting of UN resolutions can be seen all too clearly in Iraq. UN resolutions gave legitimacy to the action of the international community against the repression of the Kurds and the invasion of Kuwait. Later, in resolution 687, the international community ordered that Iraqi weapons of mass destruction should be inspected and destroyed. Those weapons of mass destruction are still a threat, yet on 4 May *The New York Times* reported:

> "The United Nations and Iraq ended three days of talks on disarmament with an agreement to meet again, but no breakthrough on the return of weapons inspectors to Baghdad".

No date has yet been set for the next round, which is very worrying. Furthermore, any concession by Saddam Hussein to allow weapons inspectors into Iraq amounts to little if it merely pays lip service to the will of the international community and is unmatched by a genuine desire to abide by the resolutions, rather than to qualify them subsequently or to wriggle out of them. That highlights once more the problem of unmet UN resolutions, and how to enforce them. We have yet to develop an effective solution to that problem.

Although the UN has a major role to play in securing stability in regions of the world, it has an equally important role in promoting human rights and in its humanitarian work, which the hon. Member for Cynon Valley and I and many others in the Chamber have seen.

It is timely and appropriate to mention the work of the UN in Burma. Credit for the manner and timing of Aung San Suu Kyi's release goes squarely to Razali Ismail, the UN special envoy to Burma. I pay enormous tribute to him, and to so many other UN staff, who have done such useful broking and negotiating work. It is no coincidence that America and the European Union have robust policy positions on Burma and are starving the regime of the hard currency that it needs. The combination of Mr. Ismail's UN role, his Malaysian nationality and his regional links make him a highly effective interlocutor. It seems that when the UN has widespread backing from national Governments, it can play a much more effective role than it could ever play on its own. Sadly, when countries try to manipulate its processes, the UN can be constrained and its ability to scrutinise human rights severely reduced. The recent meeting of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights suggested that if the UN is to remain an effective body in this area it may need to undergo some structural and procedural reform, and that Governments must engage constructively, actively and promptly in that process.

The US and the major European players must be involved if the commission is to hold to account countries such as Zimbabwe and Burma, which must show a real commitment to human rights. The process has not been helped by the fact that the Government have apparently contracted out large elements of their human rights policy to the EU. I invite the Minister to defend his position. On Zimbabwe, we watched and pressed to no avail as the Foreign Secretary talked of one EU initiative after another. In reality, he did nothing to stop human rights abuses by Mugabe and his henchmen.

Humanitarian aid, health programmes and the building of effective education systems are all vital if we are to tackle the long-term causes of poverty and conflict. Dealing with humanitarian crises when they occur, helping refugees and feeding a starving people are all deeply important aspects of the UN's work, but it goes deeper than that to a longer-term commitment to improving social conditions and tackling root causes.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): I agree with much of the hon. Gentleman's speech, but I am disappointed with his comments on Zimbabwe. Does he not recognise that, given the possibility of Britain being accused of acting like a former colonial power, it was important to get the broadest possible international agreement to put pressure on Mugabe?

Mr. Duncan: I would argue that, none the less, the Government were too quiet in their condemnation of what was happening in Zimbabwe. The EU did a lot, but the Americans were far ahead of us, and many actions could have been taken. Sadly, I saw no evidence of work going on behind the scenes to persuade others to take the action that we were urging. The absence of that has done intolerable harm to the people of Zimbabwe who, while the world's press is looking elsewhere, are suffering miserably from the consequences of Mugabe's supposed re-election as president.

When I went to Jenin, I saw at first hand the UN's work with refugees. While I was there, I met by chance the long-time aid worker Larry Hollingsworth. He is an unmistakably recognisable figure, and with his generosity of spirit, his dedication to helping people and his refusal to take sides, he is symbolic of all that is best about the UN: its people. The UN employs many like him in some of the most difficult parts of the world. From its aid workers at the sharp end through to statesmen such as Kofi Annan, these people refuse to give up or despair about the situations that they face. They keep working for peace and to help people who are vulnerable and suffering. I pay tribute to those people, and I am sure other Members will join me in praising the work, especially the humanitarian work, carried out under the auspices of the UN.

It is a pity that time constrains what we can say today. There are so many facets to the UN's work that we can but touch on them. They include its peacekeeping role, conflict resolution work, the implications of the Brahimi report and its human rights and humanitarian work. Each of those could fill a debate on its own. However, the UN needs international support and consensus if it is to be effective. As the Minister said, that may require changes, including reform of the structure and procedures of the Commission on Human Rights. I do not presume to be able to come up with a detailed programme of reform in the short time that we have today, but it is vital that the question is addressed.

If countries such as those in Africa are committed to development, or are showing a commitment in that direction in initiatives such as the New Partnership for Africa's Development, they must be committed to good governance. The best way to express and further that is by active partnership with the UN and other member countries. Similarly, if we want effective security mechanisms through the UN, Security Council resolutions must be abided by no matter how large or small the nation in question. Turning a blind eye, applying unequal standards or attempting to suggest that resolutions do not apply to certain countries will only further stir disenchantment and make peace and international stability an even more distant objective.

There are those who would seek to devise ever more complex mechanisms to coerce and cajole countries into obeying UN resolutions. In this world of sovereign nation states, consensus and good will remain the bedrocks of the UN, and I do not see that changing. I hope that the 21st century will see a renewed era—of which we had a foretaste after 11 September—of co-operation, good will and dialogue, and I see no better forum for achieving such an end than the United Nations. It forges consensus without forcing unthinking conformity or a loss of national independence, and strives for peace, not conflict, and for prosperity in defiance of poverty. I applaud it for all its work.

3.20 pm

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): If memory serves me, there is a plaque on the Methodist central hall, just across Parliament square in Westminster, commemorating the first meeting of the United Nations, which took place in that building. The fact of that meeting always causes my spirits to rise, given the world situation that prevailed immediately after the second world war. Even then, in the face of the most terrible destruction, there was a clear commitment to a better way for the nations of the world to settle their differences and to a future for all the people of the world based on a statement of defined human rights.

I pay tribute to the United Nations and to all the nations that have kept faith with its founding principles. I also pay tribute to the even larger group of individuals, to whom we have not yet referred, including many in my constituency, who firmly believe in the basic principle that the United Nations demonstrates in all its activities that there is a better way for nation states to solve their differences other than by going to war. That principle has spread into care and concern for the education of children, tackling the problem of the lack of health care, the creation of proper education systems, concern for the future, and the examination of such questions as whether science is a benefit or a bane—I could go on listing the areas in which the UN has interested itself over the past 50 years. The UN could not have dedicated itself to all those activities if only nation states were responsible for them; the overwhelming approval of the citizens of those nation states for those activities has ensured the progress of the UN over the past 50 years.

I say "progress" advisedly. In Westminster Hall there is a fascinating exhibition of the cartoons of Low, one of the greatest 20th-century cartoonists. When I went round that exhibition, it came as a shock to see how pertinent and contemporary—indeed, up-to-the-minute—so many of his cartoons are. What Low lampooned still exists: there are still dictatorships, ferocious differences based on race, religion and perceived imbalances of power, and gross inequities in the distribution of the world's goods and benefits. However, I do not say that to criticise the United Nations. I say it simply to highlight the fact that the world's needs are constantly changing, and that the UN principles to which nation states are committed have by no means outlived their sell-by date. They are as vital to the world today as they were when that group of dedicated and innovative people sat down to draft the beginnings of the United Nations.

However, it is of concern to me—I do not exclude the Government from the criticism—that, although nation states have of late been willing to use the UN and its resolutions and mandates when it has served their interests to do so, when they are in a difficult position or do not believe that their interests are endorsed by UN

[Glenda Jackson]

principles, they use the UN in the worst of all ways. That is brought most clearly to mind by the continuing pronouncements from the Government about the perceived danger from the axis of evil nations defined by the President of the United States.

Obviously, the most pertinent nation in this instance is Iraq. I hold no brief whatever for the regime in Iraq. Indeed, I entirely support what the UN has imposed on that state, and I agree that the way forward is for it to allow in weapons inspectors. I am somewhat concerned, however, that the flouting of UN resolutions is being used as a reason for one nation state or a combination of nation states to enter into what could be an extremely dangerous war without first obtaining a mandate from the UN. The UN cannot be used at our particular national behest, however worthy the desired outcome.

Iraq is not the only example. The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) referred to the flouting of UN resolutions with regard to Israel and Palestine. My hon. Friend the Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) referred to what she perceived as an insult to the UN—I paraphrase—of Israel's refusal to allow in UN observers to check whether there has been excessive use of military power. I agree with the Minister that that in no way demeans the UN. However, it causes the nation state that chooses to ignore resolutions to lose value—I put it no higher than that—in the eyes of the international community.

That concerns me a great deal with regard to the British Government's pronouncements on possible military action against Iraq. Without the most cogent and close examination, and genuine validation of any such action—not a rubber stamp from the UN—the standing of this nation and the US would diminish in the eyes of the world.

I pay tribute to the remarkable history of ambassadors to the UN from this country and their secretariats, who have been extraordinarily gifted and capable people. We have been extremely fortunate with many of our ambassadors, and the world, too, has benefited from their undoubted commitment to the basic principles of the UN and their knowledge of the changes that had to take place within the UN.

In my view, further changes will have to take place. I firmly believe that we should examine in detail the constituent parts of the Security Council. I have also argued for a considerable time that, given the changes in the world, the UN should consider whether there could be sub-stations of the UN in various parts of the globe.

The value that every emerging nation state places on membership of the UN speaks volumes not only for the work that the UN has done, but for the work that remains to be done. However, that work will be invalidated and will have no purpose if it is not acknowledged that balances of power throughout the world are shifting and that those shifts will continue. We hope that the balance of power will be more equitable than it has been in the past, but no one can rest on their laurels.

I keep talking about the UN as if it were something separate and private unto itself, but we all know that tackling the world's problems, halting conflict and advancing the principles of basic human rights depend on the commitment of the world's nation states to supporting the UN. I am not talking about exclusively financial support, although that has been a great stumbling block to the UN achieving much that the world has wished it to achieve. There must also be a clear political and moral commitment to what the UN represents and, indeed, can achieve.

I do not for one moment pretend that that is easy. If it were easy we would be living in an entirely different world. There are always national interests and fundamental and often deeply held differences between nation states, and there may be deeply held, truthfully held, differences within those nation states, but the UN is our last, best hope as an international forum for tackling those curses that have lain upon the world for centuries. The UN has never been totally successful, but it has achieved more than any other attempt by the world to bring all those nation states together to sit around a table and discuss.

I pay tribute to everyone who brought the United Nations into being, who have maintained it over the past 50 years and who will ensure that it continues. I strongly endorse the view that the failure to maintain UN resolutions does not damage the United Nations, but it damages the countries that flout them. Our Government should give precise and deep consideration to that before they enter into any pre-emptive strike against any nation.

3.31 pm

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): I, too, congratulate the Government, the Minister and the Foreign Secretary on making this debate possible. The extent of consensus across the parties about the vital role of the United Nations in the past and, I hope, in the future has been encouraging. The UN charter begins:

> "We the peoples of the United Nations are determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind."

It was drafted in 1945 in the aftermath of the second world war and signed initially by 51 nations. Even if, in the intervening years, the world community has failed to live up to the challenge of that ambition, it is as relevant and important today as it was then.

As we debate the role of the UN today, the world seems to be a more dangerous and unstable place than it has been for a long time, as shown by the horror of 11 September, the threat posed by terrorism, the tinderbox of the middle east and the frightening heightened tension between India and Pakistan, not to mention the continuing conflicts that blight so much of Africa. That instability cries out for an effective UN. To be effective and relevant it must achieve reform, but the progress so far has been depressingly slow. Fine words and aspirations from the lead nations have not yet turned sufficiently into action.

Reform is so important because in the 57 years since the UN's creation the world has self-evidently changed dramatically, yet the institution remains essentially as it was in 1945. If it is to have a central role in this new century it must be able to respond to new challenges. The nature of conflict has shifted significantly in those years. Just in the last 10 years, 5 million people were killed in intrastate conflicts. The threat of terrorism has increased, as has the impact that terrorists can have with the weapons that may now be at their disposal.

The Secretary-General, in his report "We the peoples" to the millennium summit back in 2000, referred to the threats and challenges of the new globalised world. He referred in particular to crime, narcotics, terrorism, pollution, disease, weapons, refugees and migrants. Those all present enormous challenges. Added to them, as has already been mentioned, is the imperative to tackle sustainable development and the environmental crisis that faces the globe. That also provides a central role for the United Nations.

I should like to deal specifically with the UN's peacekeeping role. Although not mentioned in the charter, that role became a central thrust of the organisation. For the first four and a half decades, the blue berets of the UN's peacekeeping forces became synonymous with everything positive about the UN. Yet in the last decade of the 20th century, the UN's reputation for peacekeeping became badly tarnished.

The report commissioned by the Secretary-General and produced by the panel headed by Mr. Brahimi gave impressive recognition of how badly things had gone wrong with peacekeeping. It referred to the challenge of saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war, but acknowledged:

> "The U.N. has repeatedly failed to meet this challenge—and it can do no better today. Without renewed commitment on the part of Member States, significant institutional change and increased financial support, the U.N. will not be capable of executing the critical peacekeeping and peacebuilding tasks that the Member States assign to it."

Those who support the UN having a central role in the future must face up to the criticisms of its performance and find ways of improving matters.

The UN's failures in the 1990s were particularly stark—in Rwanda, Bosnia and Somalia. Brahimi referred to the consequences for those countries of the failure to distinguish between victim and aggressor, treating both equally. The result was at best ineffectiveness, but in the worst case

> "may amount to complicity in evil."

That clearly was the case in Rwanda and it inevitably had a devastating effect on the credibility and the standing of UN peacekeeping.

Reports in 2000 also highlighted the appalling corruption in the UN peacekeeping forces deployed in Sierra Leone. We have heard about the UN's positive role there, but the Nigerian contingent was guilty of involvement in illegal trading of diamonds, drug smuggling and other serious criminal activities.

Brahimi's report was deeply critical of much of the culture of the UN. It referred to wide disparities in staff quality. We heard earlier about the many people who devoted their lives to the UN, but Brahimi averred that that was not always the case, and he pleaded for the UN to become a genuine meritocracy. Excellence had to be rewarded but incompetence had to be rooted out. He warned that, unless that happened, additional resources would be wasted and lasting reform would become impossible.

That was the picture back in 2000. As we entered the new millennium, there seemed to be widespread recognition of the need for reform and the organisation's acceptance of past failures. What remains depressing is that decisive change has failed to take place. The danger is that without reform the UN will fail to meet the substantial challenges ahead.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): I am following the hon. Gentleman's argument with great interest. On a recent visit to the UN, I spent some time talking about how its role in peacekeeping had developed. The change in leadership to Kofi Annan and change in approach to peacekeeping were seen as the important element of reform rather than reform of the institutions. There was a general feeling that spending a lot of time in reforming institutions would mean taking the UN's eye off the real problems of the world. Does the hon. Gentleman agree?

Norman Lamb: I can see the risk of deflecting attention away from how best to cope with each challenge. However, the real concern is that, as presently constructed, the United Nations, particularly the Security Council, does not properly reflect the modern world. It can no longer be sustained with countries that were essentially the victors of the second world war playing the prominent, central roles. That must change, as many people recognise.

On the eve of the millennium summit in September 2000, the Liberal Democrats and the Government published a joint paper on the case for reform. It was an impressive document, the work of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) and the then Foreign Secretary. Much of it is as valid now as it was then.

Mr. Love: When the joint paper was published, there was some criticism from the Liberal Democrats because they supported the idea of regional lists of people or countries that should be on the Security Council. What is the policy of the Liberal Democrats?

Norman Lamb: We signed up to the paper and supported it. There will be debate in any party about certain aspects of official policy, but the paper clearly stated our position and I stand by that. It made the powerful point that the UN remains the only truly global institution, with universal membership and universal norms that bestow on it a unique legitimacy. As Kofi Annan put it, the UN's influence derives not from power but from what it represents—its role in helping to set and sustain global norms, its ability to stimulate global concern and action and the trust inspired by its practical work through so many of its agencies to improve people's lives.

The millennium targets that were set in 2000 to be achieved by 2015 are an excellent example of the UN taking a lead. They are based on some core values that the world community is asked to follow; that is why it is so important to rebuild confidence and credibility. If the UN is to have a central role in the future, structural reform must be achieved. I have already mentioned the need for reform of the Security Council. There is a powerful case for Germany and Japan to have a place on it and there must be additional places for Latin America, Africa and Asia if the UN is properly to reflect the modern world.

[Norman Lamb]

It is also important to address the use of the veto. Although it has not often been used since the inception of the UN, the threat of its use can be destructive. The Security Council must be more capable of responding effectively and without delay to the threats and challenges ahead. There also needs to be an audit of outstanding Security Council resolutions. Too often, they are fine words that gather dust without being translated into action.

I want to discuss when intervention in other countries is appropriate. In April 1999, the Prime Minister initiated a debate on the circumstances in which we should get involved in "other people's conflicts", as he put it. Kofi Annan joined the debate by stating:

> "No legal principle—not even sovereignty—can shield crimes against humanity."

There needs to be a framework for intervention, the criteria and principles to be followed in determining when and if it is appropriate.

What has happened since the millennium summit in September 2000, and since Brahimi's analysis of the UN's peacekeeping role? Policy continues to be developed, and in December 2001 the Secretary-General reported on progress in the implementation of the recommendations of Brahimi's panel. Things are happening slowly, but the UN peacekeeping and peacebuilding role is at least temporarily diminished.

Events since 11 September do not necessarily paint too gloomy a picture of the UN's central role of peacekeeping and peacebuilding. After all, it was the Secretary-General's special representative for Afghanistan, Mr. Brahimi, who instigated consultations on the future governance of Afghanistan, which led to the Bonn talks under the auspices of the UN. The outcome of those talks was widely acknowledged as a triumph, and the UN is continuing to play a central role in the creation of a new constitution and stable governance for that troubled country. When it came to establishing a peacekeeping force in Afghanistan, it was again Brahimi who advised against a UN force; instead, learning from the lessons of the previous decade, the international security and assistance force was under the auspices the UN but was not a UN force.

The trend increasingly seems to be for peacekeeping forces to be provided by coalitions of willing nations. Indeed, the United Kingdom performed an admirable and impressive role in Sierra Leone and Afghanistan. A new model may be emerging, with the UN doing what it does best and individual countries providing peacekeeping forces because of their expertise, yet still being accountable to the UN. If what seems to be emerging is the shape of things to come, the cost of those operations must be properly shared.

I turn to the role of the United Nations in the so-called war on terrorism. Resolution 1373, passed on 28 September 2001, set out a range of legally binding measures to be taken against terrorism. As we heard, a counter-terrorism committee was established to pursue that agenda, chaired by Sir Jeremy Greenstock, who said that its task was to upgrade the world's capability for tackling terrorism and establish a network for information sharing and co-operative executive action. I have already said that all member states were supposed to have provided details of what measures they were taking by the end of December but that 45 countries failed to respond. I would be interested to know what is being done to encourage those recalcitrant countries to respond.

There is no doubt that a globalised world needs a strong United Nations; it also needs many of the UN agencies, which are engaged in vital work. I have recently seen the work of the United Nations population fund in China, which is addressing the massive challenge of population growth in that country. I am also aware of the work of the United Nations mine action service in trying to clear mines. However, many UN agencies need to be challenged on their use of funds and on the effectiveness of their work. I was appalled to hear that UNMAS spends about 30 per cent. of its budget on central costs in New York. That must be challenged so that the money is used effectively on the ground.

It is clear that the will is strong to ensure that the United Nations again becomes an effective, central player in a dangerous and unstable world, but the fine rhetoric must be translated into action to ensure that we achieve not only structural reform but reform of the way in which it carries out its work. We need to make certain that it is effective.

3.48 pm

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): Reform of the United Nations is necessary, because membership of the Security Council encourages nuclear proliferation. If a country has nuclear weapons it gets a seat at the top table; the likelihood of a seat for India is the latest example of that. The problem must be addressed. It is a perverse incentive.

Mr. Savidge: As the Liberal spokesman said, countries were on the Security Council because they happened to win world war 2, not because they had nuclear weapons. It is important to stress that, because some people think that countries can get on to the Security Council by that means.

Harry Cohen: I note my hon. Friend's comments, but I think that there is still a perverse incentive, which must be dealt with.

Mr. Love: As a member of an association of friends of India, I should say that there are many reasons why we should consider sympathetically India's claim to a place on the Security Council, not least because there are more than 1 billion people in the country, and its population is growing rapidly.

Harry Cohen: I hear that point, and I am not unsympathetic to such reasons, but India's case started to be taken seriously only when it got nuclear weapons. That provides a perverse incentive, which must be dealt with.

It may not be popular to say so here, but it would also make obvious sense to convert the Security Council seats of the United Kingdom and France into a European Union seat. There is an obvious case for doing that, and it will come about in due course. If it does not, the Security Council will become unwieldy. Indeed, it will end up becoming the General Assembly if the reforms that have been mentioned come about. We should consider an EU seat as part of any reform process.

Reform should also encompass paying dues on time. The United States position has been a scandal, and its dues were paid only recently—by Ted Turner of CNN, not by the Administration. Paying up should be a necessary prerequisite for a country's nationals to hold positions in the UN.

I want to talk about an aspect of the UN charter. Whenever the House debates the arms trade, the Government—whichever party is in power—response is that all countries have the right of self-defence, which is enshrined in article 51. That has become the basic justification for arms sales, but the charter did not intend that. It simply stated the obvious fact that a nation's sovereignty should not be attacked by others, but arms buyers and sellers now use that to justify their arms dealing.

I would like the charter to be amended. Why should countries with appalling human rights records be allowed to use it to legitimise a dubious right to import arms? It should be made explicit that the right to import arms exists only in countries that recognise the responsibilities of good governance.

There is an irony in the present situation, in that the UN imposes arms embargoes in contradiction of its own charter. The European Union, NATO, the UK and others similarly impose embargoes in contradiction of the charter and of the right to self-defence. It could be argued that Iraq has the right of self-defence under the charter, whatever the policies of its regime. I suspect that other countries would argue the same for themselves, and I think that they would win their case if it ever came to trial under international law. The charter should therefore be made more specific, and the authorisation for arms deals should be qualified.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): Is there not an even wider issue? It is undoubtedly true that the mere presence of arms fuels conflict in many areas, and that is as valid for small arms as it is for larger ones. Is there not a role for the UN in trying to get countries such as Britain to be serious about defence diversification and about using their talented engineers and scientists in more productive employment, thus decreasing the availability of arms in the world?

Harry Cohen: I agree with both those points. I have argued for much more effective defence diversification for many years. There should be control on small arms, and I am deeply disappointed that the USA put a stop to a progressive proposal that was backed by the Government. I praise the Government for their support. It is a shame that the Bush Administration have put a block on an important proposal that would have stopped much of the killing around the world.

The UN charter should not be used to authorise unjustified arms sales, which result in turmoil. The Government should raise the issue in all relevant discussions, internationally and in the UN. I admit that such an amendment is unlikely to be passed, as there are too many regimes that want the right to buy arms without accepting proper democratic and human rights standards. However, such a move from the Government might provoke a debate about which countries should be prevented from or restricted in importing arms.

Human rights abuses bring untold misery to countries, but there are more serious international implications. A country that is willing to inflict pain and suffering on its own population is less likely to feel morally restricted about killing people outside its borders. If a dictator is aggressive towards his own people, he may well be aggressive against his neighbours. I do not like the UN charter being used as a cover for aggression, and I urge that the matter be debated at the UN and that reform be considered.

3.56 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): I welcome the debate, as the House does not consider frequently enough the work and role of the UN.

I have two points. First, we must consider how the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for the near east, which is one of the UN's oldest agencies, can be wound up while offering a secure future to Palestinian refugees. Secondly, I wish to promote the introduction of a parliamentary dimension into the work of the UN.

During the debate on the middle east that took place on 16 April on the Floor of the House, I said in response to the moving comments made by the hon. Member for Cynon Valley (Ann Clwyd) that the devastation of the Palestinian refugee camp in Jenin should encourage the international community to consider how the work of UNRWA can be brought to an end. Whatever the justification for what Israel did at Jenin in pursuit of Palestinian terrorists, it must be clear that such camps are and will continue to be a prime source of terrorism against Israel and the international community for as long as they remain.

There are 49 refugee camps, located in the host countries of Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, as well as in Gaza and the partially reoccupied west bank. Today they house nearly 1.25 million of the 3.5 million refugees who are registered with the UN. They originated from the 1948 independence war for Israel and were added to by those who were further displaced in the 1967 war. The camps are overcrowded and squalid and offer the most rudimentary facilities. Their occupants are stateless and homeless, living in increasing poverty and their hopes for a secured and settled future are dashed as every peace process fails. It is no wonder that they are a breeding ground for young terrorists influenced by Islamic fundamentalism.

Despite those conditions, UNRWA continues to produce miracles in providing basic services. Many of its schools are organised on a double shift system, so that they are, in effect, two schools in one. The teachers produce outstanding results despite those conditions, as do the medical staff in the health centres and hospitals, not least in treating patients traumatised by the violence.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) was right to pay tribute to the work of United Nations staff in such situations. However, UNRWA's ability to provide such services has deteriorated dramatically in the past decade, with a 30 per cent. reduction in spending per registered refugee as donations have been reduced and the registered refugee population has increased by more than 30 per cent. There can be no doubt that the most recent interventions in the camps in Gaza and the west bank by Israeli forces will have damaged still further UNRWA's ability to deliver those services.

[Mr. David Atkinson]

In response to the situation, the international community, through the United Nations, should now consider how those 3.5 million registered Palestinian refugees can be provided with a permanent settlement and offered a secure future after 50 years. Such a plan, including the funding for it, should be clear for all to see in preparation for the moment when, eventually and inevitably, the refugee final status issue is addressed by the two parties to the negotiations. Its aim should be to enable the camps to be ended and the work of UNRWA to be seamlessly transferred to the Ministries concerned.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe endorsed a carefully worked-out plan in its resolution 1156, which was the subject of my Adjournment debate in the House on 28 April 1998. It accepts the reality, as do a growing number of Palestinians and Arab states, that there can be no right of return to Israel, even though Israel will be expected, and has offered, to accept some refugees in order to reunify families. The options include citizenship in the host country, resettlement and citizenship in other donor countries or citizenship in a viable state of Palestine. The Assembly also proposed the establishment of a new UN Palestine refugee and displaced persons final status fund to finance the permanent settlement of the refugees. That funding would represent the compensation that is promised in UN resolutions 198 and 242 as the implied alternative to the right of return.

It is now in the interests of all of us to press for such a plan. Spain, currently the holder of the EU presidency, and the country that launched the Oslo accords in 1990, should be encouraged to take such an initiative. The United Kingdom, which is the largest donor to UNRWA, considered such a plan when it last held the EU presidency in 1998. At that time it co-sponsored the Warwick conference on Palestine refugees, which was addressed by the late Derek Fatchett, then the Foreign Office Minister with responsibility for middle east affairs. Without such a plan, I do not have any hope for the refugees or for an end to the terrorism that each new generation is tempted to pursue.

I shall conclude my remarks by making the case for the introduction of a parliamentary dimension into the work of the United Nations. Many Members serve or have served in the four Parliamentary Assemblies where we are represented by a national delegation—the Council of Europe, the Western European Union, the North Atlantic Assembly and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. I am sure that all who share that experience will vouch for the fact that, as practical parliamentarians regularly seeking re-election to continue to do our work here, we can and have proposed solutions to problems that have eluded Governments.

During its existence for more than half a century, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has contributed to almost 200 conventions, which in countless ways based on common standards and best practices today influence the lives of the citizens of its 44 member states. We have also proposed solutions to long-standing disputes and conflicts by dialogue with fellow parliamentarians when diplomacy and Governments have failed.

It was the introduction of such a parliamentary dimension in the work of the UN, based on the undoubted success of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, that the millennium conference of presiding officers of national Parliaments—Speakers, in effect—called for in its final declaration at the UN headquarters in New York on 1 September 2000. That idea has been promoted for several years by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, which continues to encourage parliamentarians to be included in the national delegations to the annual UN General Assembly. It was a great privilege for me to address the General Assembly on behalf of the British delegation in October 2000. I was told that that was the first time that a British Back-Bench Member of Parliament had done so. I was grateful to the right hon. Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), who approved that when he was Foreign Secretary.

For parliamentarians to be included in national delegations to the UN General Assembly is no substitute for the UN having its own parliamentary assembly, such as that of the Council of Europe. Although it is for the IPU to pursue its proposal for such an assembly, I hope that the Government will endorse the concept and in so doing encourage those of us who believe that it would make a valuable contribution to the work and success of the UN in future.

4.6 pm

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): I am grateful to have an opportunity to contribute, and would like to spend most of my time discussing the role of UN development. Before I do so, I want to register my huge concern, and that of my constituents, about the situation between India and Pakistan, and about the treatment of Palestinians in Israel. Those matters have to be priorities for the UN, as they affect everyone.

When the Minister opened the debate, he referred, rightly, to the millennium development goals. In September 2000, the UN declaration on them suggested that by 2015 we should halve the proportion of the world's population who live on less than a dollar a day, suffer from hunger or are unable to reach or afford fresh drinking water.

The next goals were to ensure primary education for all, promote gender equality and reduce maternal and child mortality. UNICEF is doing some excellent work on the last issue. It hopes that by 2005 we will be able to eliminate maternal and neonatal tetanus, which currently kills 30,000 women and 200,000 babies each year, for the want of an incredibly cheap vaccine and some basic hygiene methods. I hope that the Government will continue to support that important programme.

The other three millennium development goals were to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other major diseases, to ensure environmental sustainability, and to develop a global partnership for development, based on open trading and a financial system with clear rules that is committed to good governance and poverty reduction.

I hope that everyone in the House supports the UN goals, as the real challenge is to achieve them. It is not impossible. Korea, Malaysia and Morocco halved the proportion of their people who lived in poverty in less than a generation, as did the Indian states of Haryana, Kerala and the Punjab. Another dozen countries, including Botswana and Mauritius, reduced poverty by a quarter or more in a generation. Other countries can learn much from those well documented lessons. If such work has been done before, we can do it again.

The UN, having drawn up the goals, now has a duty to oversee their implementation. The millennium declaration states

> "we will spare no effort to make the United Nations a more effective instrument for pursuing all of these priorities".

Delivering on the goals involves aid and major changes in trade organisation. Also, a key part in their delivery must be to oversee a swift and fair cancellation of third-world debt.

The world's poorest countries currently owe the richest an estimated $213 billion and pay us £21.5 billion a year. In return, they receive £49.5 billion in official development assistance. More than half the assistance is given straight back, which is ridiculous when we consider the wide discrepancy in power and poverty between the richest and poorest countries.

The UN is producing a lot of fine words, but the measures that are currently in place to deal with poor countries' debts are insufficient. The heavily indebted poor countries process, known as HIPC, managed and run by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, is not living up to the UN's worthy principles. The UN states that

> "global challenges must be managed in a way that distributes the costs and burdens fairly in accordance with basic principles of equity and social justice".

However, it is not socially just or equitable that Zambia, for example, spends 13 per cent. of its GDP on debt servicing and only 3.6 per cent. on health and 2.2 per cent. on education, when 85 per cent. of the population live below the poverty line and 45 per cent. are undernourished. Nor is there an equal say for debtor and creditor countries in the HIPC process. There should be a fair arbitration procedure for all poor countries that want bad loans to be assessed. Such a procedure should include investigating whether the lending countries were knowingly giving a bad loan or a loan to a corrupt dictator, Government, politician or official, and if so, the loan should be written off accordingly. All debts should be assessed to see whether they are consistent with the millennium development goals, which will only halve the number of people who live in poverty, not get rid of poverty altogether.

If we are to lift millions of people out of poverty, it will be crucial to speed up debt relief and expand help to those countries not even currently considered in the HIPC process. The UN could play a key role in setting up such an arbitration process, which already has some firm foundations. The Jubilee research organisation has undertaken several thorough studies of the HIPC initiative and found it to be seriously wanting. It suggests an arbitration system for overseeing and implementing debt relief, based on chapter 9 of the United States legal code. Jubilee proposes that the Secretary-General of the United Nations should oversee the appointment of panels to carry out the arbitration. In addition, the IMF has recently been considering the idea of arbitration panels for middle-income countries. We are not giving debtor countries the means to shake off any responsibility for their debts, but the UN can play a central role in the process to ensure that both sides are fairly heard.

As with most issues of debt relief, the details are complex and technical, but it seems an obvious role for the UN to fulfil. It is time for joined-up thinking on development. With the two big summits this year, which will highlight the links between development and international financing, the environment and the urgent need for poverty reduction, the central problem of debt in relation to the millennium development goals must be tackled seriously so that poor countries can be made sustainable, both in economic and environmental terms.

The United Kingdom is well ahead of other countries in advocating and implementing joined up pro-poor policies in development and debt relief.

Norman Lamb: Does the hon. Lady agree that the sale of the £28 million air traffic control system to Tanzania shows an absolutely hopeless failure to deliver joined-up government, as the Department for International Development opposed the project, but the Ministry of Defence and the Prime Minister supported it?

Ms Drown: There are serious questions surrounding that. There is an obvious defence that the decision is up to the Government of Tanzania and we should not interfere, but given the extreme poverty in Tanzania, there are serious questions about how much it is reasonable to spend on such a system when there are cheaper and better alternatives.

More needs to be done on debt relief, both by this country and others. The UN can play a central role in getting other developed countries to follow Britain's lead and genuinely address the needs of developing countries. The Zedillo report for the Monterrey financing for development summit estimated that an extra $50 billion of aid a year would be needed to meet those development goals. After debt relief, at its current level, the world's poorest countries will still need $30 billion a year just to achieve the first goal. To achieve all seven will require an awful lot more.

Mr. Love: While accepting almost everything that my hon. Friend says, does she not accord more importance to the role of trade? For example, in China and India, two countries with large numbers of very poor people, trade has been a salvation. It has brought many people out of poverty, yet she does not see it. Does she also accept that if the European Union could be opened up to third-world countries, it would do more than almost anything else to raise the people in those countries out of poverty?

Ms Drown: I accept those points and I have mentioned trade at least twice already. It is a central issue, part of the seventh millennium development goal, but we are not doing nearly enough. Developing countries have to cross barriers the size of mountains to send goods to us and in return we require them to reduce the barriers to our goods. Trade, debt relief and aid support need to be joined up.

I call on the Government to work with the United Nations on a co-ordinated approach to development, to speed up debt relief, to tackle the trade issues and to

[Ms Drown]

ensure that enough action is taken not only to achieve the millennium development goals but to reach even higher.

4.15 pm

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): Since the cold war ended, especially in the post-11 September world, there has been an urgent need to re-examine those international organisations that exist to uphold the peace and to maintain global stability. The foremost and principal organisation in that effort is the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Equally, however, there is no doubt that the United Nations has enormous international significance, and I am pleased that we can debate its modern role today.

I applaud the UN's many achievements and welcome many of the comments made by the Minister and other hon. Members. I would welcome new members such as East Timor and Switzerland joining the United Nations, but its culture needs to change a little. There should be less consensus and more expansion of liberty. The UN must become a more democratic and open organisation, with serious reforms cutting out the institutional waste and bureaucracy that have characterised it in recent years.

The first step to shaping the sort of United Nations that can actually be of use to its members must be an acceptance that it needs a clearly defined role, distinct from other organisations such as NATO, and one that it can deliver in an effective and meaningful manner. As the sixth largest contributor to the United Nations, it is in the United Kingdom's interest to ensure that the direction of the UN is focused and serves a useful purpose in all its initiatives. There is no excuse for spending taxpayers' money on an organisation that fails to deliver and seems only to perpetuate bureaucracy while standing on the toes of other organisations and nations. NATO, for example, has a specific security focus, yet the United Nations currently tries to be all-encompassing, acting as a focal point for all attempts to co-ordinate international action on global issues, be it peacekeeping, humanitarian aid or in attempting to lay the foundations for stability in Afghanistan.

Let us take, for example, the somewhat excessive level of discussions, documents, treaties and proposed actions that regularly come out of the United Nations. They are all based on the perceived rights of people around the world to everything from clean water to education. Yet declaring these rights—

Mr. Paul Marsden (Shrewsbury and Atcham): Is the hon. Gentleman seriously suggesting that there should be no right for a human being to have clean water, a roof over their head and enough food in their belly, especially bearing in mind that today 30,000 children will die in the developing nations, as they do every day? What is the hon. Gentleman's solution to those deaths?

Mr. Rosindell: The hon. Gentleman misunderstands me. What I am saying is that we need to achieve these things, but not to perpetuate a bureaucracy in which there is talk about achieving such laudable aims, but a failure to do so. In a recent document produced by the US Heritage Foundation, Brett Schaefer wrote that the UN

> "has not purified any water or educated any children, and UN target dates for accomplishing its goals are rarely, if ever, met."

I cannot believe that any hon. Member would want to defend an organisation that fails in such crucial areas of policy.

Ms Munn: The hon. Gentleman seems to be suggesting that no progress is being made. Does he not accept that 63 countries over the past 12 years achieved the world summit's 1990 goal by reducing the death rate of children under five by a third, while more than 100 countries reduced the death rate by a fifth? Of course, that is not enough, but is it not an achievement for all those children who would not have been alive if fewer countries had come together under the UN's auspices?

Mr. Rosindell: Yes, that is a magnificent achievement, and I seek to ensure that the UN and other international organisations improve on that work and the progress that they have made. It is a question not of criticising achievements, but of building on them.

Mr. Savidge: I attended a Heritage Foundation seminar at which representatives said that it was terrible that they were being accused of being unilateralist because of their opposition to arms control treaties and the UN. I am not sure that the hon. Gentleman is using the most reliable source to build his definition of caring Conservatism.

Mr. Rosindell: The hon. Gentleman is entitled to his opinion and to consult and take briefings from whichever organisation he chooses. I also have that right. I believe that the Heritage Foundation produces some excellent material, which I am pleased to use today.

What the UN will achieve is a debasement of the definition of rights, the expansion of the authority of international law, and the use of organisations and administrators to impose arbitrary rights as obligations on sovereign Governments. It also hosts periodic large-scale conferences that attempt to go well beyond what they could ever achieve, and cost an excessive sum of money.

Mr. Love: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Rosindell: Not at the moment.

The social summit in the mid-1990s proclaimed an ability to develop a global strategy on creating jobs and building solidarity. That is quite a feat for a one-time gathering of national and international bureaucrats. Surely, the cornerstone of Britain's approach to international organisations, especially the UN and, for that matter, the European Union, should be based on a policy of creating an international system that is based on, and accountable to, sovereign nations, and is realistic about what it can achieve. It should not attempt to encroach on areas that are rightly the business of its own member nation states. I will now give way to the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love).

Mr. Love: We have missed the point.

Mr. Rosindell: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman is saying that I have missed the point, or that he has.

Mr. Love: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way belatedly. I am talking about his point on international conferences. Whenever I read anything in the media about the UN and international conferences, the words that always attach to them are "lobster" and "champagne". Such superficial criticism of the UN does not take us forward. If we did not have a UN, we would need to invent one. The sooner the Heritage Foundation and those Conservative Back Benchers realise that, the better off this Parliament will be.

Mr. Rosindell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but I do not think that the Conservative party or any Opposition Members are suggesting that the United Nations should not exist. The UN has a crucial role to play in today's world, and no one is saying otherwise. I am arguing for a more efficient way of spending money and a United Nations that achieves the goals that we want it to achieve. We want less lobster and champagne and more achievements for the people and nations of the world that need the most help.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): Will the hon. Gentleman enlighten us about what he thinks the UN should be aiming to do?

Mr. Rosindell: I am trying to do that throughout my speech. I have already made it clear that the UN appears to be all-encompassing on a range of subjects, rather than focusing on clearly defined roles. Today's debate is to assess the importance of the United Nations while trying to ensure that it, and Governments who are represented in it, push for it to act effectively and cost-efficiently. We all want it to be a worthwhile organisation that we can support.

In its current form, the UN seems to strive for some sort of international consensus. However, I challenge where that can lead us. I appeal to the common sense of hon. Members to accept that such a concept, while idealistic, is floating somewhere significantly north of cloud cuckoo land. There are many things on which nations can agree, but always trying to reach international consensus on all issues is simply unrealistic.

Ms Munn: I remain somewhat puzzled by what the hon. Gentleman is saying. My understanding is that the United Nations is exactly the organisation that he described. It is an organisation of nation states, which means that there are few things on which the General Assembly can achieve a consensus, and there is a lot of negotiation about those issues. It is unlike the European Union, at which we sometimes have to argue about the subjects on which we give up a veto, and precisely like the organisation that he wants.

Mr. Rosindell: I do not entirely agree. The United Nations, like many international organisations, strives for what it sees as a consensus. The problem with the idea of consensus is that it leaves us always veering towards the common ground rather than necessarily towards what is right. As I said at the beginning, I would prefer the UN to fight for the expansion of liberty and freedom rather than continuously seek a consensus.

For example, where will an international consensus be found in a territorial dispute such as Gibraltar? Britain and Spain are both members of the UN. Both countries can agree on many topics, but so long as our Government do not betray the British people of Gibraltar, the two countries will never agree, whatever the United Nations chooses to do. Indeed, Gibraltar illustrates one key area in which the UN attempts good work, but fails. The 1960 UN resolution on the independence of colonial countries and peoples gives the people of such territories the right to remain as they are or integrate with their motherland. However, bilateral talks between Britain and Spain have taken place on Gibraltar, ignoring the declaration and rendering good intentions useless.

Equally, where will a consensus-seeking organisation place itself on the situation in the middle east? That has been mentioned by hon. Members already this afternoon. Some international input can be helpful in both matters, but action is conducted often on a bilateral, rather than multilateral basis. That is why the role of the UN should not be so prescriptive. It should more flexible and responsive to bilateral relationships between nation states. We should not have a UN where the bureaucracy runs wild, obsessed with countless conferences, documents and treaties attempting to be the world government. We should have a UN where nations can come together when need be just as the coalition against terror was formed last September.

One of the most prominent activities of the UN over the past decade has been that of an ever expanding peacekeeping role, at an unsurprisingly significant cost. That is especially the case when we consider the recent missions in Kosovo, East Timor and Sierra Leone, all of which took the budget for peacekeeping operations as a whole from $800 million in 1998–99 to $1.8 billion in 2000–01, without even mentioning the possible expenditure in connection with the war on terrorism.

Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the UN at such peacekeeping can legitimately be called into question when consideration is given to the correlation between the immense cost and the failures such as Somalia and Bosnia. Therefore, certain questions must be asked. Does the UN have the necessary military knowledge to conduct such actions? Does it carry the authority and respect that a NATO or a national taskforce would carry? Is the real purpose of many deployments peacekeeping or peace-enforcing? The period after the cold war has brought many more wars of ethnicity and nationalism, bringing a greater need for peace enforcement rather than simple peacekeeping.

The question we must now ask is whether the UN is equipped to deal with such scenarios, or whether other, more tactical and security focused forces would be better. Perhaps the UN is better used for properly co-ordinated humanitarian relief efforts, leaving military action to specific military organisations. Any decision that is made on the future role of the UN must be made on the basis that the world still exists as a body of independent nation states. The answers will not be

[Mr. Rosindell]

found in Westminster Hall this afternoon, but a thorough investigation must be made of the effectiveness of what the UN does now, how it can do it better and what it is based on. Some of the ideas that I have outlined today may seem to many to be anti-UN, but that is not the case. The UN has done a great deal of good work on a humanitarian and peacekeeping level over many years. The world has changed, however, and the bureaucracy needs to be challenged and its role needs to be defined. That is the real challenge.

4.33 pm

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Last March I had the privilege of speaking at an inter-parliamentary conference in New Delhi in the Parliament buildings on United Nations Brahimi peacekeeping operations. I started my comments by saying that 11 September had brought home to us that horrors we had previously thought might be purely in the realm of fiction could happen in dreadful reality. I then read out the following passage:

> "The magnificent architectural buildings of Indian democracy were destroyed within seconds of the blast; India Gate, the Parliament Building, the national Archives, the Supreme Court, then further out with temperatures still almost a million degrees, the path of destruction hitting Connaught Place, Janpath and other landmarks of Indian heritage . . . Then, like in Bombay, the firestorms reached the flimsier structures, the more densely crowded parts of the city where people died in their tens of thousands."

I said that whether one believed that scenario from "Dragon Fire", a carefully researched novel by BBC Asia correspondent Humphrey Hawksley, was credible, the possibility of conflict between India and Pakistan ending in nuclear war was all too terribly and dreadfully believable. That is even more true today. I am pleased to say that Sonia Gandhi, who was leader of the Indian opposition at the time, raised the same points in her message to the conference.

I said at that conference that I was not trying to be patronising or colonial—asserting that some countries could be trusted with nuclear weapons but others could not. I thought that I could defend myself against that accusation because I said that just two days earlier it had been revealed that Nixon had discussed with Kissinger the possibility of using nuclear weapons in Vietnam. I will also never forget Cuba. In 1993, I was at a big dinner at the Mansion house in honour of Mikhail Gorbachev. It was attended by several politicians—mostly senior Conservatives, including Margaret Thatcher. One of the speakers was David Mellor, who said that he believed Gorbachev had removed the threat of nuclear conflict. He spoke movingly about how, as a child, he had left his mother to go to school in the morning, wondering whether he would come home because we were in the middle of the Cuban missile crisis. As Kennedy said—he must have known—the possibility of nuclear disaster rose to somewhere between one in three and one in five because America had lost control of the situation.

Speaking in Westminster Hall at the start of the millennium, I said that I feared that we had missed many of the opportunities afforded by the ending of the cold war for reducing the terrible risks posed by weapons of mass destruction. I suspect that all hon. Members present would feel that the way in which events have gone since the beginning of the millennium has, if anything, increased the fears that something terrible could go wrong.

The comment made by President Truman in 1945 on the signing of the UN charter applies more than ever. He said:

> "We did much more than draft an international agreement among 50 nations. We set down on paper the only principles that will enable civilised human life to continue to survive on this globe."

The UN is not just our best hope of survival. It is an essential component of a safer world. The UN has many faults and legitimate complaints can be made about its bureaucracy and other problems, although I do not echo the comments of the Member for north cloud cuckoo land. As the hon. Gentleman's speech showed, attacks on the UN have often been grossly unjust. One thinks, for example, of the occasions on which NATO operates on UN command; if things go wrong, the failure is blamed on the UN and if things go right, NATO is credited with the success. The UN is often blamed in situations where the real fault has been member nations blocking an initiative.

One also thinks of how often the fact that the cold war never became a nuclear or a world war is credited to various factors, such as nuclear deterrence, and how rarely the contribution made by the UN is acknowledged. Hon. Members have referred to various UN activities: its success with decolonisation, refugees, famine relief, health, education, the environment, peacemaking, peacekeeping, conflict resolution, as well as the vital role it plays in combating terrorism and, of course, in arms control and disarmament. The UN is the fundamental basis of creating a peaceful, just and stable world.

I wish to concentrate on the UN's crucial role of opposing war and its causes. As the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) said, it will have an increasing role in halting civil wars. To be effective, it must be properly resourced and the forces must be properly integrated. The European rapid reaction force could provide a useful model. We must also work on policing and the sort of nation-building exercises that we have seen in Afghanistan.

I want to focus specifically on the three main world problem areas. The first is India and Pakistan, to which the Minister and others referred, where the risk of a conflict going nuclear is serious and the fatalities could run into millions. Even if no other countries were involved—heaven help us if China joins in—the consequences could be horrific. If just India and Pakistan became entangled in nuclear conflict, the fatalities would spread way beyond their borders as a result of the radiation, and even if a nuclear winter did not break out, climate change could occur in countries where many of the inhabitants are already living on subsistence levels.

The Prime Minister's judicious response to the question asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Govan (Mr. Sarwar) yesterday has the overwhelming support of both sides of the House. My own early-day motion 633, urging the Government to seek a peaceful resolution and reduce the risks of nuclear conflict has already found the support of 315 Back Benchers from across the political and religious spectrum, including the most prominent supporters of both countries. Unanimity exists not just in Parliament, but throughout the country, in support of the Foreign Secretary's peace mission next week. The UN has a vital role to play in resolving the problem.

Iraq is another major problem. Of course we must deal with Saddam Hussein and weapons of mass destruction, although I am somewhat wary of that phrase, which diminishes the difference between nuclear weapons on the one hand and biological and chemical weapons on the other.

4.41 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.56 pm

On resuming—

Mr. Savidge: I begin with an apology. I referred to the Member for north cloud cuckoo land when I should have said the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell). My knowledge of Essex geography is a little limited; is that some way beyond Barking?

I was speaking about Iraq. Obviously, the problem of Saddam Hussein and weapons of mass destruction must be dealt with, but inspections and sanctions must be decided under the United Nations. Any consideration of any other type of action against Iraq or any other state that is of concern must also take place under the UN. I reject the phrase "rogue state", because it is simplistic and I do not see why we should accept the language of the extreme right in the United States.

To quote the impressive speech made earlier by the Conservative spokesman, the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan), if the UN is "ignored, undermined or sidestepped" in this respect, as in any other, it will be diminished, and the possibility of other countries feeling that they have a right to take unilateral action will be increased. I also associate myself completely with the excellent and impressive speech made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson).

On Israel and Palestine, I take it as read that Israel has a right to exist within its borders in security, but I also take it as read that Palestine has a right to exist within its borders in security. I have grave fears about the implications if the Sharon Government continue to resist a proper inquiry into events in Jenin, to occupy territories where they have no right to be and to assume a licence to kill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate referred to Sir David Low's exhibition in Westminster Hall, which includes two very telling cartoons. One is about Japan and Manchuria, and the other relates to Italy and Abyssinia. He was forecasting that the failure of the League of Nations to take suitable action in those respects would lead to disaster, and we all know that it led eventually to world war.

I shall draw another historical parallel, which David Low also illustrated amply. I am pleased that there is discussion of peace talks this summer involving the United States, the European Union, Russia and the UN. It is important that a number of parties that are not seen to be partisan towards Israel should be part of those talks, but I have one fear at the back of my mind. We must not allow the situation to be like that involving Czechoslovakia in 1938, with the settlements being treated like those of the Sudeten Germans, and the weaker side—Palestine—being humiliated, as Czechoslovakia was, and forced to accept Bantustan status. That would be a recipe for disaster.

One of the crucial things in the failure of the League of Nations was its relationship with the United States. The United States played a wonderful role in setting up the League in the first place, but then unfortunately the isolationists took over. There are concerns in the rest of the world about the relationship of the United States to the United Nations. There are concerns about the sort of extremists to whom I have referred already, who treat the United Nations with hostility. I find it worrying that a popular film could be made that suggested that there could be a war between the United States as the goodies and the United Nations as the baddies.

Apart from those sorts of extremists, the Heritage Foundation and other isolationists, there are other concerns. There is concern felt in a number of parts of the world that some countries use the United Nations when it is convenient, and ignore it when it is not. There is another concern that I have heard expressed in several countries that the United Nations is dominated by the Security Council, the Security Council is dominated by the permanent five and the permanent five are dominated by the United States. To be fair, there is a concern in the United States that I think should be recognised by the rest of the world. The United States feels that we are happy to use its dollars and military resources when it suits us, but to blame it when it does not. I think that the balance of both concerns is covered very well in something that was said by John Fitzgerald Kennedy in 1961:

> "We must face the fact that the United States is neither omnipotent nor omniscient—that we are only 6 per cent. of the population, that we cannot impose our will upon the other 94 per cent. of mankind—that we cannot right every wrong or reverse every adversity—and that therefore there cannot be an American solution to every problem."

Clearly, part of the resolution of the difficulties between the United States and the United Nations, and other difficulties related to the UN, must lie in reform of the organisation. The General Assembly quite rightly represents countries, but that is without any relation to their size. The Security Council is supposed to balance that, but as we have said, the permanent five are there largely as a result of history. Of course, the role that we played in the second world war deserves to be recognised, but we have to recognise also that it would be unacceptable for our role during the first world war or the Napoleonic wars to give us a right to a permanent place on the Security Council. We will have to recognise that, at some point in the future, Britain will not necessarily be one of just five privileged states.

I would look for further reform. Ultimately, there needs to be an elected Parliament as part of the organisation. Until that time, one could look at whether there should be more involvement of parliamentarians. I think that the earlier comments of the hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) were warmly applauded by everyone. I would hope that there will be

[Mr. Savidge]

a possibility when China becomes a democracy—as I hope it may—of moving towards a further democratisation of the United Nations.

Personally, I look to the ambition of a world Government, continental Governments and national Governments, with power devolved to the lowest levels, right down to community councils. I realise that that might be a distant vision, but I think that Churchill's oft quoted dictum that

> "democracy is the worst form of government, except all those other forms of government that have been tried from time to time"

bears a lot of repetition.

Humanity has devised the means of encompassing its own destruction before it has evolved a system for avoiding conflict and war. That is the greatest challenge facing us all, and the United Nations must be vital to our hopes of meeting that challenge.

5.4 pm

Mr. Paul Marsden (Shrewsbury and Atcham): I wish to declare an interest. I am member of the United Nations Association and I would urge all hon. Members who have not already done so to join that worthwhile organisation, which campaigns educates and raises funds to help turn the ideals of the United Nations into reality.

Much fun was had at the expense of the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) earlier, but I have to admire him for having the courage of his convictions, and the fact that he genuinely believed what he said. He probably spoke for much of the Conservative party when he talked about wanting to reduce some of the bureaucracy and making the UN a better organisation. I agree with him on those subjects, but he simply did not get the whole point of the United Nations. I should like to put on record part of the preamble to the UN charter. It states:

> "to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small".

As someone said, if we did not have a UN, with all its faults, we would have to invent it.

I agree with the Minister's ideas and suggestions for reforming some of the structures of the UN, and for creating extra permanent places for other worthy nations. However, I disagree with his utter complacency, which he expressed by not demonstrating how we will solve some of the most horrendous problems that face the globe.

The UN has carried out an awful lot of important and successful work. Just to remind those hon. Members who do not think that it has been successful, I shall run through one or two examples. United Nations' peacekeeping is a vital instrument for peace. It currently has some 37,500 military and civilian personnel, provided by 89 countries engaged in 15 operations around the world. The UN environmental conventions have helped to reduce acid rain, cut marine pollution and phase out harmful gases that are destroying the earth's ozone layer.

The World Food Programme provides about one third of the world's total food aid a year. Through the UN, smallpox has been eradicated from the world; polio has been eliminated from the Americas and is on course to being eradicated globally. UN agencies are hoping to aid and protect more than 25 million refugees and displaced persons throughout the world. However, the UN has never enjoyed the full, unequivocal backing of the US Government and other rich western countries, including Britain, that it needs and deserves in order to fulfil its charter. As a result, it has had to make financial ends meet. It has had to fudge and compromise and kneel to the world's superpowers.

When I visited Pakistan on the Afghan border in November I saw for myself the enormous struggle, ingenuity and determination of UN aid agency workers as they helped to provide food, shelter and medical supplies to those fleeing the bombing in Afghanistan. I salute each and every one of them for what they are trying to do. However, I also saw a huge bureaucracy in operation, in which those workers were caught up, between the UN and Governments, and internally between a multitude of UN departments.

There has been an attempt to draw a UN family tree. The result is 22 funding programmes, 17 offices of the secretariat, 15 commissions, 14 specialised agencies and an absolute plethora of committees, entities, institutes, ad hoc bodies and tribunals. I truly think that there is a better way to fulfil the UN charter than the current mish-mash.

When I visited the Chaman border in south-west Pakistan I saw how the operations worked in practice. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees was putting up the tents; the World Food Programme was trying to distribute the food and the United Nations Children's Fund was trying to care for the children together with various other non-governmental organisations such as Oxfam and Islamic Relief. There were, apparently, strict demarcation lines, and one body could not cross over to the other. The result was that, although the people were fed and shelters were set up, it was incredibly inefficient and caused all sorts of friction.

That brought home to me the human level of the problem. We can talk about the people who are dying and the children who are starving, but I remember walking around that refugee camp. It was designed to accommodate 250 families, but at that time it contained 650 families. In recent weeks that figure has risen to 3,000 families—although some of them are now returning home.

I was shown around the camp by the UN and the tribal elders. We came across a group of children who were laughing, joking, and playing peek-a-boo behind the tents while watching all the strangers who were walking around. They seemed to be happy. They were not too badly off; they had some clothes. However, I will always remember one image. There was a little girl with beautiful brown eyes and dark matted hair who was covered in dust from head to foot. She had been fed that day, and she was playing with the other children, but her feet were cut to ribbons because she was running around on the sharp razor stones on the desert floor. Yet she did not care.

It is for the sake of that little girl that I am making this speech, and for the sake of all the other similar children around the world. As I mentioned to the hon. Member for Romford—30,000 children will die tonight, as they will tomorrow, and next week. Every single day we lose those children.

I echo what has been said about the words of President Kennedy. If the people of the United States make up 6 per cent. of the world's population, Britain has only 1 per cent. However, a third of the people on this planet live in poverty, and a sixth—over one billion—live in abject poverty that takes countless lives. Annually, around £35 billion of aid is donated, and international aid agencies in Britain have said that that needs to double if there is to be any chance of meeting the millennium pledges to halve that extreme poverty by 2015.

When it is put in context, the US Government's recent U-turn about pledging extra aid pales into insignificance. The US Government and other military powers spend about $800 billion every year on military equipment and arms. The UN helps to control a budget of $6 billion for spending on the world's poor. The increase in the US defence budget for next year is roughly equivalent to the total aid donated across the entire globe. It is utter madness, and a criminal act, that we allow so much money to be spent on creating arms that might be used to kill—or may never be used—while we allow those people to die.

It would cost about £17 billion to save 2.9 million people who die annually from vaccine-preventable diseases. That is a lot of money. This country is rightly engrossed in discussions about how we will deliver the public services that we need. We rightly want better hospitals and schools, more police, a more integrated transport system, and so on, and we can make those services world class. However, 3 million people are dying simply because they cannot get a jab in the arm. We do not appreciate how lucky and wealthy we are in this country.

After five years, the Labour Government are barely halfway to achieving the UN aid target of 0.7 per cent. of gross national income. I welcome the efforts of the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for International Development. They have shown a genuine commitment to raising more money, reducing debts, and so on. However, so far, they have been unable to do what I think they should have been able to do.

The Liberal Democrats have demanded that we reach that 0.7 per cent. target by 2010. I think that we can achieve it before then. People are dying out there. Many people have a miserable existence and we should be able to find the money.

Every day, 30,000 innocent children are dying of starvation, TB, cholera and diarrhoea, and all the while we have a UN that is dedicated to deliver them to salvation. About a year ago, the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, wrote:

> "The world has fallen short of achieving most of the goals of the World Summit for Children, not because they were too ambitious or technically beyond reach . . . It has fallen short largely because of insufficient investment".

The Secretary-General's report, "We The Children", contains alarming statistics. Out of every 100 children born today, the births of 40 will not be registered—who knows what will happen to them? Twenty-six will not be immunised against any disease and 19 will have no access to clean drinking water. One in three will suffer from malnutrition during their first five years and 17 will never go to school.

There can be no doubt in any rational mind that from within the ranks of the 1.2 billion people who live on less than 60p a day, terrorists will find fertile and receptive ground for new recruits, training camps and hiding places. The President of the General Assembly of the United Nations, Mr. Han Seung-Soo, said:

> "In the wake of 11 September, we will forcefully demand that development, peace and security are inseparable".

He described the poorest regions as

> "a breeding ground for violence and despair".

Kofi Annan has noted that

> "in an increasingly globalised world, rich nations depend on the stability of poor ones more than ever . . . We live in one world, not two . . . No one in this world can feel comfortable, or safe, while so many are suffering and deprived."

Even the World Trade Organisation director general, Mike Moore, has called poverty

> "a time bomb lodged against the heart of liberty".

How true.

King Abdullah of Jordan, who is a friend of America, has called poor nations

> "breeding grounds for conflict"

between

> "Western haves and worldwide have-nots."

He said that the weapons for a victory over terror must include increased financial aid from rich nations.

The United Nations recently had to agree to £47 million cuts from its General Assembly budget. At the same time—post-11 September—there is a great outpouring about how we must begin to address the massive inequality that exists. Although the UN could provide solutions, it must incur cuts. That is partly because it must provide £36 million for increased security. The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan) said that the United States has paid off its UN arrears, but it has not. The House of Commons Library confirmed today that, despite the uproar over the arrears, there is a still $290 million outstanding, which has accumulated over the years. The effect of the arrears contributes to the cuts.

Poverty is endemic throughout our world, and the UN agencies, which I salute, are heavily involved in trying to help people throughout the world. In the past few weeks, the United Nations website has shown the problems that people face: drought in Kenya; problems faced by refugees in Liberia and Guinea; floods in Ecuador; the earthquake in the Philippines; the ongoing conflict between Palestine and Israel and, obviously, the conflict in Kashmir.

There is a shortage of funding in Afghanistan. The internal displacement programme to return people to where they came from has faced massive problems. The International Organisation for Migration warned last week that it needed an extra $10 million to continue its operations. Unless that additional funding is pledged, the IOM will be obliged to suspend all internal transportation network operations in Afghanistan within the next fortnight for financial reasons.

The question is not whether the money will be found but how we reached that situation. Chairman Karzei is constantly reassured that the money will be found after the Tokyo conference. That demonstrates the ineptness,

[Mr. Paul Marsden]

unfairness and total complacency of the Governments of rich western nations, including the US Government and this Government.

People in southern Africa face a terrible drought. In Malawi, 45,000 children are starving. More than 600 have died in the latest cholera outbreaks. In Angola, which has seen a constant series of wars, 60 per cent. of children cannot even attend school. The World Health Organisation has estimated that 50 million children born last year have iodine deficiencies. The list goes on, but the question is what do we do.

We need a radical plan and, above all else, a reaffirmation of countries to the UN charter and its principles. There must be a greater focus on world interests, not just national interests, and an emphasis on proactive deployment. That does not mean that there will be carte blanche to start bombing Iraq. It will mean the opposite: using the rule of law and going through the UN General Assembly and Security Council, which must be reformed, to ensure that the international will prevails. A new commitment is required to find peaceful and diplomatic solutions to conflicts, and aid budgets should be trebled and increased in line with rich nations' average gross national income each year. There must be a continuation of strong, visionary and dynamic leadership. I salute Kofi Annan in all that he has tried to do, but he seems to be working with his arms tied behind his back. For that reason, contrary again to what the Conservatives maintain, I believe that the UN's own budget is small. Having £1.3 billion to run a worldwide set-up is small beer compared with the budgets of similar organisations.

There must be a genuine commitment to international law by member states. The UK and US Governments simply threw it out of the window over Afghanistan, but they should follow clear protocols for international criminal tribunals.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): Does the hon. Gentleman recall that the UN Security Council approved the action taken in Afghanistan in response to the attacks on 11 September as pursuant to its resolutions? Therefore, are not the British Government and forces in Afghanistan acting within international law?

Mr. Marsden: The hon. Gentleman was right to point out the failure of how the Security Council works, but I would like him to show me where resolutions 1368 and 1372 say that we can start bombing Afghanistan. If I can, I shall go on to say how I believe that the Security Council should be reformed. There are vested interests and the permanent members of the UN Security Council have too a strong influence over the other member states in deciding what to do. With their automatic veto over anything that criticises them, they will not pass anything that condemns their actions. We should end the Security Council's permanent members' vetoes. One member should be elected by free vote among member states from each continent—north America, south America, Europe, Africa, Asia and Australasia. They should serve for five years, with another 12 members elected to serve for one year on a rota.

We must ensure that all future military operations are conducted under article 47 of the UN charter, which would mean the establishment of a military staff committee. That would then mean that forces required to take military action do so under the auspices of the UN, not through the unilateral military action that continues to prevail, whether it is by the United States, Britain or any other state. We must establish a rapid reaction force with a remit that includes peacekeeping, peacemaking, peacebuilding, the enforcement of human rights, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and collective security enforcement led by the blue berets and their administrative support. They must have a greater freedom to operate.

We should be enforcing UN resolutions by all diplomatic, military and financial means, which we do not do now. We must improve the flexible interdepartmental working in the UN, to which I alluded before, and the evaluation and feedback processes so that we can assess whether we are getting value for money and whether we can improve projects on the ground through best practice. We must establish a people's assembly, which includes the non-governmental organisations, religious groups and interested political groups to work alongside the General Assembly. We need a closer working relationship with the international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, and trade organisations such as the WTO. We should aim to cancel all unsustainable debts, and to bring the arms trade under control. We must also have fair trade to allow the third world access. We must build peace and save lives. I ask the Minister where the urgency is to start saving those poor people. At the moment it is simply not there. My United Nations Association membership card states:

> "The more voices we have, the more we are heard. Be angry, be sad, be passionate, but don't be silent."

5.25 pm

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): It is a pity that the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) was not here for most of that speech, because he asked for less consensus, which the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) provided.

I thank the Minister for having requested this three-hour debate. Last November, I was privileged to be part of a group of Members of different parties who visited the UN in New York. The delegation, ably led by my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Bradford, South (Mr. Sutcliffe), went to find out more about the UN. Like many people in this country, I had a general awareness of the UN and its work, but had no great appreciation of its history or development, or of the range and complexity of the issues that it tries to tackle. Some of those issues have a higher profile than others. It is perhaps no surprise that we have heard largely about the more high profile issues. We need to appreciate that the UN does many other things: the fact that we can get on airplanes reasonably safely and fly around the sky makes our increasingly complex world work.

The construction of the UN is imperfect. An organisation that started off with a little more than 50 member countries will shortly have 191. It is bound to be different and not work as it would if we set out to design it that way. We were not told on our visit that there was no case for reform. There is certainly a case for reform of the Security Council, and a consensus may be developing on how it might look. However, the people who work at the level below Kofi Annan told us that there is a real danger that if we enter into long discussions about how the UN can be reformed, the difficulties facing the world will not be tackled. As a result, more people will die, and more will continue to live in poverty. There has to be a balance between reform and allowing the UN to get on and do the task it needs to do.

I want to concentrate on one aspect of the UN, as it is impossible to cover its whole range of activities. I want to talk about children, whose voices we rarely hear. The UN is making a real difference to children's lives. I can inform the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham that people in New York constantly told us that the work that is being done by the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for International Development is excellent. They are leading the way in improving aid and support for children.

I also want to pay tribute to the work of three organisations—there are many more—who are involved in that work. UNICEF, Save the Children and World Vision International have provided me with information. They have done a great deal of work over the years.

The 1990 world summit for children was, at that time, the largest gathering of world leaders in history. It declared that there could be no task nobler than giving every child a better future. Those leaders signed up to a far-reaching principle that children should have first call on all resources. Those proposals and agreements have been systematically followed up and monitored. We have heard a one-sided view of that. It was a catalyst for political commitment to the convention on the rights of the child, which had been agreed the year before and which is the world's most widely embraced human rights instrument. Kofi Annan, the Secretary-General of the United Nations said:

> "There is no task more important than building a world in which all of our children can grow up to realise their full potential in health, peace and dignity."

A mixed picture of the past 12 years emerges, but real and significant progress has been made in a number of areas. There have been more gains against child poverty in the past 50 years than in the previous 500. As I said earlier, many children are no longer dying, because countries have achieved the goal of reducing the deaths of children under five. The high levels of child immunisation reached in the late 1980s in most regions of the world have been sustained. The life-sustaining practice of breast-feeding increased during the 1990s.

Worldwide, there are more children in school than ever before. Non-governmental organisations and the media are increasingly drawing attention to protection issues such as child labour, trafficking, sexual abuse, the exploitation of children and the impact of armed conflict. The United Nations General Assembly has addressed children's issues, and the Security Council has formally acknowledged the centrality of rights and the well-being of children and women in the pursuit of international peace and security.

However, there are also unfulfilled commitments. Almost 11 million children still die every year before their fifth birthday, often from readily preventable causes. There are an estimated 150 million malnourished children in the world. Almost 120 million children are still out of school, 53 per cent. of whom are girls.

New obstacles have appeared over the past decade, which prevent countries from progressing as fast as they need to. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has reached catastrophic proportions. Millions of children have been orphaned and the disease is killing teachers, health workers and other professionals who maintain and operate the vital infrastructure of society. Chronic poverty remains the greatest obstacle to fulfilling children's rights. When humanity has more resources at its disposal than ever before, some 3 billion people subsist on less than $2 a day, with 1.2 billion, half of them children, suffering absolute poverty and struggling to survive on less than $1 a day.

However, there are grounds for cautious optimism. There is now the opportunity to reach the remaining world summit goals, and to mobilise the global alliance that will achieve a breakthrough in human development based on actions for children. Compared with what the world spends on armaments and luxury consumer items, the resources needed to provide the basic needs of children are modest. The cost of universal access to health, education, water and sanitation was estimated by the United Nations and the World Bank at 1995 prices to be between $70 billion and $80 billion a year. To secure that future, political will is necessary to bring about a decisive shift to make investment in the well-being of children our overarching goal.

Two weeks ago, I was privileged to attend the Inter-Parliamentary Union meeting that took place at the United Nations General Assembly special session on children. It was very interesting because, as well as bringing parliamentarians together, it gave children and young people a voice.

A 14-year-old girl from Gambia seemed to have none of the usual nerves when addressing the large room full of parliamentarians from more than 100 countries—she had a clear message to deliver. She was chosen by the young people attending the special session to read out the children's forum message. A group of young people from all over the world had met and had put together their views in a presentation to parliamentarians. Among their demands were respect for the rights of the child, an end to exploitation, abuse and violence, an end to war, the provision of health care and education and the eradication of HIV/AIDS. They want the environment to be protected and an end to the vicious cycle of poverty. Speaking clearly to an attentive room, she told us that children are not the source of problems in the world.

A young man from Guatemala said:

> "Think about us, listen to us, let us participate in the politics of our country."

A young woman from Albania told us that children in that country are part of the children's rights commission, but that time and effort are needed to help young people to get involved. A young man from Kenya spoke forcefully, stating that promises had not been kept, age should not be an issue and young people should be respected.

The special session ultimately produced an outcome document entitled "A World Fit for Children", signed by Governments at the end of the session. Governments accepted their primary responsibility for ensuring the rights of children and agreed to do more to protect children. The outcome document goals are steps

[Ms Meg Munn]

towards protecting children around the world, but they need to be developed into action. The United Kingdom Government can do much to get us towards those goals. As parliamentarians, we could ask for more emphasis on children and young people. For example, we should perhaps have a Select Committee on children's issues, ask for child impact reports on all new legislation or have an annual debate on young people and children's issues.

I have focused heavily on children and young people's issues and the UN role in improving children's lives, but I could have discussed many other areas. The UN is now a backdrop to all our lives, and with proper commitment from Governments and parliamentarians together we could achieve so much more.

The voices of the children and young people at the United Nations General Assembly special session will stay with me for a long time. Their natural frustration with broken promises, excuses and delays rang loud and clear. I urge everyone to read their message in full. Loud and clear, they told us:

> "We are not expenses; we are investments. We are not just young people; we are people and citizens of this world."

As the young girl from Gambia said,

> "a world fit for children is a world fit for all of us."

5.36 pm

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): Thank you, Mr. Amess, for affording me the time to contribute to the debate, if only briefly. I shall make only one point, which has not been raised in the debate, about the public perception of the UN.

Most people think of the UN as a force for good, which may be reflected in the debate, but most closely identify it with its high-profile peacekeeping roles, some of which have been successful and some less successful. When I went to New York last November as part of the delegation with the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn), that was my primary view of the UN, but I discovered that the truth was far more interesting. The Afghanistan crisis dominated the political agenda, but people in the UN were following a parallel agenda, considering world poverty, AIDS, climate change and globalisation.

I was hugely impressed by the officials from the UN whom I met and with whom I discussed those issues. What struck me was that they used the same language about issues such as globalisation as those who write to me in my constituency, who feel that they are disengaged from politics. It seemed ironic that the UN, which was created by Governments, contains people who are committed to addressing and attacking world poverty and issues of globalisation—the very issues that people who are disengaged from politics say Governments are not addressing. We, as parliamentarians, should recognise that we have a responsibility, because the public do not regard the UN as addressing those issues.

I was a political animal before I visited the UN, and thought that I had a clear understanding of what it did. I confess that I did not really know what it did, and young people in particular lack a clear conception of what a tremendous vehicle for progress the UN is. UN organisations seem to contain idealists who look back to the time when the organisation was founded, and are strongly committed to the organisation and the ideals that set it up.

With one or two exceptions, there has been great consensus today. In the new century, we as parliamentarians need to make our constituents much more aware of what a force for good the UN is in a difficult time. We must tell them that it addresses their concerns. If we develop that message with our constituents, the UN will attract more support from them. We will be recognised as individuals who try to address the issues that the Churches, young people and non-governmental organisations put so much pressure on us to tackle, and that the UN now tackles.

5.40 pm

Mr. MacShane: This has been one of the most enjoyable debates that I have had the pleasure of listening to and participating in since I became a Member of Parliament. The best of nations are the most internationalist of nations. When Britain engages in great international issues and causes, that always shows the country at its best. I warmly endorse the tribute paid by my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) for the leadership that Britain showed in 1944 and 1945 in the creation of the United Nations.

We have a permanent seat on the Security Council as a result not of an historic anomaly, but of 50 years of taking the institution extremely seriously. It might be more a duty and responsibility to hold one of those seats than a privilege. That is why we want to extend the permanent membership of the Security Council in a practical way, to reflect the new realities of the modern economy.

There must be a debate on the global pattern of countries, but in Britain's view we need a stronger UN, because we set high ambitions and high hopes for it. The organisation has delivered on many of them, as hon. Members have said. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) listed some of its achievements, and I welcomed her reflections. It is right that the UN not only tries to handle the problems of international security, but reflects on the causes of terrorism and poverty. The UN has to debate the great economic and social questions that concern us all.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown) talked of the importance of debt relief. The hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) made some disobliging remarks, but the work of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has been welcomed and recognised around the world. I am proud that, until a few months ago, we were the only major G7 or European Union country to increase its share of gross domestic product spent on overseas aid by as much as 45 per cent. That is not far enough or fast enough, but—if I may be party political—my goodness it was good to be a Labour MP in those five years. How sad is the carping criticism from those who have left the Labour cause, and others in opposition.

We discussed the need to wind up certain UN institutions. I would like sunset clauses to be built into UN activities, and have asked officials to consider that. The hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) made the sensible suggestion of a UN parliamentary assembly, which I welcome. However, if 191 member states each sent 20 or 30 MPs to such an assembly, a big football stadium would be needed to hold them all. On behalf of the Foreign Office, I guarantee that it will continue to work with hon. Members from all parties, and to ask them to attend and participate in UN work.

I will finish by making a plea. Hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell), referred to the League of Nations, which was very weak. Other hon. Members willed the establishment of democracy and the end of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, but baulked at the means. The UN is a mirror. If we hold it up and do not like what we see, we should not blame the mirror. It is for us to make it better.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Six o'clock.

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Westminster Hall

Tuesday 11 June 2002

[Sir Michael Lord *in the Chair*]

Central Railway

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): I am delighted to have been able to secure this debate. The subject is of great interest to the Opposition, and I am grateful for the support of my hon. Friends. If it comes about, the Central Railway scheme would have as great an impact on my constituency as anywhere else. Not only would an area of outstanding natural beauty have to play host to a 14 km tunnel that would take five years to construct, but the railway's operations would have a disastrous impact on the quality of life of thousands of my constituents in Merstham, where the route is proposed to run overground.

Since being elected in 1997, I have spent some time making home visits in order to listen to the noise of trains in tunnels. I and my hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) have no confidence that the tunnel would insulate those unfortunate enough to live above it. It is therefore unsurprising that, following the scheme's resurrection after its decisive defeat in Parliament in 1996, I have been taking a keen interest in Central Railway's proposals. I note that the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson), is the fourth Minister to reply to debates on Central Railway. I hope that he will be the last.

The scheme's proponents claim that it will meet 75 per cent. of the Government's objectives in moving freight from road to rail, but that it will be done at no cost to the taxpayer. That superficial level of analysis seems too good to be true. Indeed, on the available evidence, one must conclude that the scheme is too good to be true at national level, as well as being too awful to contemplate at constituency level.

When the subject was last debated here—it was in a debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond), who is in his place today—the then Minister, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), was unable to answer my hon. Friend's two simple questions. He had asked whether the Government supported the scheme and, if so, whether they would use the company's proposed vehicle of a hybrid Bill to enable it to escape the usual scrutiny of a planning inquiry. The Minister said that it would be impossible for the Government to take a position until the Strategic Rail Authority had completed its review of Central Railway's proposals.

That evidence was made available to the Government last year, but still no decision has been taken. Indeed, yet more work has been commissioned from the SRA. I regret that, as do my blighted constituents, but I understand the Government's reluctance to give up their pursuit of the crock of gold at the end of the Central Railway rainbow. However, enough is enough. My primary objective today is to invite the Government to state their opposition or their support for the scheme at the completion of the latest analysis.

I want to summarise why the Government should not support the scheme. In the last debate on the subject, the Minister helpfully recited the terms of reference that the Government had given the SRA, and they are listed at column 54 of the Westminster Hall debate of 6 March 2001. Because of time constraints, I do not intend to repeat them, but any analysis based on the Government's terms of reference will show that the scheme should fail.

First, on volume, market share, revenue and operating forecasts, the conclusions of chapter 3 of the consultants' report, "Market and Revenue Forecasts", are devastating for the Central Railway proposal. Central Railway claims that within three years it will win a 35 per cent. market share of all freight currently transported by lorry or container between the United Kingdom and the continent via all French, Belgian, and Dutch ports and through the channel tunnel. It is claimed that that market share will generate revenue of £1.4 billion in 2011. That is based on the market continuing to grow at historic rates of 6 per cent. per annum. Central Railway claims that that figure is conservative, but I regard it as heroic. However, from what we know so far, the SRA is in no position to advise the Minister that those market share assumptions are valid. The SRA's report states:

> "Central Railway's investigation of the price elasticity of demand in the UK showed that a 10 per cent. reduction in tariffs would generate a 27 per cent. increase in volume. The consultants were not told whether a 10 per cent. increase in tariffs results in a 27 per cent. reduction in volume."

The consultants went on to say:

> "The traffic forecasts are highly dependent on the assessment of price elasticity and customer mode switching behaviour, however demand is very price sensitive. The model does not assume any competitor reaction to Central Railway, it is almost certain that improvements would be made to the competitor offer . . . MDST concludes that a 40 per cent. market share is unattainable"

and that

> "the haulage rates used are totally unrealistic."

Yesterday, I asked Chris Savage, the director of government affairs at Central Railway—I am grateful to him for taking the time to come and brief me—whether any further work had been carried out on the economic forecasts. He told me that it had not. That updates the SRA's consultants' statement that

> "Central Railway has not yet carried out any further market research to test specific service/price propositions and provide a validation of its initial assessment of buying behaviour."

The whole scheme rests on one survey of 200 road hauliers conducted by the proponents of the scheme. In a paper exercise, the hauliers responded overwhelmingly to a question about price. In the real world, it will not work like that, even if the price data are reliable. For example, Central Railway states that the scheme

> "assumes that Transport firms would use the unaccompanied service if the cost saving justified it."

[Mr. Crispin Blunt]

At the moment, Central Railway is proposing that lorries will go on trains without their drivers. Quite apart from the inherent inflexibility of rail compared with road, Central Railway appears to have taken no account of the fact that a significant percentage of the road haulage industry is represented by owner-drivers who are unlikely to want to put their lorry unaccompanied on a railway. There is no discount factor in its calculations for that section of the road haulage industry. Its calculation is based solely on its price claims.

The Minister said in the previous debate on 6 March 2001 that operating costs were part of the SRA's remit. The SRA states:

> "As part of our review, we sought back-up for the operating cost assumptions. Central Railway told us that these had been provided based on advice from France (SNCF)."

It is, at the very least, inconsistent for what is supposed to be an entirely commercial scheme to rely on advice about operating costs from a nationalised and highly subsidised business. The Minister will have noticed that the SRA's consultants dryly report:

> "The costs do not appear to have been benchmarked against any current UK experience or supply market tested."

On capital costs, at the time that the consultants' report for the SRA was completed, Central Railway did not have a comprehensive costed schedule of all the work that is required to be undertaken for the total route. According to the information that I received from Central Railway yesterday, that remains the case. Even the most superficial examination of the capital costs, related solely to the work in my constituency, suggests that the ballpark estimate of £4 billion for the construction costs must be way off the mark. Central Railway claims that the 14 km tunnel that will end in an unspecified place in my constituency between junction 8 of the M25 and the A23 will represent 10 per cent. of the cost. It does not know where the tunnel will go, which is a comment on the quality of its proposals. In 1999, my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), his predecessor, Sir Archie Hamilton, and I met the chairman of Central Railway. We had to point out that the company's paper exercise on where the line would run showed that one end of the tunnel would come up in the middle of a housing estate in what was then Sir Archie Hamilton's constituency. On the basis of that information, the tunnel's planned route was changed, but there is still an almost total lack of detail about this important matter.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I do not want to stop my hon. Friend in mid flow, but I am sure that he agrees that all our constituents face a big problem because their properties will suffer blight as long as the plans and the route remain uncertain. Admittedly, that blight has been masked by the rise in house prices, but it is blight all the same. Something must be done quickly, which is why I am sure that my hon. Friend will urge the Government to say no to the plan as soon as possible.

Mr. Blunt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. One can see from the presence of so many hon. Members today that there is concern among constituents, who are experiencing real hurt because of the loss of asset value of their properties. The Central Railway proposition has been kicking around for seven years, and anyone living near the proposed route or routes has suffered property blight. The Government owe it to our constituents to end that uncertainty, and the primary objective of today's debate is to enable the Minister to give an undertaking to do so.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): My hon. Friend will see that several Opposition Members from Buckinghamshire are here to support him. Do the figures that he received recently from Central Railway include estimates by Chiltern Railways of the costs involved? Chiltern Railways recently received a new 20-year franchise, and is probably the best train-operating company in the country. It says that the wide gauge of the Central Railway trains would require every station on the Chiltern line to be rebuilt and new tracks to be installed. It also notes that Central Railway's ill-thought-out proposals could be achieved only by constructing two entirely separate tracks along the Chiltern line. Has my hon. Friend received any estimate of the vast costs and disruption to our constituents and the local economy?

Mr. Blunt: The answer is, of course, no. Indeed, I do not think that Central Railway has any idea of the costs that would be incurred, which is part of the difficulty with the scheme. As the Strategic Rail Authority's consultants told the Government, there is still a complete vacuum as regards details of how the scheme will operate alongside existing railways, such as the Chiltern line. My hon. Friend has given a classic example of the risk factors involved in such schemes. As she said, they have not been quantified at all in this case.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his approach to the matter, and I strongly agree with him and with my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) on the question of uncertainty. Does he accept that people up and down the M25—I refer particularly to constituents in Byfleet and West Byfleet—have faced blight for years? That uncertainty is damaging, and it is vital to reach a conclusion quickly and to oppose the proposal.

Mr. Blunt: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support for my central proposition, which is that the Government must make a decision at the end of the period of analysis. I hope that the Minister will give us and our constituents comfort on the matter later in the debate.

Central Railway claims that the tunnel, one end of which will be in my constituency, will take up about 10 per cent. of the construction costs of the whole railway—£400 million. Nearly two decades ago the channel tunnel cost £100 million per kilometre, four times the price that Central Railway claims for the proposed tunnel under the North Downs. It proposes that the railway will exit the tunnel and run alongside the M25 and M23 past the Merstham estate in my constituency. Any examination of the substantial cuttings and embankments that make up the boundary of the motorways at that point will demonstrate what a huge civil engineering undertaking that 3 km stretch alone would be, let alone what the Highways Agency would have to say; I am not even sure that it has been consulted. On the evidence of my eyes, I cannot believe Central Railway's capital cost forecast for the scheme.

The Minister will also know that the chapter on technical feasibility and deliverability of the scheme in the SRA consultants' report is far from a robust endorsement. The consultants said that, to clarify feasibility further,

> "There will be a need to communicate and operate the route with interfaces with Railtrack as the UK's prime infrastructure owner. Each interface constitutes a risk to the operation of the networks. These risks have yet to be quantified which can only occur when the dialogue with Railtrack, the TOCs and the SRA has been undertaken on a more focused basis."

That is the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) made and it is reinforced in the report that is before Ministers. If the Minister does not get satisfaction on those points, it will be a serious indicator that the Government should reject the request for a hybrid Bill.

Central Railway has been around for over seven years; longer than Railtrack or the train operating companies. The fact that it has been unable to address the issues with them in a serious way, and to find solutions, must give us cause to doubt the robustness of the proposal, which throws up myriad serious planning concerns, not least in my constituency, as some of my hon. Friends have mentioned. One can understand why the company wants a hybrid Bill. The Government should not give their weight to any scheme that poses as many serious planning issues the length of the country as this one does, if that enables the issues to escape proper public scrutiny.

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I hope to say more later, but I should like to highlight the inclusion in the scheme of terminals for trans-shipment from road to rail. One is proposed in my constituency in an area that is already saturated with traffic, and to which it is intended to attract lorries from a 200 km radius. Such issues and their implications seem to be totally unaddressed by Central Railway.

Mr. Blunt: My hon. Friend makes the point extremely well and I agree with him. I am glad that I do not appear to be getting a terminal as well as a tunnel. The point about planning is central. A hybrid Bill would be the most inappropriate vehicle for this scheme. Planning blight is well documented and has already been mentioned—many of our constituents have been badly affected. After seven years, those constituents and other people who have suffered damage as a result of the scheme are now owed certainty from their Government.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): My hon. Friend has kindly raised the question of certainty. That is much in the minds of my constituents, as they still have hanging over them the possibility of a service station at Downside. This morning's papers report that consultants now say that the M25 should be widened further. That will undoubtedly affect my constituents and his, and it means that the Central Railway plans will be subject to many other considerations that the Government will have to take into account. We will not know the outcome for some time unless the Government are decisive and reject at least that element of uncertainty.

Mr. Blunt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, as I had not been aware of the precise points that he made. The M25 has recently undergone an extension, not least through Reigate. The junction of the M25 and M23 is a central point, and no doubt the motorways will be developed beyond the present four lanes. To put a railway line bang alongside the M25 and M23 would be unacceptable to the Highways Agency, I imagine, as it would preclude expansion of the motorway network in decades to come. Consultation has not taken place on such issues, which is another nail in the coffin of the Central Railway scheme.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): I have a question on blight. My hon. Friend will be aware that Central Railway maintains that it has an innovative compensation scheme for people who are likely to be affected. Has it suggested how many people might benefit from that scheme? Does not the firm retain control over who is offered the compensation package?

Mr. Blunt: My hon. Friend is right. On superficial reading, the compensation scheme seems excellent, but one then has to read the small print. In the end, Central Railway decides who has access to the scheme. As there is no one else to adjudicate on access, the decision will be taken by Central Railway.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunt: In a moment.

However good the compensation scheme looks at first, I regret to say that it is not robust enough to survive analysis. Perhaps the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) will suggest that the scheme has changed since it was last presented to me, but that is currently its fatal flaw.

Mr. Hopkins: Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that the scheme proposed by Central Railway was praised by the then Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions? The essence of it is that it will pay enough to compensate people. There have been examples of negotiations with possible trackside homeowners in which they have agreed to accept compensation under that scheme.

Mr. Blunt: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, because he makes the point that the scheme is superficially generous and sounds good. However, in preparation for the debate, I asked Central Railway in a letter whether entry to the property owners' compensation scheme was a matter for the company's discretion. Central Railway replied that the provisions of the property protection scheme were at the discretion of the company, and pointed out that they were more generous than the statutory arrangements. It also said that people would continue to have their statutory rights under the scheme. The scheme sounds very nice, like the whole Central Railway proposition, but the detail is lacking. It is in the detail that the scheme fails.

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): The essence of the compensation scheme as I understand

[Mr. Philip Hammond]

it, is to underwrite the value of a property, and thus make it tradable while the blight continues. Is not the real weakness of the scheme that the guarantee is only as strong as the company that makes it? That company is thinly capitalised and likely to go belly-up if the scheme itself does not proceed.

Mr. Blunt: Quite.

I want to return to capacity. Some other points may be dealt with in other hon. Members' speeches, and I will hurry to a conclusion to allow time for others to contribute.

The channel tunnel is a vital choke point for the scheme, but it does not have enough capacity for Central Railway's projections alongside those of everyone else. There will be a mix of demands from different rail operators through the channel tunnel. Central Railway must operate throughout the day to handle its forecast volume of ad hoc lorry traffic. It suggests that peak arrivals in 2010 will be 403 units an hour. That includes 10 Central Railway trains, increasing to 15 trains an hour by 2020. However, by 2010 the tunnel will be approaching capacity, based on the projections of the Eurotunnel shuttle and the high speed Eurostar passenger traffic from St. Pancras. Simply put, there may not be enough capacity in the tunnel to meet Central Railway's plans. In response to that potential showstopper, Central Railway challenged the assumptions of Eurostar and Eurotunnel, but why should their assumptions have less merit than those that underlie the Central Railway proposition?

The quality and detail of the Central Railway proposal has always been the problem, which is perhaps unsurprising given the nature of the company. It employs fewer than a dozen full-time equivalents, has only one corporate shareholder and its proposed project manager is an American company called Parsons, which owns only 8 per cent. of the equity. The remainder is owned by the directors and employees. The entrepreneurial nature of the company is at one level to be admired, but the Government would be in wholesale dereliction of their duty if they invited Parliament to pass a hybrid Bill on the basis of the scant information available now from that little company.

The latest report from the SRA leaves more questions unanswered than answered. It has exposed a project built on unreliable evidence. In the words of the disclaimer on Central Railway's own information document, "The business case for Central railway":

> "While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information in this document, no responsibility can be taken for errors or omissions made."

The Minister will be aware that the Government cannot properly make such a disclaimer—certainly, we understand that to be the case under the new management of his Department.

The Government are providing Central Railway with a third opportunity to refine its superficially attractive proposals for a freight railway line from Liverpool to Lille. On examination, the proposal seems an entrepreneurial and environmental catastrophe waiting to happen. The SRA will finish its next assessment of the revised proposals in September. The Government must then be willing to put this half-baked scheme out of its misery.

9.56 am

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): I congratulate the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) on raising this important subject, although I take a different view of the scheme. I am a strong supporter of the concept of Central Railway and look forward to the Government, in time, making a positive decision to accept and support it.

Mr. Hammond: If the scheme's merits are so self-evident, why are its promoters reluctant to use the established procedures for obtaining approval, as laid down in the Transport and Works Act 1992, and seeking instead to shelter behind Government support in the form of a hybrid Bill?

Mr. Hopkins: The hon. Gentleman would have to ask the company that question. The hybrid Bill route is one way in which to achieve Government support and involvement, which is important for a scheme of such national consequence. It might be easier to get the scheme through under a hybrid Bill than by using the measures under the Transport and Works Act 1992.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman has hit the nail on the head. Of course it would be easier to get the scheme through under the hybrid Bill procedure because it would avoid the planning constraints and public inquiries that would normally take place. In other words, by that means, the scheme would avoid proper public scrutiny. Does the hon. Gentleman not think that that is an inappropriate way in which to proceed with such a scheme?

Mr. Hopkins: No, I do not think that it is an inappropriate way to proceed. Of course, any Government involvement would necessarily mean that the Government would have to take careful account of all interests involved, especially those affected by the route. No Government would ride roughshod over people's feelings and interests—certainly not this Government.

I have been involved with the scheme for the past seven years, but I should emphasise that I have no pecuniary interests in the matter. I have had lunch with people from the company on many occasions, but have always insisted on paying for myself, because there is no such thing as a free lunch. I believe profoundly in the scheme, which would make a vital contribution to the nation's transport infrastructure. A dedicated freight link between the industrial heartland of Britain and the continent, especially from the north, is essential.

Mr. Grieve: How can it be a dedicated freight line when its proponents intend to share the track that will run through my constituency and the constituencies of several of my hon. Friends with Chiltern Railways, which says unequivocally that shared use is incompatible?

Mr. Hopkins: It is essentially a freight scheme. Clearly, extra track will have to be built in some areas, but the scheme will mostly use unused track bed and unused tunnels. I do not dispute that there are likely to be technical and civil engineering difficulties, and, indeed, social and economic difficulties on the route.

Those will have to be dealt with and paid for, but that is insufficient reason to prevent this great scheme from going ahead.

The north-west of Britain and south Yorkshire have suffered serious economic decline in recent decades, and it is vital to link peripheral economies with the continent of Europe. We are experiencing increasing gridlock on our roads, which increases the difficulties for lorries such that reliability will soon be impossible for the road haulage industry. This turn-up-and-go rail scheme will guarantee delivery to the continent of Europe in a few hours and will have tremendous cost advantages for road hauliers but, more importantly, it will have the advantage of reliability and will breathe new life into northern economies.

Roads beyond south Yorkshire and south Lancashire can still cope because traffic density in the area is not as great, but roads further south are already clogged, and getting worse.

Mr. Hammond: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the objectives that he has outlined of revitalising northern economies could be achieved as easily by the alignment of a freight-only railway to the east of London, and that such an alignment would fit more comfortably with the Government's policy of regenerating the Thames gateway? Can he see any reason why the railway would have to pass to the west of London?

Mr. Hopkins: No. I do not think that there is an argument for any alternative. The original scheme proposed a long tunnel from Olympia to Croydon in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies). There has now been a new proposal, but I do not think that there are other alternatives. It is important to ensure that the scheme goes ahead, so that there is an aorta—a lifeline—between the northern and midland economies of Britain and the continent of Europe. It will form part of the trans-European networks on which the European Union is so keen. I have some criticisms of the European Union, but in this respect, I am on its side. I believe that there is also some sympathy for the scheme among Commissioners in Brussels. That may not persuade all Opposition Members, but the scheme is important to our economy.

The major advantage of the scheme is that it will use super gauge—large height and width gauge—so that full-scale lorries can be put on to trains and rolled off at the other end. It will not require investment in cut down trucks or special lorries—a key advantage for hauliers. The gauge will also permit double stacked containers, although the channel tunnel cannot take two full-size containers. It can take one container of 9 ft, 6 in and one of 8 ft, 6 in, but not two containers of 9 ft, 6 in. If the channel tunnel were built slightly larger, double stacked full-scale containers could have been used all the way through.

Mr. Blunt: The hon. Gentleman has just given an example of how the scheme fails in the detail. There is no dispute about what appear from his argument to be the superficial attractions of the scheme. I agree with him about the desirability of the strategic objective that Central Railway appears to deliver. The problem is that the scheme simply fails on both the business and the practical cases. Double stacking, which was in the Central Railway proposals for some considerable time, is a classic example: it failed to measure the size of the proposal against the size of the channel tunnel. That rather suggests that the scheme is under-prepared and under-resourced in terms of research. It would be wholly improper of the Government to invite Parliament to support a hybrid Bill on the current evidence.

Mr. Hopkins: The primary attraction of the scheme is to put lorries on trains. Another attraction is that it can take containers and double stacked containers up to a certain size. The limiting factor is not Central Railway, but the channel tunnel. The problem is the lack of foresight of those who built the channel tunnel.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that to the extent that it is possible to stack double containers or to have full-height lorries going on at ambient level in journeys within the United Kingdom, the environmental impacts in the rural parts of our constituencies will be considerably aggravated?

Mr. Hopkins: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention, but the alternative is more lorries on roads. As the M1 goes through my constituency, I am very conscious of the impact of lorries on roads. Trucks damage roads, and motorway congestion is caused by road repairs necessitated by that damage. Axle weight is crucial. The fourth power road law suggests that road damage is proportionate to the fourth power of an increase in axle weight. If the axle weight is doubled, road damage is multiplied by 16; if it is trebled, it is multiplied by 81 and if it is quadrupled it is multiplied by 256. If there were no lorries and only cars on the motorways there would be almost no damage. There would be almost no congestion due to road repairs because the motorways would last for such a long time. It is lorries that cause the problem. We will have to have lorries on the motorways for the foreseeable future, but if we take a significant proportion of them off the roads, there will be less road damage and lower costs to the Government.

Mr. Grieve: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I appreciate his point as a generality, but there is a practical issue. Those lorries will have to get on to the trains at some point. Terminals have been projected by Central Railway and one is to be located in my constituency. The hon. Gentleman will know the geography of my constituency well enough to realise that the area is currently entirely saturated with traffic. Far from reducing the volume of lorry use in the area I represent and the surrounding districts, the scheme, if Central Railway is successful, will multiply it by an almost infinite amount. Yet here is a proposal—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Nicholas Winterton): Order. This is becoming a speech. Will the hon. Gentleman bring his intervention to a speedy conclusion?

Mr. Grieve: I will do so. The issue has not even been addressed in Central Railway's own proposals.

Mr. Hopkins: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his interesting intervention. The bulk of the traffic will be

[Mr. Hopkins]

international and will go from the north right through his constituency. But there will clearly be some terminal loading and offloading in parts of Britain too. Inevitably there will be some disruption in certain areas to get this great scheme to work. The alternative is for all that traffic to go on roads through Kent and other beautiful southern counties instead of on a relatively narrow rail track at a rapid rate, with several trains an hour and many lorries on each train.

The loading and offloading will be very quick. I visited France last year with the rail freight group and a number of hon. Members from both sides of the House. We saw the modern technology for loading and offloading lorries. It is very speedy: it takes a second for a truck to drive on at an angle, straighten and go off the other side. One can take the tractor on the train or leave it behind. The technology is advanced and is in place—indeed, the technology for building railways has existed for a century and a half. No new trickery is involved; it is very straightforward. The costs are nowhere near as questionable as hon. Members have suggested.

Mr. Hammond: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but there are just 20 minutes before the Front Bench speeches start and at least five other Oppn Members want to speak. The hon. Gentleman has been speaking for 14 minutes. Does he intend to convey the impression that he is filibustering?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I must come to the defence of the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins), who has given way many times. However, we need to start the winding-up speeches in 20 minutes and several hon. Members have indicated a wish to speak. I want to call at least four hon. Members before then. I hope that hon. Members will show self-discipline.

Mr. Hopkins: I will draw my remarks to a close soon. I thought it important to take interventions and I am trying to be generous, but that cuts into other people's time.

The key issue is the future of our country, in terms of its environment and economy—particularly the northern economy. Many hon. Members live in areas of high unemployment and some look forward to the development of terminals in their constituencies because they provide much employment to people in the construction industry. The scheme would provide other economic benefits.

Mr. Blunt: The central economic point is that we do no service to the British economy if we initiate a scheme that turns out to be entirely uneconomic when the business case is examined. That would suck resources from the economy rather than improve it and do damage to the whole economy, including businesses in the north.

Mr. Hopkins: I shall round off my remarks by saying that that is not the view on the continent of Europe. Last year I visited France with the rail freight group; we saw massive investments in rail freight and passenger services. We should go the way of France. It is building new passenger lines and using the older network as a dedicated freight network for the whole country. It takes railways seriously; it invests two and a half times what we do in railways every year. That is the way forward. Railways take traffic off roads. Roads and road damage are causing problems and the country would be grateful if the Government sensibly allowed the scheme.

I have been to two revenue forecast presentations by independent consultants. Both concluded that the revenue case is very strong. I see no possibility of the scheme not working, given the enormous demand for north-south freight traffic in Britain. That traffic is currently crowded on to our motorways and up to the equivalent of one motorway lane would transfer on to the proposed railway. The scheme has a great future and I hope that the Government will eventually promote it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hope, unofficially, that subsequent speakers will restrict their remarks to four minutes. That would enable most hon. Members who wish to do so to speak. *[Interruption.]*

10.14 am

Sitting suspended.

10.15 am

On resuming—

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Long may the peace continue.

I first came across the proposal as a member of the Committee that considered the channel tunnel rail link. The Committee sat in this very Chamber—it was then known as the Grand Committee Room—from February 1995 to February 1996, and we sat for long enough to walk from London to Madrid at a leisurely pace. During the 300 hours of sittings, we considered the then proposal for the Central Railway.

We are short of time today, but I must say that the proposal now before us is a much-improved one. It is entirely consistent with the Government's strategy of getting more traffic off the roads and on to rail. That will benefit Hinckley, a main town in my constituency of Bosworth in the middle of England. It is absolutely right that the Govt have asked the Strategic Rail Authority to make further investigations that will answer many of the questions raised by those of my hon. Friends who may not view me as a particular friend in this debate. I apologise to them.

The hybrid Bill procedure that was used for the channel tunnel rail link legislation is the correct one to use. That quasi-judicial Committee dealt with a complex measure and had to fix many important aspects of that route and to make decisions about tunnels.

I am also impressed that the funding for the railway is intended to come from the private sector. If the money does not come, the railway will not be built and the private sector will decide on the merits of the proposals. They are not right yet, and I know that my hon. Friends the Members for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) and for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) feel that strongly, but the proposals are well on the way.

Let us not forget that the Sheffield, as the Great Central railway was originally called, was propelled south from Sheffield through Loughborough, Leicester and Rugby at the end of the century. It came into St. Marylebone after upending the pitch at Lord's, and that is why there is a slope on the ground there. It was the finest railway ever built in Britain, and many in the midlands think that the wrong line was shut. Beeching should have shut the Midland and not the Great Central railway. To rebuild the section between Princes Risborough and Rugby would be relatively easy, because most of the track bed is in place. It is also a very level railway. As the hon. Member for Luton, North pointed out—I shall not use the same terminology—it was built to Berne gauge, so one of the greatest tunnels ever built, the great tunnel at Catesby, is built to Berne gauge. The "cage" at Rugby is still there where the Central railway crossed the west coast main line. It was a superior railway.

The proposal to rebuild the Central railway on a new route around the M25 makes a great deal of sense. I had a long discussion on Friday with Albert Sharpe, a former railwayman who is a consultant in my constituency, and he spoke about the upgrading of Hinckley station to take heavy goods trains and the ability to run more traffic on the upgraded new line. That is the right approach.

All the problems that my hon. Friends have described will be resolved quite simply and all the planning blight will disappear when the line is built. There will be no relief until the line is built. It is the obvious option and we need the line in the midlands and the north. If this proposal is kicked into touch, there will be another proposal for the Central railway, as the track bed is largely in place. If one studies the map in the Library, one sees that the proposal would use mainly disused railways, and the hon. Member for Luton, North is nodding as I make that point. There is inevitability about the proposal. The line will be built sooner or later. It is in all our interests to build it—and the sooner, the better.

10.19 am

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): In principle, it is a good idea to have a north-south freight railway that links to the channel crossing. However, in practice, the proposal is flawed and faces many political and business problems. The financial risk that would be involved in the Government promoting the current scheme would be enormous and the opportunity cost of the money that they would end up spending to bail out a business failure could be better invested in the main transport infrastructure that we so urgently need.

I have several specific problems with the proposal. As Members will know, a cursory glance at the projections for the channel tunnel shows that it is expected to reach capacity in terms of Eurotunnel and Eurostar by 2010. There is no prospect of widening the tunnel or building another, so the proposal is immediately reduced to a north-south rail link, leading on to ferries. It may be a good idea to have such a link, but we should not pretend that any of the freight would be able to go down the tunnel.

Doubledecker containers and stacking on trains have been mentioned. An earlier proposal presumed that doubledecker trains could go through the tunnel, but in fact they cannot—we cannot get them under bridges, for example. That shows how early on we are in pushing forward the proposal. We must consider the detail, because it is not the case that everything will be all right once the proposal has been considered. Whether trains fit in tunnels is a fundamental issue, and the fact is that they will not. The smaller trains will fit, but there will be no opportunities for them unless Eurotunnel and Eurostar give up some of their capacity, and obviously they will not.

The business analysis assumes that the trains are filled to 100 per cent. capacity, but empirically one finds that they are more likely to be filled to 50 per cent. My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) said that there would be no delay in loading and offloading, but in reality if a lorry breaks down in the queue on the way to a train, the train will be delayed and will not get through the tunnel or will not get its slot. The assumptions are based on perfection, but clearly we live in an imperfect world. In reality, delays occur and have a knock-on effect on efficiency.

A haulage company owner wants to know that his product will go from A to B in a certain time. Obviously, there are congestion problems and delays on the motorways, but it would require only a series of unexpected delays on the trains for a client suddenly to go on to the roads, and the fixed costs in the infrastructure—interest costs and so on—would become difficult to pay. The private sector—the consortium that backs the project, in the first instance—would then go into quick liquidation, and the public sector would have to pick up the tab. If there were a multi-billion pound investment in a north-south freight link, ultimately the Government would be required to finish the project once it had been started. We would then have an enormous white elephant and a massive problem for taxpayers.

I know that many other hon. Members wish to speak, but I am concerned about the risks down the line for Government and taxpayer. I am concerned about ownership of the line passing to Central Railway and about public accountability. The train-operating companies, Her Majesty's railway inspectorate, Eurotunnel, Railtrack and so on appear not to have been properly consulted. I hope that the Government are not suggesting that the proposal will hurtle ahead, but that it will be properly evaluated and the opportunity costs of alternative risks and investments properly considered. That would allow us to get more freight on to the railways, but not on the back of a rather hare-brained scheme.

10.23 am

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): I am no opponent of rail freight in principle. I would very much like Daventry international rail freight terminal to be used more intensively. However, the Minister is well aware of the difficulties with security in the channel tunnel, and this debate has brought out well the long-term constraints of that tunnel in terms of a separate rail link. For that reason, I have serious reservations about the Central Railway proposal.

I have not spoken on the matter previously, not least because I thought that as we were likely to consider it under the Transport and Works Act 1992 procedure, I

[Mr. Tim Boswell]

should operate quasi-judicially and wait until we had a scheme to consider. I would have fewer inhibitions about making my views known if the measure were to be introduced as a hybrid Bill. I suspect that, like me, most of the Opposition Members here today are concerned about the environmental impact on their constituencies. That concern is proper, especially with regard to my constituency, as the railway would transect it from south-east to north-west over a 30-mile area and would have a major environmental impact. My singling out of particular places in no way removes the generality of my concern.

In Brackley, the major viaduct of the old great central line was demolished some years ago, and rebuilding it would cost some £10 million. It would also be necessary to produce a new alignment around the housing and industrial developments that have been built since its removal. In Helmdon, flora has developed within the old cutting, making it a site of special scientific interest. At Woodford Halse—the old marshalling yard and engineering base of the great central line—a housing estate has been built across the line. The village of Lilbourne—the newly proposed diversion route from Rugby in the far north-west of my constituency that adjoins the Leicestershire border—is already heavily beset by the M1, and would suffer further major environmental, visual and aural intrusion. The bypass would also have major implications for any restructuring of junction 19 on the M1.

I want to emphasise how different things are now from 1963, and the different concept of the scale, frequency, visual and aural intrusion of the trains. I add my concerns to those developed so adeptly by my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt). My abiding concern, which echoes that raised by the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Geraint Davies), is that it may be possible to find some answers to these problems, or even to produce a scheme that would be acceptable to some extent, although many of my constituents will never accept it however good the package on offer. However, the costs are enhanced each time a difficulty is identified and addressed. My greatest fear, especially with the hybrid Bill procedure, is that the Government must stand behind the scheme. If it runs into financial difficulties with its private sector backers, the Government will have to step in and finish it off or be left with a half-finished scheme. There is the danger of having an environmental impact, but no benefits. That is far too high a cost to pay at present.

10.28 am

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) on introducing the debate on a matter of great concern to my constituents and those of other hon. Members here today.

There is no doubt that the idea of switching freight from road to rail is attractive. The problem, which we explored thoroughly today, is that the scheme does not and will not work. My hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) says that there is an inevitability about the scheme, but the only inevitability is that it will fail. It would be better for it to fail at an early stage—although we cannot describe the stage as early even now as it has been going on for seven years—rather than for it to lumber on causing further blight and unhappiness along the way before finally petering out. The financial case for the project is extremely weak. I speak as someone who in a previous incarnation acted as an adviser to Eurotunnel. We all know that the project encountered significant financial difficulties despite the huge amount of backing and careful planning, and the Government's full support. This project has none of that. It is weakly thought through, under-capitalised, and based on a wing and a prayer. A survey of 200 businesses is not a sound basis on which to construct a business case for a project that could cost £6 billion and affect freight movements across Europe.

I am also concerned about the project because of its impact on my constituents, particularly those in South Godstone, South Nutfield and Bletchingly. I have been formally approached by the director of environmental protection for Tandridge district council to express its grave concern about the impact that the project would have in an area of both green belt and outstanding natural beauty. I had hoped that the project had died in 1996, but someone forgot to put a stake through its heart. I hope that the Minister will do that at the earliest opportunity.

10.30 am

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): I should like to make three points. First, on blight, the Government must do something about the situation that our constituents have experienced as a result of the Central Railway proposal. It appears as though a relatively small company can propose a scheme that creates a blight, which is revealed on local authority searches and makes it virtually impossible to dispose of property, with absolutely no obligation to make progress with the scheme. The Deputy Prime Minister said in 2000 that he hoped that an application under the Transport and Works Act 1992 would be made imminently, but we still have not seen any progress. It offends my sense of natural justice—as it must do the Minister's—that this blight can be imposed without any obligation on the scheme's promoter to move things forward.

My second point relates to the scheme's substance. If the Government are considering using a hybrid Bill, the scheme that is covered must optimise the proposals in public policy terms. As I suggested earlier, the alignment of Central Railway's proposal around the south-western quadrant of the M25 runs contrary to Government policy to promote development in the Thames gateway. If it were a purely private scheme going through the planning process, it would be up to the promoters to decide which scheme they wanted to introduce. If the Government are going to support the scheme actively through a hybrid Bill, it is incumbent on them to ensure that it is the most appropriate in terms of public policy.

My third point concerns the appropriateness of the hybrid Bill mechanism. It is not appropriate for the Government to offer shelter and protection to such a scheme. They should not actively support a private scheme that runs counter to public policy in some respects and will effectively put them in the position of promoting one company's proposal rather than opening the field for competitive bids for a north-south rail freight scheme, which my hon. Friends and I would recognise as a good idea in principle. There is a perfectly good mechanism for determining the planning aspects of such a scheme, which is the 1992 Act. The Government introduced a consultation paper on planning for major infrastructure projects, and their approach is to build on what is currently made available by the 1992 Act. It would be wholly inappropriate for the Government to allow this scheme to bypass the proper controls and mechanisms that already exist.

The Government have it in their power to relieve the misery of my constituents and to put an end to the blight that they have suffered during the past three years. I urge them to do so without further delay.

10.34 am

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I totally agree with the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) about the general desirability of a scheme to take freight off the roads and put it on to rail, but it must be matched against the reality of the project's details. It may be right and necessary for individuals in my constituency to suffer a diminution in their quality of life for some greater good, but we must consider the scheme's details. They are incompatible with the current use of the Chiltern line, which has been encouraged by the Government and is likely to take many road users off the road and on to the train service to London. That alone should encourage the view that the current proposals are fatally flawed. Furthermore, the location of the freight terminal proposed for my constituency, which remains obscure under present proposals, is truly extraordinary in view of the saturation of the road network, amply demonstrated in a recent planning inquiry into another road/rail depot to be located close by.

That is why we should be deeply sceptical about the proposal. It is not an ordinary proposal, but one seeking Government backing. As I tell my constituents, it is no good blaming the proposers. I may believe that the proposal is flawed, but in a free country anyone is entitled to suggest it. However, the proposers want a hybrid Bill, which places a serious responsibility on the Government to determine their view of the scheme. I hope that the Minister's response today will demonstrate that, in the absence of detailed planning, the Government will be hostile to the scheme and that they will reassure us about the need to remove the planning blight that is harming my constituents and others.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I thank hon. Members for their co-operation.

10.36 am

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I congratulate the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) on securing the debate. In the eight or so minutes available, I hope to do justice to this serious issue.

The Liberal Democrats support the principle of moving freight off roads and on to rail. On paper, the Central Railway proposal looks attractive. We agree that using rail for freight is a good idea, but the implementation and impact of the proposals is the key issue. Hon. Members on both sides have raised important questions, to which I hope the Minister will respond shortly.

The proposal should not be allowed to proceed without a satisfactory and full environmental impact assessment. It should not allow the Government to escape from improving the national rail infrastructure, but the proposal is certainly preferable to the six-lane Birtway floated a few weeks ago.

If the proposal goes ahead, will the Government ensure that a full environmental impact assessment is carried out? To what extent will the Government accept financial exposure for the project if it first succeeds but subsequently fails? Many environmental claims have been made about the proposal. Apparently, 3 million lorry movements per year will be removed from the roads. Central Railway has a memorandum of understanding with several national environmental agencies that will ensure that agreed proceedings for assessing and managing environmental impacts are followed. Will the memorandum of understanding be binding?

The proposal suggests seven terminals, perhaps five of which could be located in industrial or brownfield areas, leaving at least two on greenfield sites. Will that contravene any of the Government's greenfield or green belt policies?

Hon. Members have referred to the hybrid Bill. Do the Government support that route or the Transport and Works Act 1992 route? Given the level of concern across the country, proceeding with a hybrid Bill would be a risky venture for the Government, so I hope that they will reflect further on the Transport and Works Act, which would allow more detailed consideration of the proposals. The timing of the Government's plans to overhaul planning procedures for major infrastructure projects might enable them to follow that route in preference to a hybrid Bill.

Many hon. Members have referred to the proposal's impact on rural areas. What can the Government do to alleviate such anxieties if Central Railway's scheme goes ahead?

What consideration have the Government given to one of the greatest matters of concern: the proposed railway's integration with the rest of the network and its compatibility with Chiltern Railways? Is it possible to run a dedicated rail freight line alongside that railway or along the same line as the passenger services, given the impact that the proposed scheme will have on stations along the route?

Many hon. Members have called for much more detailed work to be done on the business case. Central Railway estimates that the total capital cost will be £4.5 billion, although other consultants suggest that the cost will be closer to £8 billion. Have the Government assessed those estimates and what is their view of the potential cost of the proposal? What will be their financial exposure if they provide support for the proposal?

The Liberal Democrats would support the project in principle if the environmental concerns were addressed, if the economics added up and if the new capacity that is promised with the proposal materialised. That is not an inconsistent position; it is much better to ask searching questions and to await responses than to draw

[Tom Brake]

conclusions on whether the project is sound from the scant details available. Hon. Members refer time and again to the fact that details are not available but then draw conclusions about whether the project is viable. It is better to press for information on which to take a decision rather than to draw rapid conclusions.

It is too early to say whether the economics stack up and whether the environmental impact can be negated. I hope that the Minister will be able to answer my questions in his response.

10.42 am

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) on securing the debate on this important proposal, which will have a dramatic impact on the constituencies of many of my hon. Friends.

I shall be brief, and ask one or two questions, as it is important that the Minister and the Government come clean on the issue once and for all. Do the Government support the scheme? Do they support the use of a hybrid Bill? How many times do they intend to send the proposal backwards and forwards like a yo-yo to the Strategic Rail Authority, which will pronounce on the matter in September? May we have the Minister's assurance that the Government will make a final decision as soon as possible after that date?

The Government must take a view on whether they want the difficulties of a hybrid Bill if they are not convinced that the private sector, in the guise of Central Railway or a successor company, will deliver money from that sector.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) said, by taking the hybrid Bill route the Government, may, by association, be implicated in the scheme. If at a future date the private sector runs into difficulties and the scheme does not have the finances expected, the Government may be duty bound to bail it out. Are there not therefore considerable implications for the public purse?

10.44 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) on securing this debate and on his contribution to it. He rightly made many points on behalf of his constituents, as did all hon. Members who contributed. The debate has shown that there are differences on the Labour Benches and on the Conservative Benches—the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss) shakes his head, but there are differences. For example, the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick), who I thought was getting applause at one stage, has a very different view of the matter. It is good that there has been such interest on both sides of the Chamber—the Government are being pressed hard and therefore we must consider the matter most carefully and in detail.

I was pleased to note that I am the fourth Minister to have answered a debate on this subject. We live in interesting times and who knows how many others may yet have to do so. The hon. Member for Reigate gave an interesting analysis of what he considers to be the points against the project. I will not go into those points, but they and those made by other hon. Members both for and against the project will be given the most careful consideration when the Government decide whether to support the scheme. I can assure him that those points are not new to us and are being given careful consideration.

Several hon. Members raised the issue of blight. That is a regrettable but inevitable consequence of any major scheme. I hope that the matter can be resolved, particularly on behalf of the constituents of those hon. Members who have raised the matter today. That is why we have placed a time scale on the SRA's consideration of the scheme on our behalf. The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) talked about natural justice being served. Natural justice is served in such matters by first giving careful consideration to any proposal and then deciding on it as expeditiously as possible so that people get an outcome.

The hon. Member for Reigate asked two questions, which were reinforced by his hon. Friends. He asked whether we support the scheme and whether we support the hybrid Bill. Those questions were put on 6 March 2001 by the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge to one of the previous Ministers answering on the matter. They were recycled from that debate, so I will recycle the answers as well, in my own way. We certainly support, in principle, a move from road to rail. *[Interruption.]* It needs to be said—if the hon. Member for Reigate wants an answer to his questions, he will have to bear with me.

If a totally viable and sustainable case were made that met the terms of reference in the SRA review, we would have to make an informed decision at the end of the process. Do we support the scheme? We will have to await the outcome of the SRA review to find out whether it meets the criteria that have been mentioned and that were set out in the previous debate.

Do we support the proposed hybrid Bill? In the end, the approach is up to the proposer. If the scheme were to meet all the very rigorous criteria, we would support it. If it were not to meet those criteria, we would not. I hope that that answers the hon. Gentleman's questions and is helpful to the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge, who originally asked the questions more than a year ago.

Mr. Hammond: Since that debate in March 2001 the Government's proposals for infrastructure planning decisions have come on a long way. Will the Minister explain in what circumstances a hybrid Bill is appropriate when the Government have proposed an elaborate scheme of their own for dealing with such infrastructure proposals? Why should a hybrid Bill be used to evade or avoid the procedures that the Government are promoting?

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman suggests that proper discussion and examination might be prevented, depending on whether we take a Transport and Works Act 1992 route or a hybrid Bill route. Both routes would, however, require proper examination in the

House, and hon. Members would have an opportunity to speak on behalf of their constituents in a debate, as they have done today.

Mr. Hammond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Jamieson: I will, although it will inhibit my ability to answer some of the questions that other hon. Members have quite properly raised.

Mr. Hammond: This is important. There is a perception that going down the hybrid Bill route will mean that the scheme has Government support and, given the parliamentary arithmetic, that it will be approved. Is the Minister prepared to say that there would not be a whipped vote if a hybrid Bill came before the House?

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman is jumping to the next phase. He assumes that the scheme has Government support, but I am saying that we must weigh the matter up. If the scheme gets Government backing, it will have all the support that we normally give Bills as they go through Parliament. If it does not get our backing, it will not have that support. I hope that that helps the hon. Gentleman, and lays the matter to rest.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) made some good points about developing the economy and employment, and about why we must consider such schemes carefully. They can be important for economic development, and they are certainly important in parts of the country well to the north of his constituency. I am glad that he made those points. The hon. Member for Bosworth made similar points about his area, which I know quite well.

We must weigh the issues carefully. There are strong economic arguments for such schemes, and there are the arguments about moving freight from road to rail. We must, however, balance those against all the environmental and other issues that have been raised today.

Let me answer one of the many questions from the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) so that he does not accuse me of not answering any of them. He asked whether there would be an environmental assessment, and the answer is, of course, yes. He asked many other questions, and they are the very sorts of question that we shall ask when we consider the SRA review.

The hon. Member for Reigate has been following the Government's consideration of Central Railway's hybrid Bill proposals and the SRA's high-level review, and he will be aware that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport has written to the chairman of Central Railway about the review's conclusions. I welcome this opportunity to explain the current position to other hon. Members.

As several contributors to the debate have said, encouraging more rail freight remains at the heart of the Government's integrated transport policy, and we are committed to working with the industry to achieve that. After many years of decline, rail freight has made an impressive recovery. Indeed, the figures that the SRA released last week show that the amount of freight moved by rail has increased by 30 per cent. in the past five years. We welcome that growth, and want it to continue. Transferring more freight off the roads and on to more sustainable modes of transport is a key component of our long-term vision for transport. Hon. Members will know that our 10-year plan sets out a framework for further growth in rail freight by 2010.

Mr. Hopkins: My hon. Friend talks about the percentage increases in rail freight, but the amounts involved are relatively small, and we need more infrastructure investment to achieve a substantial increase. Central Railway could quadruple present levels of rail freight.

Mr. Jamieson: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Although there has been an increase, the base was very low, and our ambition is that it should be raised considerably.

Through its freight strategy, the SRA is working in partnership with Railtrack and the freight operators to deliver the details of the investment programme set out in our 10-year plan, including improvements to the capacity and capability of the network, better targeted funding for rail freight developments and more freight interchanges. The Government have made it clear that they are committed to rail freight growth as a key element of sustainable distribution. To that end we shall support, in principle, projects that offer value for money and bring economic and environmental benefits to the country. With that in mind, the Government would not wish to obstruct the progress of privately led and privately financed initiatives such as that proposed by Central Railway.

I am aware of the history of the project and of the results of previous attempts by Central Railway to gain the approval of this House for the scheme. In considering the company's request for Government support for a Bill to promote its project, we have taken a number of factors into account and have listened to representations from many interested parties—both those in favour of the scheme and those opposed to it. As a result of the SRA's high-level review, and given other information, it is clear that were it to succeed, the Central Railway proposal would meet a significant part of the freight market's need in the long term. However, it is also clear that important questions remain. Those were considered by the SRA's review but, due to its scope, it was not able to test them in sufficient depth to reach clear-cut conclusions.

The Government recognise the wider public interest, which the hon. Member for Reigate illustrated. We must be satisfied that Central Railway's proposals offer viable solutions for rail freight that are compatible with our long-term vision for transport and the environment. I think that that covers some of the points made by the hon. Members for Runnymede and Weybridge and for Carshalton and Wallington.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Interoperability is of key importance to my constituents served by the Chiltern line. Can the Minister give me an assurance that, in its new review, the SRA will consult Railtrack and the rail operators that would be affected by the Central Railway proposals? Chiltern Railways told me last weekend that it had still had no proper approach

[Mr. David Lidington]

from Central Railway to discuss problems. As the Minister knows, Chiltern Railways says that Central Railway's proposal is utterly incompatible with the present level of passenger services, let alone those that it is contractually obliged to provide under the terms of the new franchise.

Mr. Jamieson: I can give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that, of course, that would be part of our consideration. The availability of channel tunnel paths will be an important factor in underpinning the robustness of Central Railway's revenue assumptions. We shall therefore consider that, too.

Some hon. Members, particularly those whose constituencies are directly affected by the scheme, have urged an early response to the hybrid Bill proposal. Given the scale of the project, it is quite right that the SRA should have wished to learn more about the proposals before taking a view. It was also appropriate that it should have carried out its high-level review within the context of its overall freight strategy and the Government's 10-year plan. Inevitably, that has taken time.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport has made it clear that there is insufficient evidence to enable the Government to support a hybrid Bill. In order to reach a point at which we can take an informed decision about the proposals, further work is necessary. I can assure the hon. Member for Reigate and others who have contributed to the debate that that does not mean that the Government intend to continue to work the proposals until we find good reason to support the scheme. We believe that it is important to give the scheme a fair and thorough hearing, and that is what we shall do.

That is why, with the help of consultants and the co-operation of Central Railway, the SRA is carrying out a further detailed assessment in order to test key remaining areas of the proposals. That will not simply be a repeat of the high-level review; it will test more closely those key areas where the earlier review could not provide sufficient confidence in the proposals. We expect that the SRA's review will be completed in September. When we receive it, we will give it careful and due consideration.

Mr. Blunt: That is appalling.

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman says that that is appalling but before we make a decision, given that the scheme is of such importance and has aroused many conflicting views, it is incumbent on the Government to listen to and consider those views carefully, including those that he has aired today. If the Government did anything other than that, we would be irresponsible.

Financial Services Industry

11 am

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Some of my colleagues suggested that a debate on the integrity of the financial services industry would be a brief affair. Perhaps the full title should have a question mark, as we will debate the quest to find integrity in the industry rather than concentrating on something that is a rare commodity in the relevant companies.

I do not introduce the debate because I have specialist knowledge in the subject, although many distinguished colleagues are present who have contributed to such debates from their knowledge. My interest is as a Member of the House for 15 years. In that period, I have seen a procession of constituents whose financial lives have been damaged by the work of the financial services industry. This morning, I want to detail many of the scandals that have taken place, because millions of people have been cheated and bamboozled by commission-hungry salesmen who have mis-sold poor-value pensions, mortgages and insurances.

Having checked the numbers of robberies and muggings in the past year, I can say with certainty that the public are much more likely to be robbed by the financial services industry than by burglars or muggers. The difference is that criminal theft is usually a single event, but robbery by financial institutions continues every week for decades.

There is a seemingly endless litany of scandals. Millions of people have been cheated by the mis-selling of personal pensions, with compensation of £15 billion and rising. About 6 million endowment mortgages face certain shortfalls. Then there are the scandals of the Bank of Credit and Commerce International, Maxwell, the West Bromwich building society's home income bonds—you will remember them well, Mr. Deputy Speaker—the Independent Insurance Company, Barings Bank, Equitable Life, Chester Street Insurance Holdings and the AXA orphan assets. Now there is the split capital investment trust. Recent events form the background to that, including the collapses of Enron, Andersen and Marconi, which have dangerously shaken public confidence in the market.

An industry that manages £1,900 billion of Britain's savings is haemorrhaging confidence. Individuals and families have suffered huge losses. The well-off are often cushioned against such losses and can recover from them. The casualties are the people whom we see in our surgeries, who have tried to organise their lives so that they have a comfortable old age with an adequate income. Given the activities of organisations that behave disreputably, they now face a future on the edge of poverty.

If confidence is to be restored, I hope that we can persuade the Government to take a more active role. This and the previous Government have creditable records, but this Government must ensure that the industry simplifies its products, establishes a network of genuinely independent financial advice, nurtures the good value of the credit unions and restores faith in the national insurance system, a system that was brought about by the last Liberal Government. We want to say with some force that we are not all Thatcherites now. There is still a belief in the simplicity and good value of the national insurance system.

Let us start with the bottom feeders in the murky pond of the financial services industry: debt management companies and non-status lenders. Debt management companies infest daytime television with advertisements that promise that all one's debts can be rolled up into one manageable payment and that, somehow, the burden and anxiety of debt can be magicked away. Debt management companies take on the debts, routinely add 15 per cent. to the total debt and then pocket a whole month's repayments. Then, with one exception—Firstplus is a reasonably efficient firm—they are inefficient when it comes to paying the debts on time. They actually increase the debt and lengthen the period of indebtedness. Even more damaging is the impression they give that, by going along to such a company, debts can be magicked away. That encourages people who are not in serious debt to take on debts in the belief that, if they get into serious trouble, they need only phone the nice people on the television, who will solve all their problems for them.

There is no painless escape from debt. The average adult in Britain is now a record £3,000 in debt, and that figure is growing rapidly. In the past year alone, it has risen by 12 per cent. to a massive £130 billion, and I believe that the activities of debt management companies have played a significant part in that increase. Good advice on debt is available free from citizens advice bureaux or the Foundation for Credit Counselling. Debt management firms say that their job is loan consolidation, but it is not; it is debt multiplication.

The main non-status mortgage provider was once known as the City Mortgage Corporation. It then became Ocwen and is now known as the igroup. Many Members will have spent hours talking about the activities of that body. At least nine years ago, there was a scandal involving the City Mortgage Corporation. It seeks out people who cannot afford mortgages and offers them mortgages, in the almost certain knowledge that the loans will never be paid off. It routinely adds 2 per cent. to the interest rates charged in the high street, and it certainly used to double the interest rate if there were any question of a payment arriving late, or for almost any other reason. Borrowers would rapidly get into serious debt. The company charges enormous fees for its services and for redemption charges, with the result that a loan of £20,000 would increase to £40,000 in a short time, and the house was often lost.

I remember one constituent who was in desperate financial trouble, but he had built his own house and was determined to stay there by hook or by crook. He became involved with that company, eventually lost his beloved house and ended up in serious debt. I thought that the problem had been solved or at least reduced, but I am informed by the CAB that it has increasing evidence of bad practice by non-status companies. New regulations, which have been promised for some time, are due this year, but the wheels of reform grind slowly, often obstructed by the inertia and lobbying power of the companies involved. In one incident, the City Mortgage Corporation had the backing of certain Members and action was taken as a result. I do not want to unearth past scandals, but that incident gives no credit to certain Opposition Members.

It was not those disreputable companies that contributed to what was probably the worst scandal: personal pensions. It is hard for those who were not Members at the time to realise how we got into the scandal of personal pensions. It was a strange, surreal period. It was not the small companies but the Government and the high street banks who advertised personal pensions. One advertisement showed a person in chains saying, "Escape from the chains of SERPS"—the state earnings-related pension scheme—"to the freedom of your own personal pension." That was part of a £1 million advertising campaign paid for by the Government. An advertisement by the Midland bank said that people should not be SERPS—a SERPS was represented as a oleaginous blob that no one would want to be associated with—when they could get a £5,500 gift from the Government. Another equally misleading advert was made by Barclays bank.

The result of that activity was that unsophisticated people—most people felt thoroughly inadequate in the face of salesmen from the pensions industry—were convinced that they should leave their good-value occupational final salary pensions and plunge into the gamble of personal pensions, which are now proving to be such "good" value. Of those pensions, 40 per cent. were allowed to lapse or were transferred within the first four years; and, given the present annuity rates, those who bought money purchase schemes must be regretting that they took that advice.

I treasure one moment from 1988, when I had the effrontery to criticise the then Prime Minister on her policy on personal pensions. She told to me that, as a socialist, I was obviously against choice. However, it was Hobson's choice for those who took out personal pensions. Many people were pushed into them by firms which employed wicked tactics. For instance, when a company made workers redundant or suffered a major upset, those firms would move in. However, they employed not their own salespeople but former workers—ex-miners or ex-steelworkers who were mates, many of whom knew nothing about pensions except what they learned in a session lasting a couple of hours.

It was those trusted people who sold personal pensions to their pals and family—until they had no friends left. They were employed in selling personal pensions for an average of six months. It was a wicked way to manipulate people, but it was a bonanza for the financial services industry, which greedily and irresponsibly pushed those poor-value pensions. The scandal of the marketing of endowment mortgages proves the scarcity of integrity in the financial services industry.

The Financial Services Authority has confirmed that 60 per cent. of those who responded to its survey said that they were told that their endowment policies were guaranteed to pay off their mortgages; and a further 26 per cent. said that they were told that the policies would "probably" pay off their mortgages. Many people were told that they would receive a nest egg at the end of it; no one can determine what was said by the sales staff, but commission-hungry salesmen will say such things. Few people would risk the gamble of an endowment mortgage that depended on what would happen in the stock markets in 20, 30 or 40 years' time when, most of all, they wanted security in their homes.

[Paul Flynn]

The only people whose interests were being served by the use of endowment mortgages were those who sold them—and it is still going on.

I first raised the issue some four years ago, and I remember being hammered by my local newspaper. The local endowment mortgage sellers got together and denounced me for such terrible scaremongering. I called for a Government inquiry into endowment mortgages in 1998, because millions of people had been sold poor policies and the sellers were more interested in collecting hefty commissions than in selling the most suitable products. I was condemned, and not only by the *Newport and Cwmbran Weekly Argus*. In August 1999, I said that those who were offered endowment policies should say no, and that they should have nothing to do with them; but on 10 August 1999, the FSA dismissed claims of mis-selling of endowment mortgages, saying that the

"overwhelming majority of endowment policies pay out adequately and that there is no question of their being banned."

Sue Anderson of the Council of Mortgage Lenders said it was not correct to say that endowments were "inappropriate."

On 13 May 2002, the FSA said:

"About 60 per cent. of endowment holders, or 3.6 million people, are now in danger of failing to cover their mortgage debt. Several leading United Kingdom insurance companies could face heavy fines for having mis-sold endowment policies".

The truth is that almost 6 million have had red or amber warning letters.

The regulator has identified a number of well-known insurance companies that systematically mis-sold endowment policies by mispricing them. One or two firms will be named and shamed. There should be transparency on the matter, and we should be told which companies carried out such sales despite knowing that they were likely to end in tears.

There is a way of finding out about this practice and correcting it. The FSA figures show that only 100,000 people have complained to companies, with approximately one third of complaints being upheld. However, 218,000 policies were redressed when the FSA initiated investigations into companies. It is only right that the FSA should take a more active role to widen the focus of investigation and force more companies to take action.

I was under the impression that sales had collapsed, given all the publicity and the fact that most main high street companies no longer sell endowment mortgages. However, a letter that I received from the Council of Mortgage Lenders states that 10 per cent. of all new mortgages sold in the first quarter of this year were endowments. If the main companies that were the principal sellers have not sold those mortgages, other companies must have vastly increased their sales.

A newspaper report quoted a salesman as saying that he would need to sell 140 stakeholder pensions to earn the commission he gets from selling 14 endowment mortgages. Those who have made profits in the past continue to do so, and some companies seem to be intensifying their activities in selling to ill-informed customers mortgages that will almost certainly fail. I suggest that the most sophisticated of customers would run a mile if someone offered them an endowment these days.

The next scandal that will emerge will be with general insurance, especially for accident, sickness and unemployment. In the early 1990s, when it was clear that the bonanza days of selling personal pensions were over, there was great excitement about the idea that companies might make a killing by selling accident, sickness and unemployment insurance. The commissions charged on those products are enormous, and they are sold with virtually no controls.

I can give an example of the scandalous practices of some companies in that market. I was visited by a gentleman who had a distinguished career in public service and who went to work as an inspector for the Combined Insurance Company of America, which is very active in this country. He was a man of undoubted integrity and probity, and he was so horrified by what he saw that he came all the way down from the north of England to visit me. I arranged several meetings with the General Insurance Standards Council, the industry regulator, which he attended carrying a huge sheaf of papers. His information showed that appalling corruption was taking place—I use the word "corruption" advisedly. The company is corrupt and is corrupting its staff. It pays no wages, and the staff are so desperate to earn money to pay for their cars and expenses at the end of the week that they are forced to sell hopelessly unsuitable policies, sometimes to people with illnesses, some of which are terminal, that would debar them from claiming benefits from other policies. Life insurance policies have been sold to elderly people who could not possibly benefit from them. Many such cases have been brought before the General Insurance Standards Council.

One anecdote about the company struck me in particular. A gentleman went to work for it armed with a conscience, but found that he was not producing the required volume of work. At a social event, the Europe president of the company, Mr. John E. Johnson, asked three of the 50 managers present to stand up at the end of the meal. One of the three was the gentleman in question. To improve the morale of the staff, he explained to them that he had asked the managers to stand up because he wanted not to embarrass them, but to humiliate them. The average turnover of the company was 400 per cent. a year. Those who went to work for the company were forced to do things that they were ashamed of and that were damaging to them. Such activities create casualties among staff as well as the policyholders. However, it was made clear to them that it was a question of "no deal, no meal".

There are many such cases, and I will not burden the Chamber with all of them. I last heard from the supervisory body some 15 months ago, and I recently got back to it to ask what was being done. There has been a series of meetings to try to correct the excesses of such companies, but I understand that there has been no real improvement.

With-profits policies should be known more accurately as with-losses policies. Some 10 million policyholders hold investments worth £350 billion. Those policies are at the heart of most of the financial scandals of the past two decades. The FSA has a statutory duty to protect consumers, yet it has failed to produce any robust review of the market or to take action to ensure that the millions of consumers who are mis-sold mortgage endowments receive the redress that they deserve. [illegible] tribute to the work of the Consumers Association, [illegible] has called for the ring fencing of policyholders' funds to protect them from director and shareholder raids and to ensure that directors have the same legal duty to policyholders as they do to shareholders. It is extraordinary that directors have a fiduciary duty to shareholders, but not to policyholders.

Orphan assets also involve an enormous sum of money—£45 billion—which has accumulated as a result of very low annual payments on policies and the companies' ludicrously pessimistic forecasts. There is no reason why such funds should not be used to assist the casualties of mis-selling and other scandals over recent years. The power that directors and actuaries wield in these spheres has been abused to the detriment of policyholders. The AXA High Court case is an example. If we are to prevent another AXA case, we need new regulations that decree that asset shares should include 90 per cent. of orphan assets. There is little transparency in the business, and in many cases there has been a lack of action from the FSA—although it is a good body that is far better than the ragbag of self-regulating bodies set up by the previous Government in the late 1980s and 1990s, which were absorbed into the industry if they were not already a functioning part of it. I met many of those bodies at various times; they saw themselves as the mouthpiece of the industry.

The incestuous nature of the financial services industry is also disturbing. Many of the staff of the ombudsman's office and the FSA have worked in the industry. There is an identification of interests, and the attitude is, "We are right and everyone else—policyholders, customers, the Government—is outside us and should not interfere with anything we do".

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Would the hon. Gentleman regard as incestuous the fact that Howard Davies was made chairman of the FSA without much consultation?

Paul Flynn: I have some regard for Howard Davies and I do not want to personalise the issue. However, last August, when Howard Davies was to make an announcement for the FSA, I had an interview with the spokesperson of the Association of British Insurers, a lady who once worked for Her Majesty the Queen. She was a splendid communicator, and it emerged from the conversation that the previous night she had had dinner with Howard Davies. That seemed to me a little close and cosy, if not incestuous. On another occasion I attended a meeting, under Chatham House rules, involving the ombudsman's department, financial journalists, people from the industry and from the Consumers Association. The person from the Consumers Association and I went away feeling angry about the sentiment that had been expressed that Government of any colour should not get involved in such matters because they were not independent. The industry itself was apparently independent.

I heartily agree with the comment made by Colin Brown, the recently appointed chairman of a new body of the FSA, the consumer panel:

> "The ability of this industry to behave as though it is dealing with its own money and has a God-given right to a profit without thinking about what it is doing to consumers is unbelievable."

Such views represent an encouraging trend. The consumer panel is doing a splendid job in practising what it preaches. We are moving away from an incestuous situation.

As for the scandal involving the split capital investment trust, another product was advertised as having more safety features than a Volvo—this does not end, but goes on and on. In one case quoted in the press, an unfortunate gentleman from Glasgow invested his nest egg of £12,000 in the scheme in 1974; it was vastly over-sold, with huge commissions and poor returns, and the original sum has now shrunk to £27—not so much safe as a Volvo as dangerous as an old banger.

Colin Brown went on to say that no other industry is like the financial services industry, in which "consumer" is a dirty word, and that there is no real opportunity for the industry to grow up and behave like other industries. Brown and his board are urging the regulator to require companies known to be in financial difficulties to give public warnings much earlier than has happened in past scandals. That would have been valuable in the case of Equitable Life.

There is a great gap in what the regulation provides. It does not provide a completely safe environment for ignorant consumers, which includes the majority of us. The question is how far down the regulations should be brought to help such people and how far up we can bring their awareness. If we create better educated and more skilled financial advisers, we increase the gap between them and their potential customers. The only way forward is to simplify products, because their complexity is one of the main ways of ensuring that the public are bamboozled.

In "Star Trek", which is one of my favourite television programmes, the Ferengi are a dire warning of what the future is likely to be. They are based on a nightmare view of Thatcherism. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) should be shown tapes of the programme so he knows what he is really suggesting. The Ferengi are the likely result if the daughters of financial advisers marry the sons of bankers and breed a generation instilled in their philosophy. They have 250 laws of acquisition, including never cheat a man who is wearing a better suit than you are; treat people in your debt like family; and employees are the rungs on the ladder of success, so step on them. Those laws would not be out of place in the boardrooms of many insurance and banking companies. Two precepts of acquisition—rules 239 and 59—strike a chord. They are: never be afraid to mislabel a product, and free advice is never cheap. The word "integrity" does not occur in the Ferengi language.

The remedy is independent financial advice, which is a matter that I have raised in early-day motions tabled under successive Governments, in 1994, 1997 and 1999. The only way to restore confidence in financial products is to provide advice that is genuinely independent and free from anyone seeking commission or sales. Fifty per cent. of people questioned in a survey carried out by the Consumers Association said that they were not saving because they could not trust advice from anyone. They had learned to distrust independent financial advisers—they are not always independent—banks and insurance companies. The accretion of scandal has convinced them that they should not get involved in anything, so they do nothing, which is bad news.

[Paul Flynn]

The original suggestion in a leaflet produced by the Consumers Association was to establish a body on the lines of citizen advice bureaux that can give competent advice on a simple and a sophisticated level, which may have to be paid for, but which has nothing to do with the financial services industry.

Credit unions, which have had enormous success in Ireland and Canada, should be nurtured. There is a very successful credit union in my constituency, which provides simple banking. It is grassroots based, accessible and understood by everyone. It is entirely transparent and provides the best possible value.

New Labour's favourite think tank, the Institute for Public Policy Research, recently published a splendid report pointing out the virtues of the national insurance system.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): One conclusion of the IPPR's report was that the retirement age should be increased by one, two or three years to create a decent pension in retirement. Does my hon. Friend support that proposal?

Paul Flynn: With great enthusiasm. I hope that my hon. Friend will write to my constituents when the matter of selection is discussed in a few years' time to say that I am about eight years younger than Her Majesty. Those of us who are now in our late 60s know that we seem young compared with our parents and grandparents at that age. It is cruel nonsense to force people to retire at 60 or any other age.

If we are to clear up the wreckage of the past 20 years, it will be essential to introduce compulsion into pensions. Young people think that they will never grow old and need a pension, but they will. The only way to provide an adequate pension is through a universal and compulsory scheme.

Like all MPs concerned about this issue, I am most alarmed when I see the faces of people who have done everything right in organising their lives, have been prudent and careful in setting aside money for the future, but find to their horror that they have been cheated and robbed by a system that they do not understand. Such people are now looking forward to an old age of anxiety, worry and near poverty. I recall in my mind's eye the face of one such constituent. If I multiply that by a hundred, then by another hundred, I can continue until I see the faces of nearly 10 million people who have been badly treated by the financial services industry. That should lead us to ask about that industry's integrity, and to think about what we can do as politicians to ensure that the people who have suffered receive some compensation. No generation should be robbed in the shameful way that this generation has been.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Six hon. Members have indicated their wish to speak in the debate, but we now have fewer than 25 minutes before the winding-up speeches commence. I hope that hon. Members who are successful in catching my eye will be self-disciplined and understand that others wish to speak after them.

11.36 am

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I congratulate the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) on securing the debate, which I greatly welcome. I suspect that it will be the first of many on the subject. I also take the opportunity in this post-Thatcherite and pre-Ferengi world to congratulate the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on his promotion. He always wears a better suit than I do, so I have little chance of cheating him—but we shall see.

As hon. Members know, I am fortunate enough to represent the City of London, home for much of the financial services industry in this country. Rest assured, however, that I am here neither to praise nor to bury that industry. The hon. Gentleman raised issues that will be debated for a long time to come. However, it is important to differentiate, which the hon. Gentleman failed to do, between imprudent conduct and recklessness or fraud. We should not imply criminal intent to all aspects of failure. It is important also to instil and reinforce a culture whereby transparency, integrity and good business practice are the norm. I accept that that has not always applied to all aspects of the financial services industry. The Financial Services Authority has a tight, perhaps worryingly over-tight, regulatory regime and it is important to ensure the right balance.

A decade or so ago, the subject of pensions aroused little passion. The young did not consider it; single women ignored it; and the main pensions planners were couples over 40. That may be a generalisation, but the public's lack of detailed interest and knowledge left this country's financial services industry in a mess.

I recently listened to an executive from a major pensions company who exhorted that everyone should consider taking out a pension now—not entirely a hard sell, but largely along the lines that the hon. Gentleman suggested. We had to start planning earlier and invest 15 per cent. of our current salaries from our mid-20s onwards towards a retirement pension. No doubt it is something of a farce. The industry has proved itself incompetent to handle the public's money and the mis-selling scandals, including the ongoing disaster of Equitable Life and the mess of annuities, have virtually wrecked public confidence in pension savings. That has rightly been viewed as a potential horror story, and we should devote our collective energies to regaining the public's trust.

The more I speak to younger constituents, the more I realise that they are guided to buy property as the only safe haven for their money in the longer term. If that continues, it has all the hallmarks of a long-term disaster for this country.

I recently sought reactions and advice on the current pension needs from some of my constituents. They comprised what might be called a focus group, although not the most obvious one as they were in Knightsbridge. They made some interesting points. My wife and I worked in the City until I was elected last year, and it is clear that many of us relatively educated folk have little idea of how the pensions industry works. We simply put aside many hundreds of pounds every month, paying little thought as to what would arise from it. As someone who has always strongly believed in the idea of business probity and the importance of that within the financial services sector, I was saddened by the individual experiences described by many of my constituents.

It is clear that we have allowed ourselves to be lulled into a false sense of security by the enthusiasm of pension providers and politicians' attempts to ensure that everyone has a good life style in the longer term. The adverse publicity and the reduction in so many of the fund payouts has left the young, and especially people in the lower income brackets, with little confidence in such late life provision. By the same token, more and more employees have little expectation of a job for life and do not expect to have a long-term pension commitment from their employers. In exhorting everyone to try to save properly for their old age, it is up to us as politicians to ensure that as far as possible those savings stay safe and that no one who has saved responsibly should be left impoverished by the failure of the pensions industry.

My namesake, the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), and the hon. Member for Newport, West spoke persuasively about compulsion. However, only if the pensions industry is made far safer can we possibly contemplate compelling people to put their trust in it. If a law effectively forces us to hand over an unspent surplus of our hard-earned cash to those who are either unqualified or incompetent, there is little incentive for any of us to save. That will lead to another long-term problem.

I appreciate that the proposals to force us to put money away are not yet Government proposals, although many items have been flagged up in the financial press in recent months. Behind them lies an instinctive bossiness and intolerance, as well as a lack of appreciation why so many people fail to make provision for their future. In reality, and again this goes back to the point made by the hon. Gentleman, no amount of new legislation will overcome the fact that many of our fellow countrymen are simply too poor to save adequately for their long-term future.

Mr. Love: In 1988, the Conservative Government took away the right of an employer to make joining a pension scheme a condition of employment. Would the hon. Gentleman like to see that facet of pensions legislation changed?

Mr. Field: It is a valid point. To be fair, I have not conclusively determined where I stand on that. Clearly 14 years ago choice was seen to offer a great advantage. That choice has been something of a two-edged sword at the very best. We must therefore be open-minded about the proposals that are being put forward and are likely to be come into force following the Pickering report.

I have spoken for quite some time. I should like to say more, but other hon. Members want to contribute. I shall be interested to hear what the Chief Secretary has to say. I hope to take part in debates on these matters in the months and years ahead.

11.44 am

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): I am happy to follow the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field). As such I will perhaps be regarded as a tail of two cities. I follow him also in offering my sincere and heartfelt congratulations to the Chief Secretary. His appointment was a great source of joy to many. Indeed, I recall first meeting my right hon. Friend 10 or more years ago when he was shadow Minister with responsibilities for banking. It has been a long and well-merited track upwards.

Today is a pregnant time for the financial services industry. I refer to the expectation with which the market anticipates the Pickering report on pensions, the Inland Revenue's report on pension taxation and Ron Sandler's report on improvements to the long-term savings market. I will return to them later in my remarks if I have time, but I first want to draw the Chief Secretary's attention to a report published last week by RSM Robson Rhodes, which is a leading accounting and actuarial consultancy company.

The report demands a thorough overhaul of corporate governance to prevent an Enron-type collapse of a major corporation in the UK. The Chief Secretary will recall that in two previous debates—on Equitable Life and independent insurance—I urged tighter controls on accounting companies that use the audit function as a loss leader to sell consultancy services to their clients. Prior to Arthur Andersen coming under the spotlight at Enron, many in the Financial Services Authority saw my calls as unwarranted and alarmist, but RSM's report now urges clear restrictions on the consultancy work offered by accountancy firms to clients to which they already provide audit services. It calls further for the combined code on corporate governance to be a compulsory requirement for firms listed on the London stock exchange. Is the Chief Secretary prepared to accept those findings and take action to implement them?

A further recommendation is to raise the present requirement that one sixth of the members of listed companies' boards should be made up of independent directors so that at least half become independent directors. My right hon. Friend will be aware that those recommendations echo the proposals that the New York stock exchange introduced last week to beef up board independence and strengthen the role of the audit committee, giving it sole responsibility for the hiring and firing of auditors. The RSM report points out that we need a corporate governance system that prevents problems starting, rather than one that tries to correct them once they have happened.

That brings us back to Pickering and Sandler and what the public know as endowment mortgages. In fact, those mortgages are a bundling of two things—an interest-only mortgage and, behind it, a with-profits endowment life policy. The policy is set up to repay the capital borrowed to purchase the property when the policy matures. The borrower therefore pays off each month only the interest on the loan coupled with the premium due on his endowment policy.

[Mr. Barry Gardiner]

That is the theory, but the practice has been somewhat different. I was sent a letter by Mr. Hardgrave, who due to ill health had to remortgage more than 10 years ago. He says:

> "My financial adviser introduced a package of investments—a pension with Friends Provident, insurance with Norwich Union, PEPs with Schroeder and Perpetual, plus life cover only for myself and my wife with Scots Amicable. Upon reaching June 2002, shortly after my 70th birthday, the mortgage to C&G would be paid off leaving an £8,000 'bonus'! In reality, we are £4,000 short of the necessary repayment figure. But what is more significant, never at any time, where I am now aware, was there any warning of a shortfall. Over the ten year period I needed to earn £2,000 per month just to keep afloat . . . I enclose my adviser's letter which encourages me to bat on for a further six months. I never imagined in the heady carefree days of my apprenticeship in 1948 that I would still be working in 2002."

He goes on to say:

> "I thank you for reading my letter and I would be most obliged to receive your comments",

but it gets better. He adds:

> "Incidentally I joined the Labour Party in 1997 from sheer pleasure and relief at your ending eighteen years of crippling Tory misrule!"

What is so disturbing about Mr. Hardgrave's case is that his financial adviser was encouraging a man who was recovering from ill health and who was then aged 61—within four years of the state retirement age—to take out an endowment mortgage over a period as short as 10 years.

I do not know the details of the commission that the adviser received, but I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary will be aware that the first year's payment of premium on such policies is often consumed entirely by commission and administrative costs. It is hard to conceive that Mr. Hardgrave was sold a suitable financial product. Instead of the with-profits windfall of £8,000 that he believed he was promised, he was left with a shortfall of £4,000. How does the industry explain such cases?

How does the industry explain also that it has had to issue red traffic light warnings to 35 per cent. of all endowment policyholders so far reviewed? There is a high risk that their policy will not pay out the target amount at the end of the term. The figure of 35 per cent. of the 6 million endowment policyholders in the UK means that more than 2 million people live in real anxiety about their financial future and the security of their family home. Amber notices to a further 26 per cent. mean that almost 4 million people face a potential shortfall on their mortgage.

The industry tries to explain the project shortfalls as the result of a two-year fall in the equities market. That is nonsense. Before the current downward trend, there was unprecedented growth in equities for 10 years, and the current fall has clawed back only a third of that growth. Where has all the money gone? With-profits policies are precisely intended to smooth out market conditions. Profits made in a rising market are withheld from bonuses precisely to even up bonuses in falling market conditions.

The suspicion is that companies have not withheld profits from bonuses for smoothing purposes, but have withheld them to pass on to shareholders. That is why they do not have the resources to make up the shortfall in lean years. That point can be checked, and I urge my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to consider launching an investigation into the relative performance of mutuals and plcs in the percentage of policyholders issued with red and amber warning notices. That would need to be done by a year-by-year comparison from when the policy was taken out to show a parity. However, it could easily be done, and would provide compelling evidence of the practice of transferring funds properly due to policyholders over to shareholders.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): Many insurance polices were issued by mutuals that do not have shareholders or make profits. Their overall performance is not that different. The view that the money has gone to shareholders is not realistic.

Mr. Gardiner: The hon. Gentleman forestalls what I was about to say. I had anticipated that point and, in the light of his remarks, I caution that the investigation should also examine the transfers that both sectors—mutuals and plcs—have made to their general funds. I do not wish to replay the debate on orphan assets that we held in this Chamber, but my right hon. Friend will recognise the need to ensure that, contrary to the AXA deal, policyholders receive their 90 per cent. entitlement to their company's orphan assets, particularly when they may have been boosted by the retained profits not added to annual bonuses in rising markets. That may account for the parity between mutuals and plcs if, indeed, there is one.

I draw attention to a further absurdity of the market's response to the present endowment mortgage scandal. It says that people should have recognised that they were saving in interest payments because of low interest rates, and they should have used that saving to increase their policy premium payments. That attempts to use the public's confusion about the two elements of an endowment mortgage to cover the industry's own malpractice. It is the same as telling people not to worry about the cost of petrol increasing because the price of bananas has become cheaper.

Mr. Love: My hon. Friend is really getting at the lack of adequate disclosure by pensions companies of exactly how with-profits schemes operate. We must consider carefully, as Sandler needs to, how we can ensure that a policyholder knows exactly what is happening.

Mr. Gardiner: Again, my hon. Friend anticipates exactly the direction of my speech. Low interest rates are neither the cause of nor the solution to the endowment problem. The cause is company and shareholder greed, and a culture of excessive commission for agents. The solution, we hope, will come with the Sandler report, but a minimum requirement is the imposition of transparency about the way in which companies decide on their profit allocation to annual and final bonuses as well as to shareholders and the general fund.

I wanted to speak about polarisation, financial advice bureaux—to which my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) alluded—and bridging the savings gap of £27 billion in our pension projections. Alas, time precludes that, but I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I seek to be as helpful to hon. Members as I can. If contributions are very brief, and the winding-up speakers are prepared to surrender a moment or two, we may be able to hear two further speakers before the winding-up speeches.

11.56 am

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): I, too, congratulate the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on his position and the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) on securing the debate. He painted a pretty bleak picture, with a fairly broad brush, of the whole industry. Without wishing to turn the debate into a Trekkie convention, I should point out that he omitted to mention, in a speech more than 30 minutes long, that the starship was called the Starship Enterprise. Indeed, enterprise was notably lacking from anything that he said.

It is perhaps worth remembering that financial services remain our most successful export, and London, despite—or should I say in spite of—the euro, is still one of the most important financial markets internationally. That is probably why NASDAQ is seeking to come here to do a deal with the London stock exchange. I caution against over-regulation. I believe in regulation, but with an industry suffering from over-regulation, we should proceed with extreme caution.

The integrity of the financial industry has been called into question—rightly or wrongly—on a number of key issues. Like many hon. Members—I doubt whether there is an exception in the Chamber this morning—I have received much correspondence about Equitable Life. I note that my colleagues were successful in securing a change of heart from the parliamentary ombudsman about his original decision not to investigate Equitable Life cases following claims of maladministration. However, Equitable Life has been raised on other occasions, including in debates secured by my hon. Friends, so I shall concentrate on two other key issues if I have time.

The most important issue is endowment mortgages. According to the Association of British Insurers, 6 million homeowners with such mortgages may not now be able to pay off their mortgage loans in full with the proceeds of their endowment insurance policies. As we have heard, the proportion of those with endowment mortgages who face that problem has risen from 46 to more than 60 per cent. in the past two years.

In the recent past, when inflation and nominal interest rates were higher, endowment policies typically provided an attractive savings route to repay mortgage loans. Nominal interest rates on mortgage loans were much higher, effectively compensating lenders for the decline in real terms in the outstanding loan. Similarly, the nominal returns on endowment insurance policies were higher, reflecting higher nominal interest rates earned by the insurance companies, and the tendency for equity markets to rise in nominal terms following the nominal increase in company profits resulting from inflation. That has ended over the past decade, however, because of the climate of low inflation that has been in place since the early 1990s. On the one hand, nominal interest rates on mortgage loans have fallen, but on the other, the nominal returns on endowment insurance policies have also fallen.

The Financial Services Authority is investigating the extent to which insurance companies and others who advise on and sell endowment-linked mortgages mis-sold policies. It is focusing particularly on situations in which consumers were advised that their stock market-linked endowments were, effectively, guaranteed to pay off their mortgages. Three United Kingdom life insurers have already been fined over endowment mortgage mis-selling, and the insurance industry has set aside £325 million for endowment-related redress.

It is not for me to say whether the mis-selling of endowments took place, but the FSA has made it clear that it does not intend to launch a formal review of endowment mortgages. It has also advised that it has no evidence of widespread mis-selling, notwithstanding the escalation of problems with endowment mortgages over the past year. I would therefore be grateful if the Chief Secretary could confirm whether the Government intend to launch such an inquiry.

For its part, the Association of British Insurers does not accept that widespread mis-selling took place, and argues that the main issue is the fall in nominal investment returns. Millions of endowment policies must grow by at least 8 per cent. per annum for the mortgage to be fully repaid. Although that was widely accepted as a realistic and likely prospect in the recent past, it is simply not likely in present economic and stock market conditions. Those involved must clearly tread a delicate line. On the one hand, consumers must take responsibility for their financial decisions, and the principle of buyer beware is embodied in the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000. On the other hand, there is the issue of mis-selling.

I do not have time to refer to split capital investment trusts, or splits. I should say, however, that the bottom line in the case of endowments and splits is that while none of us can control what happens in the markets, none of us would condone malpractice. The task is, therefore, to root out malpractice and to provide consumers with the reassurance that they will receive fair redress should their case merit it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Miss Anne Begg (in the Chair): Order. I realise that several hon. Members still want to speak, but it is now two minutes past 12, so we shall move on to the summings-up.

12.2 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) and the Chief Secretary, whom I first encountered a few years ago, when he was a very junior Minister. He took on an extremely complicated adoption case of mine, and I am pleased to say that he overruled his officials. I hope that he maintains that independence of mind in the Treasury, where it is badly needed.

The key issue is that we are dealing not with scattered scandals, but with a systemic problem. The *Financial Times*—the newspaper of the City—talked about a toxic

[Dr. Vincent Cable]

legacy of mis-selling, while the chairman of the Financial Services Authority recently talked about the disgrace of the financial services industry. Those are strong words.

There has now been a cumulative loss of basic trust in financial products, which is important not only for customers, but for the Government. We have a savings gap of £27 billion a year, which will not be filled unless financial products can be sold, and that requires trust.

The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) made a distinction between crooks—the Maxwell, BCCI-type problem—and honest failure. There is, however, something in between. It is not crooked behaviour or honest failure, but sharp practice. A common element in many of the scandals is the prevalence of sharp practice and the industry's inability to get on top of it.

The pensions mis-selling scandal has largely been dealt with through compensation, but I hope that the Government will produce an evaluation of what has been achieved, because this is a Government, not an FSA issue. My concern is about who paid the £15 billion restitution. We know from Sandler and others that there is a lack of control over funds in the with-profits industry, so I suspect that much of the restitution was paid not by shareholders but by other policyholders. We need a thorough evaluation of how that exercise panned out.

We need to distinguish between the different types of mis-selling that occurred in relation to endowments. There was that by people who claimed that there was a guarantee when there was not one, and the mis-selling to people who were told that they could not have a mortgage unless they had an endowment with it. There is nothing inherently wrong with endowment mortgages; that point has not been made. I paid off my mortgage three or four years ago and received quite a large bonus on the back of the endowment that was linked to it. A number of people have had favourable experiences. However, the point is that when the market began to turn sour, the industry, which had pocketed its commissions, did not exercise a duty of care. That is not mis-selling, but it is a form of negligence. There is a responsibility involved. As interest rates fell, people with endowments became better off; they were not losing money. Somebody needed to tell them then to put money aside to compensate for the lack of value of the endowment. Nobody did, and that was the failure in the system.

We must ask whether the scope of the FSA inquiry is sufficient; it seems to have been drawn very narrowly, especially compared with that for pension mis-selling. If the FSA is not willing to look at the matter more comprehensively, are the Government? The second question, which is asked less often, is whether there was a regulatory failure. This happened pre-FSA. I suspect that the regulator was within the old structure. Did somebody in the regulatory system fail to alert the industry to the fact that customers needed to be warned to save more? Thirdly, two serious things seem to have happened in the small but important split trusts segment of the market. There has been extreme mis-selling. Customers were sold what were presented as very low-risk investments but were nothing of the kind. The other thing, not mis-selling but probably more serious, was the collusion between the so-called magic circle of companies, which were investing in each other's operations to create what was known as exponential risk. That highly irresponsible and dangerous behaviour produced a subsequent collapse and a large-scale loss of savings. The splits issue is important because it is a test of the FSA's credibility. Is it willing to insist on full restitution and to get to the bottom of what seems to have been serious market abuse?

I hope that the Minister will touch briefly on the failure of professional self-regulation, which has been exposed by recent events. The Equitable Life scandal revealed that we had actuaries who could not count and auditors who were blind and deaf. The worst thing about the Equitable Life situation was the conduct of the auditors, Ernst and Young. To the credit of the accountancy profession, it has recently shown signs of being willing to make radical changes to improve its performance. However, the ultimate responsibility is the Government's. The Department of Trade and Industry rather than the Treasury should insist on changes in audit practice to prevent that kind of thing from happening again.

Finally, nobody has mentioned an issue that is central to a discussion about lack of confidence in the financial system: the role of the banks. I mention this because it is a responsibility of the Government rather than of the FSA. As I always ask in debates on financial services, where is the follow-up to the Cruickshank report? The Government accepted that report, which suggested that there were very large "excess profits" in the banking system at the expense of personal customers, and promised us a payment regulator. That has not happened. Where is it?

A few months ago, the Chancellor presented to the House of Commons the report of the competition authorities on business lending. The Chancellor was very tough. He wanted full implementation. We discovered this morning that the banks are not implementing his instructions. Interest on deposits, which was due to be paid from the beginning of June, will not be paid—the banks are withholding it at a cost of £500 million a year to small businesses. Will the Government force through the competition authorities' recommendation? The banks are cocking a snook at the Government and the competition authorities and something should be done. Will the Government do anything about it?

Mr. Gardiner: The hon. Gentleman refers to the debate that took place on the Floor of the House. He will remember my intervention on my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on that occasion, when I asked him whether he would use the threat of a windfall tax if the banks did not comply with the recommendations. Would the hon. Gentleman support that measure?

Dr. Cable: I thought at the time that that would be excessive, but it is now beginning to seem necessary, in order to show the seriousness of the problem.

In the last minute of my speech I shall make some specific points that I hope the Government will follow up. I would like to talk about consumer protection, for which the FSA has responsibility and which it is now taking seriously. If the Minister has been following the debates on the Enterprise Bill, he will know that both Opposition parties, together with Labour Back Benchers, are urging the inclusion of a duty to trade fairly in the context of legislation affecting financial institutions that come under the Department of Trade and Industry rather than the FSA, which relates to issues such as consumer debt. Such a duty is an important omission from the Bill and I hope that the Government will address that.

The hon. Member for Newport, West and I—and, I think, the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner)—have made the suggestion in the past that there should be some kind of pro bono system of financial advice. Confidence in financial advice has collapsed and the industry needs to find a totally independent system of advice that is not linked to commission. The Government might want to promote that.

Finally, as a result of that collapse of confidence, the Government will have to take responsibility for the production of more regulated products with CAT standards. We currently have individual savings accounts and stakeholder pensions produced to such standards and I fear that many other products will have to be launched in that way in order to preserve minimum confidence in the financial system.

12.11 pm

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): I have a great liking for the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn), but I was disappointed by his speech and felt that much of what he said was not as responsible as it might have been. I was personally offended as—I declare an interest—I worked in the financial services industry for 30 years, building an investment management business of which I am still non-executive chairman. With transparent products such as unit trusts and open-ended funds investors know what is happening and—dare I say—most of the clients that we built up during 20 years were pretty satisfied with our service.

The fundamental issue is that all financial assets carry risk. If one keeps one's money in cash and inflation is rising, its real value can disappear—it is not safe. If one invests in equities, one incurs the risk of the stock markets. As the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) said, between 1980 and 2000 everyone was in the main extremely happy. Their endowment policies more than paid off their mortgages and bonuses paid out by with-profit bonds were high. They were probably too high, and that was partly because of regulations about the extent to which reserves can be built up.

Let us consider the matter another way. From 1945 until 1985, people who, on Government advice, bought gilts lost 90 per cent. of the real value of their money. Inflation eroded it and rising interest rates killed prices. The idea that everyone in the financial services industry is a cheating robber whereas the Government are wonderful and have all the solutions, as we heard from the hon. Member for Newport, West, is not fair. Risk is in the nature of financial markets.

Pensions were the great success of this country between 1950 and the 1990s. Not only were huge amounts—£800 billion or so—built up, but 65 per cent. of the population had some form of private sector pension saving. That was much more than anywhere else—even in America, the figure was only about 47 per cent. The huge taxes on employment to pay for state pay-as-you-go earnings-related pensions meant that continental European economies suffered from poor economic growth. They also suffered from capital outflows because they were bad places in which to invest.

Regrettably, occupational final salary schemes are in crisis, in part because the Chancellor thought that he could extract £5 billion a year from them. I remember him saying that stock markets would go up and that everything would be wonderful. When stock markets go down, the problem is unleashed. Not surprisingly in many ways, companies are increasingly unwilling to take the open-ended risks of having to fund final salary schemes, so they are closing them like fury.

Even money purchase pension schemes are affected. The issue of what pension people will receive, including stakeholders, will in part depend on the performance of financial markets and in part on inflation. A major problem for the generation approaching retirement is that the cost of annuities has more than doubled in the past decade, which has been the result of not only lower inflation, but a significant fall in real interest rates.

Mr. Gardiner: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the companies that are closing their final salary schemes are, in many instances, the same companies that took superannuation holidays during the past 10 or 15 years? That has left those schemes underfunded to pay the final salaries that they were supposed to meet.

Mr. Flight: No, I do not. Obviously, that applies to some large established firms, but I am aware of many firms that did not take pension holidays, especially in the middle bracket. The hon. Gentleman will know the rules about the extent to which pension funds can be overfunded anyway, which has been a limitation, as the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) pointed out.

As stakeholders move, along with everyone else, to money purchase schemes and the obligation to buy an annuity, my great worry is that we are in a period of low inflation. The guaranteed annuities one buys reflect that, with a low nominal as well as a low real interest rate. If inflation rises significantly over the next decade, as is perfectly possible, people who lock into schemes today will be screwed. Will the hon. Member for Newport, West blame the Government for forcing people to buy annuities? If that happens, it will be the result of many factors. People object to compulsion on the issue because they fundamentally know that there is huge risk in buying a guaranteed annuity when interest rates are extremely low.

Given what we have heard today, it might be surprising to know that the overwhelming majority of independent surveys show the clients of financial advisers to be quite satisfied with their services. The average income of independent financial advisers is about £25,000 a year. It is not a fat-cat profession, so it is unlike the great and good circles of large companies. There is no substantiation for the simple argument that the problem is excessive commissions and overpayments. Commissions are an issue, but there is no evidence for a rip-off argument that shows that financial advisers grow hugely wealthy on the back of them.

[Mr. Flight]

The problem with Equitable Life was about guaranteed annuities. It was about the Treasury in 1998 endorsing the mistaken decision of Equitable Life to believe that the law enabled it to force the owners of guaranteed annuities to pay the costs. When the House of Lords rejected that, trouble resulted. I remind hon. Members that Equitable Life was a mutual. Like a credit union, it was ultimately owned by its members. Credit unions are jolly useful when they work, but there are many problems with them. A great number of them are insolvent. One cannot think that they will be the solution to all our problems, given that standards of management are often not satisfactory, to be candid.

Regulation has been in place since 1986 to try to address the problems, and standards have risen in that time. There are now major problems, which largely reflect markets, and more transparency is needed. There is especially a further need to reform the insurance industry. However, talking about the financial services industry as if it is a load of cheating robbers does no good. We should be diagnosing and solving the problems; but we should remember that there will always be risk in all forms of financial investment.

12.19 pm

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): There can be no better first outing for an incoming Chief Secretary to the Treasury than to appear in Westminster Hall, with so many experts speaking on a subject that is of interest not only to our constituents, some of whom have suffered as a result of failings in integrity of the financial services industry, but to everyone. It is an important subject. In the generality of things, UK plc stands to benefit from a financial services industry that is perceived to have integrity, because the economy and the nation are better able to gain from all that it has to offer. I am grateful for all the kind things that have been said today—and, in the case of the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Mr. Flight), what was put in writing prior to the debate.

The market for financial advice is complex, and reform is required on both sides. On the demand side, we need educated consumers who are capable of making informed decisions on the products that are right for them. On the supply side, we need appropriate incentives for financial advisers, we need to extend the market in advice so that more people can benefit, and we need products that people can understand. That plea has been made by a number of hon. Members.

I am enormously grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) for sharing his experience of the financial services industry, and for giving us the opportunity to debate the subject. While my hon. Friend was speaking, I looked round the Chamber, and it seemed that apart from your distinguished predecessor in the Chair this morning, Miss Begg, whose memory and parliamentary longevity are positively elephantine, I was the only Member to have heard my hon. Friend put his question to the former Prime Minister, Baroness Thatcher. I remember that her answer was indeed to describe him as a socialist, which was her usual response to those who asked difficult questions. My hon. Friend has borne that as a badge of honour ever since.

My hon. Friend was good enough to recognise that the establishment of the Financial Services Authority signalled an end to the confusion caused by the overlapping agencies that presided over the scandals of the 1980s and 1990s. Indeed, the excellent chairmanship of Sir Howard Davies has strengthened the authority. We have gone beyond what my hon. Friend described as a ragbag; we are now in a different position, and it is important that we should recognise the positive even as we debate the negative. We should remember that there are people in the financial services industry who possess integrity and who are concerned about the welfare of those to whom they sell products. We need to achieve a balance in the debate, because we want to ensure a successful industry. I hope that no one will take that as a sign that I have gone over to the Ferengi. I rather lost interest in "Star Trek" when Lieutenant Uhuru was subject to a compulsory redundancy: when she went, so did I. I have no doubt that lessons can be learned from the Ferengi—and my hon. Friend shared them with us.

Enhancing consumer education and increasing consumer understanding are essential components of our effort to offer appropriate protection for consumers and to enhance the efficiency of the financial services market. The FSA has a statutory duty to promote understanding of the financial system. It should aim to provide individuals with the knowledge, the aptitude and the skills to become effective consumers. It is working with schools to start financial education earlier, and it publishes a range of information on financial products in easy-to-understand flow charts and comparative tables. That is important.

Pension mis-selling and mortgage endowments have been identified during the debate as areas of concern. In each case, responsibility for the detailed operation of the regulatory system properly lies with the FSA while the Treasury retains responsibility for the overall framework. I or my hon. Friends the Paymaster General and Financial Secretary to the Treasury, who have day-to-day responsibility for these matters, will write to hon. Members in response to the specific questions that they have raised, but I shall make a few short points in the time that I have available.

I shall deal first with mortgage endowments. The Government have been successful in achieving low, stable inflation, the wider benefits of which include, for many borrowers, welcome reductions in monthly mortgage payments as the interest element has fallen. However, low inflation has also resulted in lower cash returns on investments, so, in some instances, the return on an endowment, in cash terms, may not be sufficient to cover the outstanding mortgage at the end of the term. We must recognise that that down side puts the issue of mortgage endowments into a different category from pension mis-selling, and so it requires a different response.

The role of the FSA is to regulate advice and sales of investments to protect consumers and help them make informed decisions. Clearly, it has a responsibility to regulate endowments. In his letter of 5 June to the Consumers Association, Sir Howard Davies referred to the FSA's overall strategy in that regard. I commend that letter to hon. Members as a sign of the welcome work that the FSA will be doing in this area.

Pension mis-selling is a scandal that still reverberates around the industry. No one should be in any doubt that there is much to learn from what has occurred. Two million cases of pension mis-selling have been examined, and offers of redress totalling £9 billion have been made in more than 1 million cases. The FSA has paid particular attention to laggard firms which have not given the review the priority that it deserves. They should be in no doubt about the FSA's determination to deal with them. Regulators have not been soft on the industry—far from it. Almost 350 firms have already been disciplined over pension mis-selling, with fines approaching £10 million. Most recently, in May this year, an IFA firm was fined £120,000 for serious failures in conducting the review. That is very different from the issue of mortgage endowments. The FSA published guidance to firms last year to ensure a consistent approach to their handling of mortgage endowment complaints.

The FSA has the right strategy. It must strike a balance between informing consumers, so that they can take the right decisions, and ensuring that firms do the right thing. Such an approach is also important in relation to accident, sickness and unemployment cover, to which some hon. Members have referred. In 1999, the last year of the independent Insurance Ombudsman Bureau, that office handled more than 450 complaints, 10 per cent. of the total of 4,645 complaints about payment protection policies linked to unemployment and sickness. It is interesting that only 12 of those complaints related to the selling process, so it is important to understand the distinction between the three different areas.

The right balance has now been struck and, learning from the past, we can build a more efficient system with proper processes in place for consumer protection and redress. The role of Members in highlighting those issues, as we have done during the debate, is an important contribution to that process. I and my colleagues in the Treasury will continue to listen and to respond with care to hon. Members' points, because we must learn and ensure that the market responds in the right way. We must do that if we are to do something about our constituents' concerns and about the terrible looks on their faces when they describe the impact on their lives of some of the scandals. We are determined to get to the bottom of such scandals and to improve the situation, because everyone should have confidence and trust in our financial services industry.

Silicone Implants

12.30 pm

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I welcome the opportunity to follow up a debate that I introduced a couple of years ago on silicone implants. Implants were introduced almost 40 years ago, and breast enlargement is now the most common cosmetic surgery procedure to be performed on women in the United Kingdom. It is estimated that 10,000 operations are performed each year, and 80 per cent. of those who receive implants opt for silicone gel implants. Significantly, 80 per cent. of operations are cosmetic, rather than for reconstruction purposes.

According to those who campaign on the issue, 60,000 women in the UK suffer from the effects of silicone implants, and the number of websites that provide information on the issue makes the point. Despite the debate held a couple of years ago, and the report by the Select Committee on Health in March last year, no decisive action has been taken. The Government have been slow to act, and I have no evidence that they have struck the right balance between the benefits and risks of breast implants.

It is worth going over some of the ministerial responses to the March 2000 debate. At the time, the independent review group recommended that all patients who underwent surgery should be able to obtain free, independent and comprehensive information from a designated body or from the Government. That information is now available, and there is a Department of Health booklet entitled "Breast Implants Information for women considering breast implants". As others have said, however, the information in that document is not as challenging as it should be. Furthermore, the Department's website address is incorrect, so women who want to visit the website to obtain a copy of the leaflet would be unable to do so. The information in the leaflet is quite bland, and does not put across the real impact of a breast implant that goes wrong.

It is worth returning to the case history of a constituent to show that the problems associated with breast implants are not merely tenderness or the shape not being quite correct. The medical implications can be very severe, but that does not come across in the leaflet. Implants may have to be removed, and some women are left with prominent scars or holes in the tissue. Infections can also arise. Furthermore, concern about the failure of a breast implant may lead to conditions related to stress, such as peptic ulcers.

There is also concern that women who have had silicone implants that have leaked or ruptured could develop other conditions further down the line, such as myalgic encephalomyelitis or rheumatoid arthritis. The Minister may say that there is no medical evidence to support that, but there is certainly anecdotal evidence. There is concern among a significant number of women that implants have such side effects, and the severity of their concerns should be reflected in the document, but it is not. The Health Committee believes that the document does not provide sufficient information about the risks of these products. Since its report, the document may have been reviewed and additional information provided, but the Consumers Association also said that it was disappointed with the leaflet and was concerned about its usefulness.

[Tom Brake]

Informed consent for an operation is another issue. Will the Minister tell us how thorough and useful is the new consent form? Will she provide an update on progress made on implementation of the Health Committee's recommendation No. 8, which will make it mandatory to give women an identification card containing the make and model of their breast implant? That will give women a physical record to which they could refer if anything went wrong in the future.

Registration was another issue referred to two years ago, and I want to press the Minister on it now. The Government say that the registration process by which women place their details on a national breast implant register should be voluntary. Does not the Minister agree that it would be preferable to have a compulsory registration scheme in which the details of individuals were not available, but the details of the implants were? That would provide a mechanism for tracking and linking details to individual people if problems subsequently developed.

Surely we should keep proper information. When we use our cards in Tescos and Safeways, we give the supermarket chains a whole host of information about what we purchase and why, and few people bat an eyelid about that. As clear health concerns are involved with implants, compulsory registration with the data anonymised—and no means of identifying particular individuals—should not cause women any problems. If it were compulsory, we would have consistent and complete data on all the implants in the UK. Will the Minister respond to that point?

I checked with Liberty, and was told that it has no concerns from a human rights standpoint. As long as the data is anonymised, it is not worried about data protection issues. If the Minister believes that an important issue is at stake with compulsory registration, will she explain why Liberty—the organisation most likely to clamour against it—does not?

The register was established in 1993, but what research has the information been used for subsequently? The Minister will correct me if I am wrong, but it seems to me that no work has been done whatever. Nine years on, the Department of Health is commissioning a contract to establish whether the register can be used to assess the outcome of breast implants. When the register was set up, surely its main purpose was precisely that. I am alarmed that nine years after the register was established, research is being carried out to see whether it can be used for the purpose for which it was originally intended. Many women consider that, because the register has not been used to conduct detailed research into the outcomes of breast implants, women in the UK may have been used as guinea pigs in clinical trials, which would be unacceptable in countries where a moratorium on the use of implants for cosmetic reasons is in force.

Another area of concern is the apparent inconsistency in the approaches to the different types of implant. As there is insufficient evidence to show that trilucent implants are safe, the view is that they should be banned, but as there is insufficient evidence to show that silicone implants are unsafe the view is that we should allow them. Perhaps the Minister can explain that position, and why one implant is banned and another is not.

The Minister will, I am sure, be aware that a draft European Union directive will be adopted in September that will reclassify implants as class 3 highest risk medical devices. Does she think that will help? Is she worried that the Government are not concerned about silicone implants, whereas the EU is reclassifying them as class 3 devices, which will mean that more pre-market clinical testing of the products will be needed?

Associated with that at an EU level is the concept of CE marking. Everyone will have seen those two letters on products on sale in our shops and supermarkets. It is a badge of certification to show that they pass certain standards. The trilucent implants have received that badge. Is the Minister satisfied with that form of classification? Is she satisfied that the fact that a CE mark has been allocated ensures that a particular implant is safe?

Does the Minister have any concerns about the moratorium that other countries have imposed on implants, and does she feel that we should introduce one here under the precautionary principle? It is widely recognised by all quarters that silicone gel can be released into the tissue. Implants can rupture, and silicone oils can bleed through the shell into a woman's body. Silicone was found in my constituent's armpits. There is clearly concern about leakage. The associated risks, such as infection, are not spelled out clearly in the Department of Health leaflet. Perhaps some photographs of the affected women are needed. That might draw it to people's attention more than the rather bland text.

The implications for women's health need to be taken into account to a much greater extent. It is not good enough to explain the relative lack of action by saying that it takes a long time for illnesses that affect the whole of a woman's body to show up, and to argue that we need to wait for further evidence before we can conduct research into the health implications of implants. There is no conclusive evidence that they are 100 per cent. safe, and other countries have taken a harder line than the UK. It is therefore time that the UK Government erred on the side of caution and immediately banned the use of silicone implants for cosmetic purposes.

12.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): I congratulate the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) on securing a debate on an important issue that is of great concern to many women who have had, or are contemplating having, breast implants. Since the hon. Gentleman first raised the issue, there have been many developments in the safety of breast implants, whether they are filled with silicone gel or other materials. I welcome the opportunity to respond to the points that he made, and to put into the public domain further details about those developments.

The Government have always taken seriously the health of women who have had silicone gel breast implants. In the past 10 years, there have been several definitive expert reviews of the safety of those implants, and recent developments must be considered in the light of the fact that each review has firmly established the suitability of silicone for use as implant material.

In 1991, it was suggested that silicone gel breast implants might cause connective tissue disease. The Department of Health immediately initiated a detailed review of the relevant evidence, and convened an independent expert advisory group. In 1992 and 1994, the group concluded that there was no evidence of an increased incidence of connective tissue disease associated with silicone gel breast implants, and there was therefore no scientific case for changing practice or policy on breast implantation in the UK.

Despite those reassurances, some women remained convinced that silicone gel breast implants may have caused debilitating illnesses. As a result of those concerns, one of the Government's first actions in May 1997 was to ask the chief medical officer to take a fresh look at the safety of silicone gel breast implants. The chief medical officer set up an independent review group to examine pre-operative patient information and the possible health effects associated with the implants. The hon. Gentleman referred to the Department of Health leaflet, to which I will refer in detail in a moment.

In July 1998, the independent review group published its report, in which it concluded that silicone gel breast implants are not associated with any health risk greater than that associated with other surgical implants. The hon. Gentleman said that we should take steps to ban implants if we cannot be satisfied that they are 100 per cent. safe. I am sure that he will accept that no procedure will be 100 per cent. safe with any implant surgery. There will always be risks in any surgery, and therefore balancing those risks is an important consideration.

Tom Brake: I entirely agree with the Minister. However, there is a slight difference in that a medical implant is being used for cosmetic purposes.

Ms Blears: The Government and the independent review group must take into account the medical and scientific evidence, not the purpose for which the procedure is carried out. We are committed to developing a rigorous evidence base for everything that the Department of Health does. We must concentrate on that evidence base when we consider the risks to ensure that we get the balance right for people who are contemplating any implant surgery.

The hon. Gentleman referred to other countries and their views. Conclusions similar to those of the review group were reached by the American Medical Association, a Canadian independent advisory committee, the Institute of Medicine of the United States National Academy of Science, a national science panel appointed by the US Federal Court, and a scientific technological options assessment carried out on behalf of the European Parliament.

The UK is not alone in taking the advice of the independent review group, which concluded that silicone gel implants are as safe as any other surgical implant. The Government consider it important that the group continue to meet, and that this is not a one-off review. The group should consider any new evidence as it appears. It continues to meet about twice a year, and so far nothing has emerged that has caused it to alter its original conclusions.

However, although the review group was satisfied on the safety of silicone gel breast implants, it was concerned about a number of issues associated with their use. It felt that information provided to women undergoing breast implantation was often inadequate, and that that problem needed to be addressed. It made several important recommendations about information provided to women and clinicians, and about possible consequences.

Since the publication of that report, we have implemented various actions to try to ensure that clinicians and women have appropriate information. We have formed an advisory group to prepare an information booklet for women, which included representatives of women's support groups. It is crucial that patient advocates are involved in preparing the information. From October 2000, 80,000 copies of the booklet were circulated. It has recently been revised, taking into account the recommendations made by the Health Committee in March 2001, and a further 100,000 copies have been printed and are being distributed.

The leaflet includes a full section on the potential consequences and risks: the possibility of hardness, discomfort and changes in breast sensation. It talks about capsular contracture, whereby scar tissue is formed within the breast cavity, and about what happens when the scar tissue hardens and the effect of that on the implant. It refers to rupture rates and life expectancy of implants. A section makes clear that breast implants are a long-term commitment. It states:

> "Remember that breast implants do not come with a lifetime guarantee. They are likely to need replacing with consequent further surgery and expense. A young woman who has implants may expect to have further operations in her lifetime".

That is very clear. The section on risk is graphic.

> "Occasionally, the silicone can spread outside the capsule and create a series of lumps known as siliconomas. These may give rise to local symptoms such as tenderness . . . Breast tissue may be lost when the implants are removed."

On scarring, it says that

> "in a small number of women (up to 1 in 20) as with any surgical procedure, scars will be red, or highly coloured, thick, painful and will take several years before they improve."

On creasing and folds in the breasts, it states:

> "The nature of the implant capsule may enhance less desirable characteristics such as creasing, kinking, vertical ripple folds and rippling in the breast."

The leaflet does not underplay the likely effects of the surgery. It tries to set out for women what the decision involves. It refers to the silicone controversy, to the independent review group and to some of the symptoms that have become apparent. It says that some people believe that symptoms include muscle spasm, swollen and painful joints, rashes, changed eye and saliva fluid and hair loss. It contains some photographs, and if any woman contemplating breast implantation read it, it would give her a pretty good tour around the issues.

I am in favour of informed consent and of anyone undertaking operations having full knowledge. The hon. Gentleman asked about the consent form and about the data registry. We want to ensure that when people are entered on the registry they get a copy of the entry, with all the details about the batch and the manufacturer of the implants so that the woman is in possession of those important details.

Tom Brake: The Minister has correctly pointed out that there are photographs in the leaflet, but they would not do anything to dissuade women from having implants—I suspect that they would have the opposite

[Tom Brake]

effect. The Minister pointed out the uncertainty of the life expectancy of implants, and said that women would know that they would have something inside them with an unknown life expectancy. She has also set out some of the many problems associated with implants. Does not she consider that the problems outlined in the leaflet are sufficient to introduce a moratorium on the cosmetic use of implants?

Ms Blears: No. It is for patients to decide, on the basis of information and knowledge about the likely implications, whether they want to proceed. We are in the business of assessing and balancing risk and ensuring that people are empowered to make those decisions themselves, not making those decisions for them. That is a fundamental principle, and the information in that leaflet is accurate and graphic enough to outline the risks. The hon. Gentleman's point was that the information was bland and did not really draw out the details, but I disagree.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the specific issue of the reclassification of devices under the European directive from class 2b to class 3. The UK has been at the forefront of the push for devices to be in class 3, which will require a more detailed assessment of individual dossiers of each device. Indeed, many of the EU's recommendations have been made on the basis of actions that we have already implemented in the UK, and I can reassure him that we are at the forefront in clinical practice. He will also know that with the introduction of the National Care Standards Commission, we now have the opportunity to regulate, inspect and monitor standards in the private health care sector. That will be in the best interests of women undertaking such surgery.

The hon. Gentleman asked about research and the length of time that it has taken to use the registry to support research. The National Breast Implant Registry was set up in 1993, and it takes about five or six years to gain the necessary information. Our studies will be five years on from implantation and will consider the epidemiological implications for women. It takes time to gather the data and then to conduct the studies. Almost two years ago, a particular company proposed a study that met the quality issues for research, but it proved impossible in the negotiations to reach an agreed contract on the terms and conditions. The company raised concerns about indemnities and liability.

However, I am pleased to say that we have been able to agree a research project that will use information from the breast registry to examine epidemiological implications. The contracts are just about to be agreed, so we should be able to get on with it soon. The hon. Gentleman is right, as there has been a delay because of the difficult contract negotiations with the original research body, but that has now been resolved. I want to ensure that we press on and get research on this important topic.

The hon. Gentleman raised the point about trilucent breast implants, which have soya bean oil fillings. They were withdrawn in March 1999 as a precautionary measure, and since then we have learned more about the risks that they pose. In June 2001, the Medical Devices Agency issued a hazard notice that advised women with the implants to have them removed, because of concerns about the toxicity of the filling. When the soya bean oil starts to break down, it can have toxic effects. There is no such evidence with silicone gel or saline, which are other currently approved implants. In the trilucent case, the manufacturer organised an implant removal programme, and I understand that 95 per cent. of women who received the implants have had them removed and there are only about 200 women in the country who still have them.

There have been a number of developments in breast implants. The hon. Gentleman is right to raise the concerns of his constituent, but the UK is at the forefront of ensuring that the issues are considered in this country and throughout the European Union. When devices are approved for use in any European country, they can be used here. We are trying to get as much information and scientific evidence as possible so that women's health is protected. It is fundamental that women should be able to make the decision themselves in the light of the best available scientific knowledge. That is our current position on this extremely important issue.

Unauthorised Encampments

1 pm

Mr. Bill Rammell (Harlow): I am pleased to have the opportunity to deal with this subject in an Adjournment debate, but first may I welcome the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), to his first appearance at the Dispatch Box? I am aware of his Irish antecedents, so I apologise to him for securing this debate at the time of the Ireland game. I hope that he will not hold that against me.

I am pursuing the issue because the problems posed by unauthorised encampments are a real concern to my constituents in Harlow, Roydon, Sheering and Nazeing. However, I wish to make it clear that bigoted prejudice against travellers is simply wrong. My criticisms of unauthorised encampments are not criticisms of all travellers, but of that minority that persistently ignore the laws of the land. Everyone should have the right freely and peacefully to live their life in a manner of their choosing. However, as well as rights, in this society we have responsibilities. I simply do not believe that someone has the right to live their life regardless of the consequences for others. Some travellers cause nuisance and vandalism and engage in antisocial behaviour and criminal damage, and that is wholly unacceptable and unjustifiable.

I also wish to make the point strongly that unauthorised encampments and the problems that they bring disproportionately affect my constituency and the areas surrounding it. The Department's last count of unauthorised traveller caravans was undertaken in January this year, and it shows that the eastern region had by far the largest number of unauthorised encampments, with 25 per cent. of the English total. Within the eastern region itself, Essex, within which my constituency comes, had by far the highest total. Indeed, Epping Forest, which part of my Harlow constituency falls within, had the highest number, with a whacking 32 per cent. of all the Essex unauthorised encampments. I do not quote the figures to bore people with statistics, but to try to hammer home the message that the problem disproportionately affects my constituents compared with people in the country as a whole.

Every summer, Harlow is affected by numerous unauthorised encampments that often bring rubbish, antisocial behaviour and crime in their wake. Two summers ago, on Harlow common, we had a 100-caravan illegal encampment, which after much pressing from me and local councillors was removed by the police using section 61 powers under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. However, the clean-up costs to the community, which were borne by the local taxpayer, were a staggering £20,000.

In the three villages that make up the rest of my constituency but that come within Epping Forest district council, matters are, if anything, more serious. As I said, we now have the largest number of unauthorised traveller encampments, with 32 per cent. of the Essex total. In Roydon and Nazeing in particular, it seems as though barely a week goes by without an additional unauthorised encampment. In Hamlet Hill in Roydon, 30 travellers have been encamped illegally since the new year. Residents are rightly concerned about the impact on the green belt, local wildlife, the local environment and the security of their properties. In Bumbles Green, a 22-family encampment has been proposed, but it is green belt land and totally unsuitable for development.

Perhaps the worst current example is Payne's lane, where the problem has been going on for a staggering 10 years or more. The land is owned by travellers but has consistently been deemed unsuitable by the planning authority for permanent encampments. When an enforcement notice is issued, the travellers submit another planning application—usually a slightly amended version of the original—and that prevents the enforcement procedure from taking place. Alternatively, after the enforcement notice has been issued, the travellers move off the site for a few months and then return, and the council has to start the whole process over again.

I can give a flavour of what has been happening. An application for a stable block on that site was first submitted to facilitate the travellers' encampment as long ago as 1990. The case went to court, injunctions were served and travellers were brought before the court for contempt. All the while, the unauthorised encampment continued in one form or another and the issue still has not been resolved. Matters were brought to a head in January when the unauthorised encampment increased in size significantly. It is no exaggeration to say that the lives of residents who live in the narrow lane, which is the only access route to the illegal encampment, have been made a misery.

Some residents have been physically assaulted; the travellers have pushed garden refuse and gas cylinders into the flood ditch, forcing local residents to dig a new one; the area has become infested with rats; the travellers regularly bring hardcore to the site in large lorries, which the lane was not designed to accommodate, sometimes in the early hours of the morning, disturbing residents and causing houses to vibrate; and they park on residents' properties and abuse them when asked to remove their vehicles. It genuinely is a living hell.

To give hon. Members a flavour of the situation, I shall quote from a constituent, Mrs. Sally Cooper.

> "My life and the lives of my children and the rest of the family are not the same any more. I have been scared to leave the house because of getting out of the lane, then getting home again and what I may find on my return. If we were able to sell our cottage we would to lead a normal life again. But we couldn't currently give it away so we are stuck with this hell on earth."

I hope that the Minister will agree with me that people should not have to live like that.

My constituents need to be reassured that the Government recognise the scale of the problem and will act to strengthen enforcement provisions against unauthorised encampments. I would welcome the Minister's confirmation, on the record, that the Government have not weakened the regulatory framework to deter traveller encampments, as some have erroneously suggested.

What more can be done to relieve the misery that my constituents have to suffer? Local councils and the police should make vigorous use of the powers already available to them. In a previous Adjournment debate on the subject, the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) argued that the police could use the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 more often

[Mr. Bill Rammell]

than they do currently to deal with unauthorised encampments. He argued that section 61 of that Act, which gives the police powers to direct trespassers to vacate the land, could be used when the landowner has taken reasonable steps to ask the trespassers to leave and when trespassers have six or more vehicles on the land. I would welcome the Minister confirming that interpretation of the Act, even if it is done with the caveat that the provisions of the Children Act 1989 and the Human Rights Act 1998 must also be assessed when children are involved. Such an interpretation would greatly clarify the ability of the police to use section 61 to deal speedily with large, unauthorised encampments such as that in Harlow two summers ago. At present, my advice from the local police is that section 61 should not necessarily be considered, even when the number of caravans exceeds six. The Minister's guidance on the issue would thus be helpful.

I hope that the Minister will confirm that the Human Rights Act is a two-way street. Yes, it enforces the human rights of travellers, but it also enforces the human rights of the settled population to have their property protected and to ensure respect for their private and family life. The Human Rights Act does not give anyone, settled resident or traveller, the right to act in an antisocial or criminal manner. I would welcome the Minister making that abundantly clear.

The Porter case, concerning planning enforcement against unauthorised encampments, which went before the Court of Appeal in October 2001, led some police forces and local councils to the erroneous view that the Human Rights Act has blocked effective planning enforcement through the courts. I strongly urge the Minister to confirm that the case hinged on a technicality. The issue before the Court of Appeal was not whether the original court judgment should have been granted, but whether the original judge had properly directed himself in making his judgment. It would greatly help police forces and local authorities if the Minister confirmed that Porter did not establish a hard and fast principle, and that as long as a judge assesses the human rights issues he can still reach a judgment that results in planning enforcement against an unauthorised encampment.

I am convinced that, as well as properly using the powers already available, we must consider further changes to help communities to tackle unauthorised encampments much more quickly and effectively. I shall set out some of the ways in which I believe that can be done.

As I have said, the cost to the community of cleaning up after an unauthorised encampment can be significant: it was a staggering £20,000 two summers ago in Harlow. I simply do not understand why the general public, through their council tax, have to bear that burden. I strongly urge the Government to consider making travellers, or any other trespassers, legally and individually responsible for damage caused during an illegal occupation. Such a penalty would act as a powerful deterrent against the antisocial dumping of rubbish that often accompanies an unauthorised encampment.

Another problem occurs when travellers seek planning permission that is ultimately refused. Planning decisions and enforcement can sometimes take years, and all the while the unauthorised encampment continues. In those circumstances, I urge the Minister to allow councils to be granted an injunction coupled with the power of arrest, which would allow the police, with bailiff support, to remove an unauthorised encampment until the planning decision had been determined. Such a change would provide enormous relief to my constituents.

I urge the Government to consider fast tracking planning enforcement decisions that deal with unauthorised encampments. We have been told that the case of Payne's lane has been fast tracked, yet the original problem occurred in January, when the injunction was sought, and the case has gone to the High Court only this week. That does not represent fast tracking in any meaningful sense of the phrase as my constituents and I understand it. Surely there is a case for a specialist court, with a specialist planning judiciary, dedicated to making quicker and tighter decisions on unauthorised encampments.

The court procedures often appear to be abused and drawn out by the lawyers representing travellers to put off enforcement decisions that would otherwise be taken. The history of the Payne's lane site is beset with legalistic ruses that have no intrinsic merit, but serve to string out the court or local authority procedures. One example is planning application forms that are filled in incorrectly or incompletely time after time to delay the process. Surely there should be a limit on the number of times that that is permitted without nullifying the application. I strongly urge my hon. Friend to consider the whole planning and enforcement process, and to introduce changes that stop the legalistic filibustering that is greatly slowing down the legal redress available to my constituents.

In considering the situation, I am tempted to draw the conclusion that if every local authority provided a minimum number of permanent authorised sites, as both Epping Forest and Harlow do, we would not be facing anything like the current scale of the problem. The previous Government made a mistake in 1994, when the statutory duty on local authorities to provide an authorised site was removed. We need to reconsider that issue, and I strongly urge the Government to do so.

Many of my constituents are suffering a living hell because of the actions of some travellers. I do not exaggerate; I have been on sites and seen the impact on their lives. I hope that the Minister will reassure us that he understands the problem, that he shares our concern and that the Government will introduce changes to help my constituents. They desperately need it.

1.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): I am grateful for the welcoming comments from my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell), and I congratulate him on securing this important debate. For reasons that most people are aware of, I am a little surprised to be responding to it, but the slot became vacant because of the elevation of my hon. Friend the Member for Tottenham (Mr. Lammy). My hon. Friend the Member for Harlow is a lifelong Spurs fan, and I am sure that this is the first time in a long while that anything from Tottenham has made him so happy. The subject is important for many hon. Members, and I shall deal with the serious points that he made.

I am grateful for the fact that my hon. Friend did not criticise all travellers. Clearly, only a minority ignore the law of the land, but that attitude must not prevail.

Travellers have a right to pursue a nomadic lifestyle, with many gypsies living peaceably next to settled communities. Gypsies and travellers are the largest group among travelling communities in the United Kingdom, and form a recognised minority ethnic group. They also have the same right to access education and welfare as everyone else.

The Government are aware of the settled community's perception of travellers, and we want to dispel such prejudices and enhance toleration of the traveller's way of life. However, that is a two-way process. Travellers are often at the receiving end of bad publicity, some of which is caused by their own behaviour. We have heard reports about the amount of rubbish left behind on sites in Harlow common and Epping Forest, but we should be aware that not all travellers make trouble. That is why I was grateful for my hon. Friend's opening remarks.

Travellers excite much prejudice, but it is often ill-founded and based on knee-jerk reactions. None the less, local communities and the Government can and should expect the standard of behaviour of travellers to be the same as that of the settled community. Any antisocial behaviour must be dealt with in the same way for both communities.

The Government are fully aware that nuisance and disorder at some sites, especially unauthorised encampments on local authority or privately owned land, cause misery and distress. The typical consequences of unauthorised encampments include unacceptable behaviour, sometimes of a criminal nature, and a lack of respect for other people's property, the general environment and the amenities and quality of life of surrounding residents—not least those eloquently described by my hon. Friend when he talked of the residents of Payne's lane. He and the resident he quoted are entirely right that no one should have to live like that.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister receives a huge postbag from hon. Members, local authorities and the settled and business communities regarding unauthorised encampments by travellers. The Department has responsibility with the local authority to manage unauthorised camping, and Ministers in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Home Office work closely together to ensure that any criminal activity is dealt with.

The police and local authorities have powers under the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994 to direct travellers to leave land if they are camped without consent. The police can use their powers under section 61 of that Act. If reasonable efforts have been made to ask travellers to leave an unauthorised site and they have refused, the senior police officer present may direct them to leave if certain statutory conditions have been fulfilled. Travellers must have been abusive to the landowner or his or her agent, caused damage or brought six or more vehicles on the land. The powers do not apply to land forming part of a highway.

Mr. Rammell: Can my hon. Friend make it clear that it is necessary for only one of those criteria to apply, not all three of them?

Mr. McNulty: That is the situation, as far as I know. I shall inform my hon. Friend if I am wrong.

The decision to use section 61 remains an operational matter for the senior police officer on the ground, but Home Office Ministers have made it clear that police powers should be used at an early stage, where necessary.

As part of any decent society, even within the context of unauthorised camping, an effective strategy must also address the welfare and educational needs of travellers and their children. In exchange for better site provision, travellers must respect the settled community. When using the services provided, travellers should leave sites clean and tidy and adhere to acceptable standards of behaviour.

The new Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is working closely with other Departments to develop our policies and initiatives. My hon. Friend spoke about stronger eviction powers and enforcement. The ODPM is working jointly with the Home Office to produce new guidance on managing unauthorised camping, with a view to publishing it later in the year. That new guidance will be informed by the view of stakeholders from the settled, business, farming and travelling communities. It will emphasise the need for effective local strategies that clearly set out lead responsibilities for taking action between local authorities and the police.

The guidance will also emphasise that the same standards of behaviour and regard for the law are expected from all sectors of the community, including regard for public health, proper disposal of waste and the conduct of business activities. However, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has policy responsibility for waste management, and subjects such as fly tipping and pollution come under the purview of the Environment Agency. Under section 59 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, the Environment Agency has powers to remove fly-tipped waste, and to recover costs from those who deposited it or knowingly allowed it to be illegally dumped.

It is a criminal offence to dispose of waste without a waste management licence, or outside the terms of a registered exemption from licensing. That offence can be subject to severe penalties, including an unlimited fine or imprisonment for up to two years. The Government will evaluate the effectiveness of the new guidance in making improvements on the ground, and will continue to keep the scope and application of existing powers under review. The guidance will inform much of what we do following its publication in the summer.

The ODPM is also researching site provision, again with a view to publication in the summer. That research—being carried out by Birmingham university—is considering the availability, quality and management of sites, detailed information about site closures and pitch losses, and actual site provision, which includes what sites exist, the need for sites and how demand can be met. The Government will take that into account when considering future policy and spending considerations, and will review the adequacy of existing enforcement powers in the area. With the guidance, the research on sites and other enforcement powers, much is being done to evaluate the existing position and to reach a stage at which the people of Harlow and Epping Forest are not encumbered in this way.

Furthermore, the ODPM's site refurbishment programme aims to keep the existing network of more than 300 local authority sites in good repair and available for use. That programme is making £17 million available between 2001–02 and 2003–04. In those three years, we shall spend £3 million, £6 million and £8 million. Round one has already taken place, with 38 bids approved

[Mr. McNulty]

totalling almost £4 million. The bidding guidance for round two, which will apply to 2002–03, was issued to local authorities on 15 October.

The ODPM received a total of 86 bids from 50 local authorities. The results were announced on 20 March, with a total of 57 successful bids amounting to £8.1 million. The site refurbishment grant meets 75 per cent. of the costs, and the unsuccessful local authorities received evaluation feedback. My hon. Friend will know that the Elizabeth way site in his constituency successfully secured £15,400 for fencing work.

It is important to note that such work and the measures we are taking with the Home Office will inform us far more about the way forward on unauthorised encampments. With those initiatives in place, I am sure that hon. Members will recognise that the Government are actively seeking ways to enable local agencies to manage the problem effectively.

As my hon. Friend suggested, the problem is one of balance. Rights and responsibilities are important. The people who dwell on unauthorised encampments should tolerate and respect the settled communities around them. He is also right to suggest that the legal and regulatory framework remains the same as it was under the previous Government, and has been the same for some time. I am more than happy to put that on the record.

It is a matter of real regret that some unscrupulous politicians seek to abuse and exploit this issue for their own ends. They should work with us and with local councils to resolve the problem of competing interests to the satisfaction of the travellers and of the settled community. We suggest that there are rights and responsibilities on both sides.

My hon. Friend mentioned in passing the case of Porter *v.* South Buckinghamshire district council, and suggested that the conclusion drawn by some people that the Human Rights Act 1998 means that enforcement can no longer prevail on unauthorised encampments was erroneous. He was absolutely right. I understand that that case revolved entirely around the judge's competence in a particular area to direct himself to a conclusion, and concerned merely that legal technicality. It has no impact on the planning jurisdiction, which prevails as before. I exhort those who feel that the erroneous conclusion arising from that case is accurate to re-examine the matter, and to get in touch with my office to receive the same advice that I have been given. As I understand it, the case does not alter the planning jurisdiction with regard to enforcement.

This is an issue of real concern that warrants serious debate. The ODPM site research programme is important, because any solution to the problem must revolve around the issue of sites. I do not concur with my hon. Friend that the 1994 statutory obligation of all authorities to have a site for this purpose should be restored. However, we now have the site research programme, the new guidance to be issued jointly with the Home Office on unauthorised camping and the site refurbishment programme for the existing 300 sites. All those elements will better inform us of the need for any changes in the way that central and local government deal with the issue.

I end where my hon. Friend began. We need to get to a stage where residents such as those in Payne's lane, Roydon, Nazeing, Hamlet Hill and Bumbles Green—all the areas that he mentioned in his constituency—do not have to live that way and be encumbered, put upon and disrespected because of unauthorised campsites.

I thank my hon. Friend for his thoughtful comments. I assure him that as and when events unfold, which will be before the summer and therefore sooner rather than later, I will keep him fully apprised of any new developments in the area following on from our work on site provision, research and the new guidance. The issue is serious but if it is dealt with fairly and in a balanced fashion those on both sides—whether from the settled or the travelling community—should be able both to enjoy their rights and to be apprised of and live up to their responsibilities.

I am grateful that my hon. Friend said clearly at the beginning of his speech that it was not intended as a criticism of all travellers, but merely of a small minority. Much of our enforcement and other powers will be directed at that minority, especially those on unauthorised encampments. For the majority, research into site provision, the provision of further sites and the maintenance of existing sites remain paramount, so that the settled and the travelling communities can live together and respect fully each other's rights and responsibilities.

Mental Health Services (Mid-Surrey)

1.29 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I shall start by expressing my gratitude to the Minister of State, Department of Health, the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), for allowing me to take some time out of her busy diary today. I want to raise a number of issues in relation to the provision of mental health services in my constituency and in mid-Surrey generally.

The Minister will be aware that mental health services have been a cornerstone of the community in Epsom for the best part of a century. Epsom has played host to five substantial mental hospitals, which were set up in the early years of the 20th century. At their peak they held approximately 10,000 residents; they were a dominating feature of that part of my constituency. Nearly 100 years later, with the advent of care in the community, the ethos of caring for those with learning disabilities and mental health problems has changed.

Over the past decade or so, we have seen a gradual move from institutional care to a more community-based provision. Step by step, those five hospitals have ceased to be used for their original purpose. Many arguments can be made for and against community-based services. The changes that have taken place have thrown up a large number of concerns in the Epsom area, which I suspect are invisible to the Government because that substantial and obvious block of care is no longer being provided in the area.

I want to raise three issues, the first of which concerns the debate that has been taking place over a number of years between the NHS and the parents and relatives of residents at St. Ebba's hospital, some of whom still live there. Secondly, I am concerned about how health service structures impact on mental health care in mid-Surrey. Thirdly—I am afraid that it often comes down to this—I draw the hon. Lady's attention to funding. I do not come here with a begging bowl, but when future NHS funding decisions are taken I want her to be aware of the particular circumstances of my constituency, and the fact that our problems could be overlooked when assessments for a broader funding formulae are made.

The Minister will be aware that a number of parents and relatives of patients at St. Ebba's have been arguing strongly for a long time for the creation of a village community on the site. Indeed, the Government have given much attention to the principle of village communities, because they deliver a high quality of mental health care in many parts of the county. St. Ebba's poses a conundrum because it is not always apparent from the exchange of letters between the Department for Health and the parents and relatives of the patients that two issues are involved, the first of which concerns what will happen to the residual services provided by Surrey Oaklands NHS trust on the St. Ebba's site.

The Minister may be aware that there has been some debate, and not a little controversy, about the trust's plans. A controversial planning application was recently lost on appeal for the provision of flats on the site. The trust is also putting a number of smaller units on the site to absorb some of the residents from St. Ebba's for whom care in the community may not be the right option.

A final solution to the trust's future provision is not yet in place, but the goal of the parents and relatives group is rather different. Surrey Oaklands is considering its current operations and what still needs to be done, but the parents and relatives have been arguing for a long time that using part of the St. Ebba's site as a village community could offer much more than is offered to current residents. There has been much debate about whether a village community would be appropriate and feasible. Over the years, the parents and relatives have drawn carefully on the Government's policy on villages. Most recently, in a letter to my one of my constituents on 17 May, the Department made it clear that options for the care of people with learning disabilities and other mental health care problems

> "should include small scale ordinary housing, supported living and village and intentional communities",

and stated:

> "Councils should respect the preferences of individuals and their families, wherever the preferred options will meet individuals' assessed needs and are affordable."

That is right, and there is no dispute or debate about it. The parents and relatives group, with which my predecessor, Sir Archie Hamilton, worked actively, has argued for a number of years that St. Ebba's site should be used to provide such a community, to ensure that there is a proper mix of care in the area. There are pros and cons and planning issues to consider. Whether the borough council will permit the development of such a complex and whether the authorities are providing the resources and the people to populate such a community we cannot be certain. However, I think that the Government have an opportunity to clear up the issue. My belief is shared by senior people in Surrey Oaklands and in the NHS community locally.

One of my reasons for initiating the debate was to explain to the Minister why I think that that opportunity exists, and to ask her whether she will consider taking it. Two of the five hospitals, The Manor and Long Grove, have been fully developed: they have been completed and are fully populated. The Horton hospital site is up for sale to developers and the outline plans are clearly in place. I expect development to go ahead within the next year or two. The fourth hospital, West Park, is still partly used by Surrey Oaklands for a number of services—I shall touch on one of them later—and is just reaching the point at which outline planning permission is being sought. Detailed discussions are taking place about the development. I should tell the Minister that NHS Estates and the local authorities will find themselves under a lot of pressure over a controversial road scheme as part of that development, but I shall not be distracted on to that today.

NHS Estates now has two big developments to deal with: the Horton site and West Park. It is also beginning to turn its attention to St. Ebba's. However, I would argue that it cannot do everything at once. These are five substantial sites, and if there is to be substantial construction work at Horton and West Park, work at St. Ebba's should be further down the track.

The Government should tell the parents and relatives of the residents of St. Ebba's that they do not know whether they are right, but they are prepared to give them an 18-month window and an option on the 12 acres at the St. Ebba's site that they are considering

[Chris Grayling]

taking on. They should be told to put forward a commercial, viable proposition, backed by the private sector and the local authorities, if they believe that it is right to do so. If they can show the Government that there is a business case and a care case for what they want to do, and that people could valuably take advantage of a village community in the area, let them do so, because it would not damage NHS Estates' ambitions to develop the other sites in the area one jot.

Therefore my first request to the Minister is to give those parents and relatives an 18-month window, so that they can come back with a solution. If they cannot do that, we know where we stand. If they can, there is an exciting option for the future that would do credit to everyone involved if it were given serious consideration.

My second concern relates to NHS structures. It is particularly associated with a seemingly growing commitment in the NHS to focus services on London, where it is delivering services to London. Whereas, in the past, a number of services have crossed boundaries, there is an increasing tendency within the NHS in London to do things itself. That has most recently manifested itself in one of the remaining units on the West Park site, the Woodside adolescent unit. Over a number of years, that has provided a service across a wide range of authority areas for young people with particular mental health problems. Discussions are taking place within the Surrey Oaklands NHS trust about the future model of care that would be required for that service, and such a debate has been taking place for some time. Surrey Oaklands is now being forced into a decision to close that unit because the principal buying source in London—Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth—has decided that it will no longer buy that service from Surrey but will establish its own unit two miles up the road in Tolworth.

Clearly, there are clinical and health considerations to be taken into account in determining the rights and wrongs of the matter, but I am concerned that that decision has been taken as a result of the desire of the NHS in London to deliver its own services. I am sure that the Minister would agree that it makes no sense to break up a team in north Surrey only to recreate a team in London. Will she ensure that no curtain is drawn across the London boundary that prevents services from being provided across that boundary? If London purchasing power is removed—it was London purchasing power that built up the services in Epsom in the first place—the community in Surrey will not have the services that it needs.

I am also concerned about proposals to establish a mental health trust for the whole of Surrey, because the last thing that Surrey Oaklands needs is another reorganisation. I ask the Minister to think carefully before pressing ahead with that option.

I now turn to finance and resources. There were 10,000 residents in Surrey hospitals, many of whom are now of pensionable age. Their families can no longer support them, although their relatives have done a wonderful job in trying to provide support in difficult situations. As a result, there is now an older community of people in the area who are more dispersed than before, and because Epsom was a magnet for people with learning disabilities and mental health problems, that community is disproportionately large. My concern is that the Government will take a decision on resourcing for Surrey based on many other factors. It would be easy for the Government to decide that the prosperous area of Surrey does not need the same resourcing as other areas, and for that mental health community to be forgotten.

That approach manifests itself to me most clearly in the fate of the mental health citizens advice bureau in Epsom. That service has been run by the local CAB for several years and provides valuable support. The chairman of the CAB told me that he no longer receives NHS or Government funding. He has been able to secure interim finance from a charitable source, but the service risks disappearing in 12 months' time. There is a need to provide a disproportionately high level of support services to that community, but I fear that services may be eroded because funding decisions will be taken according to much broader formulae. I ask the Minister to bear that in mind when making future service and funding decisions.

My concern is shared by others. Mid-Surrey Mencap has expressed its concern about insufficient funding being available for Surrey social services to meet the needs of the mental health community. I have received letters and e-mails from other people involved in mental health who say that funding decisions are eroding their ability to provide the necessary support for people with learning disabilities and mental health problems in the Epsom area.

Can we lay the issue of St. Ebba's to rest once and for all? Will the Government please take extreme care over what the NHS does as regards providing services across the London border? Will they please also ensure that future funding decisions do not remove core services from a relatively substantial community of people who have a special need? These are wonderful people. I visited a home the other day and met a gentleman in his 60s who had had mental health problems all his life, but who was the most wonderful pianist. I have visited and spoken to many of the devoted staff who care for such people. They deserve my support as their Member of Parliament and the support of the Government, and I hope that they continue to get it. I hope, too, that the Minister will take steps to make their jobs easier.

1.45 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Jacqui Smith): I congratulate the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) on securing this debate. He took a very measured approach to describing his constituents' concerns and the operation of the system in Surrey. I hope to be able to give his constituents some assurances, although I may not be able to give them all the assurances that they are hoping for. I can, however, promise him that the needs of service users will remain the primary concern throughout the many changes that are taking place in the provision of mental health services and of services for those with learning disabilities. I think that we share that objective.

The Government have proved that they attach significant importance to mental health. It was not only the focus of the first national service framework, which was issued in March 1999, but one of our clinical priorities in terms of investment. The national service framework put in place a 10-year programme with new, high standards for mental health care services. It clearly stated what services should aim to achieve, how they should be developed and delivered, and how to measure performance in every part of the country. Standards were set in five crucial areas: mental health promotion; primary care and access to services; effective services for people with severe mental illness; carers; and the action necessary to reduce suicides.

Although the framework concentrated on the mental health needs of people of working age, we are also dealing with the needs of children, adolescents and the elderly through other national service frameworks. The framework for older people was published in March 2001, and contains a dedicated standard on mental health for older people, which requires the NHS and social services to put in place by April 2004 plans for integrated mental health services for older people. My Department is also working on the children's national service framework, and one module will be dedicated to the mental health and psychological well-being of children and young people, which clearly relates to the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised about the Woodside unit.

In July 2000, the NHS plan built on the first national service framework, and provided for extra investment in mental health of more than £300 million by 2004. The purpose of that extra investment is to fast forward the implementation of the framework and to ensure that NHS commitments are delivered. It has already provided almost 500 extra secure beds; more than 320 24-hour staffed beds; 170 assertive outreach teams to provide intensive support and follow-up to patients who were being lost to services, often with tragic results; and access to services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for all those with complex mental health needs. In addition, we have provided investment to improve the physical environment in psychiatric wards, and issued guidance to ensure the safety, privacy and dignity of mental health patients.

The hon. Gentleman touched on the long-term care of people with learning disabilities, which is an important service that is often linked with mental health provision. There is no doubt that improvements were desperately needed in that area of care. People often spent a great part of their lives in large hospitals, often living in conditions that would not be tolerated now, because it was widely assumed that they had no expectancy of a normal life and would have little chance of making any contribution to the wider community.

Times and attitudes started to change, and it began to be recognised that many residents would do better in smaller, community-based care homes. However, when the old institutions closed, the comprehensive local health services needed to care for people too often failed to materialise. The Government recognised that it was vital that people with learning disabilities were properly supported in a variety of settings and given access to appropriate resources such as housing, education and work, to ensure that they had the quality of life to which they were entitled. Such concerns culminated in the publication in March 2001 of the White Paper "Valuing People", which was the first White Paper for 30 years on the care of people with learning disabilities.

The Government initiatives outlined in the White Paper and the changed attitudes that I mentioned have resulted in real benefits for a large and previously neglected group of people. We welcome that, but we must not ignore the fact that change is often stressful. It takes no imagination to understand how frightening such change must be to patients who have lived for many years in the institutional system and to their families, although many mental health professionals have stories about how the most unlikely people have thrived when given the opportunity to live in the community with the support necessary to make that a reality. We must ensure that the option to do so is open to all, but there will still be people whose needs are best served by care in the more traditional setting, and appropriate provision must be made for them.

The hon. Gentleman clearly highlighted the St. Ebba's issue. He will know that that redevelopment came about because of concerns that the residents' quality of life was not what it should have been. They lived in dormitory accommodation in turn-of-the-century buildings. They had little privacy, personal space or ability to choose how and with whom they spent their day.

I am sure that the hon. Gentleman appreciates that the future configuration of the St. Ebba's site, including the development of a village community, is a matter that must be determined locally. It is not a matter in which Ministers can intervene. However, I can assure his constituents that health and social services authorities will continue to work with parents, relatives, carers and, most importantly, the residents themselves to ensure that people with learning disabilities are placed in the care environment that is right for their individual needs.

Chris Grayling: It is true that the part of St. Ebba's that is being dealt with by the Surrey Oaklands NHS trust remains very much a local service but, at present, the remainder of the site is under the auspices of NHS Estates, which is one reason for diverting the matter to Ministers.

Jacqui Smith: I think the hon. Gentleman would agree that it is vital that we release resources that are tied up in surplus NHS properties owned by the Secretary of State and plough the funds back into the NHS for the benefit of all. For that reason, surplus NHS land, including that at St. Ebba's, is sold. I have some sympathy with those who are concerned about the future of their relatives following the changes at St. Ebba's, but I do not believe that we can put off the business case that has been made for selling the land on the basis of what the hon. Gentleman agreed was an uncertain prospect.

I am willing to consider the timetable for the sale of the land, but I would not want the hon. Gentleman to go away with the feeling that it would be sensible or efficient to lose the significant financial benefits from the sale of the land because of some of the plans that he discussed. He stated the Government's position on housing for those with learning disabilities, and I am aware of the need to carry out properly a full assessment of the care

[Jacqui Smith]

needs of those at St. Ebba's, for example, and to ensure that appropriate care arrangements are put in place. I have been assured by the local commissioner that the proposals that have been developed fulfil that duty, but housing is key to the lives of those with learning disabilities. That is why we made it clear in the White Paper that there is no veto on any option, including village communities, and that where there is limited demand for a particular option, councils and housing authorities may need to consider joining neighbouring authorities to encourage development of a greater range of provision.

Turning to Woodside, the Government recognise the importance of ensuring that a full range of child and adolescent mental health services is available to those who need them. Our ongoing commitment included extra investment of £35 million last year to assist health and local authorities to meet the requirement to improve provision of appropriate high-quality care and treatment for children and young people by building up locally based services. I have a problem with the hon. Gentleman's contention that we should protect a service in one part of the country by preventing another part of the country from developing precisely those locally based services.

It is probably good for young people with mental health problems if the services they need are developed near to them or in London so that they can be easily accessed. It is precisely that demand for the sort of services currently offered at Woodside that is the basis of the need to change and of the considerations of closure. Of course it is important that health commissioners work with other key agencies and providers—I understand that they are doing so—to plan and develop provision to ensure that there is better integration and joint work between tier 3, which covers specialist outreach and out-patient services, and tier 4, which covers in-patient services, to improve the links and provide a 24-hour crisis response team, better outreach and respite services and early intervention in psychosis. All will require some change—change is difficult for users and clinicians—and careful planning and involvement of users and professionals.

Although a decision has been made by Surrey Oaklands NHS trust to close the Woodside unit, I assure the hon. Gentleman that the views of those most directly affected will be key to the development of the new services. A steering group consisting of staff, clinicians, commissioners, carers and users has been established to conduct a review of the services currently supplied by Woodside and to recommend how the model of care delivery given to adolescents and children could be modernised in line with national policy. The group's proposals will be presented for consideration by Surrey Oaklands NHS trust later this month and will then be open to wide consultation involving all stakeholders. Their views will be taken into account before a final decision is made.

In conclusion, the hon. Gentleman referred bravely to funding and finance. I recognise his point that there are ways in the standard spending assessment distribution for local authority funding and health allocations. We must work on the formula to ensure that it delivers the necessary resources in those areas where needs are greatest and work is being done with the SSA formula and the health formula. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman agrees that the issue for Surrey may not be solely distribution but the amount of money, so I have no doubt that he welcomes the Chancellor's ongoing, extra investment into health and social services and the effect of that on his constituents.

I recognise the hon. Gentleman's concern about the particular nature of the population of those with learning difficulties. It is because we recognise the needs of those with learning disabilities, particularly with older carers, that we made that a key area for investment of the learning disability development fund.

Last year, Surrey received through local funding a 12.6 per cent. increase in its mental health grant. A further increase this year will be important to maintain the sort of services that we want for the hon. Gentleman's constituents with mental health problems and learning disabilities. Regardless of whether we are changing the system, we shall continue to place users' needs at the centre of improvements.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 12 June 2002

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Carers

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

9.30 am

Mrs. Jackie Lawrence (Preseli Pembrokeshire): I am delighted to have the opportunity to introduce the debate on support for carers. I intend to outline some of the difficulties that carers face in their duties. I shall focus on three particular areas: children who need care, hidden carers—placing emphasis on young carers—and the health needs of carers. I acknowledge the moves that have been taken to support them, but I am sure that it will come as no surprise to the Minister that I shall be pressing her for more to be done on their behalf.

I have personal experience as a former foster carer for a local authority. I also cared for my mother during her terminal illness. I recognise the number of people who, at some time in their lives, will inevitably face caring responsibilities. It is a great pleasure to hold the debate in the middle of carers' week, an event that is especially important as it will highlight the difficulties faced by carers throughout the United Kingdom. It came into being through co-operation between several organisations that represent carers and which were anxious to highlight the difficulties they face. The organisations wanted to emphasise the contribution that carers make not only to the people for whom they care, but to society as a whole.

The organisations were Carers National Association, Contact a Family, Crossroads—Caring for Carers, and the Princess Royal Trust for Carers. The week's activities are supported by the National Lottery Charities Board. The entire week will be devoted to highlighting the needs of carers, as well as celebrating and thanking them for their work. The organisations that are involved in carers' week highlight the fact that carers come in many and varied forms. They range from young carers under 18 years of age who care for a family member to people in their 70s, 80s and even 90s who care for a friend or a spouse. There are many other variations of carers, including, of course, parents who care for disabled children. I shall refer in detail to that group of carers later.

I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) is present. She has expertise in the work of carers, having been responsible for Barnardos in Wales before becoming a Member of Parliament. I am sure that everyone recognises the work of Barnardos in providing valuable respite care for families with severely disabled children.

Despite the variation in age and other factors, the definition of a carer is now widely accepted. It is a person who, without payment, provides help and support to a friend, neighbour or relative who could not manage otherwise because of frailty, illness or disability. Who are carers? Some facts and statistics from the 1995 general household survey give an insight into the wide range of carers. Six million people in the United Kingdom care for a relative, partner, friend or a child with a disability. That is about 10 per cent. of the population.

Carers can be of any age or gender and from all communities. Invariably, because of their caring duties, their lives are restricted. We are here today to debate support to ease those restrictions. It is perhaps not always recognised that men are almost as likely to care as women—42 per cent. of men compared with 58 per cent. of women. Despite the examples at either end of the spectrum, carers are most likely to be aged between 45 and 64 years. Half of all carers look after someone over [illegible] age of 75, a situation that will increase with an ageing [illegible] population. Almost 1 million carers care for more than [illegible]0 hours a week, a fact that should, perhaps, be viewed alongside recent improvements made in the workplace. The European Union working time directive has given people a choice about the number of hours a week that they work. Figures show that a significant number of carers work well beyond the stipulations of the directive.

More than 2.5 million carers juggle care with paid work. A survey of carers showed that 50 per cent. had given up work to care. That is another important aspect that relates to support, for two reasons. First, we must enable carers to maintain their income. Evidence shows that financial stress is a major problem for many carers. Secondly, we must prevent isolation, another problem that carers have identified. Keeping contact with the workplace is important.

I remind the Minister that, in a speech in London on pensions on 5 February 2002, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions said that too many people leaving the labour market do so not because they want to but because they feel that they have no choice. Many cannot afford to do so. It would be interesting to know how many leave their jobs because of caring responsibilities. Is any research being done on that, especially in light of the carer survey sample that I cited previously, in which 50 per cent. of carers surveyed gave up work to care?

The Government's family-friendly work strategy that has been implemented since 1997 is helping carers in a way that has not existed before. It is important that the situation is continually reviewed and that every possible help continues to be given to support carers in the workplace.

Surveys of carers have common themes. They all show that carers often suffer from financial worries; emotional stress; physical demands; isolation; loneliness; and, regrettably, still, despite the acknowledged efforts of recent years by the Government, lack of information and support.

Carers' needs are varied, and support for those needs must be equally wide-ranging. However, I shall take up the three aspects of caring to which I referred earlier. The first is children who need care. Three per cent. of children under 19 have a disability and need care. About 95 per cent. of those are cared for at home by a parent. That is an estimated 1 million parent carers, whose plight I shall examine in a little more detail.

Every day, 75 children in the UK are born or diagnosed with a serious disability or rare syndrome, and the vast majority of them are cared for at home.

[Mrs. Jackie Lawrence]

Discovering that their child has a special need or disability is probably one of the most devastating experiences that a parent will live through. The feeling of both physical and emotional isolation can often be acute.

There are more than 325,000 disabled children in the UK. Caring for a disabled child presents parents with challenges that are different from bringing up a child who does not have a disability. It can also have a dramatic impact on other, non-disabled children in the family.

Surveys have shown that more than half of households with a disabled child lack some of life's basic necessities because they cannot afford them. Three quarters of families with a disabled child live in an unsuitable home. There are few specialist nurseries or child minders with accessible premises. Training needs are involved, to enable parents to work. No assistance is provided for families towards the cost of visiting a disabled child in hospital.

Contact a Family offers parents of disabled children access to good-quality advice and information and contact with other families in similar circumstances for mutual support. It also provides training for parents of disabled children, such as in how to lift and care for a growing child. Obviously, such training can help to avoid health problems for carers. Will the Government consider making access to such training a statutory entitlement, perhaps through the education budget, in the same way as, for example, basic literacy and numeracy training is free for adults?

I am also aware from my constituency casework of the many different stresses and strains that are placed on families with disabled children, who must often wait for assessments to be carried out. Delays are often caused by a shortage of certain professionals, such as speech therapists. Such delays can impact on their child's ability to stay in mainstream education, which in the long term is to the child's detriment. Other delays, whether relating to adaptations to the home or supply of necessary equipment, also impact on families unnecessarily. What further practical steps does the Minister feel can be taken to minimise delays to families in obtaining such necessary help?

Secondly, one of the most disturbing facts identified in research by carers' organisations is the number of hidden carers. They are people who care for another person but do not identify themselves as carers. They might be frightened of a perceived stigma or be simply unaware of the importance of their role. Either way, it means that many people who undertake a caring role fail to gain the available help and support that could improve the quality of their lives and the lives of those for whom they care.

There are an estimated 51,000 young carers aged under 18 who are part of the group of hidden carers. It is important to identify those young people and to give them help in their caring roles. Their roles are often recognised only when they are absent from, or have problems in, school. A closer examination of the widely publicised case of the mother who was jailed for her daughter's truancy from school revealed that two hidden carers were involved, which demonstrates the problems.

There are several projects, drop-in centres and websites specifically for young carers but, unfortunately, the Government's guidance to schools to be alert and sensitive to the needs of young carers does not seem to have been adopted by all schools and education welfare services. I understand that a young carers information pack that has been designed by the Carers National Association is available through the Department for Education and Skills. Will the Minister confirm whether that pack has been distributed to all schools? I understand also that officials from the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills met earlier this year to consider support for young carers projects and the production of quality standards for young carers' support. What was the outcome of those meetings?

Carers UK should be congratulated on two leaflets that it produced specifically for carers' week. The first gives information to carers on the help that is available, and the other is designed to help general practitioners to identify their patients who have caring responsibility but might not readily realise their role.

Thirdly, I turn to health needs of carers. The Princess Royal Trust for Carers published information at the end of last year showing that 23 per cent. of the carers it surveyed had suffered deteriorating health since taking on caring duties. The figure was 35 per cent. for carers who had cared for 10 years or more. Carers UK has conducted work on carers' health. It found that half all carers have sustained a physical injury since becoming a carer and that half have suffered a stress-related disorder.

Surveys undertaken by Crossroads show that a regular break can make all the difference to carers and will enable them to maintain their own health and well-being. A break from caring is invaluable in reducing the psychological and emotional stress that many carers face.

One of my constituents is a mother whose severely disabled teenage child has been allocated one overnight stay a fortnight in a respite care facility. That break has made a tremendous difference to the family. However, it should not have required a letter to the local newspaper and contact with the family's local Member of Parliament to achieve that.

Clearly, the £140 million carers special grant that was announced last year for respite care will be a substantial help. Will the Minister say whether the situation is being monitored? What further moves are being made to examine carers' health needs overall?

We have a different situation in Wales. It is the Assembly's responsibility to deal with the practicalities of grants for carers. However, I shall mention one of the worries of Pembrokeshire Crossroads, which is in my constituency. It wants to ensure that carers' special grant money that is given to Wales by the United Kingdom Government is not rolled up by the Assembly into the general rate support grant after 2004. Although clearly the Assembly must decide how to handle the funds, I hope that it will listen to the views of carers' organisations in Wales before making its decision.

Henry Johnson, who is the chairman of Pembrokeshire Crossroads, told me that 4,000 extra hours of support have been provided to local carers for short breaks—for example, to go shopping—under existing arrangements. He told me that there is a tremendous local fear that if the funding is rolled up rather than ring-fenced, Pembrokeshire county council will not recognise and support the valuable work of carers. Regrettably, that fear has substance. Studies recently undertaken reveal that Pembrokeshire has the lowest per capita spending on social services of all the unitary authorities in Wales. Certainly, my local council's approach to social services spending is reflected in my mailbag by problems that might not exist if there were a greater commitment to the needs of carers. Perhaps the Minister will discuss Mr. Johnson's concerns when she next meets the National Assembly's Minister for Health and Social Services.

From the information that I have gathered about carers, it is apparent that the caring role arises out of a relationship. Practical caring is usually an extension of emotional caring, whether as a parent for a child, a child for a parent, a neighbour for a neighbour or a spouse for a spouse. Caring arises out of human relationships, which are above economics. However, we cannot ignore that, on a financial level, the work and commitment of carers saves the United Kingdom vast amounts. Figures published on 2 May 2002 by Carers UK show that carers save the state about £57 billion a year—the total annual cost of the national health service.

It has also been shown that 77 per cent. of carers providing substantial care are financially worse off. The Government have now announced changes to invalid care allowance that will benefit many carers and will come into operation in October this year. They have also listened to the requests of carers for ICA to be paid for eight weeks following the death of the cared-for person, which reduces stress at an emotional time. Carers' organisations welcome these changes.

Whatever ICA is called, it has always meant a loss of earnings benefit. Many carers would wish me to raise that problem. Given the massive financial and social contribution that carers make, it is time that the Government considered making carers' allowance a benefit that recognises the extra costs of caring rather than being a simple loss of earnings benefit. That would eradicate the many problems caused by overlapping benefits, which cause carers tremendous frustration. Significant cost implications would obviously be involved in any such change, but viewed against the straightforward financial value of carers' work to society as a whole, the sum would be well spent. I would welcome the Minister's response to that point.

Another worry for many carers occurs when the person being cared for moves into a residential home, and the carers find themselves without security of tenure. During the passage of the Health and Social Care Act 2001, the Government gave a commitment to review the need for a mandatory property disregard when former carers continued to live in the properties of individuals permanently admitted to residential care. At that time, the signs were that progress could be made only if resources became available. Will the Minister update hon. Members on that commitment?

In its document "Caring on the Breadline", Carers UK identifies another disturbing fact—it is estimated that one third of carers in receipt of income support are cutting back on food to make ends meet. That is entirely unsatisfactory and is bound to have an impact on a carer's health. The same research found that nearly eight out of 10 carers aged 56 to 60 who were providing substantial care had given up work in order to care, which underlines my earlier point about the need to support carers in the workplace.

The carers and caring organisations that I spoke to all acknowledged the significant work done so far by the Government through the national strategy for carers. However, it is clear that, as the Government have said on many occasions, while much has been done, there is much more to do. I hope that the Minister will continue to stress that point, especially to her colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions, with regard to incomes for carers. Every year, more than 3,000 people become carers, which is testimony to the continual need to monitor and review support for carers. As I said, the estimated financial benefit to society offered by carers equates to the entire annual cost of the NHS. That should be kept continually in mind. It is important that the amount is quantified, if only to show how public expenditure on care would increase if a tiny percentage of carers stopped providing support for any reason.

There are 14,688 identified carers in Pembrokeshire, and 376,000 throughout Wales. If only 10 per cent. of carers in my county alone could no longer carry on, 1,500 people would become totally dependent on the NHS and the local social services department. It is not difficult to understand the impact that there would be on public spending if that pattern were repeated across the UK.

Although a health Minister is present, I hope that she will accept that many of the issues under debate apply equally to other Departments, and I hope also that she will give an undertaking to discuss them with her colleagues. The Government have so far listened to what carers need and have implemented several of the requests that have been highlighted. However, with an ageing population in the UK, there will inevitably be more demands on carers, and those demands must be matched by continued government commitment and action. That action has been forthcoming, but as someone once famously said on another issue, such actions should be a process and not an event. It would be welcome if the Minister acknowledged that.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There are fewer than 40 minutes of Back-Bench time left, and 10 hon. Members wish to speak. I hope that those whom I call will be mindful of the needs of others.

9.51 am

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): I congratulate the hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence), not only on obtaining the debate and on her timing—it is national carers' week—but on how she presented her arguments. In many ways, she has said everything that can be said on the subject.

I, too, thank carers throughout the country for their dedication to a job that they have taken upon themselves voluntarily. We all know from personal experience of people who have devoted themselves to the care of another person, whether elderly or young. It is easy to pay lip service when thanking people for that work, and we must ensure that we do more than that.

[Mr. John Randall]

We must not take them and their work for granted. It is undoubtedly true that carers save various agencies a great deal of money—although that is not why they do it—but we must not let that be taken merely as a fact. We must give them as much aid as possible in the vital work that they do.

The hon. Lady mentioned many of the issues that strike one immediately, such as the need for respite care. Looking after someone with the dedication of carers is time consuming, emotionally draining and physically difficult. Many people have back trouble, for example, as a result of having to lift someone for whom they care who is not able to help to move themselves. Sadly, that often means that the carer soon becomes ill or disabled. It is not unknown for the carer to pass away before the person that they are looking after, such is the strain put upon them.

There is also the question of isolation. It is difficult for people who devote themselves to looking after someone full time to get out and about. The hon. Lady mentioned Crossroads, which does a superb job, as do organisations like it. However, that job cannot be left purely to some of the voluntary agencies. There must be more help, to enable carers to live as full a life as possible. Sometimes, they do not ask for it. but it is always vital.

Most hon. Members will have experience of something else that concerns me; the early release of patients—especially the elderly—from hospitals. It seems that hospitals operate like conveyor belts; they have to make room, because beds are needed. Therefore, patients are sent home when proper care is not readily available for them there. That puts great pressure on people such as elderly partners. We must always be looking into that.

Many hon. Members wish to speak, so I will conclude. I offer heartfelt thanks to all the people who do the hard and dedicated work of the carer. It is not easy work, and although we all hope that we would be able to do it, we will be unsure whether we have the necessary backbone until the situation arises for us. It is easy for us to pay tribute to people in the House of Commons, and we often do that. However, we must ensure that that is not merely lip service; we must thank carers for the work that they do, but we must also act to ensure that their lot is improved.

9.56 am

Mr. David Lepper (Brighton, Pavilion): I add to the congratulations that have been offered to my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) on securing the debate. I am sure that the Minister has noted that many hon. Members of all parties are present and hope to take part in it, and that, at the last count, more than 180 hon. Members had signed the early-day motion which is in my name—and in the names of other hon. Members who are present—in support of carers' week. These facts show that hon. Members are very concerned about the plight of carers; they appreciate the value of the work that they do, and they understand that they need additional support. I also congratulate all those who work with the voluntary organisations that have organised carers' week; it enables us to focus on and celebrate the work of carers, and to recognise their continuing needs.

The isolation that is felt by those who care for others has been mentioned, so I also especially welcome Carers UK's recently launched carers' online website. It is intended to develop it to become one of the tools that enable carers to overcome a sense of isolation, by the provision in their homes of information about their rights, and the benefits and services that are available to them, and of news that is of interest to them. Eventually, the website is intended also to enable carers to contribute to the debate about policy development, and for it to become a truly interactive service, so that it operates as a sort of virtual community of carers. As has been said, they often feel isolated from the real communities in which they live.

One of the aims of carers' week is to highlight the hidden carers—those who not only work in isolation in their own homes looking after relatives or friends, but who often do not think of themselves as carers, and therefore do not claim the benefits that are available to them, or ask for support. Perhaps they would do so, if they knew where to find them.

In the area that I represent—the city of Brighton and Hove—there will be several events this week, including one on Saturday that is being organised by our own carers' centre. It will bring together several organisations that work in our local community. I pay tribute not only to the organisations involved in organising carers' week, but to many others, and particularly the Alzheimer's Society, with which I have been connected. It is only in recent years that the full impact of dementia on family life and the need for support for those caring for dementia sufferers have been recognised.

I welcome the moves that the Government have made since 1997 to recognise the needs of carers. For the first time, we have a national carers strategy. Improvements have been made to the invalid care allowance, there is the carers grant and there will soon be the second state pension, a scheme that will provide support that has previously been missing to carers who have been unable to obtain their full pension entitlements on retirement because they left work early to take on caring responsibilities.

Many hon. Members would welcome some reassurance from the Minister about the future of the carers grant beyond 2004. We would also welcome some indication of how the Government will ensure that carers who are entitled to the second state pension but who might not claim it know that they can. What will the Government do to reach out to those people?

I also ask that the Government give some attention, although the matter does not lie within their responsibility, to the importance of paid care workers in providing respite for carers. Many organisations need such care workers to provide that respite and they are a vital group, whose pay is shockingly and scandalously low, especially for those who work through private agencies. As they have to pay their own travel costs, they often earn less than the national minimum wage.

I shall highlight one aspect of the work that is done in my constituency. I have mentioned our carers' centre, which brings together several organisations working with carers, including Crossroads—Caring for Carers. One of its most successful projects during the past few years has been its young carers project. My hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire has already mentioned the importance of acknowledging the needs of young carers.

The young carers project in Brighton and Hove works with youngsters between five and 18 years of age. It is currently working with 110 young people. Over four years it has worked with 250 such youngsters, and 50 per cent. of them have been of primary school age—children under the age of 11 who have a caring responsibility in their family. In our city, in a third of families dependent on young carers at least one of the parents has mental health problems, adding to the burdens faced by these youngsters.

The young carers project provides support for those carers in their homes. It works in our local schools to raise awareness of the importance of young carers and their needs. It works with teenagers, bringing them together for social activities that they might otherwise not have the opportunity to take part in because they are stuck in their home with a responsibility that they face day in, day out.

The project is working in many ways to overcome young carers' sense of isolation and to ensure that they do not miss out in terms of academic attainment and social accomplishments. I am sure that anything that the Minister can say to assure hon. Members that the Government are aware of the needs of young carers and the need to provide them with extra support would be welcomed.

The local chairman of Crossroads in my constituency points out that every Crossroads scheme that must be registered faces a 29-page registration document requiring a range of information not only about those working for the organisation but about its trustees. Often, documents such as passports and birth certificates are required, which he says adds to the bureaucracy faced by those organisations. We must be scrupulous in ensuring that the people who work for organisations such as Crossroads are able to go into other people's homes to help. I ask the Minister to consider the registration requirements again, and whether anything can be done to streamline them.

10.5 am

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): I congratulate the hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) on securing this important debate during carers' week.

From personal experience within my family and as a social worker, I know of the dedication of carers. It seems sometimes that the last people whom carers care about are themselves, and that they come at the end of the queue. We know of the long hours that carers put into their work. The requirement for invalid care allowance is that care should be substantial and regular, which is usually defined as 35 hours a week. When I say that, I hear hollow laughter the length and breadth of the United Kingdom, because 35 hours a week would be a lovely treat.

The value of carers should not be in dispute. What is lacking is sufficient support, proper services and, importantly this week, an organised opportunity for carers to contribute to the community and have that contribution recognised. From the documents that I have read in preparation for the debate, I have been impressed by the number of hours that carers put in by volunteering for community activities.

Recently, carers in my constituency and that of my hon. Friend the Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) held consultation days. The concerns raised were familiar and depressing, but constructive. They discussed benefits and noted difficulties in claiming disability living allowance and attendance allowance, including the formidable size of the application forms. They noted that invalid care allowance stopped at pension age, although the care role increased. I have had recent dealings with the West family in my constituency, who have cared for their daughter over a long period and now face difficulties as she turns 18. They will almost certainly face a cut in benefits after leaving work to give a large amount of selfless care.

In Wales, health is a matter for the National Assembly, but the carers in Meirionnydd Nant Conwy and Caernarfon noted concerns throughout the UK, such as the lack of communication between hospitals, carers and day-care facilities on such basic matters as medication. They noted difficulties in the standard of care, such as the feeding of people with Alzheimer's, a lack of back-up staff in, for example, the memory group, difficulties connected with bathing in day hospitals and the intense transport difficulty that is significant in much of rural Wales. People are often taken to day care via several other communities and spend long periods in cars and vans. I will not go into detail about these problems, but they are avoidable and should be sorted out. They would be sorted out if we valued carers more than we do.

Mindful of the number of hon. Members who want to speak, my next point shall be my last. It is about language, which is something especially significant in Wales but also relevant elsewhere. It is essential that services fit the carer, rather than the carer fitting services. In Wales and elsewhere, that entails a choice of the language in which services are delivered. I would be interested to hear the Minister speak about the development of services in languages other than English throughout the UK.

The Welsh Language Act 1993 has gone some way to securing the availability of services in Welsh and English on the basis of equality, but much more needs to be done. Certainly, we do not provide services in languages other than English and Welsh, so we have some way to go when providing highly personal services in discussing people's deep problem. We must normalise proper, diverse linguistic provision throughout the UK. We must normalise the service, rather than the carer's place in it. The service must change, and language choice must be institutionalised. A manual called "They all speak English anyway" contains five principles relating to language and social work. The first is that language choice should lie with the user, not the provider, and I commend that principle.

10.10 am

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): I am delighted to be called in this important debate, which gives hon. Members an opportunity to pay tribute to those who act as carers, day in, day out. It is important that those of us with no experience of such things recognise their contribution.

As a nurse for 25 years, I regularly worked 12-hour shifts and cared for people with carers at home. Caring for people with dementia-type illnesses for 12 hours was

[Laura Moffatt]

quite enough for me. It left me exhausted and strung out, and I can hardly imagine what it must be like to care for someone full time in one's home, even if one loves them very much. That must be extremely difficult.

Many hon. Members have spent time with carers in their constituencies in the past few days, and this is a time to celebrate being a carer. I had a fantastic opportunity on Friday to spend time with members of the Crawley carers' social club. They do not feel down-trodden or put upon, but they share a collective interest. Many hon. Members have talked about isolation, but such groups diminish isolation enormously. On Friday, we had lots of laughs, ate fish and chips and drank wine.

We also discussed issues related to caring. Members of the Crawley group said that we should not think of them as down-trodden, or assume that their lives are thoroughly miserable, even though caring is difficult and frustrating. One of them, Mrs. Kidd, told me some funny stories. She said that she had cooked some steak for her husband, who suffers from dementia. She went out, and when she returned the steak had gone. Her husband had thrown it in the bin, because he did not fancy it. They had to have chips and peas because that was all that was left, but Mrs. Kidd laughed about it. She told me also how difficult caring was and about how she had to sleep by the front door, because she was afraid that her husband would walk out of the house.

Each member of the group had similar experiences, and another carer, Rose, told me about caring for her mother and husband. The person who gets the group together, Yvonne Morris, cares for her mother and for a child with severe learning disabilities, but she makes time to go on day trips, and ensures that she is part of the community. She did not have the sense that things were wrong. The Crawley group shows how information is shared, that people can understand issues, and how isolated people get to know about the many advances that have taken place. There is no doubt about that.

The Government's carers strategy was an important step in ensuring that carers are properly recognised for their work, and it has made a massive contribution alongside the other carers package. Of course, carers still face enormous difficulties, and they feel strongly about financial insecurity. Why should they be disadvantaged because of their position as carers?

We have heard much today about the money that the state would lose if it had to care for people who are looked after by carers. The reality is, however, that carers will not walk away. That is not a primary argument for supporting carers. We support them because they want to do the job properly. They all want to hold up their heads and say, "I am doing this job because I want to do it, and I want to do it well." The Government's role, in which the House of Commons must play a proper part, is to ensure that that happens.

We have heard that early discharge can cause difficulties, but a proper discharge plan could deal with that problem. I should be surprised if anyone in a ward would say, "I am sorry, but you have got to have your carer back home because we cannot cope here." To me, as an ex-nurse, that would be unforgivable, and greater account should be taken of that. When carers eventually find that they can no longer continue their caring duties and when delayed discharge from hospital into the settled, safe and caring environment of a residential home is not quickly forthcoming, enormous despair can ensue. It is important that we continue to work on that. We know that caring is difficult work and that it can be extremely damaging for the carers, and we in this place have a role to play.

Like other hon. Members, I was glancing at information for today's debate. The Department of Health carers website, which was both interesting and helpful, highlighted some of the things that are happening. I noticed that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister had written an introduction, and I am sure that not many of us would disagree with it. He wrote:

> "What carers do should be properly recognised and properly supported—and the Government should play its part. Carers should be able to take pride in what they do. And in turn, we should take pride in carers."

I hope that everyone recognises the truth of that statement, and that we must move forward and celebrate their work.

10.17 am

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): First, I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) for securing this debate. It is important, this week especially, to draw attention to the situation of carers.

Lorna Fish and Brenda Howlett, two hands-on carers, together set up a campaign called "A better share for those who care". They say that carers are the backbone of the nation's care structure and that many carers feel undervalued and, to some extent, exploited. I hope that everyone would agree with the Prime Minister's comments on the Department of Health website, but we do not yet provide adequate support. These women make two key points—first, that carers need improved financial support; secondly, that improvements need to be made to the infrastructure of support services.

On finance, they make the obvious point that any of us could face having to give up a well-paid job in order to care for a relative. At that point, one's income plummets and, as other hon. Members have said, one is left in the invidious position of having to work very long hours in order to care for a loved one. A good case can be made for a thorough review of the financial structure of support for carers.

They make a case for improving the infrastructure of support. My experience is of a rural area, and other hon. Members have spoken about isolation, saying that carers can be stuck completely on their own in a community but with no access to guidance, support or help on the services that may be available to them. Brenda Howlett told me that she had to fight for two and a half years to get two nights' care a week for her father-in-law. In order to look after him, she has to live separately from her husband for most of the week. That situation has alerted me to the fact that it is the articulate, those who know how to fight the system, who get the support that they need. What about the others who do not have those attributes? They are left sinking on their own, often suffering ill health, as we have heard.

There needs to be much better and more regular respite care. Two weeks a year is no good; it needs to be on a regular basis. There must also be top-up care every week, to provide the support that such people need.

I am concerned about the carers of children and teenagers. I have come across some tragic cases of parents looking after autistic children and children with Asperger's syndrome. They are totally frustrated and in despair that the authorities and agencies push them from pillar to post. There is no co-operation between agencies. When they try to arrange education for someone with autism, they find that the health service will not talk to the education department—there is no joined-up thinking about how to provide a proper package of support for children who are being looked after by parents who are often in absolute despair.

Finally, I reiterate the point about the pay levels for paid carers. Norfolk county council is proposing an effective pay cut for the care workers that it employs by cutting their pay for unsocial hours. That is being proposed to a group of already very low-paid workers. That is how we treat people who are caring for others in the community. The attitude of authority and of society has to change. This week is especially important in terms of drawing attention to the needs of carers. I hope that it will lead to action from Government; it is much needed.

10.21 am

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) on having secured the debate and on her comprehensive coverage of most of the issues that we want to address.

I am particularly pleased to speak because, as my hon. Friend said, before I came to the House of Commons I was an assistant director for Barnardos and was involved in setting up schemes to provide respite care for disabled children throughout Wales, and support schemes for young carers. Thus, in my previous professional life, I had a lot of experience with carers.

I am also a carer—I look after my mother, who was severely disabled by a stroke two years ago. Since that happened, I have become so well aware of the vast number of people—men and women, as has been stressed—who care for relatives or friends in their own homes and who do not always recognise themselves as carers. They are doing a tremendous job and make a huge contribution to society.

I, too, want to mention paid carers. It is important to recognise what a skilled job they do. Consider what they do when they come into a home, often entering a difficult and sensitive situation. They might spend the night caring for a member of the family and acting in a way that could require years of training—yet we know that many of them have not had such training; they have learned on the job and are not paid the rates that they deserve. My hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) and others have made that point strongly, and I want to stress it. We must value the paid carers who come in to help the carers. It is often only because of people like that that carers, who otherwise suffer broken sleep, getting up two or three times a night, are able to keep going. The health needs of carers, as my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire said, is an important area to consider. In this carers' week, it is important to emphasise the sensitive way in which many paid carers work to help carers.

I shall refer briefly to young carers. The Government have started to address the problems in that area, as have the Administration in Wales in the Welsh carers' strategy. Youth is an important time in the lives of young carers. I am sure that many hon. Members have seen the look in the eyes of young carers whose parents are suffering from alcoholism, when they are waiting to see in what state they will come home at any hour of the day or night. I have seen that wary look. We must recognise that those events are happening at a time when that child or young person is developing and should be having a good time, enjoying social activities and developing their school work. Many young people are missing out on that or doing it halfway, because at the back of their minds they are worrying about their parent, who may have any of a range of disabilities. I have worked with children whose parents have mental health problems, and I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire highlighted the issue of young carers.

I shall draw my remarks to a conclusion because I know that many hon. Members wish to speak. It is important that we all have a chance to have our say on this important subject during an important week. In the debate, we have recognised the achievements of carers, who want to do their work. As elected politicians, we must ensure that they have as much help as possible.

10.26 am

Dr. Phyllis Starkey (Milton Keynes, South-West): I, too, congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence). I shall keep my remarks brief, but I want to draw on the experience of the Milton Keynes carers project, of whose work I cannot speak too highly. It supports carers by ensuring that they have access to information about the services and benefits available to them and by providing incredibly effective support and networking. I am sure that there are many other equally effective organisations in other areas.

The Government must recognise the important work that is done by such organisations and ensure that they have adequate finance to do it properly. Five years ago, the Milton Keynes project was in touch with about 400 carers. It is now in touch with about 850. That is a substantial number, but it is still only 4 per cent. of the estimated total number of carers in Milton Keynes. The project could do much more and reach many more people if it had more funding.

I shall draw attention to two groups of carers with specific needs. The first is young carers, to whom many hon. Members have already referred, and I emphasise the importance of supporting them. One young carer in Milton Keynes is quoted as saying that the peer support provided by the young carers' group let him know that he was not alone in the world.

The second group is forensic carers, whose relatives are not held in high regard. A group has been set up in Milton Keynes for people who care for mentally disordered offenders currently or previously resident at Marlborough house, a local secure mental health facility. I know that the Home Office is interested in the work of the group. Such carers face enormous problems but receive little support because other people are scared of the relatives for whom they care.

[Dr. Phyllis Starkey]

The Milton Keynes carers project asked me to stress the need for real joint working between health and social care staff and day-by-day involvement with carers. It is extremely important that professionals acknowledge that carers should be equal partners in supporting the people for whom they care, and that social services and health care workers should take every opportunity to listen to and work with carers. I quote a carer with an adult son with a learning disability who, after a review meeting, said that she felt that "it was the two of us against the seven of them. I felt it was them or us." That is terrible and should never be the case.

10.30 am

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): I congratulate the hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) on securing the debate. I, too, am a carer and have much experience from caring for a young daughter.

In Scotland, the situation is slightly different because many items affecting carers are devolved. One item that is still reserved to Westminster is benefits, and I hear many complaints about that subject in my surgeries. People such as myself do not have the financial difficulties that are suffered by many carers, some of whom are desperately poor and rely on benefits. The Carers National Association estimates that half of Scotland's 620,000 carers have no savings and that a third struggle to pay utility bills. As many as 23 per cent. cut their food bills and buy out-of-date food, and many cannot afford to pay their rent or mortgage. That is a desperate situation.

Angus carers recently held a conference, during which we heard much about the benefits problem. Many carers said that they had to tread through a minefield to get benefits, and that what they received from one hand was taken away by another. If they received income support and claimed invalid care allowance, the allowance was deducted from the support, so they were no better off. One of my constituents gave up her job to look after her mother and, as a result, became far worse off. That is not unusual.

Hon. Members have said that carers save the state a large amount of money each year. A recent report from "Carers Week" showed that in Angus alone, which is not a large area, carers saved £106 million per annum.

There are further inequalities in the system. If the cared-for person does not live in the same home as the carer and the carer claims invalid care allowance, it is deducted from the benefit of the cared-for person. That creates an immediate problem for a carer who wants to ensure, as he or she gets older, that the cared-for person has a chance of an independent life when they have gone. That is a factor that faces all of us who care for children—at some point we will no longer be there. We have to ask ourselves what will happen to the child then.

In a recent debate on carers in Scotland, the Minister referred to changes in pension arrangements for those over 65 who receive the ICA. Carers are confused, however, as to whether that will be paid in addition to the retirement pension. Will the Minister clarify that point?

I would not like to give the impression that carers are concerned only about money. Many other issues affect constituents, especially in areas such as mine. One of my constituents raised the problem of travelling to benefits appeal hearings. In my area, the appeals are heard in Dundee, which is a considerable distance from many places in my constituency. For a carer to get to an appeal hearing, he or she must first find someone to look after the person who is being cared for before travelling a considerable distance from Montrose to Dundee, for example. That is not easy or cheap without a car. The carer is away for the whole day, causing considerable stress to the carer and the cared-for person. Will the Minister consider the possibility of holding appeals nearer the home of the carer rather than in central locations?

10.34 am

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I congratulate the hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) on securing the debate on this particular week and giving so many hon. Members the opportunity to take part in it. It is a great pity that it is impossible for everyone to have their say in a debate of an hour and a half, so the Government may arrange a debate on another occasion.

Thanks to the carers' centre in my constituency, I have been fortunate to have the opportunity to shadow carers over the past four years. It has been a real eye opener. Life changes when a person becomes a carer. Things that he or she took for granted stop. It is hard work suddenly to find that one's husband or wife is in need of support, and no longer able to give support. The carer is alone even when the person for whom he or she cares is around. Getting started as a carer always seems to be a challenge. Obtaining help from the national health service, social services and other agencies can prove time consuming. It is not so much that such help cannot be provided, but that the agencies take so long to get their act together.

Unless people are carers, they cannot begin to put themselves into the shoes of carers and understand the mixture of emotions that caring day-in, day-out, stirs. No matter how deep the love that binds people together, caring 24 hours a day grinds a person down. That is certainly the experience of the carers whom I have met. Should society expect people to carry on caring in that way? If carers want to, that is fine. However, if such action is taken out of a sense of obligation and because the alternative is degrading and unacceptable, it is wrong.

Surveys show that most of us want to carry on living in our own homes for as long as possible. I support that view, but we must make sure that those unsung heroes who are carers do not shoulder an unbearable burden. Earlier this week, I again had the opportunity to shadow a carer, something which relates to part of the speech made by the hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire. I spent time with Jenny, who cares for James. James is nine years old. He has attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autistic spectrum disorder. Jenny is full of praise for the support that she has received from health, education, social services departments and others, particularly the carers' centre in my constituency. Her story has been one of struggle to have her son's needs met. Were it not for her persistence, a move back to

Sutton and her decision to seek a private diagnosis of her son's condition, the agencies that rallied round to help might still be arguing over what the matter was, what help was needed and, as my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) said, who was responsible for providing that help.

Like so many carers, Jenny feels isolated. She has a second son, Lewis, who is at infant school. No allowance is made and no support is offered to him by his school, yet he is a young carer—supporting his mum, making her laugh, keeping her going and looking out for his brother. Will the Minister talk to her colleagues in the Department for Education and Skills about the possibility of Ofsted, in its inspections, examining how policies are being developed within schools to turn the packs that are given to them into a practical reality? Perhaps such action can be a positive initiative.

School holidays can be particularly isolating for such families. The development of regular, supervised holiday activities for children, with opportunities for parents to meet others in a similar situations, could do much to overcome isolation. Just having an adult conversation can make a difference. If we set Jenny's story against the fact that three in five of us could become carers, it is clear that there is much more to be done to improve the lot of carers. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk said, carers are the backbone of the care system. Without them, the NHS and social services would be overwhelmed.

As the hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire said, it is estimated that 6 million carers save the United Kingdom a staggering £57 billion a year. In 10 years, the proportion of carers providing between 20 and 49 hours of care a week—and probably many more—has more than doubled. In the past five years, the number of people receiving home care, which was formerly provided by social services, has fallen by 100,000. The burden on carers has increased at a time when social services departments are increasingly rationing access to care, especially when an informal carer is already on hand. What assessment has the Department of Health made of the impact of the increasingly restrictive eligibility criteria on carers? The consequences of the rationing of care will be to store up problems for the future.

Research clearly shows that half the people who become carers sustain an injury. The hon. Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) referred to back injuries. Similarly, many carers will require treatment for stress-related disorders. A survey that was carried out last year by the Princess Royal Trust for Carers UK suggested that one in four carers in the United Kingdom had suffered health problems. The report suggested that lack of help—two out of three received no support at all—was having a significant impact on their health.

That brings me to the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000, which was meant to give every carer the right to an independent assessment of their needs. Like all carers' legislation, it was a private Member's Bill, not a Government Bill. In the Labour party's general election manifesto, there was a promise to examine the development of a fund to help local authorities to meet the needs found through those assessments.

Resources are dearly needed; indeed, the Local Government Association's survey of this year found that one in four councils did not have the resources to implement the 2000 Act. They estimated a modest shortfall of £40 million. What is the point of an assessment if there are no resources to follow it up? Will the Minister tell us whether the examination promised in the Labour party's manifesto has begun, when it will be concluded, and with what results? When will the Act be backed with resources?

Investment in carer services is as much about preventing the carer from descending into disability, ill health and dependency as it is about sustaining the cared-for person in his or her home. Research shows that despite the national carers strategy and the carers' grant, which are welcome, it is the experience of too many carers that the agencies are going through the motions when it comes to consultation, and that lip service is paid to the need to recognise carers, but that such recognition is still not deeply ingrained in the culture of public service organisations.

I hope that the Minister can tell us what is going to be done to change that, and I hope that she will take from the debate an important message: that national carers' week should be every week. Carers are undervalued, overlooked and overloaded, and unless we change that, not only the Government but the wider community will lose out.

10.41 am

Tim Loughton (East Worthing and Shoreham): I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence) on securing the debate and on her timing. Not only is it the beginning of carers' week, but she has made sure that the overtime in the England match did not sprawl into the debate. Perhaps that is why so many hon. Members are here and have made it such a good and worthwhile discussion, which has included a vast array of individual experiences.

The hon. Lady is competing this week with men's health week and volunteers' week, but carers are important members of our constituencies of whom all of us have personal experiences. Those experiences may be of the many carers' organisations that hon. Members have mentioned. The hon. Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey) commented on how important it is that those organisations are supported, and are given the resources to support the carers that they represent. I am sure that many of us have experiences of family members who have been carers.

The debate gives us all the opportunity to say thank you to those carers and carers' organisations. As my hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge (Mr. Randall) said, it is important that they should not be taken for granted, as they so often can be. I should like to congratulate Carers UK, too. The "Adding Value" report that it has just brought out has been quoted extensively and considers the extent of carers' involvement in supporting other carers. I think that that is particularly interesting. It estimates that the value of carers' involvement amounts to at least £1 billion per annum in community activity, excluding the wider value of the impact of their support on reduced health costs, for example.

The study found that one in four carers had helped to set up new services in the voluntary sector in the past 12 months. The respondents had contributed an average of 18 hours per month to their local community, often on

[Tim Loughton]

top of full-time caring responsibilities. "If you want to get a job done, ask a busy person" could not be truer than it is in that case. More than half of those surveyed were driven to become involved and set up organisations by their frustration at the lack of services for disabled people or carers in their communities. That is an important point because as everyone agrees, carers perform an invaluable service in their communities and in the country as a whole. We need to make their job as easy as possible, not put hurdles in the way of it.

The hon. Lady gave an array of figures; there are almost 6 million carers in the country. That is one in eight adults. In particular, it struck me that 51,000 carers are young people under the age of 18. They are missing out on a social life and on a child's normal development into adulthood. There are particular pressures on them, and they need especial support. More than 2.5 million carers have to juggle their caring responsibilities with paid work. Over half of carers look after someone who is older than 75, and 18 per cent. of them care for more than one person. Perhaps the most alarming statistic is that more than half of all working carers suffer from health problems as a result of caring. They suffer not only from back problems and other physical injuries, but from mental stress. As the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) said, that is particularly the case with regard to looking after people with dementia problems such as Alzheimer's disease. That can bring enormous stress to family environments. Many carers also suffer from financial stress, as hon. Members have mentioned. We need to address that in a sensitive and sensible way. In short, carers do not suffer only from physical injuries.

Recently, on television, I watched the story of a woman in her 70s who was a carer for her disabled husband and for her two grown-up and educationally challenged sons. She had also been waiting 15 months for a knee operation. She was hobbling around. We need to be much more sensitive to individual carers' needs. That woman was looking after three family members, as well as coping with her own severe difficulties. Such people need the maximum help. Given such examples, it is no wonder that Carers UK calculates that carers save the Government £57 billion per annum, which is an enormous increase compared with 10 years ago. We should pay particular attention to the illness and stress that is caused to carers themselves.

The costs of caring will further increase, as will the number of carers who are needed, and the number of older people who require care, because of demographic trends—more than 2 million of the 6 million carers in this country are older than 60, and a fifth of them are older than 75. A lady came to my surgery recently; she was 77, and she had been looking after her 95-year-old mother for many years. She said, "Look, I've been a pensioner for the past 17 years. I cannot go on like this. I need help." She had done that work with dedication, and we need to give such people much more help. These problems will become worse.

Despite the progress that has been made as a result of the Government's national carers strategy, problems remain. "Adding Value" mentions that 63 per cent. of carers did not feel that their caring role, or their expertise, had been properly recognised, or that their contribution had been properly supported. Too often there is a problem with regard to giving proper recognition to the valuable role that carers perform. Being a full-time carer is not regarded as a proper job, but it is, of course. Carers often have problems with financial services, and accessing bank accounts and other simple matters, because they do not have a conventional job. We are placing extra financial stresses on carers who already have enough stress and problems.

Almost all of the hon. Members who have spoken have mentioned respite care. In that context, the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir) made an important point about travelling to benefits appeal hearings. Just trying to get respite care to be able to do that results in a catch-22 situation. If carers cannot get to those appeals, they cannot get the benefits, which means that their job becomes even worse. More respite care cover is also needed so that carers can go to local social service departments, or wherever, to get better training. However, it is extremely difficult to get respite care for training cover.

We know about the pressure on social services because the subject comes up virtually every other week in debates in Westminster Hall. Many social services departments are experiencing large funding gaps, which means that they are retrenching many of the services that they might offer. That has led to a shortage of home helps, and that problem has been exacerbated by bed blocking problems. Too many people are being forced out of hospital beds early. That is a false economy because many of them have to return to hospital within a couple of months of their early discharge.

It is no good sending an elderly person home when their broken leg—or whatever—has been patched up if that person cannot look after themselves at home. That is a false economy. If carers do not have the resources to do that, we are only storing up problems for the future. Carers commonly complain that families and carers are not consulted prior to a patient being discharged, and there must be much more sensitivity in the health service.

The low pay of private care workers was also mentioned. That is especially a problem in the south-east, where there is a great shortage of such workers. Buying in private care workers is subject to value added tax, which adds to the problem.

I shall leave several questions with the Minister. Will she tell us about the future of the carers grant, which is guaranteed only up to December 2004? How many assessments of carers' needs are carried out annually? What improvements have there been since the Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000 took its place on the statute book?

Also, can we encourage employers? It is good employment practice to take account of a worker's needs, if they care for people at home. Companies such as Centrica offer their employees greater flexibility, enabling them to switch their hours to take an afternoon or day off to look after a relative at home.

It is right that we should help carers. We should give them far more support and encouragement because there is a demographic time bomb—by 2037, an extra 3.5 million carers will be needed to cope with an estimated increase of 3 million in the 75-year-old plus population. We must give carers greater respect and pride in their important role and help make their jobs as easy as possible. They are some of the most vulnerable people with the most acute needs. We must give them help and support, not hassles and hurdles. There are too many institutionalised hassles and hurdles in the system, and I urge the Minister to do more to help.

10.51 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): In the relatively short time available to me, I hope to respond to as many points as possible made by hon. Members in this excellent debate. The number of hon. Members present, the range and depth of knowledge and experience of personal matters brought to the debate have helped it to come alive. I shall be taking away all the issues raised in order to inform our policy and ensure that it is more responsive and accessible to the carers in our community.

This is a timely debate. Not only is it carers' week, which raises the issue all the way up the agenda, but we have also seen the publication of important reports from the Office for National Statistics, which updates the figures mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mrs. Lawrence). It is now estimated that 7 million adults are involved in caring. The number of carers is growing and they are becoming an increasingly substantial part of our community.

A report directed specifically at the health needs of carers identifies that, in terms of mental health, carers who are caring for more than 20 hours a week are more likely to report mental health problems, and that women carers are more likely to report mental health problems. Women are, perhaps, more willing to report health problems, but huge numbers of men are carers and are under similar stresses and strains as a result of their responsibilities.

My hon. Friend set the scene in an excellent speech. She covered a range of issues on which action has been taken, although I am the first to acknowledge that much more remains to be done if we are to provide the type of support mechanisms for carers that are required.

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): Although the Government support package for carers is welcome—especially the carers grant—given that there are 7 million carers, it amounts to about £20 per carer per year, as against about £10,000 that each individual carer saves the country in terms of professional services. Little respite can be bought with £20 a year, and local authorities are cutting back on support for carers. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a danger that support for carers is slipping back rather than developing?

Ms Blears: My hon. Friend makes an important point: we must put as much resource as we can into supporting carers. However, he must acknowledge that, although there have been substantial increases in personal social services over the past few years, there is always a need for more. In the Budget statement, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor set out that there will be increases for personal social services of 6 per cent. over and above inflation over the next three years, which should enable local authorities to begin to meet more needs, not only of carers but of personal social services in general.

My hon. Friend is right to keep up the pressure for services for carers. However, some of the practical examples that hon. Members will have seen in their communities this week show how the carers grant is beginning to provide much more respite. That speaks for itself.

One issue highlighted by all hon. Members is the need for services for young carers. A range of projects in communities tries to support young carers.An example that I should like to highlight is that in Gloucestershire, where for the past few months a project has been implemented to try to help young carers who are preparing for their GCSEs and who have not had time out for study and training, to ensure that they have the chance to get the qualifications that will be so important for them in future. They have had a residential weekend away, with support and respite—a real break from their day-to-day responsibilities. Such projects are being implemented throughout the country. Several projects deal especially with the needs of black and ethnic minority groups. Hidden carers are a top priority for the Government.

Hon. Members mentioned culturally sensitive services and ensuring that services are provided in languages that people can understand. The services are extremely personal, and we must ensure that they are as culturally sensitive as possible. In Kensington and Chelsea, a night-sitting service is available, especially for Bangladeshi, black African and Caribbean, Chinese, Indian and Pakistani families. Such services were not in place years ago. There is real innovation and support in the field.

Lincolnshire has a hospice-at-home project, whereby carers care for terminally ill friends and members of their families and communities to try to ensure that at a desperate time for many people, care and respite is available. Indeed, many voluntary organisations, such as Crossroads—Caring for Carers—have a night-sitting service in Wigan, which provides a huge amount of help to people with dementia, which my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Mr. Lepper) mentioned. We must be aware of the huge stresses and strains on people.

One of the top aims of carers' week and of the Government's priorities is tackling the issue of hidden and young carers, who have never before been on the agenda. For young carers, we have the quality protects programme, which is designed to ensure that we consult young carers in devising policies. We must ensure that the structures put in place reflect the needs that they tell us that they have. We want not a system whereby the Government or local authorities provide a one-size-fits-all service, but one that is flexible and responds to communities' needs. We now have learning mentors in schools to help young carers get the most out of their education and the early years, when they should be enjoying making friends, having a social life and doing all the things that children in other families sometimes take for granted. We have the Connexions service, with personal advisers for 13 to 19-year-olds, which is again designed to involve young carers.

The matter involves not only the Department of Health and local government but the Department for Education and Skills and important benefit issues, which are the responsibility of the Department for Work and Pensions. I shall certainly bring the matter to the

[Ms Blears]

attention of my colleagues in those Departments to ascertain what we can do with Government and the voluntary sector working together in partnership. It is one of the key areas in which services in silos will never support the incredibly valuable work of carers.

Another important aspect that many hon. Members mentioned is supporting carers in employment. The measures that we have introduced to enable people to have time off work for family emergencies are a real innovation. We must ensure that employers are aware of carers' needs, and we have a mountain to climb. Our £1.5 million project on work and family life balance is designed to ensure that employers are sensitive to carers' needs and can adapt their working practices to fit in with people's family demands.

Work is also being done to provide a new national helpline for families with disabled children, which many hon. Members mentioned, and a system that can put them in touch with all the different agencies that can provide a package of care and support, whether relating to education, health, support in the community or transport. We are funding Contact a Family to the tune of £500,000 a year for the next three years to set up that national helpline, which will be a huge step forward. We are also match funding Carers UK's employment project to support carers in work. The Department for Work and Pensions has introduced the new ONE series, which is designed to get carers back to work and to give training, support and advice.

I pay tribute to the tremendous work that carers do. We have made significant progress on the strategy, the carers grant and practical projects. However, I acknowledge that we have much more to do to ensure that we give carers the right support, information and care for their health. We must ensure that they keep well so that they can do their fantastic work. I look forward to a continuing dialogue with carers on these important issues.

Music Industry

11 am

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): I declare an interest. I am a member of the Musicians Union and of the Performing Right Society, I have been contracted to Chrysalis Records, EMI Records and Sony Music and I receive an ever-diminishing return on my recorded work. As a Scottish nationalist and part-time member of the tartan army, may I offer my most sincere congratulations to England on qualifying for the second round of the World cup?

I find it astonishing that this is the first House of Commons debate to be held exclusively on the music industry, because it contributes some £3 billion to our economy and employs 122,000 people full time throughout the United Kingdom. We are second only to the United States as a source of repertoire, and the UK market is the third largest for recorded music in the world. Although the rest of the world, including the United States, recently experienced a decline in record sales, there has been growth of some 5 per cent. in the United Kingdom.

Our music industry is a UK success story—it is something that we do well—and I believe that we lead the world in creativity and innovation. The history of UK popular music is littered with all-time greats of world pop and rock music. Our consumption of music is massive—greater than that of any other nation—and we buy four units of either CDs, cassettes or our old friend vinyl per person per year. We bought 226 million recordings in 2000. Music extends to all genres, but we must be clear about the fact that the majority of music bought in the UK is popular and contemporary: pop, rock, dance and soul music. That accounts for some 80 per cent. of all albums sold in the UK.

Years ago, there might have been a reluctance to discuss the music industry, because perhaps we fuddy-duddy politicians should not raise a subject that is primarily focused on young people. However, popular music and the industry that supports it have been with us for some 50 years and they are involved in all our lives. Popular music has formed at least part of the soundtrack to the lives of everybody in this Room.

I was in London last week when the extraordinary concert from Buckingham palace garden took place. If there was ever a question whether popular music has arrived as part of our mainstream culture, it was answered that evening. When Ozzy Osbourne plays in Buckingham palace garden—he did not quite receive royal approval, but maybe royal assent—we know that we are once again at a defining moment in the history of popular music. Politicians must play a role to ensure that our music industry becomes the most competitive and successful in the world. It is our task to ensure that we remain brand leaders in something in which we excel.

As a new Member of Parliament elected last year, I was keen to bring my 15 years' experience in the music business to an all-party music group, so I was surprised to discover that no such group existed. I set about establishing a new group and I met key figures in the music industry. We now have a successful and viable all-party music group, which is chaired effectively by the hon. Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn), who is present. I hope that he contributes to the debate and that the all-party music group continues to engage meaningfully with the music industry and to be an effective forum for the exchange of ideas between us—the politicians—and the key players and representatives of the industry.

In addition to being a great success story and contributing so much to our economy, the music industry faces key challenges, not least that presented by the illegal recording of recorded pieces of work. That might threaten the viability of the music industry's future more than any other issue.

The music industry is at the cutting edge of new technology and e-commerce. Music exists in a digital and online world, with products easily cloned and available for download on the internet. Unfortunately, the pirates and criminals who look to profit from the creative works of others have been able to exploit that new environment and marketplace. The legal framework to protect our artists and creators is insufficient. At best, it is patchy and it is certainly applied inconsistently across the European Union.

Compact disc piracy loses the music industry millions on millions of pounds each year. Yesterday, the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry released its new figures, which show that 1.9 billion pirate recordings have been sold, and it is estimated that one of every two CDs in this nation is a pirated and illegal recording. That is simply unsustainable for any business. It is therefore our responsibility to ensure that the legal framework is in place and that we make the laws to protect our creators and artists. We must also stress to the public that such piracy is a serious criminal activity.

Piracy threatens the well-being of our music industry and when a pirate CD is sold, money goes to criminals, not to the artist, the musician or the creator of that music. Many of those criminals are linked to organised crime, such as drug trafficking and money laundering. Piracy affects every level of the music business, from the top acts to aspiring musicians in its many cottage industries. Only a few weeks ago, the top artist Eminem made the unprecedented decision to rush-release his album by two weeks, in a vain attempt to beat the pirates.

It is not only artists such as Eminem who are affected by piracy, however. For example, the excellent singer-songwriter Dougie Maclean lives in my constituency. Dougie runs his own record business from his base in highland Perthshire, and he recently took the extraordinary decision not to put his new album into retail or distribution, such is his fear of piracy. His livelihood is fragile, and piracy threatens the well-being of such people.

The Government can do more to protect our industry, and some key measures are before them. Those measures are technical—they might be said to be boring—but they are important. Most notable are the draft electronic commerce regulations and the European copyright directive. On both, the Government face choices that will either enhance or undermine the industry's ability to maintain and build on its position on the world stage. What they offer and what the industry wants is the development of technical measures that will increase flexibility and choice for consumers while protecting creators from theft.

Before the recess, progress was made in the other place on the Copyright, etc. and Trade Marks (Offences and Enforcement) Bill, the private Member's Bill promoted by the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), who unfortunately cannot be here. That useful and helpful Bill would harmonise the law relating to intellectual property. Importantly, it would also increase the penalties on some copyright offences from two years to 10. I know that the Government support it, so there should be no reason to assume that it will not be on the statute book before too long. I look forward to the Minister's comments on that and on the implementation of the EU directive.

However, even if the Bill becomes law and we have the best possible result from the EU directive, there will still be serious concerns about enforcement. Trading standards services are woefully underfunded and under-resourced. Provisions exist to deal with certain crimes under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, but so often the pirate and the counterfeiter evade the law because there are not enough personnel to deal with such crime.

The music industry earns the Exchequer £300 million a year in VAT receipts, so I believe that it is justified in reminding the Government of the money from it that boosts the economy and in asking for money in return to ensure that the laws are enforced and that the pirates and counterfeiters are brought to justice.

We must tackle the culture as well as enforcement and the establishment of the legal framework necessary to protect our artists and creators. If we are successfully to stop piracy and the illegal counterfeiting of music, we need the support of the general public. We must ensure that they understand that the crime is serious. The message that we must put across is that stealing somebody's intellectual property is the same as stealing their video recorder or car cassette player.

A culture has grown up that music has no real ownership and that anyone is free to use and abuse it in any way they want. Concepts such as the freedom to use music whenever and however anyone wants are usually mentioned in debates on the subject, and that attitude is usually accompanied by the belief that some bureaucratic, remote, faceless, well-endowed industry will pay. That is not so. The artist, creator and musician pay and they ultimately lose out; their livelihood is threatened. We must ensure that that message is understood by the public, especially young people.

Many young people know how to download music from the internet, but we should stress to them that they could become creators or songwriters, turning their leisure skills into careers. Our vision of a dynamic online society, which is one of the Government's key objectives, will be achieved only if we educate young people as to the responsibilities as well as the opportunities offered by the online world. Education remains vital to increasing young listeners' awareness of the value of music and of incentives to be creative. If, at an early age, young people valued their own creations, their own pieces of art, as much as they value their skateboards and their Game Boys, we would begin to make progress.

Record sales in the UK have grown while sales worldwide have declined. Although we may be relatively satisfied at the robustness of the UK industry, there

[Pete Wishart]

must be concern about that worldwide decline. We are a net exporter of music, which has consequences for the UK industry in a worldwide slump. EMI provides the most notable evidence of that, as restructuring has meant the loss of hundreds of jobs.

There is also justified concern about UK penetration of the US market, which is by far the largest music market in the world. The UK market share has fallen from some 32 per cent. in 1986 to a measly 0.2 per cent. in 1999. That must be of great concern to the music industry, not least the artists who rely on US success for part of their international profile.

US business infrastructure has changed, and UK acts are failing because they are struggling to keep pace. The British Council report on the performance of UK acts in the US was released last week. I was surprised that it made the UK news, but, for the first time ever, there was no UK act in the American top 40. That is a monumental development. The report concludes that the UK music industry in the US does not depend only on the personal choice of the American record-buying public; its troubles are due to a lack of a musical business infrastructure in North America. The report argues that trading conditions for UK music companies in the US have become considerably less favourable in recent years.

The report ends with a good suggestion—the establishment of an office in the US to act as a musical embassy for creators, record companies, artists and managers. It could be used to re-engage more positively in the American market. That initiative is looking for Government support. Would the Minister's Department be prepared to support it?

We must consider the future. As well as challenges, the new technology offers many exciting opportunities for the industry and artists. If we can put the necessary legal framework in place and provide the protection that musicians, artists and creators need, there is no reason to believe that the online world will not enhance our music industry. For instance, the ability to put work on the internet is an incredible way for unsigned, new artists to get an audience.

When I started my musical career, I was told that the future of music would involve the selection of pieces from a wire in my living room. Although that dramatic, brave new world has not exactly arrived, I believe that customers look for flexibility and increased choice in music purchasing.

Many superb initiatives have emerged recently, especially in the independent sector, allowing fans the flexibility that they desire to purchase their favourite music. They also give labels secure digital distribution. We must consider how we can best exploit such opportunities and we must move beyond the siege mentality that considers new technology to be a massive threat. There is no escaping the future, so we must make the future work for us if we are to be successful.

I do not have time to touch on a number of issues that are crucial to the music industry. If I were to deal with everything that affects it, such as education and tuition, the work of the Brits, the two-in-a-bar law, which is the Minister's favourite, and the live music scene, which has experienced difficulties and challenges, I would be here all day. I hope that other hon. Members mention those aspects.

I know that the Minister supports our music industry, and the Department has been receptive to its concerns. I hope that the debate shows that the music industry is a grown-up industry that deserves our understanding and support. The House should be aware of the contribution of our music industry not only to our economy, but to the cultural well-being of every single part of the United Kingdom.

11.14 am

Mr. Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart). I was going to say north Teesside, but that would be slightly wrong, given his accent. The debate is today's second most important event, after England's qualification for the next round of the World cup a couple of hours ago. Our elation at that victory has probably taken something from the atmosphere here today. I hope that the hon. Gentleman, despite his political beliefs, congratulates the England team on their great achievement. I congratulate him on securing this wide-ranging debate. As he said, he could not raise every issue, because that would have taken several hours, and I appreciate his leaving time for other hon. Members to put their points.

As chairman of the all-party group, I was delighted by the enthusiasm that Parliament showed in setting up the group and, subsequently, in getting involved with the music industry. As Members of Parliament, we represent people throughout the country, and our enthusiasm for the industry reflects the general view. Music is an important part of everyone's life, and we all have our favourite songs and pop groups. We all recall favourite memories and special occasions involving listening to music, and we all had heroes when we were younger.

Like football, the music industry is loved in this country, because of the memories, enjoyment and entertainment that it gives us. However, the industry is more important than memories and favourite songs, and we must remember what it does for the UK. It is a UK flagship, which fosters international relations like no other industry does. We have seen the problems of football and violence, but there is never violence when the music industry goes abroad. It does great things for the UK, and it promotes the use of the English language like no school or education media could. UK stars are household names throughout the world.

Hon. Members have mentioned the industry's important input to the national economy. I have seen the figure of £4.5 billion, £1.5 billion of which is exports. The industry has 122,000 full-time employees, and we cannot laugh at such a figure when jobs are so important to all our regions.

I want to concentrate on trading standards capabilities and on stamping out piracy while ensuring that money stays with the industry and, of course, the UK taxpayer. I pay tribute to the work of trading standards departments throughout the country. As local Members of Parliament, we all work with them, and we know that they play a vital role in protecting consumers from rogue traders of all kinds. Their expertise will be vital if we are to take piracy seriously, and we must use their capabilities to stamp it out.

I hope that trading standards departments see our efforts to give them extra powers and extra duties not as a burden, but as a professional opportunity. It would be wrong not to appreciate their concerns about any additional powers, however. Departments are understaffed, and there is a shortage of trading standards officers. They also lack the resources to carry out their duties, although that is not the Government's fault.

Every year, there is a budgetary round in local government and a scrap over who gets the money from the pot. Nine times out of 10, trading standards departments come out worse off, because the more attractive services, such as education and social services, get the greater share of the money. However, we appreciate the departments' problems. As well as considering giving trading standards departments the additional duty of stamping out piracy, we might consider ring-fencing money when it is provided, as the Government have done through the modernisation fund, to ensure that trading standards departments get it and can use it to combat piracy in the music industry.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Dr. Kim Howells): My hon. Friend knows that the £30 million that was made available—while I was the Department of Trade and Industry Minister responsible, I might boast—is there to be bid for by local councils. It is not to be spent on anything else and it is up to the local authorities to show the imagination and the initiative to start tackling the pirates and the gangsters. The money is there for them if they bid for it.

Mr. Hepburn: I thank my hon. Friend for that point, which I appreciate, but my general point is that although trading standards departments do a great job, they have to battle against other local government services for their share of the money. If we are considering introducing additional powers, we should try to give trading standards departments a lead and propose new initiatives to enable them to compete for the modernisation funds.

There is no doubt that illegal CDs and piracy in general are causing a major problem. They are being sold in their thousands, not only in shops, but on the internet and at car boot sales. Profit margins for the criminals engaged in that trade are huge and the risk of capture is minimal. The Government have recognised the importance of stamping out piracy, because they have increased the maximum penalty to 10 years' imprisonment, but the departments' lack of statutory powers or duties to enable them to act renders that meaningless.

Piracy in the music industry has a Del Boy image in the UK. It must be tempting for somebody who does not earn a lot of money to buy a top 10 CD for £4 or £5 from somebody who comes into their local with a suitcase full of them. We must get away from that image, because such CDs are not as good as the genuine article and consumers often receive shoddy goods. Being undercut by that criminal activity costs UK workers their jobs in the music industry and it costs the taxpayer, because money goes not over the counter in reputable and proper shops, but from hand to hand. That makes taxes rise, which affects the national health service and other services, and revenue is lost to the music industry itself.

I recognise the serious impact that such crime has on all walks of life and that the Government appreciate the problems experienced by trading standards departments and are making extra money available, but I ask the Minister to address the specific problem of piracy. In particular, will he comment on the fact that local trading standards departments have real concerns about getting involved in such work, not only because of a lack of resources, but because of manpower issues and their knock-on effects?

11.23 am

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): I, too, am delighted that the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) has secured the debate, but I want to pull in a slightly different direction from him and other Members who are interested in the subject.

Of course, the music industry is phenomenally important to the United Kingdom. Whether one is a republican or a monarchist, one must acknowledge that last week was an enormously significant event in terms of public relations for this country. Generations of British musical talent performed at Buckingham palace in classical and pop concerts, showing a cultural breadth and excitement about Britain that will have been attractive to tourists around the world. I congratulate the Department on its involvement in the jubilee weekend, which provided perhaps the best piece of PR for the country in many years.

The music industry has been especially important to the Celts among us, and I reckon that about 50 per cent. of those in the Chamber are English and 50 per cent. are Welsh or Scottish. *[Interruption.]* All right, the Celts have the majority.

The Minister is to visit my constituency on Friday, travelling a great distance from Pontypridd to Rhondda, to see one of the most interesting innovations in a traditional, post-industrial constituency. The Pop Factory is where Corona—"Every bubble's passed its fizzical"—was originally made. Now, it is where pop music is made and where all the greats of British and Welsh music over the past few years have played. Television programmes are made there and young people are encouraged to get involved in the music industry, not just in its traditional forms, but in new online and digital versions of music. That is all very exciting, because it brings economic opportunities to an area that was associated solely with decay following the closure of the mines.

Historically, the Government and the law have protected the rights of artists and the recording industry through copyright legislation. Almost all the discussion over the past few days in anticipation of the debate has centred on the economic rights of rights holders—those who make the music—but moral rights are equally significant. People should have the right to say, "I wrote this piece of music and no one else can use it without my permission. If they use it, they must attribute the music to me."

Many people do not think of copyright as dramatically affecting their lives, yet how we consume music, television and theatre is affected by copyright law. For example, we never hear "Happy Birthday To You" sung in a movie because copyright must be paid to use it. Invariably, one hears "For He's A Jolly Good

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Fellow", even if it is a woman's birthday, because no one wants to pay the extremely expensive rights for "Happy Birthday".

Similarly, one reason for our strong church music tradition, which does not exist elsewhere in the European Union, is the exemption for such music under British copyright law. That exemption has allowed the Church to invest significantly in music, which can then be used in every other church in the country without additional moneys being paid to the composer when it is used in a church setting. That caused complications for Princess Diana's funeral, due to uncertainty about whether the music written by John Taverner, which was subsequently made available on CD, was exempt. Much of the preferred music for the funeral could not be used because of copyright law.

"Top of the Pops" has been so successful in this country and around the world partly because British copyright law enables broadcasters to reach an easy resolution of copyright issues with the recording industry. Furthermore, a French, Spanish or German satirical television programme that uses a song that takes the mickey out of someone renders it exactly whereas in Britain a version is used—for example, a song that sounds like a Sting song. Other countries have exemptions for music used for satirical purposes.

Copyright law goes to the heart of whether we enjoy our music and television programmes. It also affects news broadcasts. In Belgium, there is no exemption for showing public works of art and buildings, which means that one cannot film a news clip in front of the European Parliament building, for example, without obtaining permission from the architect. There is such an exemption in the United Kingdom, which is why it is unnecessary to obtain permission from Richard Rogers or any other architect involved before filming in front of the Lloyd's building. I happen to think that the exemption is right, but others in Belgium, France and other EU countries take a different view.

There are also exemptions in the United Kingdom for the blind and throughout Europe for copying for libraries. The nub of my argument is private copying, and a different resolution of that issue has been arrived at in each EU member state. In the United Kingdom, it has been accepted that individuals might legitimately record a television programme or a CD on to tape for use at a different time, on the condition that they bought the original CD.

That practice is written into the life of British society, as thousands of people record television programmes on a Friday evening and watch them the following week. The law presumes that they will then wipe the tape. We would certainly enter interesting territory if every Member in this Room who has kept a tape of a television programme recorded several years ago declared themselves pirates. However, the assumption is that every private copy of a CD or a television programme is in some sense pirated.

We must establish a clear and balanced position that benefits the artists, the recording industry or broadcaster and the consumer. Governments should be wary of responding on the rightful claims about privacy by saying that all private copying must stop. In Germany, there is a blank tape levy under which video and audio tapes are more expensive, with the extra money going to the recording industry. There is provision in the EU copyright directive for the United Kingdom to take or not to take that option. Politicians should be wary of treading on consumers' toes in respect of such issues.

Although I have heard a lot from the recording industry about possible damage to artists—that industry is one of the most effective lobbying organisations in the world—I also hear from artists, who say that their rights are often not protected by the recording industry. Nina Simone is unable to be with us today, but if she were here she might point out that she has not received a single penny for the song that plays in every bar in the country—I cannot remember its name. Many recording artists get a bum deal from the recording industry.

Dr. Howells: The song is called "My Baby Just Cares For Me".

Mr. Bryant: I thank my hon. Friend. Everyone in the Room knows the name of the song apart from myself—I feel very inadequate.

When the Government implement the copyright directive later this year through a statutory instrument, I hope that they continue to allow for private copying when it does not lead to commercial use. That is the nub issue.

Pete Wishart: I am interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's views. How would he make a distinction between private copying for individual use and illegal pirating for sale? What distinction would he draw between the rights of those who make private copies and those who undertake illegal mass production of CDs?

Mr. Bryant: The issue is complicated, and many battles were fought in the European Union, the Commission and the Council over the wording. In fact, all parts of the industry are happy with the wording in the copyright directive on that issue. I am simply worried that the Government may be pushed into being more restrictive than the copyright directive allows for. When they implement the copyright directive, the Government should consider allowing some of the additional exemptions in this country that would have no commercial significance and that are available in other countries. Harmonising copyright throughout the EU would be in the interests of all concerned, because many of those issues are not purely national. People can pirate from one country to another. I hope that Ministers will be keen to point out that although not all copying is piracy—one can be a legitimate copier—we need to put an end to illegitimate piracy.

It is worth pointing out that an MP3 does not provide a perfect copy. It has been said that digital copies are always perfect, and that that causes many more problems than in the past, but that is simply untrue. Embedded phonographs—music used in television programmes—should be treated as a legitimate form of copying and not immediately submitted to harsh restrictive practices, otherwise broadcasters in the UK would find it difficult to sell programmes abroad that provide a good showcase for British talent.

The UK recording industry faces a few substantial challenges, one of which must be finding a new revenue stream. I doubt whether more trading standards officers or more restrictive copyright laws will be able to stem the tide in the change of the revenue stream. It is up to the music industry to find that alternative source. I know that many recording artists have chosen to bypass the recording industry in an attempt to achieve that. The recording industry must establish better contractual arrangements for artistes. Many artistes get a bum deal, and they need a better deal. It needs to find a way of building long-term talent, and not only the "Pop Idol" style of talent that we have seen during the past few years.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): Shame.

Mr. Bryant: I supported "Pop Idol" and watched every programme, but—*[Interruption.]* I voted for Will. I always support the winning team.

It is important that we make use of the slow-build talent; it may be more costly for the recording industry, but in the end it may prove far more beneficial for it and for the country. Some of the biggest names associated with UK recording are those who have been around the longest—the Stings, the Elton Johns and others—who would not have got to the top if they had been judged only on their first album.

My final challenge to the industry—it is one that the Select Committee has issued to the recording industry several times—is to make CDs cheaper, because that is the best way of ensuring that people buy more of them. It is disgraceful that CDs are still dramatically more expensive in this country than in the United States or Canada. Despite much special pleading from the recording industry, responsibility for that still lies with industry itself.

Mr. Eric Illsley (in the Chair): Before I call the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans), I remind hon. Members that if they are brief I should be able to call everyone who seeks to catch my eye before the wind-up speeches begin.

11.33 am

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley): I start by congratulating the England team. My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) and I watched the match on the Terrace, and we are delighted at the result. *[Interruption.]* That was on our Terrace, not theirs. Anything that gives Sir Cliff Richard an opportunity to rush out another version of "Congratulations" as England win the World cup is good.

It is good to take part in a debate that might even get clipped on MTV—who knows?—and I congratulate the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) on securing it. Part of the problem is that people treat the music industry as if it were peripheral and unimportant, and as if it can take care of itself. The music industry is important to the nation. It creates billions of pounds-worth of revenue, and hundreds of millions of pounds, if not more than £1 billion, of tax revenue flows from it. It also creates employment.

When we talk about jobs in the music industry, we all think of the musicians themselves. Of course, they are vital; without them, the many other jobs would not exist. Those involved in selling CDs and DVDs are important, as are those involved in holding concerts in venues such as theatres, pubs and clubs throughout the country, although I know that there is a licensing problem, which I hope the Minister will address in his speech, and those who manufacture and sell the merchandising that goes along with music, and the music press.

When I was involved with the original all-party group on music many years ago we went to Abbey road and walked across the famous zebra crossing, and we put out a press release saying that we had walked in the footsteps of the Beatles. My researcher was not as au fait with the spelling of their name as I was, and we were ribbed in the New Musical Express for not being able to spell the name of the most famous group in the history of music. One has to take the rough with the smooth.

Without a shadow of a doubt, the music industry is vital. We have already heard from the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) about "Pop Idol" and how important that was. It gripped the imagination of the entire nation, and I understand that the format is being sold all over the world. Undoubtedly, royalties will accrue from that as well. More people voted in "Pop Idol" than voted Liberal Democrat at the last general election—which I am sure we all understand. It is absolutely amazing how that gripped everyone, and it is not just Will Young who has done well out of it, but Gareth Gates and several others. I went into the pub the next day and just said "Will or Gareth?" to people at random, and they knew fairly well what I was talking about, and were able to say who they had voted for.

The music industry is enormously important. Of course, "Top of the Pops" has been mentioned in the debate, and rightly so. That programme has been sold all over the world. I was in South Africa this week and managed to watch on BBC Prime editions of "Top of the Pops" and "Top of the Pops 2", which featured some of the bands that I grew up with. The format has been sold in a number of other languages, which is important as well.

Just because we are supporters of the music industry, it does not mean that we support every type of music. That is clearly not the case. There is some music that I do not like, and I understand that there is some that the Minister is not so keen on at times, but I suspect that we will not hear too much about that today. We have preferences, and as vice-chairman of the all-party music group it was great to go with the chairman and the Minister to the Ivor Novello awards and see people such as Kate Bush—I was at university when she became very popular—and the enormously talented Sting receive awards.

The jubilee concert was mentioned and I understand that it has raised £150 million between the classical one on the Saturday and the popular one on the Monday. Rights have been sold all over the world for that absolutely enormous showcase for British talent. We have heard about Ozzy Osbourne, but of course several great British musicians have already been knighted, and Mick Jagger may be the next in line to get his

[Mr. Nigel Evans]

knighthood and hear the words "Arise, Sir Mick." He has made an enormous contribution to the music industry.

I have to declare an interest. I grew up with two brothers, one of whom played the guitar, and the other of whom played the drums. Despite that, I still appreciate music. The guitarist actually got a record into the shops in the 1960s as part of a group called the Outer Limits. People see how much the most famous musicians earn, and think, "Those musicians are OK, aren't they?" I am not sure if the hon. Member for North Tayside wants to intervene at this moment. The vast majority of people who play in clubs on a Saturday use the money that they earn to pay for fuel to get to some of the clubs that are many miles away. At times, they are a bit like a social service. They appreciate the music in its own right, while hoping that at some time in the future somebody will recognise their talents and they will do very well out of it.

It is important that we have mentioned the new technology today. When I was growing up, even CDs were not available. Now we have CD burners, the internet, Napster—well, not any more—and other look-alikes on the horizon. Who can say what will be developed during the next five to 10 years? Digital radio used not to be available, but is now becoming more popular in this country and throughout the world.

We have heard about some of the initiatives that the Government may take, such as putting a levy on blank video and audio tapes. There is, however, an opportunity, through the work of scientists and the industry, to use the technology that produced the opportunities for people to pirate music or access it for nothing to rectify that problem. There was a time when any software for computers could be downloaded from the internet, but Microsoft developed a technology that prevents the copying of particular pieces of software. As downloading times become faster and faster people will want the convenience of downloading music and the music industry will, I hope, be able to harness technology to allow them to do so. However, the industry must not lose out because people are not buying music in the traditional way in a shop or store. It needs to get money through subscription or some other means to allow it to make the profits that it needs to invest in new talent.

I offer my congratulations on the jubilee concerts and also congratulate the BBC on the proms, which it organises every year. They are an enormously successful showcase for classical music and are incredibly popular throughout the country.

Small music festivals provide an opportunity for both more and less well-known talent to have an airing. The Ribchester festival in my constituency starts on 26 June and finishes on 30 June. George Melly and John Chilton's Feet Warmers are opening the concert, and they will be followed by opera and quartets. It is superb that a small village is able to put on such a festival with the support of sponsors. We should not forget the enormous sponsorship required by music festivals. It is important that businesses of all sorts are able to create profits in one area and share their wealth with another, such as the arts, while taking the opportunity to grow.

I hope that the Minister will say something about schools and education. It is important that youngsters are given an opportunity to learn to play musical instruments, and that should not be pushed out of the curriculum because of the intense pressure on youngsters to concentrate on core subjects. It is important that we give talented youngsters the opportunity to learn to play musical instruments, as is the case with the Brit school.

A number of small and medium-sized enterprises rely on Britain having a healthy and vibrant music industry. I started by saying that the industry is seen as being hugely successful in this country, second only to that of the United States of America. That is not an excuse, however, for turning a blind eye, walking away and thinking that it does not need nurturing to ensure that it will prosper and flourish in the future. I hope that when he replies the Minister will be able to say how the Government will encourage the music industry to flourish in this country.

11.48 am

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden): I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate, and I congratulate the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) on securing it. I was afraid that we would all come along today and say exactly the same things, but it has been exciting to hear other Members' views about the diverse issues that face the music industry.

I should like to declare an interest in that I am the secretary of the all-party group on music, which was relaunched earlier this year to give MPs and peers an opportunity to become aware of the issues facing Britain's multi-billion pound music industry by meeting its representatives who include both performers and producers. This debate is just one example of the high profile that the industry rightly holds in the minds of politicians. As many hon. Members have said, Britain's recording industry accounts for about 15 per cent. of the global market and Britain's domestic market for music sales is the third largest in the world.

Since I took over the job of secretary of the all-party group on music, I have had the opportunity to meet a wide range of people. Outside politics, music is my greatest passion. A long-term constituent of mine in Mitcham and Morden told me that in the mid-90s he put up one of his most important clients for the night on the settee; the postman was given the surprise of his life the next morning when he bumped into Stevie Wonder leaving a small terraced house in Courtney road, Colliers Wood—who said that Mitcham and Morden in south-west London suburbia was boring?

Mr. Bryant: Stevie Wonder.

Siobhain McDonagh: No, I think that he came back.

My main concern is the lack of opportunities for new bands to make live music. Through my teenage years from the age of 17, a week had not ended properly if I had not had the opportunity to see a live band in some small pub or club not far from where I lived. Many of those venues have now gone, and people now in their late teens will not be able to see the equivalent of the Jam, or say that they saw them in a small pub in Croydon on the Sunday night that their first single hit the charts. Many such stories have built my love for music, and I should like young people to be given the opportunity to attend concerts at little cost and to watch bands thrive and develop.

It is a tragedy for live music in this country that many venues have gone. It is also a tragedy for live music of the future—there are fewer places where bands can start out and learn the craft of live performance. It is not the fault of the Government's new deal for musicians, which has been welcomed by the Musicians Union, and which has given a hand-up to more than 9,000 young musicians; nor is it the fault of the union learning fund, which is a small grant scheme that was set up by the Government in 1998 to encourage unions to help their members develop their talents. The decline in small music venues is largely the fault of local authorities and their public entertainment licences, and all the Government's good work will be stymied without positive licensing reform.

For a nation that rightly takes pride in the global success of its music industry, it is strange that licensees commit a criminal offence if they allow three singers to perform in a pub, or in any other premises covered by the Licensing Act 1964. Even spontaneous singing—which I have been known to do, particularly in the Strangers Bar—is technically an offence. *[Interruption.]* Yes, my singing is an offence. Such activity is an offence unless a special permit called a public entertainment licence has first been obtained from the local authority. Last week's BBC Music Live community sing-a-long was therefore an act of mass civil disobedience for most of the pub customers who took part.

Without a public entertainment licence, premises may provide unlimited recorded sound, and radio, live satellite and terrestrial television broadcasts. The maximum penalty for unlicensed public entertainment however is a £20,000 fine and six months in prison—a bizarre state of affairs. The two-performer exemption from public entertainment licences is understandably derided by musicians who call it the two-in-a-bar rule. Only 5 per cent. of 111,000 liquor-licensed premises in England and Wales hold an annual public entertainment licence, which is why the word "rule" is more appropriate than "exemption." It means that a live gig tonight performed by more than two musicians would be illegal in more than 100,000 bars, pubs and other liquor-licensed premises.

The low take-up of public entertainment licences is largely due to rising costs and red tape. Home Office circular 13 published in April 2000 warned councils against excessive conditions and asked them to consider lowering fees for public entertainment licences. Few have taken any notice. Annual public entertainment licence revenue for local authorities in England and Wales rose by about 20 per cent. a year between 1998 and 2001; for the record, the figures are £11.005 million between 1998 and 1999 and £16.067 million between 2000 and 2001. That data comes from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy. In fact, the totals are almost certainly higher, because a small percentage of councils do not provide CIPFA with such information.

To me, revenue from public entertainment licensing looks suspiciously like a music and dancing tax. Local authorities argue that public entertainment licence fees are justified on the polluter pays principle, but since alcohol sales of some £30 billion a year generate some £12 billion in VAT and duty, perhaps some of the money should be available to local authorities to underwrite the legitimate costs associated with regulating music and dancing premises. Surely, that would be better than a locally set tax, which often bears no relation at all to the polluting capacity of the premises.

The two-in-a-bar restrictions on live performance are ludicrous by any standards. In Ireland, whose team has also had significant World cup success in the past few days and which many of us support, a pub without a live band is the exception. No entertainment licence is required in rural areas, although a permit costing £24 a year is needed in towns. In Scotland, most pubs can provide live bands before 11 pm without a public entertainment licence, and Scottish pubs—indeed, all workplaces—are regulated by UK-wide safety and noise legislation, which begs the question whether a public entertainment licence is the only way to address safety and noise concerns.

On the face of it, the rationale for public entertainment licensing is eminently reasonable. Public entertainment licences are supposed to ensure public safety and minimise noise nuisance, and prevent crime and disorder. However, if it is deemed safe for pubs without a public entertainment licence to entertain customers with live sport on widescreen television, as they are doing with the World cup, surely it is safe to provide a folk band, a jazz trio or, in the case of some restaurants, a string quartet.

It would be mistake to assume that noise from live music is a major problem for local authorities. According to the Noise Abatement Society, 81 per cent. of complaints are caused by noisy people in the streets outside premises. The remaining 19 per cent. of complaints relate to noisy neighbours, noisy machinery or loud recorded music escaping from bars and nightclubs. Loud amplified bands may be a problem, but there is effective legislation to address it, as the Scottish example shows. Licensing justices have the power to attach noise conditions on the grant of liquor licences. It seems that the power is not widely used, but it is there.

According to the Musicians Union, in Finland, Denmark and Germany there is no separate licensing requirement for live music. Its provision is assumed when the equivalent of a liquor licence is granted. As one would expect, the premises are subject to noise-limiting conditions, particularly if they are open after midnight. I understand that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has announced that the Government do not intend to require live television sport in pubs to be licensed under the proposed new alcohol and entertainment Bill. Perhaps the Minister would confirm that. Yet the Government propose that, in future, even one amplified guitarist in a bar will be illegal, unless such entertainment has been declared when applying for a premises licence and subsequently approved by the local authority.

I recognise that the Minister publicly acknowledged in his Department's press release of 12 April that simply abolishing the two-in-a-bar rule was not enough. Indeed, the licensing White Paper "Time for Reform" carried a risk assessment that musicians could lose work as a result. So how exactly do the Government expect that live music will benefit if the starting point for all

[Siobhain McDonagh]

licensees becomes none in a bar? Sweeping away red tape and making licensing simpler and cheaper will undoubtedly benefit the licensed trade. The Government are to be congratulated on the scope of their proposed licensing reforms, but surely a thriving musical life at all levels in society is somewhat more important than the potential for 24-hour drinking.

Setting licence fees centrally may help, but only if the levels are low. The Government have an obligation to explain more clearly how their reforms will not just stop but reverse the decline of grass roots entertainment. Pop icons such as Elton John and Dave Stewart have recently complained about the lack of talent and depth in the contemporary pop scene. Composer and performer Big George Webley, who wrote the music for "Have I Got News For You" and won Sony Music broadcaster of the year last month, said:

> "Over the past two decades this once great musical nation has lost its breeding ground for talent. Pre-packaged lightweight muzak fodder has replaced grass roots entertainment. If the Beatles, Queen or Dire Straits were starting their careers today, they would never get on stage, let alone make a record or get on the radio."

12 noon

Mr. Mark Oaten (Winchester): When the title of this debate came up on the Order Paper, I thought that it would be fun and informative, and it certainly has been. We have had an excellent debate and I have learned a great deal about the music industry. I feel apologetic that I do not have a regional accent and only come from Hampshire. It is interesting that so many contributions have come from the Celtic fringes.

I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart). For a moment I thought that I might be responsible for some of his royalties—I must check my record collection, but we passed notes and I may have had the wrong band in mind earlier. He rightly said that this important industry is an incredible success story with a turnover of £4.6 billion, 10 or 15 per cent. of the world share, and employs more than 100,000 people in this country. We are rightly proud of an industry that I believe sets us apart from many other countries.

As we have heard, however, the industry faces important challenges. I disagree with several hon. Members—I spoke in advance of this debate to people in the industry whom I know, and the message that came across is that it is indeed successful. It has problems, but for goodness sake, let us not panic. Let us not have the Government ploughing in and over-interfering—many in the industry think that that would be the kiss of death.

What, then, should be done about the issues that have been raised? The most important problem, which was touched on by the hon. Members for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn) and for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant), is that of piracy. We must split that issue into the different forms that it takes, because different responses are required from the Government. The first and most difficult, which requires tough regulation and tough action, is organised criminal activity. Countries such as Mexico now have their own music awards for the best-selling artist, which is based on piracy sales. Clearly, the system has got completely out of hand. Unsurprisingly, the artists are never there to receive the awards. The Government must take tough action to tackle that type of industry, which has many criminal undertones.

There are other forms of piracy, such as CD burning—sales of blank CDs have been soaring. CD burning is the kind of thing that people's mates do for them. As the hon. Member for Rhondda asked, do we really want to clamp down on individuals who do that? Another is e-piracy, which involves the internet. Again, I am concerned about over-regulation in that area. We know that it is phenomenally difficult to regulate the internet and that those involved in the industry say that they do not favour a heavy-handed approach. It is practically impossible to track down the source of the music, and although we may be able to regulate in this country, can one regulate if music on the internet is sourced from Spain, Italy or Australia? It is virtually impossible to tackle some of those issues.

Although about 17 per cent. of people who use the internet have admitted downloading and using music, I think that we should be relaxed about that, and accept that that is the new world that we are moving in. We should be relaxed about CD burning, but very tough indeed on organised piracy.

We know that piracy has an impact on the music industry. In 1999, if an album went into its second week its sales would dip by about 20 or 25 per cent. We know that sales are now dipping by about 40 per cent., which demonstrates that people are not going out to buy records in that second week. Things cannot have changed so much that all artists are producing bad records two or three years down the line.

Although there is clear evidence that piracy is having an impact, I would question how hard the Government's response should be. The Bill proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) examines copyright issues. We should be exploring issues such as that rather than over-regulating the internet.

There are other reasons why such problems occur. Reference has been made to the high cost of CDs. We were promised that, with new technology, prices would fall. That has not happened, and the problem must be tackled. We cannot blame some of the problems of the music industry purely on piracy or the cost of CDs. Other issues are involved, such as trying to get products of our music industry into America. As has been said, for the first time in 38 years we do not have a record in America's top 40. Is it likely that a Government initiative, in line with the British Council, can solve that problem? I do not think that it can. The success of music is based on what happens on the street, not what happens in Downing street. A Government endorsement of a record would be the kiss of death. After all, the most successful popular music has been about rebellion, not Government endorsements.

I accept the concept of the embassy providing back-up and support in America, but I would be worried if we were entering into a new Labour, cool Britannia phase trying to over-promote British records. That would be counter-productive. We must think about the quality of music. The best and most effective way to break into the American market is to have better records. The hon. Member for Rhondda referred to "Pop Idol". I also watched it and became interested in how the Hear'Say band was developed. It has been successful in this country, but we will not break into the American market with artists like that. Robbie Williams is the sort of artist who could have broken into the American market—but there comes a point when such artists may not want to go to America. They do not want to start on the bottom rung, play at venues where no one knows who they are, and have to graft away to break into the industry.

David Cairns: I appreciate the financial imperative behind United Kingdom bands wanting to make it big in the American charts, but could the explanation not be that most of the music in the American charts is absolute rubbish, and our music is superior, but does not appeal to the mass market in the States? We should not necessarily beat ourselves up about that.

Mr. Oaten: The evidence from the charts shows that a lot of big American hits get to No. 1 and No. 2 over here, so British people do like American music.

As for other ways in which the music industry could develop, we must encourage new bands: those that start from the grass roots, from the streets, and are not a product of high-level marketing. The Government could become involved in that. For example, they have helped the film industry, especially by giving tax breaks to individuals who have invested in small film companies. Similarly, there may be a case for giving tax breaks to individuals who invest in smaller record labels.

The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) and the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) talked about ensuring that live venues go on being successful, so that artists can have an early opportunity to hold gigs. there is been much discussion about the "two-in-one-bar" law, and I hope that the Minister will mention that. My hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) has tabled an early-day motion on the issue, and that has attracted 94 signatures.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Since yesterday, my early-day motion has now attracted 133 signatures. There is enormous support for a change in the licensing law. The Minister unfairly castigated Somerset folk singers and, although he will become the subject of the first Somerset fatwa since Judge Jeffreys, I still believe that he wants a change in the law. There will be enormous disappointment throughout the country if there is not a licensing Bill in our next Session. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will take that suggestion away with him and tell the business managers that there is a need for a change to what he agrees is a daft law.

Mr. Oaten: My hon. Friend is right. I am sure that the Minister will come out with a glowing endorsement of folk music when he responds to the debate. The law is illogical. The previous Speaker was fond of holding musical evenings and performances at Speaker's House. Did they have to be licensed?

I shall end by raising the issue of live music outdoors, such as pop festivals and concerts held at open air venues. The Homelands event is a very successful concert that is held in my constituency. It is organised by the Mean Fiddler, and about 40,000 people come to Winchester to attend it. Winchester is, perhaps, not what one would think of as the normal kind of venue for such an event, but it has been extremely successful for the past four years.

However, for pop concerts there is a particular problem with ticket touts. I understand that ticket touting is illegal for football matches, for example, but not for pop concerts. I would be grateful if the Minister would consider that issue.

12.10 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) on securing the debate. The House benefits greatly from his musical talents and experience, and the fact that he is here with us shows what a big country the UK is.

I turn to today's football match. As a Celt, I was delighted to see England qualify, but as my team, Scotland, is out of the World cup, I will have torn loyalties when my mother's home country of Denmark plays England in the next round—so that is one match that I might miss.

I welcome this opportunity to recognise the important contribution that the music industry makes to the UK economy, and to our cultural life. There has been much talk in the debate about the contribution that our musicians and creative artists make to the US, but nobody has yet mentioned that the economic downturn that the industry—especially its retail and distribution sectors—suffered after 11 September was particularly notable in the US market. That event has had a major impact; it is not that our music is bad, but the US market is particularly difficult to penetrate at present.

I also wish to praise the pop and classical concerts that were held for the golden jubilee, which were hosted by Buckingham palace and put together and broadcast by the BBC. As the hon. Member for North Tayside said, it is especially noteworthy that the Black Sabbath day came, because Ozzy Osbourne was invited. We should give special congratulations to those who organised that, and recognised heavy metal music in this way—*[Interruption.]* I cannot be the only person here who listened to Radio Luxembourg and Radio Caroline in my youth. The singles chart was extended to the top 20 in 1954. That was a particularly good year, and we have never looked back since.

I recognise the problems of piracy, which have been referred to by many hon. Members, in particular the hon. Member for North Tayside, who is closest to the industry. As recently as 15 May, I received a written answer from one of the Ministers who has managed to maintain her place at the Department of Trade and Industry after the reshuffle. It says:

> "Accurate figures for losses due to internet piracy are difficult to gather and distinguish from other misuse of copyright material on the internet."—[*Official Report*, 15 May 2002; Vol. 388, c. 635W.]

I gather that for the year 2000, a £20 million loss was estimated for the music industry alone. That is very damaging to the industry in terms of lost revenue, drain on business and a brake on investment in new music talent, development and promotion.

I vigorously state that in no way would we, as the official Opposition, wish to be seen to be discriminating against young people in this debate. However, it

[Miss Anne McIntosh]

happens to be the case that young people have a special penchant for adapting new technologies in imaginative ways, and it is because of that that this loophole has been exploited.

Many young people enjoy enormous work opportunities in the creative industries—or in their retailing and distributive sectors—and I pay tribute to the work done by BARD, in its entertainment retailing yearbook of 2002, in recognising the unique opportunities that are offered to talented young people either as creative artists or in the retail and distribution sectors.

As for trading standards and the extra resources that are required, I seek a commitment from the Minister. We must see whether we can take some positive measures and provide trading standards departments with extra resources from the Government to enable them to do the work that they seek to do.

We robustly support the recent private Member's Bill, the Copyright, etc. and Trade Marks (Offences and Enforcement) Bill, which enjoys cross-party—indeed, all-party—support. I learned on 8 May from the same Minister, in answer to a different question, that the Government

> "will be strengthening copyright law relevant to online use and misuse of copyright material in regulations to implement the EC Directive on copyright".—[*Official Report*, 8 May 2002; Vol. 385, c. 247W.]

That is in addition to the Government's support for the copyright Bill.

I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity to update the House on when the Government expect to finalise the implementing of the measures, particularly the EC directive. He might also like to comment on whether the EU competition rules always make as positive a contribution to the music industry as the industry would like. I realise that he may be in some difficulties because most of the issues that we have raised relate to the Department of Trade and Industry, but I am sure that the two Departments often speak to each other.

I recognise, as have several other hon. Members, that the figures that we got this morning from the IFPI are horrendous. Internationally, piracy increased by 50 per cent. last year alone. The EC copyright directive extends copyright protection to sound recordings, particularly in an online environment. We need effective implementation, and we look to the Government to secure that for us.

The IFPI sets out the recording industry's four key priorities, which are: that copyright law be brought into line with international standards; that optical disc regulations to control pirate CD manufacturing be secured; that there be proactive and effective enforcement by police and customs; and that there be aggressive prosecution and deterrent sentencing of such crime under judicial systems. What is the Government's response to that? The Minister might not have had time to consider the matter, but I would welcome a written answer about those four priorities.

I was amused by many of the contributions, not least that of my hon. Friend the Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans). I shudder to confess that I am the proud owner of a Spanish guitar, but I am not yet as fluent on it as I should hope to be. I am grateful to the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) for hosting the Radio 1 party two years ago, which was greatly enjoyed by all, and for which I say yet another big thank you to the BBC. She raised the serious matter of the decline of small music venues. All of us are deeply concerned about such subjects as they affect our constituencies. Bearing in mind where that most famous group, the Beatles, started from, we do not want to lose those facilities completely.

The British Phonograph Industry—BPI—has set out a shopping list of key issues for the British record industry. I should welcome the Minister's response on the subject. The BPI's No. 1 priority is copyright protection for sound recordings. The second is

> "Promoting a legislative framework that encourages investment in new technology and encryption services".

The third is

> "Supporting and promoting self regulation for content",

and the fourth is

> "Promoting a level playing field for the US/European tax regimes".

Many who have contributed this morning would welcome a more level playing field in respect of tax, anti-trust and competition regimes on both sides of the pond.

The BPI goes on to ask for support for

> "multi-platform delivery of public service broadcasts"

and

> "Improving awareness of the role that intellectual property plays in enabling creative industry to flourish".

Finally, it asks for support and effort in fighting piracy and cyber crime, and concludes that the important progress on the adoption of the Copyright, etc. and Trade Marks (Offences and Enforcement) Bill is most welcome.

It is important to recognise the phenomenal amount—the hon. Member for North Tayside said £4 billion—that the British music industry contributes to the national economy. The industry generates significant exports, with estimated overseas earnings of £1.3 billion, and provides 122,000 full-time jobs in the UK; 13 per cent. of the UK record industry's turnover is reinvested in artists and repertoire to discover new talent.

The Government have a pivotal role to play in delivering a regime that is light in touch and not over-regulatory, and will lead to an environment that enables business, culture and artistry to flourish. We are committed to that. Do the Government share that commitment?

12.19 pm

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): I add my congratulation to the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) on securing a debate on the music industry. He was right to say that it was long overdue. This place rarely debates successful industries; we usually debate failing industries. By the way, I hope that that is not a harbinger for the music industry; I do not think that it is.

I thank the hon. Gentleman not only for the debate, but for his work, with my hon. Friends the Members for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn) and for Mitcham and Morden

(Siobhain McDonagh) and others, in setting up the all-party music group. I was privileged to attend the first meeting, which was a great occasion. I welcome that move to raise the profile of the music industry, which is arguably the most obvious manifestation of cultural life in this country. I also thank other hon. Members for contributing to the debate.

Music is rightly a very important part of British culture, and it has endless variety. I am dreadfully sorry that the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) did not have the chance to stick the knife in a bit further on the question of folk music. When the Wurzels ambushed me subsequent to my outrageous comment, I was delighted when one of them whispered, "Oi married a girl from Pontypridd, you know." The cameras were all arrayed around us as I held up a copy of the Wurzels' Christmas CD, called "Come On Santa". Another member of the band then mentioned an icon of jazz—I am an unashamed jazz fan. He said that he believed that Acker Bilk was the brother-in-law of the great Adge Cutler, who was the leader of the Wurzels. That shows that music is an entirely integrated and wonderful form of cultural expression.

I hope that some of the predictions of gloom that we have heard—not this morning, I may add, because the debate has painted a positive picture—are ill founded. The UK record industry experienced a growth of 5.3 per cent. in 2001, which bucked the global slowdown. However, there are still problems, and I shall discuss those.

I agree entirely with the hon. Members who mentioned what a wonderful showcase the concert at Buckingham palace was. It was a tremendous advert for Britain. By the way, the tourism part of DCMS has managed to get some money out of the Treasury to sell Britain abroad. However, we could never have bought such a wonderful advert for this country as the incredible images that we saw last week. It was absolutely wonderful. However, I grew up thinking that rock music—I could not use the expression "pop music"; I was never interested in that—was about rebellion. Seeing knights up on the stage—well, I will not go into that. Ministers are not supposed to have opinions, by the way. If one expresses them, one gets in big trouble.

We are at an important point with regard to legislating on the music industry. Almost everyone who has spoken has said how desperately we need a new regulatory regime for venues—that is absolutely vital. I share the view of the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) that the industry is successful largely because the Government have kept their sticky fingers out of it. I am not in favour of heavy-handed regulation or, God forbid, an initiative from the Government—we have had enough of those. However, I am keen for us to tackle the real problem of the diminishing number of venues, which I have seen in my own constituency. The hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) comes from Swansea, which had a wonderful music scene. It still does to some extent, but the number of venues is way, way down on what it used to be. I hope that we shall get this right. We have some good proposals to present.

I hope that the licensing Bill will feature in the Queen's Speech, but that entirely depends on whether adequate time will be available in the view of the Government's business managers. It is vital—and it is not rocket science to reform that law. I should point out to my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden that the last thing that I want is a reform that would drive groups out of pubs, which would be the worst of all worlds.

The "two-in-a-pub" rule is idiotic. Its origin lies in a different age. Just last week, I went with one of my brothers to a pub in Aberdare, which is not in my constituency, but is where I come from. We were totally deafened by one guy with two massive amplifiers, singing drivel. However, I shall not talk about that now.

Mr. Heath: There is a problem not only with performance venues—the Minister is right about what needs to be done to reverse that—but with practice and rehearsal venues. It is important for young people to have the opportunity to play without causing a nuisance to people, in a way that will take them off the streets and, perhaps, away from trouble, too.

Dr. Howells: Absolutely. We do not talk about that issue enough. The number of rehearsal venues is diminishing even faster than the number of live performance venues, partly because rehearsals often take place in the day. For those growing up in a small town and putting a band together, the opportunities to practise in the day with at least some volume are likely to be restricted.

The hon. Member for Ribble Valley mentioned one reason for the current situation when he said that we have never taken the industry seriously enough. It is not regarded as mainstream. The hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) was right about the real integration between musicians, performers, singers, writers, music companies and retailers. She might have added those who run venues, such as pub landlords and dance hall owners, who are also extremely important. They constitute a network that is critical not only for the future of the music industry but for creativity in general.

Several hon. Members mentioned schools. The ability to learn music in schools is vital. I have gone on record before—and have got into trouble for it—as saying that I believe that successive Governments, including the one of which I am proud to be a part, have been far too utilitarian in their priorities for education. Education is not just about reading, writing and arithmetic, vital though those basic skills are. Some of our most important exports, among which we must include music, are based on skills that are not taught in that way. We need music teachers, including peripatetic ones, and we need instruments to be available for children. Most importantly, we need to understand the importance of music. It is not a peripheral but a central activity—and of course, we could spend the rest of the morning discussing the rest of the arts, too, in that regard.

The EC directive on copyright and related rights in the information society was formally adopted on 9 April last year. It needs to be transposed into the national laws of EU member states before 22 December 2002, and we are confident that we can do that. There will be an opportunity to debate many of the issues raised by hon. Members this morning while it is being implemented, when we consider the statutory instrument or other legislation.

GP Referral Procedures

12.30 pm

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth): I welcome the opportunity to initiate the debate. I do not know if this is my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary's first Adjournment debate, but it must be among the first debates to which he has replied as a Minister.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy) *indicated assent.*

Jon Trickett: It is his first. I congratulate him on his appointment, and I look forward to him engaging in the debate. I have no doubt that he has a long future as a Minister, and I hope that he can help in the matters that I intend to refer to this afternoon.

The nation is currently preoccupied, largely, by football. If we put that to one side for a moment, the national debate is about the national health service and health in general. Derek Wanless was asked to examine the health of the nation, the state of the health service and its future funding. The debate about the report focused largely on the pressures of expenditure, but is more significant than that. It also deals with supply and demand for the health service.

I want to talk about demand. I am afraid to say that Mr. Wanless described an unhealthy nation. He introduces the appalling concept of premature mortality and PYLL; the potential for years of life lost. We discovered that we live in an extremely unhealthy nation, where people die at a younger age than they should. We compare badly with countries in western Europe and elsewhere in the advanced industrial world. In the UK, women die at a younger age than almost anywhere else in the industrial world, which should trouble us all. The life expectancy for men is 25 per cent. lower in the UK than in Sweden.

Parliament and the nation focused on how we will fund the provision to take us up to the European average. How we can make the nation healthier so that there is less demand on our health service received less consideration. Mr. Wanless's interim report considered a range of issues. Paragraph 3.42 of his final report refers to expected scenarios for the next 20 years and the possibilities of continuing as we are, a mild improvement, or a vision of a much healthier nation. He also refers to the fact that not smoking, nutrition and physical activity can contribute to a healthier nation. He holds out the vision of enhanced life expectancy within 20 years, and of an improvement in the quality of all our lives by being healthier. It is clear in all the work done by specialists and non-specialists working in the health service that a more physically active population is key. Two thirds of our population may be following football as we speak, but they are non-participant observers. We want people to participate in sport and exercise to improve their general health, reducing the demand on the NHS and the taxpayer and generally promoting a much healthier and physically more active nation.

I admit to a genetic predisposition to cardiovascular problems. I come from a family who have had heart problems. I have high cholesterol and other factors that led me to the conclusion that I am in a high risk category. My GP came to that conclusion too, which worried me rather more. My father had his first heart attack when he was 47. I was in my mid 20s. At that time, I still thought of myself as an athlete but I had become extremely sedentary. I was probably drinking too much and having far too many fry-ups and other unhealthy things.

I decided that I did not want to spend the rest of my life like my father, who has gone in and out of hospital with continuing heart problems for 28 years; he is now 75. First, I wanted a better quality of life and, secondly, I did not want to be a drain on the health service. I wanted to contribute in an economically useful way to the nation. Having said that, I ended up as a Member of Parliament, so I am not sure that I am doing that. I suppose that I am paying taxes and national insurance, which is a small contribution.

I decided to exercise and to change my diet. I have not—touch wood—been affected by the chronic problems facing my father and many others like him. Far too many lives have been wasted and lost through chronic heart disease, strokes and other problems. Also, I have had a wonderful life in terms of my sporting activity. I am proud of my sporting prowess but I will not share it with the House this afternoon. However, I believe that my personal experience can be extended to the nation as a whole.

When I arrived in Hemsworth, the health of my constituents was obviously very poor, compared even with inner-city Leeds where I had come from. I had travelled a few miles but the level of ill-health in the constituency was striking. The Government recently produced various indices of deprivation. We all know that there is a correlation between socio-economic factors, status and health. The differences between the social classes in our country, notwithstanding the fact that we are an unhealthy nation, are clearly shown by the massive propensity to ill-health and to long-term limiting illness in those lower socio-economic groups; what we used to call the working class.

The wilful destruction of the mining industry by a Government who attacked the communities whom I represent, together with the traumatic events surrounding the strike, led to enormous psychological disorder and stress in Hemsworth. In any event, there would have been a link between ill-health and the kind of industry on which my constituency depended; men were not designed to work underground and to breathe coal dust for generation after generation.

The long-term ill-effects of the mining industry—together with the way in which the industry collapsed and the long-term unemployment that, sadly, has continued well into the period of this Government—mean that my constituency has one of the most unhealthy populations anywhere. As I mentioned, the Government produced indices of deprivation, which show a particular cluster of health-related factors. Unsurprisingly, Hemsworth is one of the 25 most unhealthy constituencies. I have three wards where there are massive health problems and they come in the bottom 1 or 2 per cent.

I suppose that because of my personal interest in fitness and health and the characteristics of the community that I represent, I took a particular interest in health centres and health activities, especially the creation of sports and exercise facilities in the area. One centre is in Hemsworth high school and another is in a small village called Hovercraft—sorry, Havercroft. That will give some fun to the *Hansard* writers. It is an isolated village with an extremely unhealthy population, some of whom are facing long-term unemployment. We could not fundamentally tackle the problems of deprivation, but we funded a new sports centre there and also exercise equipment in Hemsworth high school.

That was the start, I hoped, of engendering the feeling that promoting healthy lifestyles and activities was important. However, I was slightly disappointed at the take-up by the local population. Both centres are well used, but often not by the unhealthiest people. We should reflect on that problem.

Several barriers impede people from the sort of communities that I represent from frequenting sports centres. Both of the centres to which I referred, incidentally, are located within a single electoral ward; the 100th most unhealthy out of 8,500 wards in the country. Health problems there are both chronic and acute.

It was relatively easy to gain the capital to provide the facilities and equipment, but it was not easy to gain the revenue necessary for supporting the centres. Cultural barriers can be important. If someone feels unfit or obese, they are unlikely to enter the centres, which would reinforce their negative feelings. Another cultural barrier stems from the fact that GPs are often not trained to encourage exercise as a means of tackling ill-health. Other barriers stem from the absence of health and fitness providers in the centres with the requisite skills to deal with unhealthy or obese people who are perhaps at risk of cardiovascular problems. Finally, there are financial barriers, which stem from the pricing policy of some centres. Sadly, my constituency does not contain private sector providers—the money is not there—but even public sector providers have to charge fees, which can deter people from joining and participating in the centres.

My next step was to establish whether a local partnership would allow sports facilities to be opened up to the communities, and that was the context in which I first encountered the subject of this debate; GP referral programmes. I found that someone had already invented the wheel that I was trying to invent. Prompted by the excellent work of the Fitness Industry Association, the Government are taking an interesting step forward. I am grateful to Andree Dean, the FIA chairman, for the advice and information he provided.

Effectively, the scheme allows exercise on prescription. It allows GPs to allocate some NHS funding to local populations for preventive work. Engaging people in the facilities available in their communities and neighbourhoods should enable them gradually to adopt more healthy lifestyles.

It was wonderful to find that someone else had invented a wheel that I was trying to invent in my own community, and I am grateful to the FIA, the Department and everyone else involved. The scheme is at an early stage, but is working well. A register of exercise professionals has been established, and I understand that 13,000 people are already registered, which is an excellent step forward. It started only in January, so we have made great progress, but I must sound a note of caution. We need to ensure that the register is extended and that the process does not exclude people who are involved in providing sport. Some people feel that this is the professionalising of sport. I think that sport and exercise need to be professional, but the register must operate openly and not be a barrier. I have spoken to the FIA and to the acting registrar, Cliff Collins, and I am confident that the register will operate as I have described; I see my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary agrees.

There has to be a "but" somewhere in this good news story about the good work being done by the Government, and it is this; where is the GP referral programme in my constituency? There is the possibility of creating a coalition of providers that extends from health and primary care providers through the primary care trust to the health and exercise industry and sport in general. We have a wonderful vision of a healthier nation that costs the NHS less and enjoys a better quality of life. Admittedly, we are at an early stage, and I do not want to be critical, but the scheme has not yet been rolled out. Indeed, we do not know—unless the Under-Secretary can enlighten us—exactly where the scheme is working and where it is not working. It is patchy and fragmented.

My experience of public services, which goes back a long time, is that the middle classes tend to know how to manipulate the various programmes that we establish. The lower socio-economic groups are frequently excluded even from good ideas such as the one that we are discussing, but that must not happen. I fear that the exercise referral programme is being captured in middle-class areas, which is a way of putting revenue funding into the equipped provisions that I have described, thereby enabling them to operate. The programme is not reaching into the unhealthiest neighbourhoods. I may be wrong, but I think that we must establish exactly where the programme is working and ensure that it is rolled out as quickly as possible to the rest of the nation.

I shall conclude by talking about how we might profitably move forward. The scheme is excellent, but I would welcome confirmation from the Under-Secretary that the Government accept that there is a clear link between the benefits of exercise and health. It is important that the Government say that clearly, frequently and loudly.

We should perhaps ask the industry to provide us with the information that would allow the Government to ascertain how the scheme is used, how it is rolling out and how we can ensure that it reaches all neighbourhoods. Some form of general audit of provision and of where the lacunae are would be welcome, because we must find out which elements are missing and fill in the gaps.

As I have taken an interest in the issue, the FIA has said that it will help me to try to identify practitioners who will come into my constituency and provide facilities, and we will encourage GPs to be involved. However, that depended purely on the random fact that, as the local MP, I was interested in health and fitness. We should not leave these matters to individuals.

I would like the Government to ensure that PCTs understand the scheme, that money is available and that they facilitate GPs' involvement. That would require a large-scale programme, but an intermediate step may be to consider health action zones. These are located where

[Jon Trickett]

there are concentrations of poverty, deprivation and ill health. The first step may be to ensure that at least every health action zone area has a facility to provide the exercise referral programme. The Under-Secretary has powers and can use the national quality framework to ensure that the scheme rolls out. I hope that he will do so.

My final point is that a cultural shift is required to ensure that health and exercise professionals and the general population recognise that health and exercise go together. That can be done by conducting a long-term study that monitors the operation of the referral programme and studies people who are at risk to find out whether their health improves during a certain period. That information could come from the industry and the Government could monitor it, perhaps referring it to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, which, in turn, could produce a learning report. That itself could be used as a propaganda weapon to encourage people and GPs to get involved.

There is much to say, but I have spoken for 20 minutes. I hope that the Under-Secretary has time to set the general scene as well as to reply to my particular points.

12.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy): I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Hemsworth (Jon Trickett) for raising this important debate and for giving me the opportunity of my first Adjournment debate in Westminster Hall as a Minister. It is a momentous day on which to have the debate. This morning I visited probably the best football club in London—Tottenham Hotspur—with some local pupils. We were at its learning support centre to watch the England game and were all delighted that, despite the sweltering heat on the other side of the world, England got through to the second round. I was particularly pleased that young people from my constituency were getting such a positive message about sport.

Like many other hon. Members, I am both a barrister and politician. I have only nine minutes to address my hon. Friend's important points, so I hope that he will forgive me if I rattle on.

There is now substantial evidence to support the role of physical activity in promoting good health. Research has shown that physically inactive people have roughly double the risk of coronary heart disease, and it was instructive that my hon. Friend referred to his family experiences of that disease. Physical inactivity is also a risk factor for obesity, colon cancer, type 2 diabetes, hypertension and mental health problems. Those diseases have a significant human and economic cost.

My hon. Friend was right to refer to the Wanless report and its points about health inequalities and the need to move to a fitter society. We have seen a threefold increase in obesity in the past 20 years and, if the trend continues, more than a quarter of adults in England will be obese by 2010. A recent National Audit Office report outlined the significant costs of obesity to the NHS and the economy. In 1998, obesity accounted for 18 million days of sickness absence, 40,000 lost years of working life and 30,000 deaths, of which 9,000 related to obesity, before state retirement age. In response to my hon. Friend's earlier point, I recognise that there is a problem. Both diet and physical activity play a role in obesity, and we are taking action to address both factors. We already have a comprehensive action programme to improve diet.

Physical activity can help in the prevention and management of obesity and other chronic diseases, but physical activity rates are low across the adult population. About six out of 10 men and seven out of 10 women are not active enough to benefit their health, while among children, four out of 10 boys and five out of 10 girls are not meeting the recommended one hour of exercise a day. My hon. Friend is right to refer to inequalities that exist in our community; these occur in parts of his constituency and in constituencies such as mine. Rates of inactivity are particularly high among older people, some ethnic minority communities and those living in rented council accommodation.

I accept my hon. Friend's point about the middle classes, but he will appreciate that, as the economy grows and people have more leisure time, it is important that that leisure time is used and accessed by everyone. Indeed, one of the second or third things that I said to my diary secretary on taking up my new role was that she had to ensure that I got to my gym early in the morning so that I did not pass out in the Chamber at some future date.

The NHS plan makes a clear commitment to local action to tackle physical inactivity. I hear my hon. Friend's point about GPs being equipped to refer people for exercise. That is in the NHS plan and we must ensure that we roll that out and communicate it to all our medical practitioners. That is also emphasised in the national service framework for coronary heart disease, along with the national service frameworks for older people, mental health, and diabetes.

The national service framework for coronary heart disease, in particular, contains a number of milestones to which physical activity is central. Standard 1 requires all NHS bodies to work closely with local authorities in developing a local programme of effective policies on physical activity, being overweight and obesity. The standards for primary care and cardiac rehabilitation also contain milestones that require action on physical activity.

That is where exercise referral schemes, as my hon. Friend pointed out, play an important role. Research has shown that referral programmes can be effective in behaviour change. The Department of Health funded two reviews by the former Health Education Authority that specifically considered the progress and effectiveness of exercise referral schemes. The research showed that better designed referral schemes could lead to small levels of increased participation in activity, but that practice across the country was highly variable.

To address that, the Department published a national quality assurance framework on exercise referral systems in April 2001 to improve standards of existing schemes and help the development of new ones. The framework focuses primarily on the most common model of exercise referral system, where a GP or practice nurse refers a patient to facilities such as leisure centres or gyms for a supervised exercise programme, commonly called exercise referral schemes or exercise on prescription.

The document was sent to primary care trusts and leisure services in local authorities, and GPs were notified of the quality assurance framework through the GP bulletin, which is sent to all GPs in England. The guidelines were also promoted at two regional seminars for primary care and leisure professionals held last summer.

I fully recognise the importance of ensuring that fitness instructors have the appropriate training and competence to work with patients in a referral scheme. I therefore support the work of the Fitness Industry Association and the National Training Organisation for Sport, Recreation and Allied Occupations in this area. In particular, the development of the register of exercise professionals, launched last year, played an important role.

My hon. Friend says that he wants the programme to be rolled out across the country, but it is important to emphasise that the national service framework for coronary heart disease requires primary care trusts to develop local programmes and effective policies on physical activity. Referral programmes present only one option for local action to tackle physical inactivity. It is for local primary care trusts to reach their own view about how to promote exercise and make progress on this issue.

Transport (Oxfordshire)

1 pm

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I am delighted to have this opportunity to debate issues that are discussed throughout my constituency, including overcrowded roads, the lack of proper rail services, the shortage of rural bus services, noise pollution and environmental blight from heavy traffic, and the poor state of repair of many of our roads.

Those topics are of great concern throughout Oxfordshire, and they are close to my heart, too, not least because I shall be supporting the two-wheeled fraternity on Friday, when I shall travel between Witney and Oxford on the back of a motorcycle. I own a moped, so I am not frightened. I am always impressed by the local branch of the Motorcycle Action Group, which always makes its case with great vigour, whether the issue is more motorcycle parking bays or changing laws on, for example, the use of bus lanes by motorcycles.

To turn to the issue at hand, some people may think that congestion is a problem for only our bigger cities and that Witney is a predominantly rural constituency. They would be wrong, however, and the journey to work or to school is little short of hellish for many of my constituents. The A40 between Witney and Oxford is particularly bad, but other routes are also congested.

I want the Under-Secretary to help our county in three major respects, but let me first set the scene. Almost 75 per cent. of Oxfordshire is designated as green belt, as an area of outstanding natural beauty or as an area of high landscape value. We value our environment and our countryside. Our population and economy have grown rapidly, and continue to do so. Between 1981 and 1996, the population increased by 11 per cent., and another 43,600 houses were built. Another 35,500 are on their way before 2011, with even more envisaged by 2016, as the Under-Secretary knows.

We are facing the problems of success, and many of the long-term answers to congestion must be found in the planning system. This is not part of the debate, but we simply cannot go on building so many houses in the south-east without ruining the environment in areas such as that which I represent. The sooner we end centrally driven targets for new homes and give local authorities powers, the better. Those authorities could then focus more on the twin aims of affordable housing and environmental protection. However, those are issues for another day.

We must tackle the transport problems that we suffer today, and railways are the number one problem. West Oxfordshire is poorly served. The Great Western main line is quite far to the south of the county, and the old line that connected Witney with Brize Norton and Fairford is a distant memory. Fortunately, we still have the Cotswold line. The part that serves my constituency runs from Oxford to Moreton-in-Marsh, via Hanborough, Charlbury and Kingham, with trains running direct to Paddington. It is a vital link to part of West Oxfordshire, and there should be plans to expand it. However, there was little to excite commuters and other rail users in the Government's much-vaunted 10-year plan, so perhaps I can make some suggestions.

The line has desperately limited capacity, because it is single track for much of the way between Oxford and Moreton-in-Marsh. If a train going one way is

[Mr. David Cameron]

late—I am afraid they often are—the knock-on effects and hold-ups can be disastrous. Dualling the line should be part of the Government's long-term plans.

Those stations that still serve rural communities need investment and, in particular, better platforms and more car parking space. The parking problems at Charlbury are particularly intense, with cars often parked on the road into the town.

The number of train services is not limited simply by the capacity of the track. Recently, Thames Trains had to cancel an afternoon service, which stopped at Finstock, Combe and Ascott-under-Wychwood, because it was—wait for it—too popular. The company could not replace the two-carriage train with a three-carriage train, because the platforms at the stations were too short. "Why not just open the doors adjacent to the platforms?" I hear hon. Members ask. The answer is that there is no selective door-opening facility and, under health and safety rules, passengers apparently cannot be trusted to know not to get out of the train when there is no platform next to the door.

The answer must be to extend the platforms and ensure that all new trains have selective door opening. The cost of extending the platforms has been estimated at £600,000. I have asked every available body to dispute that figure, but apparently the health and safety rules seem to be the cause of the expense. Perhaps the Under-Secretary could make some further inquiries to see what can be done. The franchises of Thames Trains and First Great Western both have only a few years left to run and those companies are, understandably, cautious about investing heavily. I see some merit—I am sure that the Under-Secretary will be able to comment on this—in encouraging them to bid jointly for one franchise, which would unite the Cotswold line and reduce the number of operators running services out of Paddington. That would end one source of fragmentation.

I also see merit—I am straying here into national policy—in handing responsibility for the track, stations and signalling to the same company. If we give the train operators responsibility for providing all the aspects required to deliver a good service, perhaps they will rise to the challenge. At the moment, we have a "BSE culture" and blame someone else when something goes wrong; "It was the signals", "No, it was the track", "No, it was the other operator" and so it goes on. Improving the Cotswold line can be only part of the solution because, however good we make it, the two biggest towns in west Oxfordshire, Witney and Carterton, which have a combined population of some 40,000, will still not be served by a railway.

The recent feasibility study on reopening the Witney to Oxford railway, with an extension to Carterton, was disappointing. It found that heavy rail would cost more than £100 million. Light rail is slightly more promising, at £79 million, whereas a guided bus or tram route would cost £75million. My plea to all concerned is to keep hope alive for the railway, whether light or heavy rail. Perhaps a tramway would help to improve matters, but I have yet to meet anyone who, if they could wave a magic wand and bring back the Witney railway, would not do so.

The second major problem, a consequence of economic success and the lack of a rail link, is the dreadful state of the A40 between Witney and Oxford. Witney is bypassed with a dual carriageway, but for the 10 miles between our county town and the city of Oxford, the traffic has to cope with a single carriageway and terrible congestion. In the morning and evening, commuters, those going to school and others are stuck in long jams. The journey can take well over an hour. The knock-on effects are also significant. The A4095, which passes through Long Hanborough and the picturesque village of Bladon—Churchill's burial place—is heavily congested, often with big lorries, and the environment suffers as a result. Additional use is also made of the A44, which cuts through villages such as Begbroke and Yarnton, but more on that later.

The problem of the A40 must be grasped. I am pleased that the bus lane proposal has been shelved for the moment. To many of my constituents, it seemed to be an urban solution to a rural problem. Little evidence was produced for how it would work and there was real concern that it would add to congestion, not reduce it. Comparisons were made, not surprisingly, with the famous Prescott bus lane on the M4, and, at a cost of £10 million, it would have provided very poor value for money. It is certain that we need a link from the A40 to the A34, so that some pressure is taken off the Oxford roundabouts. The situation at the Wolvercote roundabout is especially bad.

Dualling the A40 between Witney and Oxford may be part of the long-term solution, and I hope the Government will consider that as part of their roads programme. The guided bus or tramway proposal, using part of the old Witney to Oxford railway, may also help to tackle the problem of congestion. It would certainly be an improvement on the original proposal for a bus lane on the A40. I hope that the county council will make a speedy review of that option, and that the Government will stand ready to provide funding to ease that serious problem.

In any event, the A40 is the biggest single transport problem that we face. Perhaps, if he has some spare time, the Under-Secretary would like to come with me one morning, using whatever form of transport he prefers, and drive against the traffic from Oxford to Witney during the rush hour. Then we shall see how bad the problem is. In west Oxfordshire, we have some of the best and brightest businesses in the country, but the gridlock on our main road is like a hand pressed against their windpipes. Business in west Oxfordshire must be allowed to breathe.

The third problem that I should like to raise with the Minister is the environmental effect of traffic, especially heavy lorries, using minor roads and the A roads that pass through small towns and villages. The A roads have caused the problem. I mentioned the A44 going through Begbroke and Yarnton; it cuts those villages in two. There is no speed limit there apart from the national one, so crossing the road is hazardous.

For years, a great man called Ron Perry led the A44 action group with great force and vigour. Sadly, he died recently. I gather that a 50-mile an hour limit—something that he would have seen as just the start—is to be introduced. I pay tribute to the highways department at Oxfordshire county council for that. The department always responds promptly to letters. Better still, after sixteen years of a hung council, we now have an effective administration at county hall, led by the Conservatives. More is being done under the energetic leadership on the transport front of councillor David Robertson, who is well aware of the problems that we face in the west of the county.

My reason for raising this matter is to ask what steps the Government propose to take to empower local authorities to do more and do it quickly. We are often told by county hall that something would be "unorthodox", "against guidelines" or "not usual practice." Does the Under-Secretary agree that it is not always necessary to have the same road policy in every part of the country? Many communities face the problem of heavy lorries using relatively small roads that pass through towns and villages.

I have mentioned the A4095. Two other examples are the A361, which passes through the middle of the beautiful town of Burford, the gateway to the Cotswolds, and the A415, which goes straight through the village of Standlake. In Burford, which must be familiar to many hon. Members, heavy lorries thunder down the high street and over a bridge that is more than 600 years old. I recently chaired a meeting of residents, county and district councillors and officials, the police, the town council and others. Residents are desperate for more to be done. Consider the lovely Windrush valley, in which Burford is set; the siting of a bypass either side of the town would in many ways be a tragedy. We must do what we can to deal with the problem of heavy lorries on the A361 so that such a step does not become necessary.

Recent planning decisions, like that to allow the expansion of the airfield at Rissington—the decision was appealed against unsuccessfully—have so far only managed to make matters worse. Residents in Standlake on the A415 have complained about walls shaking, pictures falling down and even lorries stopping to bend their wing mirrors inwards so that they can pass each other. They believe that those lorries should use the A34 and the A40 rather than that short cut. They, like those in many other communities, are asking for an HGV restriction.

Everyone accepts that heavy goods vehicles must be able to go about their business and everyone knows that A roads will always be used. The fact that the HGV restrictions cannot be used everywhere for fear of diverting lorries on to even more unsuitable roads is perhaps less well understood, but people want to see something done to ease the burden and they want to know that the Government are considering creative solutions. Can more be done to guide, to encourage and to exhort lorries and their companies to use more suitable routes? The county council is undertaking a review of the county's major routes. Can the Under-Secretary explain what steps the Government are taking to help in such situations? I want to leave him time to respond, although I may intervene to add some questions to his packed list.

I end with a series of pleas. The first is to the new Department for Transport, shorn of regionalism and other things and so able to focus purely on transport; work with the county to deal with our problems. Secondly, please make representations to ensure that the area cost adjustment for authorities in the south-east stays, or at least that a successor recognises the costs in our area. I ask the Under-Secretary to consider the difficulties that local bus companies have in recruiting and retaining drivers. Costs in our part of the world are high.

Thirdly, it must be ensured that transport and planning march together rather than separately. Witney, the heart of my constituency, is still marked out as a growth town in the county structure plan. We are in danger of changing its nature as a pleasant market town for ever. Some will say that improvements to the A40 can come only if we are happy to have even more development. I say that improvements to the A40 are needed even if Witney is no longer to be considered a growth town. We need those improvements today to cope with the problems of today.

1.15 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) on securing this important debate on transport in Oxfordshire. I am glad to hear that his constituency suffers from the problems of success. It is wonderful to think that, throughout the country, economic activity has been considerably enhanced since the Government were elected, which has led to some of the problems of success, such as more people wanting to use public transport and the roads. I am glad to hear him endorse some of the success that we have so clearly brought to his constituency. I think that I am right in saying that it has the lowest employment in the whole country. Oh that you and I, Mr. O'Hara, could say that, although I think that unemployment in our constituencies has been considerably reduced as well.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether practice on roads policy should be the same throughout the country. On our trunk roads and those managed by the Highways Agency, there clearly has to be consistency. Local highway authorities have wide discretion as to how they run their roads. The other measure of the success of our economy is that we have put so much more money into local transport plans, so that authorities can attain their ambitions for their people.

I want to pick up on one of the latter points that the hon. Gentleman made, which was about lorries. Solutions can be reached locally, so local authorities need to consider difficulties to see whether they can resolve them. He will know that we generally have a policy of trying to move traffic from road to rail or even to water, which may not be appropriate in his constituency. Considerable funds are available for that. On those matters, it is often for the local highways authority to find local resolutions to problems where possible.

The hon. Gentleman spoke in detail about the transport problems in Oxfordshire, but it is important that we consider the positive side of transport in Oxfordshire as well. The county enjoys good road and rail links. The M40 passes through Oxfordshire, connecting it to the M25 and the midlands. I am familiar with that stretch of road, as I travel on it not infrequently. There is a network of strategic A roads, including the A34, which provides access to the coast and to Southampton, and the A40, which provides links to the west. Several major railway lines pass through the

[Mr. David Jamieson]

county, including the First Great Western main line, the Birmingham-Didcot line, the Chiltern line and the Cotswold line. I have used some of those recently, to visit the Oxford area and others.

The county council has produced a strong local transport plan, which has been endorsed by all the district councils in the area. We have designated the county council as a centre of excellence for transport planning. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will be pleased to endorse that. The authority also won the national transport award for bus policies in 2001 and is short-listed for the 2002 award for the local authority of the year. Much that goes on in Oxfordshire is positive. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman did not have time to mention it all, but I thought that the subject was worth mentioning.

Again, the hon. Gentleman did not have time to mention the extra funding that the Government made available to Oxfordshire county council. In 2001–02, we allocated over £18.5 million to the council for local transport schemes, which represented an increase of some £7 million compared with the previous year. One does not need much of a facility in arithmetic to realise that that is a substantial increase in percentage terms.

I know that the hon. Gentleman has some facility in arithmetic because he was formerly an adviser to the noble Lord Lamont, the former Chancellor. He must have assisted the Chancellor greatly in his deliberations. I thought that he might argue today that if VAT on fuel had been retained at 17.5 per cent, people would have paid £1 in every £8 extra on their fuel bills, which might have contributed to transport schemes. At any rate, we have found the extra money. For the current financial year, we have provided a further £18.6 million. It is the first time that a Government have provided funding consistently and predictably over a period of at least five years, so that highways authorities such as Oxfordshire can plan ahead, rather than having to chop and change from year to year, as was necessary in the past.

I am aware that the hon. Gentleman is a cyclist and that, last year, he completed a sponsored cycle ride to all 85 parishes in the Witney constituency, covering 220 miles in five days. He will be aware that cycling is a key component of the transport strategy in Oxfordshire. The census tells us that the county has above-average cycle use in the journey to work. One might expect that for the city of Oxford itself, but it is also the case in Abingdon, Didcot and Witney. Leisure cycling is well supported, with three national cycling network routes converging on Oxford. There is also the Oxfordshire cycleway, which offers a quiet circular route along rural roads.

The hon. Gentleman referred to some of the elements of the Oxford transport strategy, which is a groundbreaking approach to urban transport that has succeeded in increasing bus use by 50 per cent. since 1991. Air quality has improved in the centre of Oxford, which was a considerable problem, and the pedestrianised streets are much more pleasant for shoppers.

The county and city councils have ambitious plans for the future and want improved public transport for Oxford. I would be happy to accompany the hon. Gentleman down the A40; he suggested using a motorbike or a car, but if a bus were available, I should be happy to travel on it with him to see what progress it made at busy times. The councils are introducing a system of premium routes for quality bus corridors around the city and working on the concept of the guided transit express or GTE. If approved, that system would provide a network of public transport routes within the city, linking park and ride sites with outlying towns such as Witney. That would bring enormous benefits for the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

In the hon. Gentleman's constituency, the county and district councils are working to review the Witney integrated transport strategy. A draft revised strategy is expected to be published for consultation in the autumn, and work has already begun on some measures. The hon. Gentleman can expect to see several new pedestrian crossings, as well as the Shores Green to Newland cycle route and Cogges footpath and cycleways improvements. There will also be improvements to roundabouts for cyclists and pedestrians and traffic calming on Moor avenue.

The hon. Gentleman has recently become a father and I congratulate him on the birth of his son, Ivan. I am surprised to see him here today, because I thought he would be busy changing nappies and doing all the other things that new fathers must do these days. In the near future, he will have to think about journeys to school; I can assure him that that creeps up very rapidly. The Government are determined that travel to school should be safe and sustainable. The daily school run in the family car may be seen as the safest option, but it does not teach children road sense. It creates considerable congestion at certain times of day and does not have the health benefits of cycling and walking. The school run also adds enormously not just to congestion, but to pollution. We believe that children and parents deserve the chance to choose more sustainable modes of transport where practicable. Local transport plans provide the opportunity for Witney and other towns in Oxfordshire to look at improved facilities to solve some of the problems of congestion to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Mr. Cameron: I am glad that the Under-Secretary's reply shows that his Department is not following the rules on not digging up information on the Member concerned. His contribution is colourful and I thank him for that.

If Oxfordshire county council decides that the answer to the pressing problem of the A40 is a guided tramway system using part of the old railway, will the Government support that and help to fund it? Do they share my view that the problems of the A40 between Witney and Oxford are a major transport issue that needs attention to prevent our county from choking?

Mr. Jamieson: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that my Department has not been digging up information about him or anyone else. My knowledge of him is just part of my interest in new Members and their background.

Any local authority scheme faces hurdles and must be shown to be feasible, after which appropriate funding can be applied for, but the initiative must come from the highways authority; in this case, Oxfordshire.

The hon. Gentleman referred to railways and the 10-year plan. We all agree that our railways have suffered from massive under-investment for a very long time and we are now seeing, for the first time, a substantial increase in real-terms investment in our railways. However, I must tell him, as I must tell my constituents, who are less well served with road and rail services, that we cannot do everything with the limited funds available. He listed some improvements that could be made—for example, at railway stations—and some of them could be tackled through rail passenger partnership funding. It is for the highways authority to work with the SRA on schemes for better linkages with other public transport, to improve parking, to make stations more attractive for passengers and so on. Matters such as these can be discussed urgently by the hon. Gentleman and by the highways authority.

The hon. Gentleman suggested a vertically integrated train system. It is a pity that his advice was not given in the mid-1990s when the rail system was privatised and broken up. The hon. Gentleman also referred to the "Prescott lane" on the M4 and was a little churlish. The lane was controversial initially, but the reports that have passed my desk since have shown that it has improved the flow of traffic—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman may scoff, but if the statistics show that it has improved the flow of traffic—I often use that stretch of road myself—we must accept that.

The hon. Gentleman raised a number of other points and it will be difficult to cover them all in the time available. However, I can tell him that the local highways authority has received substantial extra funds. Perhaps he ought to see what schemes the authority can work on to improve his constituency. If there are matters that are my Department's responsibility that we have not had time to cover today, I should be happy to cover them in correspondence.

Standards of Conduct (County Councillors)

1.30 pm

Gillian Merron (Lincoln): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise in Parliament a matter that is of great importance and relevance to my constituents, in view of recent events at Lincolnshire county council where the question of standards of conduct of county council members has become the focus of public debate.

In securing this Adjournment debate, I am pleased to give my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary his first opportunity to respond in his new role. In wishing him well in his new ministerial responsibilities, I hope that restoring public confidence in local democracy in Lincolnshire will be an early hallmark of a long and successful ministerial career.

As clearly stated in the public interest report into Lincolnshire county council, to which I will refer in some detail, a member of a local authority occupies a position of trust. They are individuals entrusted by Parliament and the electorate with making decisions and deploying resources contributed by others to their best effect. As a person holding such a position of public trust, a member of a local authority has an obligation to act lawfully, carefully, reasonably and with due regard to the interests of those required to fund the authority's activities. That trust imposes a duty on a member to ensure that, as far as they reasonably can, the local authority acts reasonably and complies with the law.

The vast majority of councillors comply with those expectations. They work hard for their constituents and deserve both recognition and appreciation. I also want to pay tribute to the officers and staff of Lincolnshire county council, who work diligently to serve my constituents, whose quality of life is linked closely to the services that they receive. I have long pressed the case for the public interest report into allegations of wrongdoing at Lincolnshire county council to be made public, and I am glad to say that KPMG, the council's independent auditors, agreed to make its findings public.

There has been widespread and deep concern about the disturbing nature of the published findings, and in particular the auditor's severe criticism of the unacceptable standard of conduct of the Conservative leader of Lincolnshire county council, councillor Jim Speechley. However, the open availability of the findings of an investigation of considerable public interest is only one part of the equation. Decisive action to right the wrongs of guilty councillors must also be taken and it is that for which I look on behalf of my constituents, because it is still wanting in Lincolnshire.

As the Conservative group and its leader have failed to follow the correct course, action needs to be taken. If questions exist about the conduct of county councillors, they must be made accountable to those who voted for them. The public interest report is damning, and I should like to highlight some of its main points. The auditor made it clear that

> "it would be wrong to see this report as a condemnation of the overall workings of this authority."

However, he remained concerned that

> "left unchecked the dynamics set out in the report will destabilise the Council and damage its reputation."

[Gillian Merron]

It is also important to note that

> "the matters reported on are not isolated incidents".

The ball started rolling when Councillor Rob Parker, whose persistence is to be commended, wrote to the district auditor about his concerns that a payment had been proposed to a local company, QV Foods. In addition, the chief executive had raised his concerns about a number of other matters with the auditor, who found that

> "in light of the seriousness of the issues raised . . . it was necessary . . . to commence an investigation".

Under the heading,

> "Improper pressure and misuse of power in staffing matters"

he said:

> "With regard to councillor Speechley I have come across examples of behaviour, which can only be categorised as both improper pressure, and misuse of power. This is most evident in his involvement in staffing matters."

He also found that other members were similarly lobbying or seeking to exert pressure with regard to personnel matters, and concluded that Councillor Speechley continues to be overly powerful in Lincolnshire county council.

Those points are illustrated by the case of former chief executive Jill Barrow, who received £160,000 of severance pay, and former director of education, Norman Riches, who received £250,000 of severance pay. Both cases arose from a misuse of severance powers. Negotiations were conducted as if the council was entitled, when making severance payments, to take into account simply what needed to be paid in order to get rid of the chief officers, and to get them to agree to quit; a particular desire driven by Councillor Speechley and the then deputy leader, Councillor Mawby, regardless of whether particular payments were lawful.

A further example of abuse of power relates to the then director of highways and planning who was instructed to appoint an individual to a particular post, or find that his own position would be in jeopardy. Interestingly, Councillor Speechley told the auditor he could not remember meetings, nor any threats to dismiss the director. Even more interesting is how such memory lapses from the leader are peppered throughout the report.

The auditor, having seen a note of the relevant meeting prepared by the then chief solicitor to the council, concluded that Jim Speechley did indeed threaten to dismiss the director, which was improper and unlawful. The auditor comments:

> "Cllr Speechley had no authority or justification for acting as he did."

He goes on to say that councillors present at the meeting

> "ought to have disagreed with Cllr Speechley's conduct there and then, or at the very least, disassociated themselves from his comments. Their silence whilst Cllr Speechley spoke will have lent support to his words. I find Cllr Speechley's threat to be totally unacceptable behaviour which fell below the standard that is expected of local government councillors."

A further section of the report concerns the grading of the principal officer with responsibility for the offices of the leader and chairman of the council. The auditor concluded that Councillor Speechley and the then deputy leader sought to interfere and improperly influenced the outcome of the principal officer's regrading claim, such that she was awarded a higher salary than she was properly due. In his conclusions on improper pressure and misuse of power, the auditor says

> "certain majority group councillors, in particular Cllr Speechley and former Cllr Mawby have stepped beyond the proper bounds of conduct for members in staffing matters".

However, a further illegal payment has come to light of £150,000, which came in the form of a grant to QV Foods. Shortly after a site visit by Councillors Speechley, Croft and Taylor, there was a meeting between those councillors, the owner of QV Foods, the then deputy leader Councillor Mawby and the then director of highways and planning. At that meeting, the owner of QV Foods was told that the policy committee would be asked to agree to a payment of £150,000 towards the cost of a road improvement.

Warning was given by a DTI official who wrote to the council, stating that the proposed payment would be in breach of state aid rules, would be deemed unlawful and would be liable to repayment. Nevertheless, that payment went ahead. The public interest report says:

> "The payments to QV Foods were unlawful . . . The whole exercise was no more than a device in order to circumvent the State Aid rules . . . The payments were unlawful both in terms of domestic and European Law."

In the same vein, certain majority group councillors let officers know that they preferred certain matters not to be aired in council, committee or sub-committee.

> "The PIR notes that as a result officers relied upon the former Chief Solicitor's delegated authority when they ought to have advised members that the matter did need to go before Council, Committee or Sub Committee."

That gives a flavour, albeit rather distasteful, of the standards of conduct of the leader and some other councillors at Lincolnshire county council. In the wake of the public interest report, a number of things have happened. First, the county council set up a standards committee. At the time, it was the only county council that decided to set up its standards committee without any representation from the opposition groups. However, I am pleased to say that, because of external pressure, including pressure from the Under-Secretary, the council reviewed its original decision to appoint a one-party standards committee and has now put that right.

An action plan in response to the public interest report has been drawn up, and credit must go to the officers and councillors who seek to be positive in such a difficult environment. The matter is not just one of individuals but the culture, the very essence of which needs to be changed.

Councillor Jim Speechley has been re-elected as leader by the Conservative group, although a recorded vote at the full council meeting showed that 11 Conservatives were not in agreement with the action. It is that that has most shocked and outraged my constituents, and rightly so. I am repeatedly asked how such a thing could happen. The crux of the question about county councillors' standards of conduct is how the leader of a council can be found guilty by the council's independent auditor of involvement in the illegal use of council taxpayers' money, of bullying and of systematic abuse of power, but still remain in post, not only as a councillor but as leader, a post that is reaffirmed by his political party.

Political parties should put their own houses in order. We all have a responsibility to police the conduct of our elected representatives and to take action if that falls short of expectations. Not only has the Conservative group on Lincolnshire county council failed to grasp the nettle—albeit that there are many dissenting voices—so has the Leader of the Opposition. On a visit to Lincolnshire earlier this year, the right hon. Gentleman said that he would be very happy to see the results of the investigation and act upon them. However, he has had access to the public interest report, and we are now told that the matter is best dealt with locally.

Finally, to add confusion to inaction, the office of the Leader of the Opposition has advised that the party chairman, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), was having discussions with Councillor Speechley, but both parties say that no such thing is happening.

Unison has strongly advised its members not to attend any meetings with Councillor Jim Speechley unless accompanied. It is a sad day when a union believes that it has to do that. As leader, Councillor Jim Speechley has personally appointed the members of the executive who will run the council and has appointed each of the 19 special interest members. There has been no apology, no recognition of unacceptable conduct and no change at the top; just a wider and deeper hole of political management into which decent standards can fall.

I applaud the action that the Government have already taken to improve standards of conduct for county councillors: a code of conduct, which must be observed and signed up to; a standards board, which can oversee the implementation of the new ethical framework; and acceptance of the Nolan committee's proposals—most notably, a new criminal offence of misuse of public office, which I urge the Under-Secretary to introduce as a matter of urgency. That robust framework will help restore public confidence in local democracy and help protect and promote the role of councillors.

This is a time of tremendous change, and I am pleased that we can and will look forward to better things in Lincolnshire. However, I look to the Under-Secretary on this point; because the events outlined in the public interest report into Lincolnshire county council predate the new regulations, they do not apply. Therefore, they are of little comfort or use to my constituents, who have been taken for a ride by unscrupulous county councillors who should hang their heads in shame, and not deny, defend and reinforce their own positions.

It will take a long time for Lincolnshire county council to regain the public's trust, and it has now become clear that that will happen only with external intervention. Council tax payers, service users and staff need to be reassured that the conduct of county councillors is decent, legal and in the interests of the people of Lincolnshire. I urge the Under-Secretary to do all in his power to ensure that that happens.

1.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Christopher Leslie): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Gillian Merron) on securing the debate and providing the opportunity to debate standards of conduct in local government, especially county councils.

I start by setting out strongly my belief that the vast majority of members of local authorities observe the highest standards of conduct. We are privileged to have such a large body of men and women who are willing to devote time, energy and enthusiasm to the service of their communities. All hon. Members, not just those who have served on local councils, will be aware of the commitment and the high standards displayed by council members in every part of the country.

The strength of local democracy, the delivery of effective local services and the vitality of local communities depend heavily on the commitment and the willingness to serve shown by elected members, who speak up for their communities in council debates, take tough decisions on local priorities and the allocation of large budgets and lead partnerships to tackle many of the country's most difficult social problems. We should not take that commitment for granted; we are lucky to have high standards of probity, accountability and propriety in this country.

However, we cannot disguise the fact that failings sometimes occur. There have indeed been cases, albeit rare, in which elected members have fallen short of the conduct expected of them and it is all the more serious that such misconduct has an impact that goes far beyond the damage done to the particular local authority in which it takes place. Misconduct by councillors, when it occurs, harms the community they are elected to serve and the wider reputation of local government in the rest of the country.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln referred in great detail to some extremely serious matters relating to the auditor's report in Lincolnshire. I appreciate her concerns about the county council. I echo hon. Members' feelings about the need to identify and challenge poor performance in local government.

The auditor for Lincolnshire county council recently issued a public interest report in respect of the council, which identified a breakdown in corporate governance at the authority and the failure of legal and ethical safeguards. In the auditor's view, that led to unlawful payments being made to council staff and to a private company. The auditor made a number of recommendations to the council to ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place for the future.

I understand that the council accepted that it acted unlawfully in various areas. A committee of the council has recommended the setting up of a framework of measures to address the auditor's concerns, which we welcome. The auditor's role is to consider the adequacy of the council's response to his report, and to take decisions on follow-up action. Such action might include issuing a further report on the council's position.

Auditors are independent officers, appointed by the Audit Commission. The issuing of a public interest report, as in this case, is a matter for the auditor. It is then for the council to consider action in the light of the recommendations made. The Government expect all public servants, whether they are officers or elected, to uphold the highest standards of integrity in carrying out their duties.

[Mr. Christopher Leslie]

Although I have no remit to intervene in the auditor's role in this case, I fully recognise the concerns expressed in the debate on the need for action to be taken when poor performance by authorities has been identified. Authorities who do not uphold high standards of integrity let down the people they are supposed to represent and to serve. In the case of Lincolnshire, the auditor has put the ball firmly back in the council's court. It is now for the council to demonstrate to local people that it is prepared to take vigorous action to address the concerns identified. The auditor, and the Government, will look closely at the council's response. The council accepts that it acted illegally, which should serve as the starting point for its action.

The auditor will base his decision on the next steps to take on the willingness shown by the council to tackle the problems, and on any evidence of progress in putting an action plan in place. The Audit Commission may take into account the auditor's assessments of such authorities when it carries out its comprehensive performance assessments. The assessment process for Lincolnshire will begin in July. Information from the assessments will identify councils that are failing and provide a vehicle by which action can be monitored and shortcomings addressed. Where a council is identified as failing and there is little or no prospect of improvement, the Government will not hesitate to apply intervention measures if necessary. We are determined to tackle poor performance by authorities, and are prepared to intervene in cases where intervention is needed.

I want to highlight measures that the Government took before my appointment to improve the new ethical framework that applies to county councils and local governments. Promoting high standards of conduct in local government is an important objective for the Government. If we are to re-invigorate local democracy and enable councils to provide the local leadership that communities need to deliver the services they want, we must establish a high degree of trust in local councils.

The White Paper, "Modern Local Government—In Touch with the People", was published in July 1998. It proposed a new framework to support high standards of ethical behaviour. The new framework is an integral part of the modernisation agenda, and is no less important than the need to modernise constitutions or to provide the right mechanisms to support service delivery. It must provide a robust, efficient, fair and effective means of investigating misconduct allegations and dealing with any councillors found to have misbehaved. It must also demonstrate clearly to the public that misconduct will not be tolerated, that the highest standards are expected and that investigations will be thorough, consistent and not influenced in any way by party politics.

The Local Government Act 2000 put the framework into effect. Two of the most significant provisions of that Act are the introduction of new codes of conduct and the creation of the Standards Board for England. I will return to those provisions in a moment. In accordance with the Act and following consultation, the Government made an order in April last year that sets out 10 general principles that should underpin the conduct of members of local authorities: selflessness; honesty and integrity; objectivity; accountability; openness; personal judgement; respect for others; the duty to uphold the law; stewardship; and leadership. Those principles summarise what is expected from local councillors, and provide a yardstick against which their conduct can be measured.

In November last year, again following significant consultation, the Government laid before Parliament a set of model codes of conduct which draw on those principles and lay down more specific requirements. They build on earlier national codes of conduct and include some familiar provisions. They require, for example, the registration and declaration of interests. They also provide a more sensible and simple framework for handling personal interests, which should ensure that councillors can take part in more frequent discussions in which they have expertise but no prejudicial interests.

The codes have been generally welcomed, especially by counties and other larger authorities. There have been some complaints from smaller parish and town councils, especially about the registration requirements that are being introduced to parishes for the first time. I am confident that many of the concerns, especially those based on exaggerated press reporting about the detail required, will be eased as councillors grow familiar with the new codes. It is important to mention that within two months of the adoption of a new code of conduct by an authority, its members must make a written declaration that they will observe it. Failure to do so will mean that they cease to be councillors.

I understand the concerns expressed today about the need to take decisive action where the conduct of elected members does not meet the highest standards. The Government have recognised the need for more robust and effective mechanisms to allow cases of misconduct to be investigated and dealt with. We have put in place the Standards Board and other elements of the new ethical framework, which will ensure that complaints can be investigated independently and thoroughly. In the most serious cases of misconduct, the adjudication panel that has also been established will be able to disqualify members from holding office for up to five years. I am confident that the new framework will provide a sufficiently rigorous mechanism to address the general concerns that have been raised today.

From 5 May 2002, the provisions of the new codes have applied to all councillors. Any allegations that the code has been breached can be reported to the Standards Board for England, which decides whether to investigate. The board, under the chairmanship of Tony Holland, to whom I pay tribute, includes members with considerable expertise and experience of local government and of wider ethical matters. Since the creation of the board last year, a good deal of work has been undertaken to appoint ethical standards officers who will be responsible for investigating cases, and to set up systems needed to support their work. I know that the board has already received a small number of allegations and is conducting investigations; I am confident that its procedures will be efficient and rigorous.

In addition to its responsibilities for investigating misconduct allegations, the Standards Board has the wider role of promoting and maintaining high standards of conduct in local government. Last month, the board held a successful first assembly of standards committees in Birmingham, attended by around 1,000 members, officers and others. I have no doubt that the board will prove to be a strong force for promoting greater confidence in local democracy. It is worth noting that councils, other than parish councils, are also obliged in law to establish their own local standards committees that will take responsibility for standards issues in local authorities.

As we conclude this very welcome debate, it is worth emphasising once again that the new ethical framework was not introduced by the Government because of any systematic corruption in local government or widespread failings in the behaviour of elected councillors. The reverse is the case; we believe that the vast majority of local councillors are fundamentally honest, selfless and committed to the service of their communities. The framework is necessary because we need to convince others of that fact. In particular, we must demonstrate to local communities that their councillors have signed up to the highest standards of conduct and that the machinery is in place to deal with any shortcomings. The old conduct framework had too few effective means of dealing with acts of misconduct that were not necessarily criminal or likely to involve financial loss, but which were nevertheless damaging to the standing of local government.

It is regrettable that genuine cases of misconduct arise. However, the new framework with the Standards Board at its heart will be well placed to handle such cases, and to demonstrate the priority given—in local and central Government—to tackling misconduct.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at two minutes to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 13 June 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Railways

[Relevant documents: First Report from the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee Session 2001-02 HC 239-I, and the Government's response thereto, CM 5472.]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

2.30 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): It is always a delight to see you in the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, not least because I am sure that you are one of the few people who can keep us in order with charm and talent.

An important part of the work of a Select Committee is to consider in considerable depth subjects of concern to the voter and traveller, as well as to the House of Commons and House of Lords. The Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions has an excellent record in considering urgent problems with care and in sufficient detail to be able to suggest one or two in-depth and important solutions.

The railway system was thrown into total chaos at the time of privatisation. The system needs to be integrated, and to be focused on safety and comfort. Its fragmentation has cost us dear. When the Government came to power, they took time to put a Transport Bill on the statute book that was capable of transforming the railway system and of having an immediate impact on how it was reorganised. I regret the length of time that that process took, as I am sure do many other people.

It was useful that the Select Committee chose to examine the refranchising of the railway system when there was considerable feeling that the privatised industry was not carrying out the tasks that it had been set at the time of the original changes. Once the Committee began to consider the problems in detail, it found that the division between a rail track authority and individual operating companies had not produced smooth integration or an efficient use of resources for the travelling public.

It did not surprise us that criticism of Railtrack, which was core to the railway system, was widespread. We found its performance entirely woeful. We thought it significant that one of the largest corporate fines ever imposed by a regulator had been imposed on Railtrack, because of its failure to fulfil its set task and its apparent inability to change or improve to ensure a better rail system.

That matters for both Her Majesty's Government and the traveller. The railway system is fundamental not only to transport but to economics and the quality of people's lives. The ability to move people and goods about is so fundamental that we all pay an enormously high price if the system goes wrong. The Committee found that, in the split between a core service such as Railtrack and the train operating companies, there was an immediate difficulty with the interfaces—in knowing who was responsible for what and who would be able to put right mistakes that arose.

We said that we wanted Her Majesty's Government to undertake several tasks. First and foremost, we said stability was needed in the industry, and that it should be returned as soon as possible with a high level of expertise and confidence. It is an extraordinary fact of life in this country that more than 3,000 people are killed every year on the roads, yet four or five deaths on the railways give rise to long and frequently virulent campaigns against that form of transport. We realise that that is because there are fewer major accidents on the railway system. Nevertheless, we had a good opportunity to say what had gone wrong.

The first problem was manifest: Railtrack was not in control of fundamental aspects of the rail system. The use of contractors and the constant dilution of the safety case almost inevitably meant that it had difficulty assessing the quality of the work that was being done to maintain and improve the railway. It often had insufficient trained staff within its own complement to ensure that it knew what was being done in its name. Furthermore, the nature of its relationship with the operating companies meant that those involved tended not to suggest ways of working together to produce the best system, but to blame one another for various aspects of railway administration. It would have been better to decide such issues jointly, and to operate in a useful, co-operative mood.

We said that first and foremost it was important that the Government had begun to understand that the Strategic Rail Authority, which they created, had not, under its previous chairman, played the role that we had hoped it would. It had not produced plans, leadership or a clear view of where it was going.

It then became obvious that Railtrack was in considerable financial difficulty. Some hon. Members will argue this afternoon that it was entirely viable and, indeed, capable of meeting all its debts. Choosing its language carefully, the Committee said that, on balance, it did not think that that was the case. It said that the previous Secretary of State was right to say that Railtrack's constant reiteration of its need for extra funds and the fact that it returned to the Department for extra support were clear enough indications of its problems and of the need to put it into administration.

The previous Secretary of State was very open with the Committee. He gave us clear evidence, and offered to show us the minutes of his meetings. I always find it interesting when Ministers are sufficiently confident to offer Select Committees minutes of meetings in which they have taken part. That shows that they, at least, are happy with what happened.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Dunwoody: The hon. Gentleman is ruining my career again.

Chris Grayling: May I remind the hon. Lady that the minutes of the key moment of the key meeting disappeared, and were written a number of weeks later?

[Chris Grayling]

We always welcome openness through the publication of minutes, but there was no timely record of what took place at that meeting.

Mrs. Dunwoody: We must be fair to the former Secretary of State. He sat in the meeting, and he thought that the minutes existed. Indeed, he offered the Committee a copy of them, and we really cannot expect more of a Minister. Had previous Governments followed the same practice, a lot more information about what was happening would have come into the open much earlier.

The Committee's argument was not with the previous Secretary of State. He said that the Government could show that Railtrack was failing, because it was still going to them for more money. It did not fulfil its key objectives or hit its targets—that was the opinion of the rail regulator, not the Department. After a difficulty one emotionally charged weekend, the rail regulator told the Committee that Railtrack was the author of its own misfortune. He said that for the simple reason that it had never consulted him about its financial difficulties. Had he been asked, he would have had the chance to do something about its economy, but he was rung late on a Saturday night and asked whether he could produce millions of pounds by the Monday morning. Not surprisingly, he said no. At no point did Railtrack return to reopen those negotiations. To be fair to the previous Secretary of State, he was quite open with us in the information that he provided.

We said that it was essential for the successor company to Railtrack to focus above all on safety, maintenance and performance—not profit. We said that it had to be set up quickly, and that Railtrack's period of administration had to be ended as soon as was useful and possible. We said that we wanted a successor company to have direct responsibility for inspecting the network and to employ directly those responsible for its maintenance and renewal. We wanted much greater emphasis put on the engineering skills and experience of the staff.

I am a member of the National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers. It is clear from the evidence—I am speaking for myself and not for the Committee—and the constant stories that I have been told about the way that contractors work, that even if they have been slightly misled, the majority of people working for contractors are very worried about safety standards, how people are trained and the way that they are allowed to work on the rail system. The workers believe that safeguards are not in place and that individual contractors have been only too willing to turn a blind eye to the abandonment of practices essential to the protection of railwaymen and railwaywomen. That calls into question the quality of the maintenance and operation of the rail system.

Above all, the Committee was very concerned that Ministers did not appear to have a contingency system in place. It did not require a very great brain to foresee that Railtrack might get into difficulty. The company did get into difficulty, and we were surprised that Ministers were not ready with an alternative and had to take rapid action in a short period. We thought that the information available ought to have been acted on even earlier, and that that ought to have been very plain, even to the Government.

We want the successor to Railtrack—whatever it is called—to have sufficient money to be able to carry out its job. The modernisation work that is still required in the rail system will need large sums of public money, and that will continue for a long time. It cannot be funded by the fare box. The Treasury must accept reality and stop arguing that somehow or other there is a magic formula—that other people can be made to pay. We suggested that a full assessment should be carried out before using any alternative source of funding.

We heard a lot about special purpose vehicles. The Committee was unconvinced of the future efficiency of such schemes, because little detail was supplied as to who would be responsible, who would take the risk and who would have ultimate responsibility for any disruption to the network. There were no detailed arrangements for transferring enhanced assets to Railtrack's successor. Those are all important questions. If we do not have answers to them, it is difficult to judge whether a new form of financing called a special purpose vehicle will be the answer to our prayers.

We also believe that there was an opportunity, in the allocation of the new franchises, to rethink the future of the railway. We can argue about whether privatisation could have been a success, but the reality is that this is an integrated system. The operators must work together, not as independent companies, because rail has no opposition. Fashionable economists might say that the opposition to the railway system is the motor car or the plane—the bicycle has not yet been cited, but I am sure that it will be in due course. However, the reality is that for those who need to use trains there are very few alternatives. The idea that when one cannot get a train one can always hop on a bus begs an important question, because buses take far longer, do not necessarily go where one wants to go or turn up when one wants them to turn up. Buses cannot be regarded as a substitute for a train service. The Government and the House of Commons must confront that problem.

The argument originally used at the time of privatisation was that subsidy from the public purse would gradually disappear, because companies would become so efficient that they would be able to replace all the cash. That has manifestly proved to be nonsense, and many of us said so at the time—sometimes it is nice to be able to say "I told you so". It is clear that the railway system will largely depend on the public purse for one, two or three decades. Only by supporting an efficient rail system can we reap the benefits.

We want the Government to take short-term measures and to renegotiate many of the franchises, based not on how many pennies can be extracted from private enterprise partners but on the quality of work. Like other hon. Members, my postbag is full of the hundreds of letters that I receive every day detailing the conditions in which ordinary passengers travel—not only those who travel into the centre of large cities but those who travel between cities. Those of us who use the west coast main line do not need to be told about the conditions, because we are subjected to them every week.

This country has a real problem. If we want an efficient form of transport, we shall have to pay for it, but not, as appears to be happening at the moment, by train operating companies constantly putting up their fares above the level of inflation or making railcards virtually unusable through the terms and conditions that they apply to them. Those companies comply with a price cap for only a very small number of services.

People need and want to use railways. If they have clean, comfortable and safe transport, they will enjoy using railways, but they will not leave their cars at home if the Government continue to make motoring cheaper and travel by public transport more expensive. It is not an argument between the car and the bus: those who use the train frequently drive to the station and those who get off the train at the other end frequently take some form of wheeled transport to get to their destination. The Government must accept that they need a coherent policy that encourages more people to use public transport. The way to do that is to ensure that it is reasonably priced, safe, clean, comfortable and absolutely reliable—that it arrives when it is supposed to arrive and gets to where it is supposed to go. Our report sets out some straightforward undertakings that we thought were important. The plan that we proposed is useful and could be followed by the Government to advantage.

I shall say one short word about the work of the Transport Committee and Select Committees in general. As long as members of such Committees attend often enough and remain through the sittings, they will hear a variety of evidence, including many written submissions. Indeed, the evidence submitted to us is varied and sometimes contradictory, but it is always useful. People who are called before our Committee as witnesses have given interesting written evidence. That places responsibilities on Members of Parliament: they have to turn up, do their homework, think reasonably intelligently about the questions that they will ask and surprise themselves by listening to the reply—a task that does not always enamour itself to politicians. I believe that since it was constituted after the 1997 general election, the Select Committee has done a responsible job. It worked hard and produced many more reports during the first Session than any other Select Committee. It has continued to address the whole gamut of transport issues during this Session. If it is dissolved, that will be a great loss, and if it is replaced by a slightly more amenable Committee, I shall not be surprised. The House of Commons operates best when it has sufficient confidence in its hon. Members to allow them to ask difficult questions of any elected Government, to wait for the replies and to use that process as the basis of its reports. That is how it has always operated.

This report is slightly different from some others because it contains a clear minority report from two Committee members who are part of Her Majesty's Opposition. Therefore, unlike the others, it is not a totally agreed text. However, that is an exception. The majority of the Committee's reports have been agreed, because some people give a little and others are prepared to abandon one or two of their beloved ideas. That is how Select Committees work, and it is a credit to the House of Commons and to the parliamentary system.

I have regarded it as an honour to chair the Committee and have enjoyed it. I find it very amusing. I do not regard myself as in the pocket of the Conservative Members, or even of the Whips Office or the Back-Bench Labour Members. However, to have served on a Transport Committee that has, if I might say so immodestly, produced high-quality and properly researched work, is something that I value and that I hope the House of Commons will continue to value.

2.51 pm

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): On a personal note, may I declare a number of interests with which the members of the Committee are only too familiar? I owned shares in Railtrack and own shares in Eurotunnel and First group, but it is not my intention to set up as a financial adviser. In view of the latter remarks of the distinguished Chairman of the Transport Committee, the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), may I say what a privilege it has been to serve under her chairmanship. It is no secret that politically and personally we do not agree on everything. Sometimes she must feel that we agree on nothing, or very little. However, I have learned a huge amount from her, and it has been a privilege to serve under her and her colleague, the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett). Long may that continue.

I should also like to put paid to certain allegations, nuances and innuendos that were made in a recent article in *Tribune* magazine. It may not surprise you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that I do not normally subscribe to the magazine—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I must ask the hon. Lady to confine her remarks to the report.

Miss McIntosh: There were allegations that there was all-party support for the main Committee report. As the Chairman has just said, Conservative Members did not, regrettably, hijack the main Committee report, despite our best endeavours, but we felt so strongly that we were moved to table a minority report. It is a matter of regret to me that we were unable to persuade distinguished members of the Committee to join us in our views. There is still time before the end of the debate for them to change their minds.

The Chairman commenced by saying something with which I disagreed. She called the process of privatisation faulted and fragmented. That is the main issue on which the minority report showed a strong difference of opinion. I do not wish to dwell on that, but if the argument is that the fundamental process of the original privatisation was flawed, the Government compounded that fragmentation from 1997 and made the situation worse. They created the Strategic Rail Authority and the Office of the Rail Regulator and then proceeded to ignore the advice of both. We have recorded our disappointment in the minority report and in the main report.

The previous Secretary of State ignored the advice of the former chairman of the SRA, notably with regard to his recommendation to give a long-term renewal of the east coast main line franchise to GNER, which was my personal wish. I do not have a financial interest in GNER, but I use it most weekends to go home and I know that constituents overwhelmingly supported such a franchise renewal. The decision not to award a long-term renewal of that franchise is jeopardising GNER's investment in rolling stock, which is regrettable for the travelling public.

[Miss McIntosh]

Even more serious was the fact that the then Secretary of State overruled the advice of the rail regulator, particularly when Railtrack was put into adminstration. I do not wish to revisit this old chestnut but, in my view, contrary to what the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich suggested, the incontrovertible evidence was that Railtrack was commercially viable and had returned a very good financial result in that year. That is why our minority report tabled a robust amendment in paragraph 26(a) on page 56 expressing our extreme concern that, following the Government's refusal to support Railtrack and their decision to force it into administration, private sector confidence in the railways has evaporated.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Would the hon. Lady care to reflect on the evidence that the Committee received that, in spite of suggestions that a review by the rail regulator may have been appropriate in January, it was not taken up by Railtrack and, indeed, not taken up when the High Court agreed the administration order.

Miss McIntosh: I do not want to get drawn into a long, protracted argument on this point, because, with the greatest respect to the hon. Gentleman, there is evidence that points to the contrary. Railtrack did not oppose the order in the High Court for the simple reason that we had taken powerful evidence from the rail regulator that he had, as an independent adviser, given certain advice to the then Secretary of State that he would recommend that Railtrack be allowed to have the rescue package. That is regrettable, especially given the Government's 10-year transport plan. Approximately 55 per cent. of the £34 billion of investment forecast in the 10-year transport plan for rail transport is to come from the private sector. I firmly believe that, by putting Railtrack into administration, the then Secretary of State destroyed industry and private sector confidence and security in any future investment that it may have had. Should the Minister wish to agree with me, he need not respond to that point, but if he disagrees, perhaps he would argue his case to rebut the minority report.

Over the past five years, the Government have failed to act to improve rail freight. There is all-party agreement in the Committee and elsewhere that more freight should be moved by rail instead of by road. Ministers in the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and in the Home Office—I gather that this is largely a Home Office matter—have failed to act to improve rail freight through the channel tunnel. That is a matter of regret on which the Committee commented several times, and it has had a great impact. The Government have failed to meet even their targets in the 10-year transport plan. I have tabled several parliamentary questions on that subject, but have not yet received satisfactory answers. As a result of the Government's failure, one of the companies involved, English Welsh and Scottish Railway, has had to take a complaint to the commission and losses have been incurred, not least by Potters of Melmerby in my constituency.

I am delighted that the Committee will visit northern England to take evidence on railway franchises and operation. In the minutes of evidence for Wednesday 10 April, on page 9, paragraph 28, I had the opportunity to ask the present chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority whether the poor industrial relations and bad strike record of one of the applicants for the new franchise currently operated by Arriva Trains Northern, formerly Northern Spirit, might jeopardise its case. I was delighted that Mr. Bowker said that that would be taken into consideration.

With regard to our second conclusion at paragraph 26(b), if the Strategic Rail Authority is to remain a viable force, the Government must allow it to operate independently, free from Government interference, and it must be held to account and publish an annual report and update its strategic plan. I hope that the Transport Committee will hold the SRA to account.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich also referred to the relationship between contractors and Railtrack. I do not disagree with her entirely, but I hope that the recommendations in the Cullen report will be implemented as soon as possible. As a shareholder, I have taken a keen interest in these matters, but I understand that it is not unusual for independent contractors to provide their services as subcontractors to other engineering systems besides the railway. I regret that the three central recommendations of the Cullen report on managing contractors were not implemented by the deadline of March 2002—that was mentioned in *Railnews*. I fervently hope that the Committee and the House will put pressure on the Government to ensure that those three central recommendations are given effect as soon as possible.

Many questions remain unanswered following the demise of Railtrack, including several points to which the hon. Lady and the report referred. For example, false hopes were raised by the previous Secretary of State on the funding of Railtrack from April last year, particularly with regard to Renewco. It is deeply regrettable that on 5 October, after the October deadline, the Office for National Statistics ruled that the use of Renewco as a vehicle would run counter to Government policy. It would have been deemed to have had public sector spending implications and would therefore be considered inappropriate. I believe that that gave false hope to Railtrack—the company and its shareholders. That is regrettable.

Despite the hon. Lady's most charming exhortations, and despite the fact that we were in agreement with many of the Committee's conclusions, we had no alternative but to make a minority report. In it, we record the fact that we were appalled at the Secretary of State's decision to apply for railway administration. We believe that future private sector investment, to which the Conservative party is still committed, has been jeopardised because its security appears to have been threatened by the unilateral decision to put Railtrack into administration. The demise of Railtrack and the failure of the previous Secretary of State to agree long-term franchise renewals will have far-reaching implications for the whole railway industry.

Looking ahead to Newtrack, the successor company to Railtrack, we had the opportunity to question the previous Secretary of State on the specific detail of how the private sector would be involved. However, on page

45, paragraph 157, the minutes of evidence show a distinct lack of clarity from the Secretary of State. The Committee heard compelling evidence from much of the industry, which thought that its ability to contribute would be threatened.

We have a new Secretary of State for Transport, and I wish him every success. I wish to declare an interest. The right hon. Member for Edinburgh, Central (Mr. Darling) and I are both non-practising members of an elite club—the faculty of advocates: we are members of the Scottish Bar. I hope that he will succeed where others have failed. I hope also that the Committee, and any future Committee, will hold him to account, and that it will monitor and scrutinise the Government's ability—or inability—to meet present and future targets.

I commend our minority report to the House. It proved that the previous Secretary of State failed to achieve the Government's targets.

3.7 pm

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): I want to refer to those sections of the report that deal with the future of the railway infrastructure. First, however, I wholeheartedly concur with the congratulations and warm regards that have been expressed to my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). She has been described as formidable—she has been described also in less congratulatory tones—but in all her doings, I have never had her down as a knife-wielder. I echo the warm regards.

I shall confine my comments to the strong recommendation in paragraph 54 on page 29 that

> "the Government should consider the role and responsibility of the Strategic Rail Authority in relation to maintenance, renewal and development of rail network."

I shall return to those words, which I believe are crucial.

Unlike the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh), I believe that the action taken in October 2001 by the previous Secretary of State was right. The majority report certainly reflected that, as the majority of the Committee believed that there was no alternative. Rail privatisation has been a disaster. Disaster is the appropriate term, as it has been a financial and economic disaster and, in some tragic ways, a human disaster.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman refers to a human disaster. It is important to remind hon. Members that the Cullen report specifically says that safety on the railways has improved rather than worsened since privatisation. We all regret deeply the tragic accidents that have happened on the railways in recent years, but they cannot simply be attributed to privatisation.

Mr. Stevenson: The hon. Gentleman is correct in his assertion about that report. My view—and we shall have to agree to disagree—is that although the railways remain a relatively safe method of transport, we have witnessed, and continue to witness, human disaster. I make no apologies for raising that point.

Privatisation has been a disaster for the railways. I shall refer to the future and emphasise three problem areas, which are noted in the report, that the Government have begun to tackle only partly. I emphasise again that I welcome the previous Secretary of State's decision on Railtrack in October 2001. Any cursory glance at the evidence shows that the problems were remarkably consistent throughout the industry. Three factors exposed our railways to enormous blight: the pre-eminence of the profit motive and shareholders' interests being put before safety; the fragmentation of the industry; and the confidence that needs to be generated, particularly from the private sector, if the Government's 10-year investment plans are to have any chance of success.

I want to deal with the Government's action and the contents of our report on the profit motive. It has been damaging to place shareholder interests before anything else. The evidence was clear from the previous chief executive of Railtrack—he is now the chief executive of Woolworths, although that is another story. There was a clear conflict between the profit motive and shareholder interests and the safety and infrastructure of our railways. The evidence is clear, and the question is whether we can be confident that the Government's actions since October and their pronounced intentions for a replacement will remove the conflict between the profit motive and the interests of the railways. *[Interruption.]* My hon. Friend the Minister is nodding his head. I understand why he is gesticulating in that way.

The previous Secretary of State said in his evidence to us that his preferred model was a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. I am not sure how certain he was about that intention, because he said:

> "I am not sure that is the model that we will end up with at the conclusion of the period of administration."

It is clear that he was not, by any stretch of the imagination, entirely sure that the preferred model would lead us to where we all want to be.

My concern, which is reflected in the report, is that a not-for-profit company without shareholders will still seek to make a profit. Profits may be ploughed back into the industry instead of going to the shareholders, but they remain profits. That is an important point. It is not a subjective view, but one shared by the rail regulator, Mr. Winsor, in his evidence to us. I will not go through the whole of his evidence, but I shall quote one piece of it. He argued that the not-for-profit company should operate on a commercial basis, and when I asked him how he interpreted that, he said:

> "The company is operating so as to make a profit and avoid a loss."

The rail regulator, who is responsible for setting the financial framework in which the new company will operate, is already saying that it will be a profit-making company. The new company may not distribute profits to shareholders, but the profit motive is clearly central to its establishment. Other factors also indicate that, in spite of the Government's well-intentioned and necessary actions, we will still have a railway industry shot through with the profit motive.

We are told that we could have 15 special purpose vehicles, which constitutes investment by the private sector in the development of strategic rail capacity. I readily admit that I am not a member of the honourable company of advocates and am certainly not an economist—I am an ex-bus driver who used to work down the pit. However, one does not have to be a person

[Mr. Stevenson]

of letters to recognise that if a private company invests heavily in an infrastructure project, it will want a rate of return. It is unrealistic, if not naive, to suggest that private investment in special purpose vehicles will not be subject to the maximum transfer of risk from the private to the public sector and to a rate of return that will make our eyes water.

Those two realities, in addition to the status as a so-called company limited by guarantee, convince me, as a privileged and proud member of the Select Committee, that the railway industry will remain shot through with the profit motive. The fact that the public purse will pay for those profits is neither here nor there, because we will have shareholders in special purpose vehicles and a company looking to make a profit. Who says so? The rail regulator. I am not convinced that the Government have minimised the profit motive. All the evidence received from across the board suggests that the profit motive and the running and development of our railways are simply not compatible.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I apologise for interrupting the flow of the hon. Gentleman's remarks, which are fascinating. Before he moves away from the specific issue of the new Railtrack body, does he agree that tough regulation is needed for any monopoly? Whether that regulation would be enforced through the SRA or another regulatory body is a matter for separate debate. There is a duty to ensure that everything is done in the public interest, as competition regulation requires. Does he agree that the Government's model of moving to a not-for-profit company or a company limited by guarantee is better than the existing one, but could be significantly improved if the public interest were emphasised more?

Mr. Stevenson: Yes. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, but I shall return to that point in my concluding remarks.

The other blight on the industry is fragmentation. The minority report did not challenge the evidence for that, as any member of the Committee who sat through the evidence will know, but I note that many Members present did. Let us consider how the Government propose to remove this blight, which should be removed or at least minimised. The Government are telling us not to worry about it too much as they anticipate that as the years roll by we will have 10 or 15 train operating companies and 10 or 15 franchises, not 25. The rail regulator appears to take the same view. Fine. We will wait and see if that rationalisation happens. I know that the Government accept that fragmentation has blighted the industry, as the Secretary of State says so.

Miss McIntosh: Without going into any great detail, let us assume that there is a difference of opinion. The hon. Gentleman argues that there is fragmentation. Does he agree that the Government compounded that fragmentation by creating the Strategic Rail Authority and the rail regulator, and then dissociated themselves from the advice of those bodies?

Mr. Stevenson: No, I do not accept that. The Committee produced a report, which I believe was unanimous, that congratulated the Government on setting up the SRA. This is the first time in many years that a strategic vision has been possible. I am not the only one who says that. We based our report on evidence, not individual opinions. I asked Mr. Christopher Garnett, the chief executive of GNER,

> "would you agree that one of the major blights on the railway industry has been fragmentation?"

He said, "Yes." That is not a political or dogmatic opinion, but a statement from a major player in the railway industry.

What have the Government given us? We had Railtrack, and we have the SRA and the rail regulator. The new company, Network Rail, will look after the maintenance of the current network, and the SRA will be responsible for developing the new network, which is another split. Some 15 special purpose vehicles will develop their own bits of railway throughout the country. There will also be up to six regional companies, which are offshoots of Network Rail. If fragmentation is a blight on the industry, how will the new structure reduce fragmentation? I argue that it will do exactly the opposite: it will increase fragmentation, which does not bode well for the future development of the railways along the lines indicated in the report, which we all want.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): I presume that the hon. Gentleman signed up to the majority report. I shall highlight two paragraphs. In paragraph 29, the Committee expresses its concern about the new franchise for East Anglia going to Liverpool Street and states that it is not convinced that having one franchise operating from one London terminus is a good thing. However, in paragraph 56, on vertical integration, the Committee concludes that there is no evidence that vertical integration would work. How could the hon. Gentleman sign up to both of them?

Mr. Stevenson: The debate on vertical integration was interesting. Some doubts were expressed, particularly by the train operating companies, that vertical integration was the way forward. I share that doubt, and the sections of the report to which the hon. Gentleman referred reflect that. The situation in London is not typical of what the rest of the country is experiencing, but although the hon. Gentleman is right to quote from it, the tenor of the report in many paragraphs reflects the evidence that we took that fragmentation is a blight on the industry.

Mrs. Dunwoody: It is important to understand that all the companies told us that vertical integration has not been proved. They do not know whether it will work, but they are frightened that the Government might take an area, such as Scotland, do a trial and then say to the rest of the country that it works in that area. It is an important point. There is no inconsistency in the arguments. There was [illegible] clear acceptance by the industry that it had no evidence that vertical integration would work.

Mr. Stevenson: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's intervention.

The last matter that I want to mention is investment and confidence in the future. It will be no surprise to hon. Members that I have serious concerns about the removal of the profit motive. As I have said, I think that the industry will still be shot through with the profit motive in the future. I have also expressed my concerns about fragmentation, which is likely to get worse in spite of the Government's best efforts. Rather than the actions of the Secretary of State being to blame for the private sector's diminished confidence about investing in railway infrastructure, it is those two areas that the City and the private sector have doubts about. Until we act decisively on those two areas, the confidence that we need from the private sector will not be forthcoming.

What do we need to do? I think the logic is compelling. All the work that is being done—or not being done, as in the case of the east coast main line—on the railway infrastructure is, with one exception, either paid for directly or guaranteed by the taxpayer. As an example, I quote from my questioning of Mr. Grant, then the chief executive of Railtrack, about the east coast main line. I asked him who is paying for it, and he replied, "SRA is paying." I asked, "In total?" and he said,

> "In total . . . The agreement reached so far . . . is for £28 million of development work."

The SRA is paying for it; the Government are paying for it. I asked the Secretary of State who is paying for the east coast main line and he confirmed that. I also asked him who is paying for the west coast main line.Every single penny of phase 1 of the west coast main line—in excess of £4 billion—is coming from the public purse. The second phase is being held up because costs have escalated to £7.5 billion, £10 billion—who knows?—and the Treasury is baulking at the prospect. All the infrastructural investment in this country's railways is, with one exception, either guaranteed or paid for directly by the public purse. Public sector responsibility for railway infrastructure is important. It is abject nonsense to split the maintenance of our current railways from the development of new railways.

The entire railway infrastructure, including maintenance and development, should be incorporated within the Strategic Rail Authority, for which the public has paid and will continue to pay. We do not have the commitment to the public interest that the circumstances demand. As we heard in evidence, the private sector invests in rolling stock, but not necessarily in infrastructure, and has a formidable job to do in operating our trains. The interface between the public and the private is not the Government but the rail regulator. In future, the Government—probably the present one—will be faced with that compelling logic. We are half way there: we now need the Government to take the next step in the public interest.

3.30 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I rise to speak as co-author of the minority report and co-hacker, but I start by paying tribute to the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) who was a fair, if robust, Chairman of the Select Committee. The idea that anyone could hijack her Committee is a fantasy writ large.

I also pay tribute to Select Committee members of all political persuasions. Our debates took place in good spirit, despite significant divisions over certain aspects of the report. It was a happy and constructive Committee and I hope that the reconfiguration following the reshuffling of Government portfolios will not destroy the Committee's valuable parliamentary contributions. Parliament would be a poorer place if the Committee failed to make the same constructive criticisms that it had in the past.

I shall start by focusing on aspects of the minority report and then ask the Minister about developments that took place since the report was published, which remain pertinent to its content.

Government Members have spoken about privatisation. I am no universal defender of every aspect of it. Some aspects did not work as intended, but I do not accept that everything bad is attributable to privatisation. There is much to be proud of in rail privatisation—not my words, but those of the Strategic Rail Authority in its plan published in January. The SRA is a creature of Government. We should recognise that consensus exists between the Government and the Opposition that privatisation included much to be proud of and has worked quite well.

The minority report refers to the strong growth in rail usage since privatisation and to the investment in new locomotives and wagons in the freight industry, and in rolling stock in the passenger industry. It highlights many positive developments on the network during the past few years. It also provides some specific examples of private companies making a difference—the Chiltern franchise, for example.

I was brought up near the Chiltern line, which today bears no relation to the form that it had under British Rail. There are services and new lines on the route now that would never have been dreamed of in those days. Services now go to Kidderminster and Birmingham when once they made it up a single track to Banbury. That is one example of positive developments. Likewise, we are now seeing an expansion of cross-country services from Basingstoke to East Anglia and on a number of other routes throughout the country. There have been some powerful service innovations since privatisation.

The rolling stock industry is another example of success. Indeed, other countries are seeking to adopt the leasing formula, which has been a strong way of delivering substantial new rolling stock to the network. Having been ordered two, three, four and five years ago, that stock is now beginning to come on stream, and that is one of the real fruits of rail privatisation.

I intervened when the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) referred to safety. I differ from him on this point, although not in relation to the circumstances of the individual accidents that have taken place, because they clearly resulted from structural, operational and human failings within the privatised rail industry. My point is that those failings are not unique to the privatised industry. I think back to the Clapham disaster of 15 or so years ago, when human error and failings in the engineering environment caused a disastrous accident under BR. Over the history of BR, there were many such incidents, but every incident, whether under BR or the private sector, is regrettable and lessons have to be learned.

I cannot escape the conclusion that came from Lord Cullen, of all people: the trend of improved safety on the railways that has been the case over generations has

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continued since privatisation. Any of us who jumps on the bandwagon—I am not accusing members of the Committee, but it does happen in this place—to accuse rail privatisation of having caused accidents is in danger of undermining confidence in the rail industry, and we all know that that would not be the right thing to do. Rail is a safe way to travel—much safer than the roads—and we should do nothing to undermine it while working to improve it.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): No hon. Member would blame privatisation for all safety problems on the railways, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is aware of the respected commentator, Christian Wolmar, who regularly writes on railway matters. In his most recent article, he says of safety on the railways:

> "We are back to the way the industry was privatised and fragmented, which introduced a new and incalculable risk into the railways which has caused these disasters: interface risk."

Did not privatisation introduce a new risk into the railway system and is not that why Mr. Wolmar concludes:

> "The Tory ministers who foisted an unworkable structure on the railways have blood on their hands"?

Chris Grayling: I know, like and respect some of Mr. Wolmar's work; I do not always agree with him. In this case, I prefer to take the opinion of Lord Cullen, who looked exhaustively through all the evidence surrounding the accidents into which he chaired inquiries. His report clearly says that the trend of improved safety on the railways has continued since privatisation.

Mrs. Dunwoody: May I point out that that trend started under British Rail? Some of the things now claimed for the privatisation of the railways are actually changes that were instigated by the safety divisions of British Rail. Central door locking is a classic example; it made an immediate impact on the number of deaths. The two-year period afterwards was directly attributable to what happened under British Rail.

Chris Grayling: I still say that I have yet to hear anyone seriously dispute Lord Cullen's conclusion that over generations the trend of improved safety has continued. As I said, there have been structural failings, but it is not right to say that all the problems are because of privatisation.

The minority report aims to highlight our severe misgivings about what took place last year. As Opposition members of the Committee, we are committed subscribers to the idea of the importance of the railways. However, we believed that the actions of the Secretary of State last year were likely to retard rather than help the development of the railways, and I fear that subsequent events have reinforced our views on that front. We heard a number of worrying elements in the evidence. There were inconsistencies from the Secretary of State and some degree of evasiveness, for example, in the reporting of his meeting with John Robinson, the chairman of Railtrack last July. There was a lack of willingness to answer questions.

The Secretary of State strenuously avoided answering the question, put to him repeatedly, about the date on which he took the decision to draft the proposed legislation to bypass the rail regulator and to remove his right to carry out an independent review of Railtrack's finances. We subsequently learned from the reports about the meeting that he held with Pam Warren a month before Railtrack was put into administration that he had been thinking about it for a considerable period before he took the decision. Pam Warren's evidence made it clear that the decision was not taken at the last minute.

We heard about a lack of consultation. I was particularly worried that the Secretary of State should have dived into a process like this without taking serious advice from the people who could have steered him one way or another. Sir Alastair Morton told us that he knew nothing about what had happened. The Strategic Rail Authority knew nothing about it. Tom Winsor, the rail regulator, knew nothing about it either: his evidence showed that he was shocked when the Secretary of State told him what was planned.

Much of that has come home to roost. It contributed significantly to the Secretary of State losing his job. We have also seen the Government forced into a U-turn over compensation to shareholders. Their initial dogmatic approach was that shareholders do not matter but they have now been forced to face the reality that one cannot walk all over shareholders and expect to carry on regardless in an environment where private money is needed. Ironically, the Government will end up spending more than Railtrack asked for in the first place.

Mr. Stevenson: While the hon. Gentleman is on that subject, would he care to attempt to answer the question that I asked of the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh)? Why did Railtrack not take up the option of seeking a review from the rail regulator in January of the year in question and still had not taken up that option nine months later?

Chris Grayling: My immediate answer is that I think that the Railtrack management was very foolish not to object to the High Court action and not to pursue its claim for an interim review. However, I can understand why it did so, given that it had just discovered that the Secretary of State, in an almost unprecedented step, had informed the independent rail regulator that if he took a decision that favoured Railtrack he would have his powers removed by Act of Parliament.

Mr. Stevenson: This is a crucial question. I am not talking about the events of late September and early October that were reported to us in evidence from the rail regulator, but about events of the previous January. Why, from January to October, when Railtrack had a perfect entitlement to seek a review of its financial base, did it refuse to take up that option?

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point. We have to think back to the timing of the establishment of the budget for control period 2, which was produced immediately after the Hatfield crash, although the detailed work was done before then. As the financial consequences of Hatfield became more clear, Railtrack became increasingly aware that it would require more money. At the same time, Tom Winsor was making a number of public statements to say that Railtrack was over-ambitious in its financial demands. He used the phrase "begging bowl".

Early last summer, one of the City institutions that provided finance to Railtrack wrote to the company expressing grave concern about its relationship with the rail regulator. I know that because I have seen the letter. It said that if the matter was not resolved, it would undermine the company's ability to raise finances in the markets in future. My belief is that there was a fundamental breakdown in the relationship between the rail regulator and Railtrack, which ultimately led it to go to the Government rather than the rail regulator to sort out its financial problems.

Miss McIntosh: I apologise for disturbing the flow of my hon. Friend's speech. The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) seems to be disingenuous in overlooking two points that I raised, one about Renewco and the other about the interim review. Renewco was meant to be part of the funding that was disqualified only after Railtrack was put into administration, which might be another reason why Railtrack did not oppose the High Court review.

Chris Grayling: I thank my hon. Friend for that. It is important to remember that John Robinson said publicly that he did not ask the Government for more money. He asked them most immediately for a letter of comfort that would enable Railtrack to raise bond finance in the markets.

Mrs. Dunwoody: Will the hon. Gentleman explain to those of us who are very simple the difference in real terms between asking for money and asking someone to guarantee every penny that is borrowed?

Chris Grayling: The key issue is the lack of confidence in the City that led Barclays Capital to send a letter to Railtrack to say that future powers to raise bond finance would be jeopardised by the problems between the company and the rail regulator. The purpose of seeking a letter of comfort was to reassure possible investors that the Government would continue to support Railtrack and provide funding for it.

Mr. Don Foster: I have a sense of deja vu. It is perfectly possible to debate who said what to whom and when and where, and to say that the issue was not well handled. Equally, we could have a debate in which we say that we want to get on and put the solution in place as quickly as possible.

We have been over the ground many times, and I would be much more interested to hear whether the hon. Gentleman believed that all would have been well had the then Secretary of State done nothing whatever. Alternatively, does the Conservative party have a solution to what was undoubtedly a problem that had to be solved one way or another? The then Secretary of State at least had a solution, and I would love to hear what the hon. Gentleman's was.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that I have been doing hon. Members the courtesy of responding to questions that they have raised. I mentioned that I intended to go on to some of the substantive issues that face the industry, and I shall do so now. In a debate on the report, it is important to explain some of the context for the divisions in the Committee and the publication of the minority report.

The consequences of administration and Government decisions on passenger rail franchising are proving extremely serious for the industry, and I want to set out some of the reasons why. Most immediately, the factor that has not been adequately taken into account in consideration of the industry's situation is capacity. Many of the practical problems on the network are caused by the fact that there is simply no space. During the past five to seven years, there has been almost unprecedented growth in the number of people using the railways, to the extent that there are more passengers today than there were before the Beeching cuts, with a network at a fraction of the size.

We see the consequence of that in the performance figures. Last week, 70 per cent. of services by South West Trains arrived on time. As a regular user of South West Trains, I realise how full the trains are on that network and how easily the timetable gets out of kilter for hours if something simple goes wrong. The capacity problem is at the heart of the rail challenge that the Government face. Unless that is tackled, we will not see the improvements that the rail network needs.

A tragic consequence of that background, and the reason for my main criticism of administration, has been the confrontational environment that it created. The industry should have worked together to deal with its problems, reshaping by consensus not by confrontation in the courts, if reshaping was truly necessary to deliver improvements. Another consequence has been a delay in the major projects needed to ease the capacity problems.

I shall give a specific example. South Central operates from Victoria to Brighton, and has other routes that head down through my area, among others. South Central has a project on the books to upgrade its line, to create new flyovers and to do station improvements for new loops that would greatly improve the capacity problems on its network. When Railtrack was put into administration, it had a team of 200 people on that project, working towards the creation of a special purpose vehicle that could make it a reality. That team has been disbanded. A skeleton staff of 12 people are now working on the project, which will take years to revive. The delay has happened and the team has been disbanded because there is nobody to work with it on the infrastructure side in the long term.

The Government are causing problems for the future development of the network by over-reliance on organisations that are concepts and not realities. The first is Network Rail. I wish Network Rail well, because it is the only option that the Government have left us with. However, it is a shell company with a small group of people, mostly financiers, operating out of an office in Tottenham Court road. It has no expertise in transforming railways. We hope that it will deliver and succeed. However, there is no reason to believe that it has the ability to deliver something that Railtrack could not.

There are fundamental questions about Network Rail. Who carries the risk? What happens if something goes wrong? Tom Winsor has said repeatedly that

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shareholders bring a cushion against things going wrong, because if they do, the shareholders lose their money. What happens if something goes wrong in Network Rail, such as major cost overruns or major under-performance in the business? Who carries the can and picks up the cost? The inescapable answer is the Government. There is nobody else. Who is accountable and responsible for Network Rail?

I have found it particularly frustrating in recent weeks asking the Department questions about Network Rail. It is a company that has been established by the Strategic Rail Authority, and its senior directors were recruited, and paid, by the SRA, but the Government continue to behave as though it were a stand-alone company for which they have no responsibility. If something goes wrong, who is accountable for Network Rail? We have no answer. The Government are clear that they are not, but I am far from clear that they can shirk that responsibility.

Mr. Foster: I happen to agree with the hon. Gentleman's concerns. However, I would go further. We have the ludicrous situation in which the SRA is meant to make recommendations to the Secretary of State for the future while separately, but borne by the SRA, another company is making its recommendations. The Secretary of State is meant to choose between the various bids, yet we know that he has already made up his mind. A great deal of money is being wasted in the production of alternative bids that will fail because the new body will succeed.

Chris Grayling: The Government have been lucky in that those who were preparing alternative bids and ideas have not banged more strongly on their door, especially since the developments in March.

The other concept area is that of special purpose vehicles, to which the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South referred. They are untried, untested and unestablished. We are months, if not years, away from the establishment of a special purpose vehicle that can start to deliver improvements on the network. However, I have spoken to senior people in the rail industry who have real doubts that those vehicles can be established and can work.

There are fundamental financial issues about special purpose vehicles. First, the Government depend almost entirely on such vehicles to deliver the 10-year plan for transport. We recently heard in evidence to the Select Committee from the previous Secretary of State that there is only some £4.5 billion of uncommitted cash in the 10-year plan from the public sector for investment in the railways. The rest is for routine subsidy or specific regular routine maintenance grants for Railtrack, which include only the west coast main line, and money for the channel tunnel rail link or for paying debt—the interest on the private sector contribution. So, of the £33 billion of public finance, there is only £4.5 billion spare. That means that the £34.5 billion of private sector finance in the 10-year plan for the railways has to take up most of the slack in delivering improvements.

That is where the special purpose vehicles must play a vital role. But how will that work? One can set up a special purpose vehicle, which is effectively a public-private partnership scheme, to make station improvements or to modernise the east coast main line, but ultimately a separate company cannot own the east coast main line in isolation from the rest of the network, because it is not a separate, stand-alone entity.

Even if we find contractors who will put together a financial package and take on the modernisation of the east coast main line, at the end of the process, the line must be transferred back to Network Rail in some way. Assuming that the people who had built the line would want to be paid back, Network Rail would have to buy it back, either in cash up front or in long-term liabilities.

Out of the £34.5 billion, £7 billion or so is allocated for rolling stock investment and will come through the leasing companies, but the other £25 billion to £27 billion is infrastructure investment that will be channelled through special purpose vehicles. At the end of the process, that investment will have to be bought back by Network Rail.

The successor is a company limited by guarantee, owned by we know not who, controlled by we know not who, that needs to start off by raising £9 billion of debt in the City and then needs to buy £25 billion of assets from various special purpose vehicles during the next 10 years. The basis for that is a business that, as Railtrack, had a turnover of £2.3 billion. Does anyone understand how that arithmetic will work? Does anyone think it credible for a company to have debts that are 10 times larger than its income? I do not believe that the current model will or can work. The problem is that although special purpose vehicles can deliver some of the improvements needed they can provide only a fraction of what is necessary. The 10-year plan is stuck in a siding and I do not understand how the current financial approach will get it out.

It is important to remember that the report began as one into passenger rail franchising, but circumstances on the networks steered us down the infrastructure side. We were, and we should still be, extremely critical of the introduction last summer of short-term franchise renewal—the two-year extension to the GNER franchise is an example. The Government have defended the practice using the example of the Midland Mainline two-year franchise extension, saying that it has not affected investment. However, that is disingenuous, because the Midland Mainline extension was a two-year extension to a closing date far in the future. We effectively turned a franchise with five years remaining into one with seven years remaining. GNER is not like that. The extension was for two years and it is a short-term measure.

We know, because we took evidence from the company, as my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) said earlier, that GNER will not invest in rolling stock in the way that it had hoped and expected because of that short-term franchise extension. Common sense says that if somebody is given a two-year extension to a franchise, they will not rush out to make major investments in the network. The Government need to be careful before going down that path again and I hope that there will be no more such franchises.

We also need clarity about the number of franchises that we are to have. I believe that there were too many, although I temper that remark by saying that if we get rid of some of the smaller franchises, we might get rid of some of the more successful ones. The Chiltern franchise has done so well that one would not wish to replace it. However, there have been too many franchises. I was particularly concerned by the Government's decision to create a separate Wessex franchise and split the South West Trains franchise into two. I am delighted that the SRA is holding consultations on that proposal at the moment but I wish that the Government would draw that consultation quickly to a close and get on with a single franchise for the whole of the south-west.

The Government's actions over the past few months have exacerbated the industry's problems, which were undoubtedly there already. They are now creating a situation where projects are being delayed unnecessarily because of the hiatus in the industry. The danger now is that it will become impossible to deliver the 10-year plan, not just for financial reasons but in logistical terms. All those projects will be condensed into such a short period under the plan that it will be logistically impossible to build them all at once. It is a shame that our country cannot afford to do so, because we need to get things moving.

I urge the Government to get at least some of those much-needed projects under way. They must do what they can to ensure that Network Rail gets Railtrack out of administration quickly and to sort this mess out. If they do not, I fear that the Committee—in whatever guise it takes—will return to the issue in two or three years' time and come up with a report that makes the Government as uncomfortable as our recent reports have made them.

4 pm

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): Although I am not a member of the Transport Committee, I am pleased to have the chance to take part in this vital debate. Paragraph 71 of the conclusion to the Committee's report states:

> "As the Prime Minister has said, there are two reasons why the problems with the railways have arisen. The first is related to privatisation which 'is generally accepted to be a disaster'... Secondly, there is the under-investment in the industry which went on for 'a considerable period'".

We have heard much about the disaster of privatisation, the problems caused by the fragmentation of the railways and privatisation's destruction of the safety culture. I shall not repeat those arguments, but instead confine my remarks to issues that, while somewhat historical in nature, are none the less pertinent to the report.

In 1833, the Great Western Railway company was formed to build a railway from London to Bristol. Such moves were supported in Reading by public opinion and by the Liberal-supporting paper, the *Mercury*. It was opposed by the landed gentry, and the paper that was set up to support the Conservative cause, the *Berkshire Chronicle*. Despite strong support, the first Great Western Railways Bill was defeated in the House of Lords, but a second Bill, in 1835, was successful.

The line reached Maidenhead in 1838, but because of the difficulties caused by the construction of the Sonning cutting, it did not reach Reading until early 1840. On 24 March, just before the line opened, a freak whirlwind struck Reading: it drowned two fishermen in the River Thames and tore off a 4-ton section of the station roof, hurling a young man, Henry West, to his death. His colleagues erected a memorial to him in St. Laurence's churchyard in Reading. As an aside, I should mention that the whole episode often features in pub quizzes in Reading. I shall return later to the problems caused by high winds.

The expansion of the railways saw Reading connected to Newbury and Hungerford in 1847. In Basingstoke in 1848, the Great Western line linked up with the South Western line from London to Southampton. In 1849, Reading's South Eastern station opened on the line connecting Reading with Guildford and Reigate. In 1856, the completion of the line between Wokingham and Staines gave Reading a second link to London, at Waterloo.

That growth in the rail system was matched by growth in Reading, with the result that Huntley and Palmer biscuits were eaten all over the empire. That growth also allowed the seeds grown by Mr. Sutton at his Royal Berkshire Seed Establishment, which were widely known among British farmers, to be exported all over the world. The tin boxes of Huntley Boorne and Stevens were taken on the railways, and iron founding and brick and tile making all grew.

The great age of the railways stretched from the 1850s to the first world war. Very little investment took place during the war, and some people blame the subsequent state of the railways on that. To remove the duplication and waste of resources caused by the existence of more than 120 companies, the Railways Act 1921 created the big four companies. In his excellent book, "Broken Rails", Christian Wolmar describes the big four companies' unsuccessful attempt to achieve profitability, which in turn led to serious under-investment. The London and North Eastern Railway company paid no dividend to shareholders and chose to invest any moneys in the system, whereas GWR paid the highest dividends, and although some companies invested in the electrification of the heavily used southern commuter routes and in creating extra capacity on the east coast line, GWR undertook little electrification.

After the second world war, the railways again suffered from years of intensive use and under-investment. Contemporary accounts record that nationalisation was rushed, which resulted in as complex a management structure as privatisation created 50 years later. Furthermore, the Government paid over the odds: shareholders in the big four were paid £20 billion at current prices. It is interesting to compare that figure with the £2.5 billion received for Railtrack in 1996.

In the 1950s, a modernisation plan was drawn up to deal with predicted future losses by investing heavily to reduce costs—in particular, in mass electrification and the introduction of diesel trains on branch lines. That plan resulted in the electrification of the west coast main line and investment in new trains, but then the tap was turned off. Thereafter came the pro-roads Transport Minister, Ernest Marples—the man who started serious motorway building in this country and who, amazingly, owned a company that did very well out of the massive investment in new roads.

Mr. Marples employed Beeching, who proposed making massive cuts in the railway network. If Beeching's report had been implemented in full, there

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would remain only lines to the north-west, Glasgow, Edinburgh and south Wales, but the implementation of his report was patchy, with some profitable routes being axed and other loss-making and duplicated routes surviving.

Barbara Castle's Transport Act 1968 heralded some improvements. The 1970s saw the electrification of the east coast main line and the introduction of high-speed trains out of St. Pancras station and on the western region lines out of Paddington station. At the time, however, they were seen as a low-tech solution that would be replaced by the advanced passenger train. Although the 1980s saw massive fare increases, and the boom of the late 1980s saw passenger numbers increase, the advanced passenger train did not happen; and the recession of the early 1990s and the fall in the number of passengers led to privatisation.

We are now back at the conclusions of the Committee's report. In his review of the 50 years of state control of the railways, Christian Wolmar talks about the problems caused by stop-go investment, and adds:

"the biggest mistake of successive British governments has been the failure to think strategically and to develop the kind of grand plan whose success makes the British so envious when they travel on the French TGV system."

Huntley and Palmer, Suttons, Huntley Boorne and Stevens, the iron foundries and the brick and tile makers of Reading have gone, to be replaced by Microsoft, Oracle, WorldCom, Thames Water and Prudential. I have been into some historical depth to illustrate the lack of investment in the western region for most of the period since the first world war. Our railways, both private and state-controlled, have been given promises of investment that, by and large, have not materialised.

The western region has not been electrified, except for the stretch used by the Heathrow express. One of the reasons that I was given for the lack of electrification was that Cornwall was too windy for the overhead wires, which would be blown down by Cornish winds. I am grateful to my constituent, Dr. John Missenden, for telling me that when the same overhead wire system was sold to China in the 1980s, it was described as typhoon proof. Reading has had only one whirlwind, and I am sure that the overhead wire system could have stood up to it.

To that extent, I wholeheartedly support the recommendation of the Select Committee report at paragraph 62:

"that the Strategic Rail Authority should implement a programme of electrification without delay."

It could do no better than start with the western region. However, the Government's response to that recommendation was:

"The SRA does not believe that electrification is a current priority for investment . . . The SRA believes that the benefits of electrification are not as clear cut as they were twenty or thirty years ago. It is . . . expensive to provide both the necessary infrastructure and the high standard of reliable power supplies which modern electric trains require. There is also now no significant fuel cost saving between the use of diesel and electricity. Similar performance characteristics and noise levels between modern electric and diesel powered trains mean that most passengers can no longer discern any difference between them."

I am sure that that is all true. However, the Government's response makes no mention of the undoubted environmental benefits of electrification.

At Reading station, we have a capacity bottleneck that Railtrack's network management statements said was one of 10 worst in the country. We have had more than a decade of promises from Crossrail of a line from Reading to the east of London, passing under London en route, but it is not built and we still face reports on its viability and consultations on what its route should be. The west coast main line is receiving an upgrade to its upgrade, and planning is being don for the upgrade of the east coast line upgrade. The strategic plan for the Strategic Rail Authority was finally published at the beginning of the year, and the Select Committee's report details the delay and disappointment. Yet the same plan timetabled any work to modernise or upgrade the western region for the very end of the 10-year period, offering jam tomorrow, yet again.

There is now a route from Heathrow to Paddington, but there are no plans for a route to link with the western region and only a half-baked plan to link up with the railway somewhere south-west of the airport. Reading is at the crossroads of north-south routes and routes between London and the west. Movements on those routes cause conflict at Reading station, which has reduced its capacity. Reading borough council has been talking to developers about redeveloping the area around the station, which could pay for some of the other improvements that I have mentioned, but what chance is there that those who currently run the railways would be interested in working together on such improvements? As much chance as there has been for the past 50 years of electrifying the western region.

This morning, I received a document from the Railway Forum entitled "Building the Railway for the Future: Update 2002". Based on the work of the distinguished transport economist, Dr. Rana Roy, it states that estimates of potential growth contained in the 10-year transport plan are understated. The original document, "Building the Railway for the Future" said that the estimates of railway growth were underestimates, as a result of congestion charging being introduced sooner than expected and because of higher than estimated growth—and there will be even higher growth in future. It is important that railways develop to accommodate that growth, rather than rapidly increase prices to choke it, causing even greater environmental damage as people turn to their cars. There is another debate to be had about how price increases have disadvantaged public transport users by comparison with car owners during the past 25 years.

Railway safety is another important issue. We must be careful that, as a result of a few high-profile accidents, we do not focus too much on spending all investment on railway safety rather than on improvements to the system.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Does the hon. Lady share my concern about the lack of investment to provide extra coaches on popular services that are heavily used, particularly those in rural areas, where there might be a service only every two hours? There seems to be a deliberate attempt to minimise the amount of space available in order to choke demand; meanwhile, as she mentioned, investment is made in safety measures, which do not have the same beneficial effects of encouraging people to get out of their cars and travel by rail.

Jane Griffiths: I share the hon. Gentleman's concern about lack of progress on increasing the number of coaches, but I do not agree that it is a deliberate ploy. I simply want to warn against such a strategy, which would fail regardless of its effect on the railway system.

Since privatisation, there have been eight deaths a year as a result of train accidents. That compares with an average of 3,400 deaths a year on the roads. It says something about our society that we seem to be more relaxed about deaths on the roads.

Mr. Don Foster: The hon. Lady raises an important point by comparing safety on roads and on rail. Is she aware that new statistics have been published today which show that there has been a 1 per cent. increase in road deaths in the past 12 months? One per cent. might appear a small increase, but it represents about 34 additional deaths—far more than the total number in any year on the railways. That illustrates her point even more forcefully.

Jane Griffiths: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right.

The railway service from Reading to London is fine. Sufficient trains come from Wales and the west country that passengers do not need to use a timetable: they just turn up at Reading station and catch a train within 10 or 15 minutes. Journeys elsewhere are a different matter. A member of my family who lives in Cornwall needs to travel regularly to Bristol: she leaves three hours leeway to ensure that she arrives at meetings in Bristol on time.

I talked about the past and present in relation to the report, but I shall conclude by talking about the future into which the report must lead us. There should be an electrified western region, from Reading to the south-west and Wales; Crossrail should finally be introduced with Reading at its western end, offering a link from Reading and the west straight through to Stratford and the channel tunnel rail services; and there should be a link to Heathrow airport on to the western region from the west. That would make it possible to have an airport and channel tunnel check-in at Reading station as they have on similar stations on Swissrail, which allow luggage to be checked in and dealt with before reaching the international plane or train. Reading station should be rebuilt to increase capacity as part of the redevelopment of the station area.

I talked earlier about the important part that railways have played in Reading's growth. It has become more than a sleepy market town as a result of its place on the transport network; it is at the centre of a region that is helping this country's economy to expand, and it is important for Reading, the region around it and the whole country that there is a modern and efficient rail network. We will not have such a network if we repeat the mistakes of the last century and fail to invest. I have set out a vision for the future of rail, but it is up to the Government, the Strategic Rail Authority and the companies to implement that vision. I call upon them not to fail in that challenge and not to allow the under-investment that characterised the last century.

4.16 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): On behalf of Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National party, I welcome the Committee's excellent report. We do not have a minority view on it, as we do not have a place on the Committee—indeed, we have no place on any departmental Committee, but that is a separate complaint. The report shows the stamp of the Chair, who is to be congratulated on her sterling work in the past few months in keeping the issue alive and at the top of the political agenda. It is a long time since railways dominated the political agenda as they do now. I would say that some of the responsibility for that lies with the former Secretary of State for Transport, the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers), who dug some holes that he did not have to dig, but some of it certainly lies with the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). She should be congratulated on that, and the Committee as a whole should be congratulated on the report.

I intend to address three key aspects of the report that affect Wales and, to an extent, Scotland: first, the delays in the franchising procedure—Wales and the borders will form one franchise area for the first time, which is a huge step forward but the delay is of great concern; secondly, the placing of Railtrack in administration; and thirdly, the nature and some of the limitations of the 10-year plan. I shall start with the 10-year plan and the underfunding that can clearly be seen in it, especially in the light of what we want to achieve in Wales.

I was interested to hear the hon. Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) outline her plans, which were not in the least ambitious. My ambitions for Wales are even smaller and more minor than her plans for Reading. The Minister knows what those plans are, but they are as far from fulfilment as they were two years ago, and almost as far from fulfilment as the hon. Lady's.

The 10-year transport plan allows for £60 billion to be spent on the railways by 2010, of which half will come from public funds. We have questions about exactly how the rest will come from the private sector, but that subject has been discussed already. The Committee's report makes it clear that the Government must give a commitment to that public funding. If long-term funding does not come from the current Government or future Governments, the switch to roads will continue, there will be an increase in road traffic and a failure to deliver on the Deputy Prime Minister's promise. A 1 per cent. increase in road deaths can be linked to the increase in road traffic, although that is somewhat decoupled from the growth in gross domestic product.

In the Welsh context, that £60 billion amounts to only £20 million a year, whereas a rough calculation based on the Barnett formula and the needs of the Welsh railways gives us a figure of about £300 million a year. That is backed up by work from Professor Stuart Cole from the Wales Transport Research Centre. Wales receives about a fifteenth of what it needs. The Minister was challenged on that when he gave evidence to the Select Committee. My hon. Friend the Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) helpfully asked him whether Wales was being short-changed. His answer—"Yes"—was even more helpful. It is now clear that it is less a matter of short change than of no change. What will the Minister do to rectify the problem? We have some short-

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term ability to rectify it, mainly because the National Assembly is plugging the gap with its own funds even though it has no responsibility for rail, but in the long term—over the 10 years of the plan—there is a huge funding gap for the railways in Wales.

My constituency offers a prime example of how the problems are affecting Wales in general. The National Assembly has been working with the Strategic Rail Authority and the companies to agree a £6.5 million upgrade of the line from Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth. All we want is an hourly service, the reinstatement of some sidings that were removed in the 1980s so that trains could pass on a single track and to save costs, and an upgrade of the Dovey junction. I do not know if anyone has been to Dovey junction, but it must be the loneliest junction in the world. If anyone got out there, they could not leave without another train coming to pick them up, because it lies in the middle of a marsh. Nevertheless, it is vital as it is where the line from Aberystwyth diverges up to Pwllheli and the north Wales coast. It is a hugely important line for tourists, and for linking local communities in a rural area.

We will not be short of the £6.5 million—at least, no one says that finding it will be a problem. The National Assembly put up £2.5 million of its own money from a transport grant, and the SRA earmarked £4 million. However, the plan was put on hold just before Railtrack went into administration, and it is now no further forward. I understand that that is to do with engineers and the Railtrack's inability to undertake the work. I am talking to the bidders for the Wales and borders franchise about whether they are prepared to take on the work as part of the bidding process, as there is no reason why the company that takes over the franchise cannot undertake the part of the work for which Railtrack was responsible and use the money available to employ engineers from other private companies.

Small but significant regional upgrades like the ones in my constituency are being overlooked in the planned, but not yet delivered, massive investment in the south-east of England and in schemes such as the train protection warning system. I hope that the companies are amenable to them in principle, as the SRA was when I talked to it. I hope that the Minister will take up the proposal and use some of his good offices to whisper a suggestion in the right quarters. If that were to come off, many people in mid-Wales and in the National Assembly would see that the relationship between his Department and the Assembly has become better in recent months, even though it is due in part to the Railtrack fiasco.

The process of franchising in Wales is currently a minefield. Eight pre-qualified parties want to run the Wales and borders franchise. I believe that one recently withdrew—the Minister might be able to say something about that—but there were certainly eight in the initial announcement. The parties have been disgruntled by the way in which the SRA has handled aspects of the franchise process. The first guide for the franchise was produced only after the bidders had pre-qualified—they pre-qualified for a process without knowing what the guidelines for it were, which is a curious approach. The companies now within the franchising process complain that they do not have sufficient insight into the criteria used to measure the selection of the final company, despite the fact that the draft franchising statement of June 2001 said that

> "all bidders . . . must be aware of the criteria upon which their bids are being assessed."

Clearly, we have another hole.

A final problem is that the aspirations of people in Wales have been raised. The National Assembly has its own transport infrastructure projects and ideas involving buses, road transport and community transport. The railways are not devolved, but Welsh people's expectations about what can be achieved by railways have been raised. The companies applying for the Wales and borders franchise know that those aspirations cannot be met by the present subsidy for the Welsh franchise.

We were initially promised some redress for the years of underfunding in Welsh railways, but it is now clear from the facts ascertained so far and from the evidence given to the Select Committee that no significant move in that direction will be forthcoming. The Government have recently significantly increased investment in railway infrastructure of the UK as a whole, but if we focus on the regions and nations of the UK, glaring gaps emerge—gaps that could create huge problems in future.

Emergency cuts were made in Wales and the borders when Aberystwyth and Wrexham services took over the shadow franchise last winter. Organisations such as the Shrewsbury and Aberystwyth Rail Passengers Association and I were told that cuts were necessary to make the timetable work, and we had to accept that. What is really annoying is those cuts have now been removed from the core franchise. In other words, the core franchise is now what is was minus the cuts, yet the cuts were made on an ad hoc, temporary basis. We have already lost, if not a whole arm, at least a hand from the Welsh railways, a loss that will affect their reach to Pwllheli and Wrexham.

Significant difficulties remain with the Wales and borders franchise. They all revolve around the precise sum of money made available within the franchise area for Wales. The Government and the Strategic Rail Authority seem to have made a reasonable proposal. The major railways infrastructure is based in the south-east of England, where 70 per cent. of rail journeys take place, so the major investment is focused there; but we will miss a trick if we fail to remember the small and significant improvements that could be made elsewhere in the United Kingdom which could enhance the number of journeys and the comfort of passengers. The mid-Wales lines, which have two carriages, are dreadfully overused in the summer, and at weekends, when students go back and forth from the midlands to Aberystwyth, the services are dreadfully overused. The handling of franchising in Wales is confusing and is unlikely to deliver even the minimum aspirations of people in Wales, which were raised following the refranchisement process and the headline figures of fairly massive investment at UK level.

I conclude by dealing with the business of administration and Network Rail. Both my party and the Scottish National party fought the last election on the principle that Railtrack should be renationalised. We felt that it was the safest, quickest and cleanest option. Because the stock in Railtrack had fallen, it was reasonable for the Government to buy it back until it had a 51 per cent. controlling interest in shares. If that had been done, compensation would not have been such a burning issue. The Government could have reassumed control of Railtrack without the mess that the administration created. Bob Kiley, who is now responsible for the London underground, used that model for the New York subway. It would have given us the necessary public ownership without completely alienating the private sector, which is a danger in the current handling of the matter. I support the need for Railtrack to come back in to the public fold, but I question whether Network Rail is the correct vehicle with which to achieve that.

The speeches from the hon. Members for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) and for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) are relevant to the replacement for Railtrack, Network Rail. The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell will recall that Glas Cymru—Welsh Water—was used as the model. The Glas Cymru model is interesting and would bear examination by hon. Members from outside Wales. There is no question that profit has been taken out of Welsh Water; there is still profit, but it is now being ploughed back into the company. It does not go to shareholders, which is a positive move.

On the question of accountability, which was touched on by the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South, there is no element of democratic or public accountability within Glas Cymru. It was promised that Glas Cymru would draw members from all sections of Welsh society and that the executive and non-executive directors and the board of management would reflect the interests in Welsh society. However, the old officers and guard—I should probably not use the word "hacks"—of Hyder have turned up again. There has been no expansion of public accountability or any element of public ownership in Glas Cymru.

Glas Cymru seems to be working well at the moment, which pleases me. It is a different way of trying to deliver private sector control over utilities, but I would not confuse what Glas Cymru is doing with public ownership or control. Accountability has not been resolved with Glas Cymru or in the proposals for Network Rail.

Chris Grayling: I draw the hon. Gentleman's attention to another difference between Glas Cymru and Network Rail. He rightly referred to Glas Cymru's ability to plough money back into the business. However, economic ups and downs mean that railway revenues rise and fall, while water company revenues, because they are regulated, tend to be reasonably static and reliable. Therefore the weakness in the Network Rail model is that if there is a major downturn and revenues fall significantly, there is no cushion to absorb short-term financial problems.

Mr. Thomas: I accept that point, and it is notable that Glas Cymru got its bonds in the City on the basis of the regulator's comments about its prices over the next five years. The quinquennial review by Ofwat gave Glas Cymru its collateral to get the bonds in the City. Network Rail will not be able to do that in the same way because of the recent history of administration and the differing nature of income streams that the hon. Gentleman pointed out.

I hope that Network Rail succeeds and that there will be an element of public accountability in the new body. However, the Minister should take the opportunity today to say how the members of Network Rail will be appointed. He must answer the key questions: who will appoint the members, and who will then appoint the executive and non-executive directors? Any shadow of public accountability and ownership rests on those questions, and if they cannot be answered satisfactorily, the euphoria of several months ago about the idea that administration was taking Railtrack into public ownership will dissipate. We will be left with the fact that Network Rail is a private sector company in a different form, which should concern Labour Members.

A key lesson that we picked out from both the Committee's report and the recent experiences of railway infrastructure in Wales is the need for stronger devolutionary procedures. I will not argue for the immediate devolution to the National Assembly of responsibility for railways in Wales, but that is my party's position, and the Scottish National party holds the same views about railways in Scotland. However, I believe that the role of the representatives on the SRA needs to be strengthened. A member is appointed to represent Wales and a member is appointed to represent Scotland, although they have a slightly different remit in legislation. The National Assembly must be able to discuss the needs of Wales with that member, and able if necessary to issue some form of instruction about how they should be argued. That is almost the case in Scotland, although the position could be beefed up a little.

At present, we have representation without a voice. It is representation selected by the Department—there is no real interface to allow the National Assembly's views to be voiced at a senior level in the SRA. That must change because the Assembly is responsible for all other aspects of transport in Wales. If we want an integrated transport system, we must get better collaboration in Wales. My personal way of achieving that would be to have a passenger transport authority for Wales, but that is some way down the line. In the meantime, I hope that we will have a stronger representational role for Wales on the SRA.

I hope that the Minister can tell us how the franchise can be improved in Wales, and that there will be some extra money for that, although I might be hoping for too much. I hope that he will also listen to the concerns of organisations such as the Shrewsbury to Aberystwyth Rail Passengers Association about the delays in some of the smaller infrastructure projects. There is no financial barrier to those projects going ahead, only the barrier of Railtrack's administrative chaos. The Government are now responsible for Railtrack, and as the sole funder of Network Rail they will de facto be responsible for that body. They are paying the money and they must start calling the shots.

4.36 pm

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I, too, am grateful for the opportunity to participate in this debate. As my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe

[Mr. Mark Lazarowicz]

and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) said, the report goes into the issues in considerable depth. As a non-member of the Committee, I took the time to read the report and most of the evidence and the appendices. It is an extensive report. Tempting though it is to add my two ha'porth on the wider issues, particularly after the interesting speeches that we have heard today, I hope that members of the Select Committee will not regard is as a discourtesy if I restrict my comments to local issues. Indeed, I expect they would prefer it. Those local issues exemplify some of the wider problems that have been the subject of the debate. I hope that the Minister can respond to them either today or in writing at a later stage.

My most recent local experience in this matter comes from the two years that I spent immediately prior to the last general election as the executive member responsible for transport on Edinburgh city council. In that capacity I was heavily involved in the council's efforts to extend rail services in and around Edinburgh. That experience showed how the structure—or perhaps one should say the chaos—left by the Conservative Government's privatisation made it difficult to improve our local network. It is illuminating to consider how fragmentation such as my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) described affects what one can do to improve local transport services.

I was interested in the comments of the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), with whom I often disagree. Many of his accounts of the difficulty of taking forward local projects match my own experience. That is the result of fragmentation. It happens in rural Wales, urban Scotland and elsewhere. It shows how the rail network is suffering from the consequences of privatisation by the Conservative Government.

There are two local examples to which I should like to refer. The first is the Edinburgh crossrail project; one area in which the rail industry has not been extravagant is in choosing names for urban railway projects. No city in the UK seems without its crossrail project, but no matter. The development phase of that project began about seven years ago. Shortly afterwards, the shadow Strategic Rail Authority was established and funding made available. To cut a long story short, an essentially simple project to build two new single-platform stations to take passenger rail services on a stretch of line just over a mile long that was already fully functional for freight services became bogged down in a mire of negotiations with Scotrail and Railtrack. The prices initially demanded by the signalling contractor—signalling was a major element of the project—were, in the view of council officials, utterly outrageous and possible only because there was only one supplier in a privatised market. Without competition, it could demand the price it wanted. The delay resulted in the project being completed last month, about two years late. I am glad to say that it is operating successfully.

The second local example is the campaign to open a railway station to serve Edinburgh Park, a major and prestigious office quarter in west Edinburgh, which is the fourth biggest centre of office employment in Scotland, behind Glasgow, Edinburgh city centre and Aberdeen. Road access to the area is heavily congested for much of the day, but the Edinburgh-Glasgow main line runs right through it. Many of those who work in the office quarter would much prefer a speedy rail journey to work. The obvious solution was for the developers and the city council to open a station, and from the beginning they provided joint funding of around £4 million for that purpose. However, the effort of trying to get all the parties involved moving to open the station was enough to drive a person up the wall. It was one of my biggest headaches when I had responsibility for that area of activity on the city council.

What should have been a simple exercise of building two platforms on each side of an existing passenger rail route was, again, bogged down in a mire of negotiations. Railtrack made demands for new loop lines to be built, which would have more than doubled the cost. Those demands were subsequently withdrawn and then raised again. Scotrail would not agree to stop its main Edinburgh-Glasgow trains at the new station, denying it much potential benefit. Most recently, Railtrack raised the issue of additional compensation, because it was concerned that stopping trains at the new station would cause delays to existing services, and it claimed that that would make it liable to fines from the SRA for failure to meet performance targets. My constituents, along with many others who struggle with daily traffic jams to get into Edinburgh Park, find it difficult to understand how a new station and new services that would take many people off the roads and on to the rail network, thereby creating higher earnings for the rail operators, should attract a penalty for failure to perform. The system should surely encourage rather than discourage success.

The long and short of the matter is that a date has still not been set for work to begin on that project. It is now four years late, and we are seriously worried that potential jobs in the area could be lost because of traffic congestion. I was pleased that last week the Minister responsible for transport in the Scottish Executive intervened to try to break the logjam, but given the involvement of the Strategic Rail Authority and Railtrack, the matter is also the responsibility of Westminster. I urge the Minister to help his counterpart in the Scottish Parliament to sort out the mess. Will he give a commitment at least to consider what can be done to resolve the delay?

My purpose in highlighting those two local examples at some length is to show that, if relatively small-scale projects involving only three stations can get bogged down in the bureaucracy of the post-privatisation railway network, it is not surprising that much bigger schemes, such as the west coast main line, have run into so much difficulty. Those examples certainly emphasise the need to simplify the structure of the rail network, for which I think everyone is now calling, even though their solutions may differ.

My local experience does not only show what fragmentation means for the rail system. A knock-on effect of the delays to which I have referred is that other projects linked to the new stations have been knocked back. Other proposals to develop the bus system have been affected by delays in opening rail stations, so the knock-on effects go beyond the rail system.

I am perhaps more positive than some members of the Select Committee—I may be doing them an injustice—about the signs of strong leadership now coming from the Strategic Rail Authority. The excellent publication from the Railway Forum, which we all received this morning, says that in its view the Government's 10-year plan and the SRA strategic plan have laid the essential foundations for a long-term view of Britain's railway needs as part of an integrated transport solution. I endorse that conclusion. Simplification and decisive leadership by management and politicians are required, and the SRA plan provides the basis for such a change.

I also welcome the SRA's intention to simplify the franchise system. I fully endorse the Select Committee's support for longer-term franchises. I urge the Government to consider giving much more positive backing for longer-term franchises than seems to be the case at the moment.

My constituents are particularly interested in the east coast main line franchise. I accept that, in the circumstances, the two-year short-term extension agreed last year was right. It gives us a breathing space to get the terms right for a long-term franchise of 15 or 20 years, which could bring substantial reductions in journey times and improvements in reliability and frequency that will benefit not only Edinburgh but towns and cities further south and further north.

I was interested in the Select Committee's conclusion that consideration should be given to building new railway lines alongside existing routes because of the difficulty of upgrading routes already in operation. I can see the strength of that argument, but I suggest that the logic be taken further.

I urge the Government to give their backing as soon as possible to the idea of an entirely new north-south high-speed line—a TGV-type line—linking London, the midlands, the north of England and central Scotland. Such a line would not be an alternative to upgrading the east and west coast main lines, as some opponents of the proposal fear. In fact, it would complement those lines. Yes, the idea is ambitious—perhaps even more so than the agenda proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths), who has now left the Chamber—but it is attracting growing support from the industry, commentators and hon. Members. The early-day motion that I tabled on the topic earlier this year now has the backing of some 69 MPs.

When I called for that new line, some people looked at me as if I was bonkers for suggesting something so ambitious, but perhaps that reflects the poverty of ambition that we have had for our rail network over generations. What would be the norm in other countries in Europe and Asia does not seem to be easily understood and accepted in this country. To give such a proposal the green light would be a good idea for improving journey times, helping economic development, releasing capacity for freight elsewhere on the network and relieving pressure on roads and airports. It would also be a massive vote of confidence in the future of the rail network in this country.

4.49 pm

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): We have had a fascinating debate, and I begin by doing what at least one other hon. Member has done and publicly pass on my best wishes to the new Secretary of State. The debate shows the difficult job ahead of him and the various bodies that serve him.

Like many other hon. Members, I congratulate not only the Chair of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), but its members on a helpful and informative report. Although it did not have all-party support this time, it is interesting to note that the minority report refers to only a small aspect of one of the issues, and I take it that there is widespread support for the vast majority of the report. I congratulate the hon. Lady on the achievement of some notable successes. As she rightly said, the Committee produced more reports than any other Committee and, more importantly, produced extremely helpful and provocative reports that have praised the Government when they have done well and made tough statements when they have got it wrong.

I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz), because both he and the hon. Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) helped to provide an interesting counterpoint and a context to the debate. By giving her historical perspective of the railways, the hon. Lady rightly reminded us that problems and developments on our railways have not started only recently. She was also right to refer to the underlying cause of the current problems, which was the failure of Governments of all political persuasions, including the Liberal Governments at the end of the 19th century as well as Labour and Conservative Governments, to invest adequately in our railway system. Separately and more recently, the disastrous privatisation of the railways led to the fragmentation of our railway system and the huge difficulties that that has created. Many hon. Members commented on that, but the hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith did so most effectively.

I was delighted that several hon. Members made reference to safety on our railways, which must be our No. 1 priority in anything that is done in the future. However, as others pointed out, we must continue to stress that, comparatively speaking, our railways are a safe form of transport. As I said in an intervention on the hon. Member for Reading, East, the 1 per cent. increase in road deaths in the past 12 months represents more deaths than occurred on the railways during the same period.

The hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) spent much of her contribution discussing the alternative report that was published by the Conservatives and focused on Railtrack. I respect their concerns about some aspects of what has happened since Railtrack was put into administration. We made it clear that we supported the Secretary of State's move, and pointed to the fact that we recommended it many months before he did it. Despite that, we have subsequently criticised how the move was handled and the delays in resolving problems. The hon. Lady and her hon. Friends are right to point to legitimate concerns about how the issue was dealt with, but I do not believe that the decision was wrong in principle merely because of subsequent difficulties.

What matters now is how quickly we get Railtrack out of administration. Answers on that from the Minister would be helpful. It was somewhat disappointing that all that the Government were prepared to say on the subject in their response to the excellent report of the Select Committee was:

> "We share their hope that the period of Administration will be as short as possible."

[Mr. Don Foster]

That is not good enough. By now, the Government must surely be getting some feel for when the period will end, yet we understand that there are still difficulties ahead, as I alluded to in my intervention on the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling).

It is worth remembering that the legislation that allowed the then Secretary of State to put Railtrack into administration required that the administrators develop a solution in the best interests of the shareholders. The Secretary of State is rightly trying to find a solution in the best interests of the public, especially the travelling public. The legislation creates a conflict, and the Secretary of State will have to find a way through that legal quagmire before he can announce how we will move forward.

It will also be worrying if we continue to have a delay, with Railtrack staying in administration. As the Government made clear on page 9 of their response to the Committee's report, their main concern is getting Railtrack out of administration, which

> "means leaving any structural change for consideration until a successor company is in place".

The Government admit clearly that all their interests are focused in one direction—sorting out of the mess of Railtrack—which means that everything else will be put on hold. I strongly urge the Government to act as quickly as possible.

In a compelling speech, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) talked about fragmentation, which I agree has caused great difficulty in our railway system. He also mentioned his concerns about the profit motive, many of which I share. I do not necessarily concur with his conclusion, although I was increasingly convinced as he spoke. There is no doubt in my mind that the solution to the Railtrack problem must include in the final agreement a clear specification that the role of the new body—Network Rail, or whatever it is called—must be in the public interest. I hope that that will appear clearly in the documentation.

The hon. Gentleman may rightly be concerned about profit motive in our railways, but he must not be too confident that his views are widely shared by the Government whom he supports. I have referred before to the document produced by the Department of Trade and Industry and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office "The UK Railway Sector Group—Releasing the Power of Rail", in which a Labour Government extol the virtue of the profit motive in our railways. For example, it states:

> "The whole structure has been underpinned by intense competition for performance based contracts to drive down costs and guarantee results".

As we know, all the evidence now shows that that is not the case.

The document goes on to boast about privatisation. The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell was right to say that not everyone in the Government disagreed with the Conservative privatisation. The document states:

> "Privatisation has also opened the British railway market to competitive forces. There are now 25 train operating companies, instead of just one. These not only compete with each other for passengers; they seek out the best offers from railway suppliers and consultants. Suppliers have emerged as stronger, leaner organisations intensely conscious of the need to strike deals. Everything must now be justified in business, not just engineering terms."

If the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South has not already seen the document, he should read on, because it gets worse.

The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell gave us the benefit of his views on Railtrack and those expressed in the minority report that was published by the Conservatives. He went on to talk about the crucial issue of capacity. He is absolutely right to say that we have a real capacity problem on our railways that must be addressed. Several hon. Members rightly referred to the excellent document that we received today from the Railway Forum. That document makes matters absolutely clear. The letter that accompanied it states that

> "the 10-year plan growth targets have not been updated, even though it now appears that there will be a more rapid introduction of congestion charging and road pricing, the latter initially for road haulage by 2006, than was previously envisaged."

Referring to Dr. Rana Roy's updated work, it states that

> "he reaffirms that underlying growth in demand for rail travel remains significantly above the 10-year target figures but the capacity constraints have every prospect of choking off this demand."

The Minister will be aware that, partly as a result of the Select Committee's excellent report on the 10-year plan, there have been many comments to the effect that the Government intend to revise the plan. They would be right to do so, but it would be helpful if the Minister were to tell the House whether the targets in the plan are to be revised. If they are, and assuming that they would be revised upwards, what will be done about the capacity issue?

The Government, in dealing with overcrowding on our trains, fail to gather any of the data that would help us to understand the nature of the problem. The PIXC system takes only a snapshot of a small area of the country and fails to give us any real indication of the level of overcrowding, yet we know from the SRA's customer satisfaction survey that it is estimated that 40 per cent. of our trains are overcrowded.

When the Government update the plan, it would be good if they also did something about the statement of policy on passenger rail franchising, which is the basis for the SRA's plan documents and the starting point for this debate and the Select Committee's report. In that document, the Government say that they expect eight different outputs from the franchising operation. Not one mention is made of fares, yet as hon. Members have rightly said there is a real problem with that. We are squeezing out the growing demand not only through lack of capacity but through ridiculously high fares that are not regulated as they should be.

I hope that the Government will start collecting data on fares and do something about them. Perhaps, as a start, they could examine the complete farce of the London area railcard. Even senior members of the Association of Train Operating Companies whom I talk to immediately acknowledge that what they have done with the railcard will do nothing to help the Government to meet their growth targets, and indeed will hinder them. I hope that that issue will be considered in more detail.

The hon. Member for Reading, East rightly referred to the Railway Forum document. I am glad that she did so, because if other hon. Members have not yet seen it, it deserves more exposure. The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) supported much of the report, but said that there are holes not only in the funding system devised by the Government but in the 10-year transport plan. His final remarks about the need for a transport authority for Wales deserve detailed consideration, as does the development of genuine transport authorities, along the German model, across the United Kingdom.

One of the issues that we have failed to address today is that of the integration of the different modes of transport. I am well aware of the various reports that are being made on that subject, but I am conscious that many of them have been delayed for far too long.

Three other very brief—

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): There is little time available for the wind-ups, and the hon. Gentleman has had his third of it.

Mr. Foster: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. That is why I shall take only another 30 seconds. I hope that the Minister will tell us what the Government's plans are in respect of the asset register for Railtrack, which I think is very important, and that he will give us his views on vertical integration, which the Committee has criticised. Finally, I hope very much that next time the Committee produces a report that is as good as this one, it will receive a more detailed response.

5.5 pm

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): Give the Liberal Democrats an inch and they take a mile. I shall be brief, because we want to give the Minister plenty of time to wind up. I congratulate the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) and the members of her Committee who worked so hard on an excellent report. May we also express our desire that she continue her fair and scrupulous work as Chairman of the Transport Committee? May she produce many more reports of this quality.

My hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) touched on privatisation. The Government are not backward in coming forward, as the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) said, when it comes to espousing the benefits that accrue to privatisation. My hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell pointed to the stimulus to the growth in traffic—both of freight and of passengers—the greater investment that has gone in through the private sector, the new rolling stock that has been produced, and the improved services. Mention was made of the Chiltern line. I would add to that GNER, which I use to travel from the eastern region. That was transformed overnight as a result of going into the private sector.

Complaint has been made. The hon. Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) spoke about the assets of the rail industry being sold at too low a price. The problem occurred because the Labour Opposition opposed privatisation tooth and nail and gave the impression that when it came to power it might renationalise. That made it difficult to get a true value for the assets in the City. As for fragmentation, it might be that in the light of that problem the Treasury told Ministers at that time that it needed to maximise the return on the equity by making fragmentation possible.

It is clear from the report that the Committee was not happy with the way in which the Government handled the failure to achieve long-term franchise contracts. From GNER's point of view, the franchise replacement programme suffered from

"a lack of clarity and strategic vision."

According to GNER, bidders were invited to embark on a costly journey without knowing the conditions of carriage and unclear as to the final destination.

The report also refers to the problem of introducing new trains if there is a change of franchise. It says that it is no good the Government's saying that that is covered by section 4 of the Railways Act 1993. The industry's experience—GNER is an example—is that it is virtually impossible to get deals in the private sector under section 54 because of the uncertainty beyond the two-year extension.

I take issue with the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson) in respect of fragmentation. His argument goes further than the report in wanting to take the Railtrack enterprise back into the public sector—at least, that is what I read into what he said. The report's conclusions on fragmentation are not clear. First, it says that there is no evidence for vertical integration, yet even on a regional basis that would be an obvious way of solving the fragmentation problem. It has been put on one side, however, because the industry as a whole obviously does not want to go down that road. The private operating companies may not wish to take on board the incredible problems that they see in the infrastructure and the network. It is important that the Minister takes the opportunity to clear up whether successor franchises could take on new rolling stock under that section.

As far as enhancement is concerned, the report is clear about concerns about special purpose vehicles. We share that view, because the City has not yet come forward with a clear policy, even though it is at the heart of delivery by the private sector. If £30 billion-odd is to be made available for enhancement of one kind or another—even new line build—but the SPVs being promoted by the Government do not work, the industry will face one heck of a problem. It is vital that the Government make clear soon rather than later precisely how they expect the things to work.

On administration, the report divided into two—a majority and a minority report. It did so mainly on political lines, but the evidence seems to point in the direction taken by the minority report. That was back in January, or even December 2001, but subsequent events have tended to support the minority report's conclusions on how and why Railtrack was taken into administration by the then Secretary of State. For example, it was claimed that Railtrack was insolvent, but evidence has since emerged that in October last year it certainly was not insolvent, and that if the Government had made money available, Railtrack might have been able to go to the City for further loans.

The former Secretary of State was also preparing the ground for Railtrack to be taken into administration long before he admitted doing so. A press report—it was

[Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire)]

not denied by the Government; if the Minister wants to deny it this afternoon, he can—said that under a project code-named Ariel, the Secretary of State began the process of winding up Railtrack fully six weeks before he acted. Furthermore, the Department asked the Stationery Office to print orders relating to Railtrack's administration on 28 September, a week before the Secretary of State said that he took his decision to wind up the company. Further evidence has come to light in the last few weeks, as my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell pointed out. The Paddington Survivors Group claimed that, at a meeting with the Secretary of State on 12 September, they were told that Railtrack would be replaced, yet he told Parliament on 7 October that he had made his decision on 5 October.

The media anticipate an announcement being made tomorrow—it would help if the Minister could clarify this—that Network Rail has finally done a deal to get Railtrack out of administration. Of the money available for that, £500 million will be used to buy off shareholders, despite the fact that Ministers have said more than once that that would happen over their dead bodies. That £500 million works out at about £2.50 a share; the shareholders are asking for £2.80 a share, so the two figures are close. However, that £500 million includes a £300 million bung from the Strategic Rail Authority. That is Government money so presumably it will either come out of the public sector borrowing requirement or have to be repaid. It would be helpful if the Minister would say which.

The total package is some £9 billion. It will be made available by various banks as bridging finance, but underwritten by the SRA—for which read "the Government". Will all that money count against the PSBR, and if not, why not? From the £9 billion, £6.5 billion will pay the debts of Railtrack plc. It will also settle £400 million of inter-company loans and provide £2 billion for working capital for the next few years of ongoing operations. Will the Minister confirm whether those figures are correct? If they are, will he say whether an announcement will be made tomorrow or early next week? There should be a statement made on the Floor of the House by the new Secretary of State.

This is an excellent report. Reading it, I got the impression that the Committee wanted to go further but held back. However, it gave pointers to the direction that the Government should take, which includes more centralised control, especially of the SRA's operations, and tighter control of the activities of Network Rail. It would be interesting to hear whether the Minister agrees with the direction for the rail network suggested by some members of the Committee.

5.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): It is a pleasure to respond to the wide-ranging and interesting debate on the Select Committee's report and the Government's response. I echo the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), who said that the Select Committee exists to protect the interests of the voter and the travelling public. I totally subscribe to that view. I congratulate the Committee on its prodigious high-quality output since 1997 under my hon. Friend's leadership. She said that transport was important to the economy and important in improving the quality of people's lives. I agree wholeheartedly.

One or two hon. Members made remarks about Select Committees. I think that I am right in saying that I am the only person in the Chamber who has both been a Select Committee member and had to appear before one as a Minister. When I was a Select Committee member, I believed in rigorously challenging the Executive and in holding Ministers to account. I have not wavered from that opinion. Select Committees should be independent and should make their views known forcefully I congratulate the Transport Committee on having done that.

Following on from one of the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South (Mr. Stevenson), one of the great benefits of the Select Committee system is that Back-Bench Members from a rich diversity of backgrounds—miners, bus drivers, advocates and teachers—can all make a special contribution to Select Committee reports. I am pleased to have this opportunity to respond to as many points as time allows.

Under the commendable stewardship of my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich, the Select Committee has produced a report on a subject of vital importance to the people of this country—the railways. The Government and the Select Committee agree substantially on many areas. For example, the Committee recognised that the Government were right to petition the High Court to put Railtrack into administration. To take up the point made by the hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Moss), it was not the Government but the High Court that took that action, which was not opposed by Railtrack at the time.

The Select Committee recommends that

> "The Government must ensure that the Strategic Rail Authority provides the industry with a clear direction."

We agree with that, and the Secretary of State's directions and guidance recognise the importance of the SRA's leadership role. The Committee went on to say that the Government should not interfere with the day-to-day management of the SRA, and we agree with that, too. We are pleased with the progress that has been made since Richard Bowker was appointed SRA chairman. We particularly welcome the publication on 14 January this year of the SRA's strategic plan, which sets out a series of measures to improve Britain's rail network and ensure that Government growth targets are met.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South made a valuable contribution on the issue of fragmentation. The SRA was established to provide leadership for an industry that had already been fragmented by privatisation. Our directions and guidance to the SRA recognise the importance of its leadership role, and require it to provide leadership and to work co-operatively towards common goals. In creating the SRA, we have introduced measures that will, I hope, end some of the fragmentation that has been criticised today.

The Committee also says:

> "It is essential that Railtrack's successor has access to sufficient funds to operate, maintain and renew the rail network adequately".

We agree. The Government have stated that they expect Railtrack's successor to be financially sound and to have a sufficiently strong investment-grade credit rating to finance its activities in an efficient and cost-effective manner. We also agree that Railtrack's successor must learn from the past. It must focus on the key task of delivering an efficient operational rail network and on its operation, maintenance and renewal.

I shall now take up as many of the points that have been made in the debate as I can. My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich raised the important issue of maintaining the rail system. Railtrack has admitted that its approach to maintenance after privatisation was mistaken—that too much decision-making responsibility was placed with contractors and that it carried out too few inspections of contractors' work. As my hon. Friend will know, Lord Cullen made recommendations to improve the management of contractors and the training of the work force in the rail industry, and we have asked the Health and Safety Commission to ensure that those recommendations are implemented in full. The HSC report published last week shows that contractorisation itself is not the problem—it is used successfully in other industries. The need is for better management and control and for a well-trained work force, and the implementation of the Cullen recommendations should deliver those improvements.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, South asked whether Network Rail was a not-for-profit company. It has been described as a not-for-dividend company because any profit will be ploughed back into the rail system, which would not be the case if there were shareholders. We should bear in mind recent experiences with projects such as the construction of the Jubilee line, which went twice over cost and was two years late. Lamentably, that was in the public sector and the taxpayer bore the inconvenience and the extra cost.

We want to create special purpose vehicles to take forward some of the big projects. The financial risk of overrunning on time and cost would be borne by the private sector, not the taxpayer, and the channel tunnel rail link, on which we are making excellent progress, is a good example of that.

Mrs. Dunwoody: I am interested to hear the Minister say that the private sector would bear the risk. Jarvis is a company that is much in the news at present. Has he seen the statement that the company made this week, that the return on its deal on the underground would be beyond its wildest dreams and produce considerable sums? That rather suggests that the risk will lie with the taxpayer, not the company.

Mr. Jamieson: Sadly, the overrun and the cost to the taxpayer on the Jubilee line were well beyond anyone's wildest dreams. We want to ensure that there is no profiteering from the contracts, that they are delivered efficiently, that we know the cost up front, and that the risk is taken by the private contractor.

The hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) came up with an interesting concept, saying that if I did not disagree with her then I must agree with her. That sounds like something out of "Alice in Wonderland". She also said that we had destroyed private sector investor confidence, but nothing could be further from the truth. If anything destroyed confidence, it was the way in which the Conservative Government carried out rail privatisation. We have been given every indication of great interest in investing in our rail system, and the hon. Lady will see that happen over a period of time.

At one time I tipped the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) as a candidate for the Opposition Front Bench, but he could give no answer when he was challenged by the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) about what the Conservatives would have done about Railtrack. The hon. Member for North-East Cambridgeshire could not come up with an answer either. If the Conservatives are to be credible when criticising the Government, they will have to come up with some ideas of their own, and those ideas will have to stand the same tests of criticism and examination as our own policies do. However, I wish the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell well in his career.

Miss McIntosh: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jamieson: I shall, although time is short and several other hon. Members want their points answered.

Miss McIntosh: I simply wanted to ask whether the Minister has read the evidence from the Freight Transport Association, whose members went on record as saying that they would require more financial certainty before they were required to invest in the railway system?

Mr. Jamieson: If the hon. Lady considers what is actually happening, she will see that the rail industry received £4 billion of private investment over the year 2001-02, and that more is on stream.

At half-time in the debate, my hon. Friend the Member for Reading, East (Jane Griffiths) gave us an interesting historical interlude. However, I was confused at one stage because I thought that she was saying that Bristol was in Cornwall. I am sure that it is not—at least, it was not when I last passed it on the train.

Electrification is not necessarily the answer, because the benefits that would have been gained 30 years ago would not be gained now. The people of the west country would no doubt be pleased if the trains on the line that goes through Reading to the west country were efficient, ran on time and did not break down, so I am pleased to say that new rolling stock is being introduced on that line. They would also be happy if the problems of the bottleneck between Reading and London were solved, as it causes major inconvenience not only to people in the west country, but to people in south Wales as well. However, electrification is not the answer to that problem, and it would be of environmental advantage only if the electricity were produced by renewable means, which is not always the case.

The hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) rightly referred to the important issue of the Shrewsbury to Machynlleth, Aberystwyth and Aberdovey branch lines. I have considerable sympathy with the hon. Gentleman on that matter. As I have said on the Floor of the House, the finance is there, but we lack the skilled engineers needed to carry out the work. He proposed

[Mr. Jamieson]

that another body might undertake the work, but I find it hard to believe that those skilled workers exist, because all companies are having difficulty finding such workers. If he knows of a project and wants to propose it, we shall consider it carefully, but I have to disappoint him on another matter: we are not going to consider renationalisation, although it is an interesting idea, because if we did so, there would be huge disruption and we would fall several years behind on investment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) made a studied contribution to the debate, as he always does. He referred to some of his local problems, and I would be happy to discuss those issues in correspondence.

The hon. Member for Bath and others asked about Network Rail and when we could expect to hear when Railtrack will come out of administration. Negotiations are under way, and if those negotiations are successful our hope is that Railtrack might be brought out of administration by the end of July. That is a challenging target, but we continue to work with all interested parties to achieve it.

I am sad to say that I have had less time to respond to the debate than the Liberal Democrat Front-Bench speaker took. None the less, the debate has been extremely valuable. If hon. Members want to make further points through correspondence, I shall be happy to respond—

It being half-past Five o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 386 (Part 2)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2001–02

COMPRISING PERIOD
20 May 2002—13 June 2002

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20 May 2002

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 20 May 2002

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

US Farm Subsidies

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has made to the US Government concerning proposals to increase subsidies to US farmers; and if she will make a statement. [56622]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 15 May 2002]:* I have taken several opportunities, most recently during my visit to Washington in April this year, to express my concern at the increase in subsidies for which the new US Farm Bill provides. I have made clear that the Bill runs counter to our shared goal of reducing worldwide subsidies in the World Trade Organisation.

Fishery Limits

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to ensure the continuation of the six and 12 mile fishing limits after 31 December. [55485]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 May 2002]:* A decision on the six and 12 mile limits is part of the forthcoming CFP review. Previous discussions in the Council of Ministers have revealed a very strong consensus among member states in favour of renewing the present provisions; the Commission is also known to support them. My Department will be making every effort to get the limits made permanent.

Waste

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of household waste in the last 12 months, comprised plastic bags. [55484]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 10 May 2002]:* My Department has no data on the proportion by volume of plastic bags within household waste. "Waste Strategy 2000" (Part 2, p191) shows estimates of around 6 per cent. dense plastic and 5 per cent. film plastic by weight in household waste. A further national survey to update these figures is planned by the Environment Agency.

The Municipal Waste Management Survey shows that recycling of household waste plastics increased to 13,000 tonnes in 1999–2000, compared to 8,000 tonnes for the previous year.

Correspondence

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many letters from hon. Members are awaiting a response from her Department; and how many responses are due to letters dated more than *(a)* two weeks, *(b)* one month, *(c)* two months, *(d)* three months and *(e)* more than three months ago. [42963]

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her most recent estimate is of how many letters have yet to be sent a substantive response by her Department that were received *(a)* under four weeks ago, *(b)* between four to six weeks ago, *(c)* between six weeks and two months ago and *(d)* over two months ago; and if she will make a statement. [51474]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answers 13 March and 22 April 2002]:* The total number of letters from hon. and right hon. Members awaiting a response as at 15 May 2002 stood at 2,125. Of these, 1,699 responses are due to letters dated more than two calendar weeks, 1,295 to letters dated more than one calendar month, 886 to letters dated more than two calendar months and 612 to letters dated more than three calendar months.

On average, DEFRA receives around 1,160 letters from hon. and right hon. Members each month. The Department's service target is 15 working days from date of receipt. Performance was severely affected last year by the impact of foot and mouth disease, and by IT and other convergence issues following the creation of DEFRA. However, the median response time for all letters is now 15 working days, with 53 per cent. of letters meeting the target. Measures are in place to secure further improvements in the weeks ahead.

Scrapie

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what practical difficulties have been encountered by her Department's officials in administering boluses to Shetland sheep during testing for scrapie; and if she will make a statement. [56040]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 13 May 2002]:* A total of 1,315 Shetland sheep have been electronically tagged using a ruminal bolus as part of the genotype testing programme under the National Scrapie Plan. Occasional difficulties have arisen in administering these boluses, and five casualties have arisen in three separate flocks of Shetland sheep. Full compensation is paid to the flock owner for any casualty arising as a result of this procedure.

Timber

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the Department for International Development regarding the procurement of sustainable timber for Government premises; and if she will make a statement. [56043]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 13 May 2002]:* My Department works closely with the Department for International Development on all matters of common interest to do with forest management and illegal logging including the Government's efforts to purchase its timber and timber products from sustainable sources. Officials from both Departments are members of the Whitehall Forestry Group that addresses international issues and of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Timber

Procurement that is monitoring implementation of the timber procurement policy. These same officials are part of the steering group that has commissioned research into the Government's timber purchasing activities and will help supervise the action to be taken following publication of the consultant's report later this summer.

Sustainable Technologies

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what consultation has been undertaken, and with whom, over the content of Statutory Instrument 843 on TSEs. [56039]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 13 May 2002]:* My Department consulted more than 700 key stakeholders on draft proposals for the TSE (England) Regulations 2002, representing renderers, slaughterhouses, farmers, knackers, hunt kennels, veterinary, consumer and medical interests and enforcement authorities. That is, the people who are actually affected or need to know. The consultation package was distributed in February 2002. It was posted on the Department's website and a copy placed in the Library of the House. It included a Regulatory Impact Assessment. Parallel legislation is being introduced in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, with additional and broadly equivalent consultation there.

These Regulations implement current Community legislation on TSEs as set out in Council Regulation (EC) No. 999/2001. My Department twice consulted on the Community measures, giving fair warning of likely new arrangements. First, in January 1999 and again in November 2000. Community measures in relation to animal feeding were implemented under the Processed Animal Protein (England) Regulations 2001, introduced last August; there was a separate consultation exercise specifically for this legislation.

Ozone Depletion

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department had made of the viability of non-ozone depleting drop-in refrigerants. [48075]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I am aware that in certain applications there are drop-in replacements for CFCs and HCFCs. One example is in mobile air-conditioning where HFC-134a is a drop-in replacement for CFC-12, although it should be noted that HFC-134a is also a powerful greenhouse gas with a 100-year Global Warming Potential 1,300 times the warming potential of Carbon Dioxide. There are, however, many other applications where a drop-in replacement is not feasible and the only alternative would either involve costly technical alternations to the refrigeration equipment or replacement of the equipment.

Rio Earth Summit

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take to strengthen the implementation of (i) the Rio Declaration, (ii) Agenda 21 and (iii) other commitments made at (A) Rio in 1992 and (B) the United Nations General Assembly Special Section in 1997. [44350]

Mr. Meacher: On question *(a)*, the UK's sustainable development strategy, "A Better Quality of Life" (1999), sets out the many steps that DEFRA and its predecessors have taken to implement the various Rio agreements and the outcome of the United Nations General Assembly Special Session in 1997. The Department has led the world on the elaboration of sustainable development indicators to assess progress. The Government's first annual review of progress towards sustainable development, "Achieving a Better Quality of Life", was published in January 2001. This is available at www.sustainable-development.gov.uk. We have ratified the conventions on Biodiversity, Climate Change and Desertification, which were products of the Rio process, and we have made particular efforts in the promotion of Local Agenda 21.

Our future plans, *(b)*, include the publication of a DEFRA sustainable development strategy and implementation of the recently published fuel poverty strategy and waste strategy. We are also implementing the outcomes on fisheries quotas from the December 2001 Fisheries Council, and the recommendations of the Independent Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food. DEFRA's formation itself underlines the Government's commitment to delivering a more sustainable development focused agenda on food, farming and rural communities. "Working for the Essentials of Life", published in March, sets out DEFRA's plans for the future.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her Department's priorities are for the Rio+10 Summit in Johannesburg towards the objectives of *(a)* poverty eradication and *(b)* sustainable production and consumption for the UK; and what the priorities of the European Group are. [44426]

Mr. Meacher: Poverty eradication through sustainable development will be a top priority for the UK at the summit. We are keen to ensure that WSSD outcomes should assist progress towards achieving the millennium development goals (MDGs). Actions on poverty and effective management of natural resources are often mutually reinforcing.

De-coupling economic growth from environmental degradation will be central to achieving sustainable production and consumption patterns in both the north and the south, though developed countries have to take the lead. Resource productivity is a concept which underpins actions in particular sectors, such as switching from heavily polluting fossil fuels to cleaner fossil fuels and other low carbon fuel sources, changing demand patterns in favour of environmentally sustainable products and production processes by, for example, raising consumer awareness and promoting certification initiatives and supporting innovation to develop more sustainable technologies.

The priorities of the European Union are currently under discussion and will develop as the agenda becomes more firm.

Pollution Inspectorate

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 8 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 641W, on the Pollution Inspectorate, what the qualifications are to which she refers; which consultants were commissioned in 2000, what the process was through which any contract was awarded, the month in which this took place, and the terms of reference of this work; if she will place in the Library a copy of their report, and other documentation relating to this work; if she will describe the process by which the contract for carrying out a trial methodology was undertaken; which local authorities, process operators and trade associations were involved in the trial; to whom it is planned to issue the trial report for comments; and how these comments will be utilised. [44427]

Mr. Meacher: I have placed in the Library a copy of the 1995 guidance note on inspection frequency, which advised on circumstances where the specified normal inspection rate of twice a year might warrant increase or decrease.

The consultants, Risk and Policy Analysts, were commissioned in June 2000 as a result of competitive tendering. The terms of reference for the study and the trials it reproduced as Annexe 5 to their October 2000 report which is available on the DEFRA website.

The report was sent to the Department on 26 March and I expect to decide the next steps shortly. As I said in my reply of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 720W, the report has been placed on the DEFRA website as part of a three-month consultation exercise.

The trials methodology, including the method of selecting the processes involved and the industry sectors represented, is described in the report. I am grateful to all participants for their contribution to the trials. The list of participating operators could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The local authorities involved in the trials were City of York council, Fylde borough council, Wandsworth borough council, Rochdale metropolitan borough council, mid-Devon district council, Exeter city council, south Tyneside metropolitan borough council, Shrewsbury and Atcham borough council, Mansfield district council, Anglesey county council, Guildford borough council, Rochford district council, and Great Yarmouth port health authority. The two trade associations which submitted comments to the consultants were UK Steel and the Environmental Industries Association.

Bonfires

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her Department's policy with regard to bonfires, with specific reference to *(a)* the impact upon climate change and *(b)* nuisance to neighbours; what discussions she has had recently with (i) the Local Government Association and (ii) individual local authorities on the subject of bonfires; and what recent research her Department has undertaken into the impact of bonfires. [57108]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* Government policy regard to bonfires is:

(a) The Government does not consider bonfires to be a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions.

(b) Garden bonfires are a traditional way of disposing of household and garden rubbish but they can be a nuisance to neighbours and cause air pollution.

Local authorities have powers under section 79 of the Environment Protection Act 1990 to stop people creating smoke that amounts to a statutory nuisance. Where an Environmental Health Officer considers a bonfire to be causing a statutory nuisance then he or she must issue an abatement notice against the person responsible or in certain circumstances, the owner or occupier of the property. This notice can require that the activity causing the nuisance stops completely or may restrict it to between certain hours, or can require that remedial action be taken.

(b) (i) My Department has not had recent discussions with the Local Government Association or individual Local Authorities on this particular issue;

(b) (ii) National Environmental Technology Centre (NETCEN), on behalf of DEFRA, carry out, and publish the results from, regular monitoring of elevated particulate concentrations at a variety of sites around the UK, particularly on and around the traditional bonfire night celebrations. They work closely with local authorities to assist in the collection of relevant data. The latest research undertaken by this Department is given at www.aeat.co.uk/netcen/airqual.

Market Towns

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 3 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1030W, on the New Deal for Market Towns, which Department the £37 million announced for market towns over three years is coming from; and what her Department's involvement is with the regional development agencies in administering this project. [56126]

Alun Michael: The £37 million for the Market Towns Initiative is provided by DEFRA, with £5 million going to the Countryside Agency and £32 million going (via DTI) to the regional development agencies. It is for the agencies to manage the programme. While not having day to day involvement DEFRA takes a close interest in progress and I have discussed implementation with RDA chairs and with the Countryside Agency.

Refrigerators

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1149W, on refrigerators, when she will announce the further financial assistance to local authorities to meet the additional costs resulting from the implementation of EC regulation 2037/2000 in the financial year 2002–03; and if she will make a statement. [56498]

Mr. Meacher: A Government announcement on local authority funding will be made shortly.

Climate Change

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the external organisations set up by her as part of the Government's strategy to combat climate change, indicating *(a)* their remits and *(b)* their sources of funding. [50446]

Mr. Meacher: I refer the hon. Member to my earlier reply given on 22 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 12–13W.

GM Crops

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library scientific advice received from the Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment on Field Crop Trials and Other Research for T-25 and Other Genetically Modified Maize. [53814]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 2 May 2002]:* I have arranged for the following documents containing advice for the Secretary of State from ACRE on field crop trials and other research for T25 and other GM maize to be placed in the Library:

Advice on research trials for national listing of T25 GM maize (dated April 1995, March 1996, April 1996, March 1997, and May 1997);

Advice on T25 in National List trials adjacent to an organic farm in Devon (Guy Watson Judicial Review, dated June 1998);

Advice on the effect of GM Bt maize on Monarch butterflies (dated June 1999, September 2000 and January 2002);

Advice on the significance of new research on the effect of Bt toxin on lacewings (July 1998);

Advice on an article concerning gene flow from GM maize to native maize (landraces) in Mexico (dated March 2002).

This information is also available on the public register at the DEFRA office in Ashdown House, London.

End of Life Vehicles Directive

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* discussions he has had with and *(b)* representations he has received from Rover Cars about their responsibilities under the End of Life Vehicles Directive for the recycling of motor vehicles built prior to 2001 by Leyland, British Leyland, BLMC and other associated companies. [56408]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

The Department has had a number of meetings with MG Rover, and with other vehicle manufacturers, about the potential impact of the End of Life Vehicles (ELV) Directive.

MG Rover addressed the issue of historic vehicle parc liabilities in both a reply to the DTI's consultation document and in evidence given to the Trade and Industry Committee inquiry into the ELV Directive. In these documents, MG Rover asked that legislation should not place it at a competitive disadvantage as a result of a legacy parc of brands owned or produced by its predecessors, and suggested that any financial contributions made by vehicle manufacturers should be based on current market share rather than on the number of a company's vehicles being scrapped. MG Rover has had the opportunity to expand upon these points at a number of subsequent meetings.

Fluorocarbon

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received regarding the role of the fluorocarbon industry in setting international standards regulating the use of ozone-damaging substances. [56042]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 13 May 2002]:* We are aware of some international standards concerning fire-fighting equipment that uses ozone depleting substances but no representations about the involvement of the fluorocarbon industry in the setting of these standards have been received by DTI or DEFRA since June 2001. Use of ozone depleting substances is controlled by the Montreal Protocol and the EC Regulation 2037/2000 on substances which deplete the ozone layer, which are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. DEFRA and DTI received representations from various stakeholders, including from the fluorocarbon and other industries, during the negotiation of the EC Regulation.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Staff

Mrs. Calton: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what arrangements are in place for monitoring pay and positions by ethnicity, gender and disability on the parliamentary estate; and if he will make a statement. [56494]

Mr. Kirkwood *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* The House of Commons Commission is committed to fairness in its employment policies. On its behalf, officials monitor all recruitment exercises by ethnicity, gender, and disability status at both application and appointment stages. In addition, there is regular monitoring of staff across all pay bands, broken down by ethnicity and gender for each department.

In 1999 and 2001, the Board of Management reviewed the findings of two consultancy studies of all aspects of performance appraisal for senior posts and for two mid-range pay bands. These reviews focused on the fairness and effectiveness of the system in general and in particular on equality aspects.

There has been a recent programme of further training for reporting officers involved in conducting performance appraisals, with the aim of promoting consistency across the House at all levels in the application of the House's performance review markings and performance pay decisions. Officials are currently reviewing the pay system for the main pay bands, in consultation with the trade unions. The review will include an exercise in equality proofing as carried out in the Civil Service.

DEFENCE

Optional Protocol

Ms Drown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he plans to remove the Government's Declaration to the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict; and if he will make a statement. [38771]

Mr. Ingram: The declaration made on signing the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict was designed to clarify the United Kingdom's understanding of the requirements of the Optional

Protocol. It made clear our determination to accord special consideration to members of the armed forces under the age of 18, but also our understanding that the Protocol would not exclude members of our armed forces aged under 18 from taking a direct part in hostilities in certain narrowly defined circumstances (thereby maintaining operational effectiveness). The declaration defined these circumstances as being

> "where there is a genuine military need to deploy a unit or ship or unit to an area in which hostilities are taking place; and by reason of the nature and urgency of the situation:
>
> it is not practicable to withdraw such persons (ie those under 18) before deployment, or
>
> to do so would undermine the operational effectiveness of their ship or unit, and thereby put at risk the successful completion of the military mission and/or the safety of other personnel."

There are no plans to withdraw the declaration.

New guidelines are being finalised as part of the process leading to the United Kingdom's ratification of the Optional Protocol. These guidelines are designed to ensure adherence to the Optional Protocol while reflecting the practical position set out in the United Kingdom's declaration, thus maintaining operational effectiveness. Officials in both the Ministry of Defence and Foreign and Commonwealth Office continue to work actively towards ratification, and we hope to ratify soon. As part of the ratification process, an Explanatory Memorandum will be laid before Parliament to explain the significance of the Optional Protocol.

Gulf War

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many UK military personnel he estimates were exposed to dangerous and harmful gases resulting from destroyed Iraqi chemical factories in the Gulf War; and what changes there have been in this number in the last three years. [54580]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence is not aware of any United Kingdom military personnel having being exposed to dangerous and harmful gases resulting from destroyed Iraqi chemical factories during the Gulf conflict. However, on 10 March 1991, US forces demolished Iraqi rockets containing chemical warfare agents near the Khamisiyah Ammunition Depot, Iraq. The MOD's initial assessment of the implications for UK personnel of the demolitions was published in December 1999 in a paper entitled: "Review of Events Concerning 32 Field Hospital and the Release of Nerve Agent Arising from US Demolition of Iraqi Munitions at the Khamisiyah Depot in March 1991". The paper is available in the Library of the House and on the internet at http://www.mod.uk/issues/gulfwar/info/khamisiyah.htm. The paper's main conclusion was that up to 9,000 UK troops might theoretically have been exposed to nerve agent following the demolitions but that the level of exposure would have no detectable effect on human health.

On 25 April 2002, the US released a technical report about the Khamisiyah demolitions based on a revised theoretical model of the plume of nerve agent which may have been released by the demolitions. On 3 May 2002, the US Secretary of Veterans Affairs announced that the death rate for US personnel who were near Khamisiyah is similar to that for other US Gulf veterans. The US report is currently being analysed by MOD officials and the implications for UK personnel will be made public when available but at this stage there is no evidence to link the Khamisiyah demolitions with the range of symptoms of ill health being experienced by some Gulf veterans.

C17

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the original target flying hours were for the leased C17s; what the actual flying hours have been; and if he will make a statement; [55205]

(2) how many flying hours have been bought under the leasing arrangements for the C17s; when he expects these bought hours to have been flown at the current rate of flying hours; and if he will make a statement. [55206]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 15 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 640W.

Afghanistan

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what undertakings were received by Her Majesty's Government from the Afghan Interim Authority on the international human rights standards applicable to captives transferred from United Kingdom authorities to the Afghan Interim Authority. [56278]

Mr. Hoon: The Afghan Interim Authority have given us assurances that they will abide by their international obligations in handling detainees who are released by the British forces from detention and taken into custody by the Interim Administration.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what guidance he has given to military personnel on the applicability of the provisions of the European convention on human rights to persons captured in Afghanistan by UK forces. [56275]

Mr. Hoon: All military personnel are issued with guidance which ensures that their actions are fully in compliance with our international obligations, including where appropriate the ECHR.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Tomahawk missiles have been fired in Operation Veritas. [57532]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 11 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 743W, to the hon. Member for Caernarfon (Hywel Williams).

Disclosure of Interests

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what rules apply to the disclosure of interests on the part of those serving on public bodies which are responsible to his Department. [56450]

Dr. Moonie: All advisory and executive non-departmental public bodies are required to adopt a board members' code based on guidance produced by the Cabinet Office, and they should have registers of interests. The definition of interests is ultimately for individual Departments since they are best placed to decide what might be thought to influence members of their bodies.

The following table lists the non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Ministry of Defence and indicates whether they have a current Code of Practice.

	Code of Practice
Executive NDPBs	
Fleet Air Arm Museum	Yes
National Army Museum	Under review
Oil and Pipelines Agency	Yes
RAF Museum	Yes
Royal Marines Museum	Yes
Royal Navy Museum	Yes
RN Submarine Museum	Yes
Advisory NDPBs	
Advisory Committee on Conscientious Objectors	Yes
Armed Forces Pay Review Body	Yes
Advisory Group on Medical Countermeasures	Under development
Animal Welfare Advisory Committee	Under development
Central Advisory Committee on War Pensions	Yes
Dartmoor Steering Group	Yes
Defence Nuclear Safety Committee	Under development
Defence Scientific Advisory Council	Yes
Independent Board of Visitors to the Military Corrective Training Centre	Under development
National Employers Liaison Committee	Yes
Nuclear Research Advisory Council	Under development
Review Board for Government Contracts	Yes
Royal Military College of Science Advisory Council	Under development
War Pensions Committees (13 bodies)	Yes

I will arrange for copies of all current Codes of Practice for NDPBs sponsored by the MOD to be placed in the Library of the House.

Sick Leave

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many days of sick leave were taken in his Department last year; how many related to employees suffering *(a)* stress and *(b)* other mental health problems; and what the cost was to his Department. [56484]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* The latest published data are in the Cabinet Office annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the civil service" for the year 2000 which shows the average number of working days lost per staff year among non-industrial staff. The figure for Ministry of Defence is 8.8 days. MOD's own records show that during 2000 4.1 per cent. of days lost were due to mental disorders (stress-related) and 6.6 per cent. were due to mental disorders (non-stress related). The overall cost of sick absence was some £22 million. These figures exclude MOD Trading Funds. MOD is committed to improving the health and well being of its civilian staff and has programmes in hand to reduce the number of working days lost through sick absence and work-related injury and illness.

Gurkhas

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Gurkhas have accompanied postings; what plans he has to expand the Gurkha units; and what recent discussions he has had with the Prime Minister of Nepal about Gurkha pensions. [57028]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* There are currently 906 Gurkha personnel in accompanied service postings.

There is a requirement to recruit 230 Gurkhas per year to maintain present force levels. While there are no plans to increase Gurkha strength, we continue to look at ways to best deploy this manpower.

The issue of Gurkha pensions was, however, raised briefly by the Nepalese Prime Minister at the end of a meeting I attended with the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for International Development on Monday 13 May.

Naval Vessels

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if HMS Sheffield will be returned to operational service in 2004; and if she will continue as an operational warship until the end of the decade. [56699]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 12 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 874W, to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin). On current plans HMS Sheffield will return to service in September 2004 and will continue in operational service until towards the end of this decade.

EU-NATO Relations

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made towards arrangement of EU access to NATO assets and capabilities; and when the arrangements will be finalised. [57791]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 30W.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to assimilate NATO planning structures with the EU. [57790]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 827W.

Cadets

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many schools have had cadet forces in each year since 1997. [57807]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

European Security and Defence Policy

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the European Security and Defence Policy procedures testing top level co-ordination and the decision-making procedures of the ESDP bodies will be exercised. [57793]

Mr. Hoon: The EU's first Crisis Management Exercise, under ESDP "CME 02", will run from 22 to 28 May 2002, and is designed to test the EU's structures and decision-making procedures for crisis management. CME 02 is a paper exercise only, involving no forces, and uses a generic scenario. CME 02 should provide valuable lessons for the continuing development of the EU's operational capability.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role the NATO Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe plays within the European Security and Defence Policy. [57792]

Mr. Hoon: In view of his responsibilities for the European Pillar of NATO, D/SACEUR may be invited to meetings of the EU Military Committee, and has been identified as a primary candidate for "operation commander" of EU-led operations. He would also co-ordinate responses to EU requests to NATO for planning support. All these arrangements are subject to finalising agreement on modalities for EU-NATO co-operation.

Iran

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of Iran's missile development programme; and if he will make a statement. [57535]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the Ministry of Defence's "Supplementary Memorandum to the House of Commons Defence Committee: The Ballistic Missile Threat" of 18 March 2002 which was published by the committee on 1 May 2002.

Missile Defence

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent representation he has received concerning the future use of *(a)* Menwith Hill and *(b)* Fylingdales base for the purpose of anti-missile systems; and if he will make a statement. [57534]

Mr. Hoon: The Ministry of Defence regularly receives representations and inquiries from right hon. and hon. Members and members of the public about the present and potential future use of RAF Fylingdales and RAF Menwith Hill, and other issues related to missile defence.

Defence Council

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what conclusions were reached at the EU Defence Ministers' meeting on Monday 13 May; and if he will make a statement. [57533]

Mr. Hoon: EU Defence Ministers focused primarily on the European Capabilities Action Plan (ECAP) and the Capability Development Mechanism. Ministers concluded that significant progress had been made in these areas, demonstrated by the successful establishment of the ECAP process. Ministers also noted the need to maintain the momentum within the capability improvement process and quickly resolve the remaining issues concerning the Capabilities Development Mechanism. The full conclusions from the General Affairs Council have been placed in the Library of the House.

European Peacekeeping Force

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will identify the units designated by each participant in the European Peacekeeping Force, with total of possible commitments by each country. [57880]

Mr. Hoon: There is no European Peacekeeping Force. EU member states have declared elements of national forces available to conduct Petersberg Tasks. A summary of member states' offers (the Compendium des Contributions Nationales) has been placed in the Library of the House.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Africa

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the assistance being given to *(a)* Malawi, *(b)* Mozambique, *(c)* Zimbabwe and *(d)* other African countries affected by the current drought. [56422]

Clare Short: The drought has affected several southern African countries. In Malawi my Department has provided £5.1 million in food relief delivered through local non-governmental organisations and £1.12 million has been provided for the purchase of seeds and fertilisers for a winter crop. In Mozambique, together with other donors, we have assisted the Government with agricultural inputs for poor farmers affected by drought. In Zimbabwe we have provided £7.5 million through the UN and through NGOs, largely to feed children and their mothers. We are in contact with national and UN teams assessing the food situation in the region and will consider what further help is required once full details become available.

Work-related Illness

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many employees of her Department retired through work-related ill-health in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was to the Department. [56095]

Clare Short: Records are not maintained by my Department which enable ill health retirements to be separately identified as work related. However, for the year 2001–02, we had three members of staff who retired with a medical retirement certificate issued by the civil service pension scheme medical adviser. Benefits provided on medical retirement are as set out in the rules of the principal civil service pension scheme and laid before Parliament, and provide for an immediate payment of an enhanced pension and lump sum. Ill health retirement expenditure is met centrally from the Civil Superannuation Vote. For the year ending March 2002, provisional expenditure met from the Vote was £310 million in respect of all civil service cases for which an ill health pension has been awarded. These cases number approximately 67,000 and include those who have formerly been ill health retired but who have now reached and exceeded the normal retirement age.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many claims for work-related illness were settled by her Department in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was in compensation. [56094]

Clare Short: We have had no claims for work-related illness in 2001.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many days of sick leave were taken by employees in her Department in the last year for which records are available; what proportion of those were due to work-related illness or injury; and what the cost was to the Department. [56096]

Clare Short: In 2000, my Department recorded a total of 8,399 days sick absence. The other information requested is not held and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Palestine

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 17 April, *Official Report*, column 995W, on European Commission assistance to Palestinians, what assessment she has made of the cost of damage as a result of military action during the last 12 months to each of the projects listed. [56122]

Clare Short: The European Commission (EC) began assessing damage and destruction to EU-funded development projects since the beginning of the Intifada in March 2002. A detailed list was produced, and a copy has been placed in the House of Commons Library. The EC is keen to update this initial assessment. This has not been possible since the Israeli re-occupation of the west bank, due to restricted access and the levels of violence.

Tanzania

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her written answer of 9 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 285W, on Tanzania, what assessment she has made of the humanitarian consequences of her decision to withhold aid from Tanzania; and when she expects aid to resume. [57005]

Clare Short: In October 2001 DFID provided £35 million budget support to Tanzania. Our decision to delay disbursement of the next tranche of £10 million budget support has not affected the £35 million budget support already disbursed, or any of the complementary technical assistance programmes and projects that are currently addressing poverty reduction with Government, private sector and civil society partners.

A decision on resuming disbursement of this tranche will be made following the Government of Tanzania's response to the review of the country's civil aviation requirements by the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO), once the ICAO report has been issued.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 685W, on Tanzania, what reports she has received from the *(a)* IMF and *(b)* World Bank, with regards to their assessment of the impact on development of Tanzania of the purchase of an air traffic control system; and if she will place copies in the Library. [57787]

Clare Short: Neither I nor my Department have received copies of reports from the IMF or the World bank regarding their assessment of the impact on development of Tanzania of the purchase of an air traffic control system. The World bank is still examining value for money issues arising from the purchase, and they and the Government of Tanzania are awaiting the impending report from the International Civil Aviation Organisation.

East Africa

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how her Department is responding to the recent floods in East Africa. [56969]

Clare Short: In Kenya, the country worst hit by the recent heavy rains in east Africa, mudslides have killed at least 53 people, and up to 150,000 people have been temporarily displaced by floods. Information from the Kenyan National Disaster Operations Centre suggests that, while the impact in some areas is serious, Government agencies and civil society organisations are coping and are delivering appropriate assistance to those affected. DFID staff are closely monitoring the situation in Kenya and elsewhere in the region.

World Trade Organisation

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which developing countries are members of the World Trade Organisation; and what progress has been made in streamlining the least-developed countries' accession process to the WTO. [56665]

Clare Short *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* As of 1 January 2002 there were 111 developing country members of which 30[1] are least-developed in the WTO. These are listed below with their respective accession dates.

Albania—8 September 2000
Angola[1]—23 November 1996
Antigua and Barbuda—1 January 1995
Argentina—1 January 1995
Bangladesh[1]—1 January 1995
Barbados—1 January 1995
Belize—1 January 1995
Benin[1]—22 February 1996
Bolivia—12 September 1995
Botswana—31 May 1995
Brazil—1 January 1995
Bulgaria—1 December 1996
Burkina Faso[1]—3 June 1995
Burundi[1]—23 July 1995
Cameroon—13 December 1995
Central African Republic[1]—31 May 1995
Chad[1]—19 October 1996
Chile—1 January 1995
China—11 December 2001
Colombia—30 April 1995
Congo[1]—27 March 1997
Costa Rica—1 January 1995
Côte d'Ivoire—1 January 1995
Croatia—30 November 2000
Cuba—20 April 1995
Czech Republic—1 January 1995
Democratic Republic of the Congo[1]—1 January 1997
Djibouti[1]—31 May 1995
Dominica—1 January 1995
Dominican Republic—9 March 1995

Ecuador—21 January 1996
Egypt—30 June 1995
El Salvador—7 May 1995
Estonia—13 November 1999
Fiji—14 January 1999
Gabon—1 January 1995
The Gambia'—23 October 1996
Georgia—14 June 2000
Ghana—1 January 1995
Grenada—22 February 1996
Guatemala—21 July 1995
Guinea Bissau'—31 may 1995
Guinea'—25 October 1995
Guyana—1 January 1995
Haiti'—30 January 1996
Honduras—1 January 1995
Hungary—1 January 1995
India—1 January 1995
Indonesia—1 January 1995
Jamaica—9 March 1995
Jordan—11 April 2000
Kenya—1 January 1995
Korea, Republic of—1 January 1995
Kuwait—1 January 1995
Kyrgyz Republic—20 December 1998
Latvia—10 February 1999
Lesotho'—31 May 1995
Lithuania—31 May 2001
Macao, China—1 January 1995
Madagascar'—17 November 1995
Malawi'—31 May 1995
Malaysia—1 January 1995
Maldives'—31 May 1995
Mali'—31 May 1995
Mauritania'—31 May 1995
Mauritius—1 January 1995
Mexico—1 January 1995
Moldova—26 July 2001
Mongolia—29 January 1997
Morocco—1 January 1995
Mozambique'—26 August 1995
Myanmar'—1 January 1995
Namibia—1 January 1995
Nicaragua—3 September 1995
Niger'—13 December 1996
Nigeria—1 January 1995
Oman—9 November 2000
Pakistan—1 January 1995
Panama—6 September 1997
Papua New Guinea—9 June 1996
Paraguay—1 January 1995
Peru—1 January 1995
Philippines—1 January 1995
Poland—1 July 1995
Qatar—13 January 1996
Romania—1 January 1995
Rwanda'—22 May 1996
Saint Kitts and Nevis—21 February 1996
Saint Lucia—1 January 1995
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines—1 January 1995
Senegal'—1 January 1995
Sierra Leone'—23 July 1995
Slovak Republic—1 January 1995
Slovenia—30 July 1995
Solomon Islands'—26 July 1996
South Africa—1 January 1995
Sri Lanka—1 January 1995
Suriname—1 January 1995
Swaziland—1 January 1995
Switzerland—1 July 1995
Tanzania'—1 January 1995
Thailand—1 January 1995
Togo'—31 May 1995
Trinidad and Tobago—1 March 1995
Tunisia—29 March 1995
Turkey—26 March 1995
Uganda'—1 January 1995
Uruguay—1 January 1995
Venezuela—1 January 1995
Zambia'—1 January 1995
Zimbabwe—5 March 1995.

There are major difficulties faced by least-developed countries (LDCs) when attempting to accede to the WTO. The WTO Secretariat, UNCTAD and several donor countries are working to address the issue, but since the inception of the WTO no LDCs have acceded to the organisation. This was recognised in the WTO ministerial declaration at Doha in November 2001 which stated:

> "Accession of LDCs remains a priority for the Membership. We agree to work to facilitate and accelerate negotiations with acceding LDCs. We instruct the Secretariat to reflect the priority we attach to LDCs' accessions in the annual plans for technical assistance."

The WTO is working to help LDC accession candidates by streamlining the existing process in a number of ways. The aim is to have as few working party meetings as possible, to have clear agendas and work plans on exit, and to move as soon as possible towards the first version of the working party's draft report. However, the WTO would also like to see more action from WTO members, and is encouraging them to be more flexible and realistic in their market access negotiations with LDCs.

DFID is at the forefront of work on WTO accession, and since 1999 we have been providing assistance (£400,000) to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) to support developing and least developed countries accede to the WTO on terms consistent with their respective development needs.

Technical Assistance

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the outcome of the enhanced integrated framework pilot scheme to improve the efficiency of trade-related technical assistance to developing countries was; and if this will be extended to a wider initiative. [56663]

Clare Short *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* Three countries (Cambodia, Madagascar and Mauritania) were selected for the pilot phase of the Integrated Framework (IF) on the basis of demonstrating a clear choice and commitment to the mainstreaming of trade into their development plans, through the Poverty Reduction

Strategy Paper (PRSP) process. This process helped the three countries to identify and prioritise trade-related technical assistance (TRTA) requirements from infrastructure to human resources within a coherent policy framework. Donors are now in the process of responding to these needs and the final review of the outcome of the pilot phase will be issued in October.

At the fourth WTO Ministerial Conference held in Doha in November 2001, the IF was endorsed as a model for LDCs trade development. In this context, eleven countries, Lesotho, Malawi, Senegal, Burundi, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, Mali, Nepal and Yemen were selected for the next phase of the enhanced IF, and work has already begun. In all 45 countries have been identified.

We remain convinced that the Integrated Framework is the best approach for mainstreaming trade into national development plans and strategies for poverty reduction, as well as being an effective mechanism for supporting donor coordinated delivery of TRTA.

Afghanistan

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is being done to prevent violence against Pashtuns in Afghanistan. [56967]

Clare Short: The Afghan Interim Administration (AIA) has established an independent commission to investigate reports of ethnically motivated violence. Following a visit to northern Afghanistan in February 2002, the commission made a number of recommendations for improving security in the area, which are currently being considered by the AIA. These include the creation of a collaborative mechanism for addressing complaints, made up of representatives of all ethnic groups in the north, including Pashtuns.

The UK is working with the Afghan Interim Administration, other donors and international agencies to strengthen the ability of the Afghan authorities to enforce the rule of law. An Afghan-led, internationally supported security sector reform programme is crucial to ensuring the capacity of the Afghan state both to deter further human rights abuses and to bring those responsible for human rights abuses to justice.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the rights of women in Afghanistan; and if she will make a statement. [56966]

Clare Short: Important progress has been made in restoring women's rights in Afghanistan. We welcome the involvement of women in the Afghan Interim Administration (AIA) and the Special Commission for the Convening of the Loya Jirga. Women have begun to return to work and girls are going back to school. But it is a slow process and more needs to be done. The UK is working closely with the AIA and the rest of the international community, to ensuring women's full and effective participation in civil, cultural, economic, political and social life throughout Afghanistan.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the extent of violence against Pashtuns in Afghanistan. [56968]

Clare Short: There have been a number of recent reports of abuses against Pashtuns, particularly in northern Afghanistan. These abuses include beatings, extortion, looting and sexual violence. Pashtuns are believed to have been targeted because of associations between their ethnic group and the Taliban regime.

In February 2002, the Afghan Interim Administration (AIA) authorised a high-level independent commission to investigate reports of ethnically motivated violence in Afghanistan. A three person team from the commission visited northern Afghanistan to meet with local people and commanders to investigate reports of abuses against Pashtuns. Based on their findings, the commission made a series of recommendations which the AIA are now considering. Human Rights Watch has also investigated reports of abuses against Pashtuns. Their report—which can be found on their website (http//www.hrw.org)—is the result of interviews and discussions with local people in Balkh, Faryab, Samangan and Baghlan provinces, representatives of the AIA and humanitarian workers.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many internally displaced people there are in Afghanistan; and what assistance is being provided to them. [56965]

Clare Short: In January 2002, the United Nations estimated that there were approximately 1.2 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Afghanistan. Since then, approximately 160,000 IDPs have returned to their homes with assistance from the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). A further 400,000 IDPs are estimated to have returned home spontaneously, without international assistance.

IDPs, as victims of conflict and the ongoing effects of the drought, are among the most vulnerable people in Afghanistan, and are targeted by UN agencies, the Red Cross Movement and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for the urgent provision of humanitarian assistance. It is a priority in 2002 for the Afghan Interim Administration and the international community to ensure reintegration of uprooted Afghans who wish to return home. Programmes coordinated by UNHCR and IOM are under way to physically transport returnees back to their places of origin, build the capacity of communities to absorb returning families, and integrate short-term programmes with longer-term strategies to ensure sustainable reintegration of returnees. Since September 2001, my Department has contributed £3 million to UNHCR and £3.6 million to IOM for their programmes in the region.

WALES

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how much was spent by his Department on paying pensions to retired employees of his Department in 2001–02; if he will estimate the corresponding amounts to be spent in *(a)* five years' time, *(b)* 10 years' time, *(c)* 20 years' time and *(d)* 30 years' time; if he will estimate in each case the proportion of such liabilities which will arise from (i) unfunded pension schemes and (ii) pre-funded pension schemes; and in the case of pre-funded schemes, if he will estimate the value of the corresponding pre-funded funds in each of these years. [57365]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The permanent civil servants in my Department are all secondees; pension liabilities remain with their home Departments.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Literacy and Numeracy

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent representations she has received in relation to the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. [57722]

Mr. Timms: Over the last 12 months, the Secretary of State has been asked 22 Parliamentary Questions and received at lease 400 items of written correspondence, including correspondence via email, related to the National Literacy and Numeracy strategies. The Secretary of State also received a total of 206 responses in response to consultation in the Autumn term 2001 about the national targets at Key Stage 2 in English and mathematics for 2004.

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which recent studies of literacy and numeracy standards among primary school children her Department has analysed; and what assessment she has made of these studies. [57721]

Mr. Timms: The following reports have been published by Ofsted (about literacy and numeracy in primary schools) in the last 12 months:

The National Numeracy Strategy in Special Schools: An evaluation of the first year (14 June 2001)

Teaching of Phonics: A paper by HMI (29 October 2001)

Teaching literacy and mathematics in reception classes: A survey by HMI (29 October 2001)

The National Literacy Strategy: the third year (4 December 2001)

The National Numeracy Strategy: the second year (4 December 2001)

Teaching of Calculation in Primary Schools: A report by HMI (15 April 2002)

Teaching Assistants in Primary Schools: An evaluation of the quality and Impact of their work (16 April 2002).

The University of Toronto which is independently evaluating the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies produced the following report last year:

Watching and Learning 2, OISE/UT Evaluation of the Implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, Second Annual Report, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto (September 2001).

The Department has considered carefully the findings of these studies which have generally been supportive of the strategies and also helped to improve them.

Work-related Illness

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many claims for work-related injury or illness were settled on behalf of *(a)* teachers in primary and secondary schools and *(b)* other school staff in the last year for which figures are available; and what the total cost in compensation was. [56057]

Mr. Timms: Claims for work-related injury or illness are matters between individuals and their employers. Teachers and other staff in schools are employed by either the Local Education Authority or the School Governing Body, and consequently such matters are dealt with at a local level. No data are held centrally by the Department about either the number of claims or the cost of compensation payments.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* teachers in primary and secondary schools and *(b)* other staff in those schools retired through work-related injury or ill health in the last year for which records are available; and what the total cost to the Department was. [56058]

Mr. Timms: Entitlement to ill health retirement under the Teachers' Pensions Scheme (TPS) is determined by the severity of a teacher's medical condition. Where the medical evidence demonstrates that the teacher is permanently unfit to teach, irrespective of the cause of the medical condition, retirement benefits become due. Information is not held on whether the medical condition giving rise to ill health retirement is attributable, in whole or in part, to a work-related injury or illness.

Non-teaching staff in schools are subject to the Local Government Pension Scheme, which is the responsibility of the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

Consequently, no data are held by my Department about the number of teachers, or other staff in schools, who retired through work-related injury or ill health.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many claims for work-related illness were settled by her Department in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost in compensation was. [56054]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: During the period April 2001 to March 2002 three cases for work-related illness reached final settlement at a cost of £20,318 including solicitors' fees. During the same period the Department received £3,280 back from a previous case where a claimant lost an appeal.

Teachers (Lancashire)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many teachers have been in service in primary schools in Lancashire in each year since 1997; [57283]

(2) how many teachers have been in service in secondary schools in Lancashire in each year since 1997. [57284]

Mr. Timms: The full-time equivalent¹ numbers of regular teachers in service in maintained nursery/primary and secondary schools in Lancashire in January of each year since 1997 are as follows:

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Nursery/primary schools					
Former Lancashire	5480	5460	—	—	—
Lancashire	—	—	4410	4390	4490
Blackburn with Darwen	—	—	630	630	670
Blackpool	—	—	520	510	550
All Lancashire	5480	5460	5560	5530	5710

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Secondary schools					
Former Lancashire	5240	5310	—	—	—
Lancashire	—	—	4390	4520	4570
Blackburn with Darwen	—	—	570	570	490
Blackpool	—	—	400	430	470
All Lancashire	5240	5310	5360	5520	5530

Data for January 2002 are not yet available at local education authority level. Information on teachers in service in January 2002 by local education authority will be published in the Teachers in England statistical volume in December 2002.

[1] Part-time teachers have been converted to an estimate of their full-time equivalence and added to full-time numbers.

Further Education Colleges

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the changes in real terms in core funding for further education colleges in each year since 1997. [52570]

Margaret Hodge: The information is as follows:

	Funding for participation (£)	*Real terms index*
1997–98[1]	3,070	98
1998–99[1]	3,120	97
1999–2000[1]	3,360	101
2000–01[2]	3,380	100
2001–02[3]	3,500	101

[1] Actual

[2] Provisional

[3] Planned

This table shows the estimated participation funding allocated to the LSC in real terms for each full-time equivalent (FTE) student in FE. It includes additional funds derived from employer contributions and other funds made available for widening participation, to support the introduction of Qualifying for Success and for increased provision of basic skills courses. Compared to the Departmental Annual Report 2001 this now gives a complete picture of funding for participation for colleges. It does not represent total funding for further education as it excludes targeted funds such as capital, standards fund and Teachers Pay Initiative (TPI).

If targeted funds were included then the estimated total funding for each FTE student in FE in real terms increased by 12 per cent. over the same period.

Exams

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average number of exams sat by a pupil in *(a)* 1991–92 and *(b)* 2001–02 was. [54889]

Margaret Hodge: The information requested for England for 1991–92 is as follows:

A 15-year-old pupil sat an average of 8.0 GCSEs in 1991–92.

A 17-year-old student sat an average of 3.0 GCE A/AS examinations in 1991–92.

The figures for 2001–02 are not yet available. The latest figures available are for 2000–01, and these are as follows:

A 15-year-old pupil sat an average of 8.2 GCSEs in 2000–01.

A 17-year-old student sat an average of 3.1 GCE A/AS examinations in 2000–01.

For GCSE and GCE A/AS exams, schools enter pupils for the appropriate subjects; the number of exam papers will vary according to subject and Awarding Body.

Vouchers

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much her Department had spent on vouchers for three-year-olds by 31 March. [55085]

Margaret Hodge: The nursery education voucher scheme applied to four-year-olds only and it was replaced in September 1997.

Maladministration

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many findings there have been of maladministration by ombudsmen with responsibility for agencies under the remit of her Department since 1997. [56317]

Estelle Morris: Information on the handling of complaints is set out in tabular form by the parliamentary ombudsman each year as an attachment to his Annual Report. For those complaints where there was evidence of maladministration which warranted a full investigation, the table sets out how many complaints were upheld as being fully or partly justified. Copies of the parliamentary ombudsman's Annual Reports for the period 1997–98 to 2000–01 inclusive can be viewed in the House Library. This information is also available on the parliamentary ombudsman's website at www.ombudsman.org.uk/publications.

Pre-schools (Documents)

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what documents have been sent to pre-schools by her Department since 1 July 2001; and how many pages were contained in each document. [55076]

Margaret Hodge: Details of those documents sent directly to pre-schools by my Department since 1 July 2001 are set out in the table.

Title of document	*Date issued*	*Brief description*	*Quantity issued*	*Number of pages*	*Reference number*
Planning for Learning	1 October 2001	Booklet designed to supplement the curriculum guidance for the foundation stage.	16,352	21	QCA/01/799
Requirements of Nursery Education Grant 2002–03	30 April 2002	Guidance to local education authorities and providers on eligibility for and administration of the Nursery Education Grant.	28,000	52	DfES/0358/2002

Title of document	*Date issued*	*Brief description*	*Quantity issued*	*Number of pages*	*Reference number*
National Standards for Under Eights Day Care—Sessional Care[1]	14 July 2001	National standards for providers of day care for children under 8. Regulations under the Children Act require providers to meet the 14 standards.	45,000	25	DfES/0490/2001
National Standards for Under Eights Day Care—Full Day Care[1]	14 July 2001	National standards for providers of day care for children under 8. Regulations under the Children Act require providers to meet the 14 standards.	30,000	25	DfES/0488/2001

[1] Pre-schools would have received either sessional care or full day care depending on the number of hours they were operating.

Special Educational Needs

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children per 1,000 in Nottinghamshire are issued with a statement of special educational needs; and what the figure is per 1,000 children in England. [55414]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is shown in the table.

Pupils with statements of special educational needs[1]—January 2001

	Number
Nottinghamshire LEA	
Total pupils	123,770
Pupils with statements of SEN[2]	1,340
Number of pupils per 1,000 with a statement of SEN	10.8
England	
Total pupils	7,733,640
Pupils with statements of SEN[3]	244,269
Number of pupils per 1,000 with a statement of SEN	31.6

[1] Includes maintained primary and secondary schools and maintained and non-maintained special schools.

[2] Pupils attending schools within Nottinghamshire LEA.

[3] Estimates have been made at national level for January 2001 because the data for SEN are known to be incomplete. Figures given for Nottinghamshire LEA are as reported by schools in the Nottinghamshire LEA area.

Nursery Education

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children were benefiting from nursery vouchers in 1997. [54887]

Margaret Hodge: In April 1997, 576,176 four-year-olds received a free, part-time, early education voucher as a result of the Nursery Voucher scheme. However, this did not necessarily guarantee a place.

Since September 1998, local education authorities have had a statutory duty to secure a free, part-time, early education place for all four-year-olds.

Furthermore we have increased the number of free, part-time, early education places for three-year-olds from 34 per cent. in January 1997 to 66 per cent. in March 2002. So in 2001–02, 924,742 number of three and four-year-olds received a part-time, early education place.

Warrington Collegiate Institute

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions she has had with the Cheshire Learning and Skills Council on how its new funding formula will affect students with special needs at Warrington Collegiate Institute; and if she will make a statement. [56678]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 16 May 2002]*: None. Funding of further education (FE) provision is the responsibility of the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Funding for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in mainstream FE provision consists of two elements: funding for the basic costs of the course, as for other students; and additional learning support tailored to meet the costs of activities to meet the individual's needs.

The LSC is introducing limited changes to its funding for basic course costs for 2002–03 which include greater emphasis on rewarding retention and achievement. While broadly cost neutral the changes are designed to reward those institutions that raise participation and achievement rates. I believe it is right that funding for retention and achievement for students with special needs in mainstream FE colleges should be on the same basis as for other students. The LSC have safety netting arrangements in place to help those institutions that may see a drop in income solely due to funding methodology changes.

Additional learning support funding arrangements for the 2002–03 academic year remain unchanged from earlier years. However, the LSC is currently consulting on its proposals to revise the present methodology for funding additional learner needs in post-16 education and training. These new arrangements are intended to ensure a coherent approach, based on common principles, to the funding of special needs regardless of age, mode of study or type of programme.

Veterinary Science

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* applicants, *(b)* accepted students and *(c)* graduates there were in veterinary science in each of the last 10 years. [54990]

Margaret Hodge: The available information is shown in the table.

Students on undergraduate veterinary science courses

Year of entry	*Applicants*[1]	*Accepted applicants*[2]	*Academic year in which course was completed*	*Graduates*
1991	[3]n/a	430	1991–92	370
1992	[3]n/a	470	1992–93	380
1993	[3]n/a	470	1993–94	[4]400
1994	1,350	510	1994–95	470
1995	1,520	540	1995–96	460
1996	1,530	570	1996–97	520
1997	1,730	530	1997–98	490
1998	1,790	620	1998–99	530
1999	1,800	630	1999–2000	560
2000	1,760	660	2000–01	580
2001	1,610	700	2001–02	[5]n/a

[1] Covers home and overseas students applying to full-time and sandwich first degree and undergraduate courses only.

[2] Covers home and overseas students on all full-time and part-time undergraduate courses in HE institutions in the UK.

[3] Not available. In these years, applicant numbers by subject were not published.

[4] Because of a change in data sources between 1993–94 and 1994–95, this has been estimated.

[5] Not available. Figures for 2001–02 will be available in January 2003.

Note:

Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the mandate of the committee on the second general system for the recognition of professional education and training is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56763]

Margaret Hodge: The committee on the second general system for the recognition of professional education and training assists the European Commission to consider requests made by member states to revise information relating to Annexes C and D of Directive 92/51/EEC. There has been just one meeting of the committee in the last five years—in November 2001. Travel expenses were met from Commission resources. The subsistence cost incurred by this Department was £114. Amendments to Annex C of Directive 92/51/EEC currently under consideration of the committee are:

Germany—change of title from "occupational therapist" to "occupational therapist/ergotherapist"

Italy—delete the profession of "chiropodist"

Austria—insert the profession of "bookkeeper"

UK—insert the profession of "listed veterinary nurse".

In the interests of improving information to the public and transparency, the Committee agreed at its meeting in November 2001 to amend its Rules of Procedure to conform to the new comitology decision. Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Commission Document 5685–02). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

School Reception Classes

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many primary schools in England and Wales have reception classes for children aged under four years; and what percentage this is of the total number of primary schools. [48218]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 9 April 2002]:* Information is not collected on the age of pupils within classes, however we do collect information on the number of pupils by age by school.

There are 18,069 maintained primary schools in England. Within these 11,844 (65.5 per cent.) have one or more reception classes.

For information on Welsh primary schools I refer the hon. Member to the National Assembly for Wales.

Class Sizes

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average class sizes were for each age group in each of the past five years. [54894]

Margaret Hodge: Information on the average class sizes by age group is not collected, however tables showing this information by year group have been placed in the Library.

Higher Education

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much has been spent by her Department on research funding for universities for each year since 1997. [53678]

Margaret Hodge: The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) funds the Higher Education Funding Council for England, which then allocates research funding to higher education institutions in England. The following table outlines the allocations made by HEFCE using research criteria per year since 1997. The table includes DfES spending via the Joint Infrastructure Fund (JIF) and the Science Research Investment Fund (SRIF). Over and above this, the Government and the Welcome Trust have made available £750 million via the JIF and £900 million via the SRIF for capital investment in higher education research infrastructure in science and technology. Furthermore Research Council funding for research and development will rise from £1,279 million in 1997–98 to £1,793 million in 2002–03 of which a significant proportion goes to higher education institutions as research grants.

Research funding for higher education in England

£ million

			Outturn			*Plans*
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Recurrent and special research grants	720.2	841.0	871.7	884.1	905.7	940.0
Research capital spend	8.0	35.9	44.2	39.9	81.9	264.8

Note: This table covers recurrent research and special research grants (academic years) and research capital infrastructure investment (financial years). Figures for recurrent and special research grants for 1998–99 onwards include London extra costs, and funds for the supervision and tuition of postgraduate students. Figures for research capital include HEFCE funding for the following schemes: Joint Research Equipment Initiative, Joint Infrastructure Fund, Science Research Investment Fund and the Research Laboratories Scheme.

Source:

HEFCE Analytical Services Group. Data prepared 26 April 2002.

Higher Education (Cornwall)

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the postcodes are of low participation neighbourhoods in Cornwall that have been identified by HEFC(E) for their performance indicator purposes. [55807]

Margaret Hodge: This is a matter for the Higher Education Funding Council for England. I have therefore asked the chief executive of the Funding Council to reply to your question and to place a copy of his reply in the Commons Library.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefit Sanctions

11. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent research he has commissioned into the effects of benefit sanctions. [55498]

Mr. Darling: It is a fundamental principle that rights are matched with corresponding responsibilities. Where appropriate sanctions are applied where people choose not to meet their responsibilities.

We have undertaken a range of research into benefit sanctions and have published the results. An important finding has been that those jobseekers subject to longer term sanctions generally increase their efforts to find work, often with success. For some, this is the first time they will have made a serious attempt to find work.

Child Support Agency

13. **Mr. Plaskitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the rate at which current CSA cases will be transferred to the new assessment formula. [55500]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, to this House on 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 315–16.

18. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representations he has received following his statement on the reform of the CSA; and if he will make a statement. [55505]

Malcolm Wicks: Since my right hon. Friend informed the House that the new scheme would not be introduced in April, the Department has received 15 letters from Members of Parliament and 4 from members of the public on this matter. Organisations representing Lone Parent Families have supported our priority to ensure the new scheme is introduced effectively, and not to repeat the mistakes of 1993.

Incapacity Benefit

14. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his target is for reducing the number of incapacity benefit claimants. [55501]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have no targets for reducing the number of people who claim Incapacity Benefit. We are committed to giving all people of working age the help and support they need to find jobs where they are able to do so, and providing security for those who are unable to work.

Jobcentre Plus will give these opportunities but there is no question of forcing disabled people into work against their will.

Jobcentre Plus

15. **Mr. Levitt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when Jobcentre Plus will be extended to cover the whole country. [55502]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: In addition to the 56 integrated Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices which are already open, we intend to introduce around 225 more integrated offices by April next year including a number of offices in my hon. Friend's constituency.

The work to extend integrated offices to the whole of Great Britain will continue progressively over the next four years. Alongside the programme for the full integration of services and refurbishment of offices, a series of service delivery improvements will be extended to the entire Jobcentre Plus network in advance of the completion of roll-out.

New Deal

16. **Mr. Kevan Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment his Department has made of the effect the new deal has had on long-term unemployment in the North-East. [55503]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Since 1997 in the North-East, long-term unemployment has been cut by over 70 per cent.

The new deals have played an important part in this success. In the North-East, the new deal for Young People and new deal 25 plus have, between them, helped over 34,000 long-term unemployed people off benefits and into work.

In addition, Action Teams for Jobs and Employment Zones have, between them, helped over 6,000 people from the most deprived areas in the North-East into work.

35. **Mark Tami:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent representations he has received from employers regarding the New Deal. [55523]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Employers have a central role to play in achieving our goal of creating and sustaining employment opportunities for all. DWP Ministers meet with a wide range of employers and their representative organisations and have a planned programme of meetings for the year ahead.

The National Employment Panel (formerly known as the New Deal Task Force) was formed in 1997 to ensure that employers, and other key customers, have a strong and permanent voice within the Department. The panel is an employer-led body that provides independent advice on the design, delivery and performance of the New Deals and our other welfare to work initiatives, reporting directly to Ministers. The National Employment Panel Employer Coalitions ensure that employers can contribute to services at the regional and local level.

Annuities

17. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will revise the annuity rule on pensions held by over-75-year-olds; and if he will make a statement. [55504]

Mr. McCartney: The Government have no plans to revise the rule that pension funds must be annuitised by the time the owner reaches 75. We believe that it is a sensible compromise that guarantees pensioners an income for life and allows them some flexibility on the use of their pension fund.

We are currently considering the responses to the Modernising Annuities consultation paper, which sets out our proposals to help all pension savers achieve better value and make suitable choices when they reach retirement.

Drug Treatment

19. **Ian Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures he is taking to help those recovering from drug treatment to find work. [55506]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We are committed to helping unemployed people who have decided to kick their drug habit move into work. Getting ex-drug users back into work is good for them and good for society.

That is why we have introduced progress2work, a £40 million initiative to give unemployed people who are recovering from their drug problem the extra help they need to get into work. 27 progress2work pathfinders are already up and running around the country.

My hon. Friend's constituency will be covered by the second phase of the initiative which will begin in the autumn.

25. **Tony Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures he is taking to help those recovering from drug treatment to find work. [55513]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We are committed to helping unemployed people who have decided to kick their drug habit move into work.

Our policies and programmes are helping people with drug problems to overcome them and lead healthy and productive lives, a key aim of the Government's anti-drugs strategy.

Drug mis-users already have early access to programmes like the new deal and Work Based Learning for Adults. We have also introduced progress2work, a £40 million initiative to give unemployed people who are recovering from their drug problem the extra help they need to get into work. Progress2work will provide additional specialist help so recovering drug users can make the best use of our welfare to work initiatives. It will also equip Jobcentre Plus staff with the skills and knowledge they need to identify and help drug mis-users, and will bring more local and national co-ordination to provision in this field.

Progress2work is already up and running in 27 pathfinder areas and will be rolled out nationally from next year.

Pension Service

20. **David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to ensure that the Pension Service can provide a local service to older and housebound pensioners. [55507]

Mr. McCartney: A key aim of the Pension Service is to provide an excellent customer service by making use of the advances in new technology. This will be done through our contact centres. Customers can access us easily through a simple range of telephone numbers, and can get their claims and queries dealt with quickly by trained experts who understand state pensions and the needs of their customers.

We fully recognise that not everyone can access the service using the telephone, post or internet—and for those customers there will be a community-based local service.

The local service is being introduced on a phased basis from 1 April 2002 and will be in place nationwide by October 2002. It will be made up of two key elements. A direct local service, providing support directly to customers which will include a targeted visiting service both in the home and at third party locations, and a 'drop in' surgery service for outreach and take up activities, and partnership services provided with partners such as local authorities and voluntary sector organisations.

In the meantime, customers should continue to deal with their local social security office until the national service is in place.

23. **Mr. Wyatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what improvements in service he expects there to be from the new Pension Service. [55511]

Mr. McCartney: The Pension Service, formally launched on 1 April 2002, will provide a modern, efficient and customer focused service, dedicated to combating poverty and encouraging saving for both today's and future pensioners.

It will comprise centralised pension centres working with an improved local service nationwide which will operate in the community working with local partners to provide face to face contact for pensioners.

A key aim of The Pension Service is to provide an excellent customer service by making use of the advances in new technology. This will be done through our contact centres. Customers can access us easily through a simple range of telephone numbers, and can get their claims and queries dealt with quickly by trained experts who understand state pensions and the needs of their customers.

We fully recognise that not everyone can access the service using the telephone, post or internet—and for those customers there will be a community based local service.

The local service is being introduced on a phased basis from 1 April 2002 and will be in place nationwide by October 2002. It will be made up of two key elements. A direct local service, providing support directly to customers which will include a targeted visiting service both in the home and at third party locations, and a 'drop in' surgery service for outreach and take up activities; and partnership services provided with partners such as local authorities and voluntary sector organisations.

The new Pension Service sees a key shift in emphasis from processes to people: their needs, what they want and the way they want it delivered. This improved service will be rolled out over the next few years. In the interim, our customers will continue to deal with their existing social security offices until they are contacted in writing about the new arrangements.

32. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement about the assistance ethnic minority pensioners will receive with their claims through the Pension Service. [55520]

Mr. McCartney: The Pension Service will provide a service tailored to the needs of all its customers, including those from ethnic minority backgrounds and people with disabilities.

As part of our commitment to ensure that we provide the best possible service we have facilities which enable customers to access the Language Line—a telephone interpreting service covering over 150 languages. We also produce leaflets in a wide range of languages. Our services are also available in Welsh.

The pension centres and local service will also offer a full service to customers with disabilities. For those people with impaired hearing we can offer Typetalk, BT TextDirect and the services of sign language interpreter if required. Many of our written communications are available on request in Braille, audio cassette, e-mail and large print.

The local service will establish close links with organisations representing different groups to ensure we meet the needs of the community.

Minimum Income Guarantee

21. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners are in receipt of minimum income guarantee in *(a)* England and *(b)* the north-west. [55509]

Mr. McCartney: Over 2 million pensioners benefit from the minimum income guarantee (MIG). These pensioners are on average £20 a week better off. In the north-west Government office region, nearly 250,000 pensioners were in receipt of the MIG, 3,200 of these live in the Burnley constituency.

To help meet our aim of tackling pensioner poverty, we have introduced a new Pension Service. It will provide a modern, efficient and customer focused service for both today's and future pensioners.

It will comprise centralised pension centres working with an improved local service nationwide which will operate in the community working with local partners to provide face to face contact for pensioners.

This improved service will be rolled out over the next few years. In the interim, our customers will continue to deal with their existing social security offices until they are contacted in writing about the new arrangements.

Our pension centre in Burnley has been up and running since February 2002 and has created some 300 new job opportunities in the region.

22. **David Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent assessment he has made of how many eligible pensioners failed to apply for minimum income guarantee in the year to 31 March. [55510]

Mr. McCartney: Over two million pensioners benefit from the MIG and are on average £20 per week better off.

The latest figures for the number of pensioners who may be entitled to but are not claiming the minimum income guarantee are available in the Library[1]. Estimates for pensioners are subject to greater uncertainty than other published take up estimates; research is under way to improve the precision of take up estimates.

Around 1,900 pensioners in the north-west Leicestershire constituency are receiving the minimum income guarantee, and around 16,940 winter fuel payments were made last winter.

[1] Income Related Benefits—Estimates of Take Up 1999–2000.

Labour Market

24. **Mr. Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on recent trends in the labour market. [55512]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: There are problems in the world economy, but the UK is withstanding these better than other major countries.

Employment is at a record level of 28.42 million, growing by 172,000 over the last year and by more than 1.5 million since 1997.

Claimant unemployment is under 953,000, its lowest level since 1975, down by more than 24,000 over the last year and by more than half a million since 1997. For the first time in half a century we have the lowest International Labour Organisation (ILO) unemployment rate of any of the major industrialised countries.

Building on the foundation of a strong and stable economy, the Department's policies have played an important part in this success. For example, the New Deals have helped well over 600,000 people off benefits and into work, and Action Teams for Jobs and Employment Zones have, between them, helped over 52,000 people from the country's most deprived areas into jobs.

Means-tested Pensions

26. **Mr. Wiggin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what change has taken place in the number of means-tested pensions since 1997. [55514]

Mr. McCartney: For the purposes of this question 'means tested pensions' has been taken to refer to income support and minimum income guarantee. In November 1997 the number of claims to income support was around 1.7 million. In November 2001, the number of claims to income support paid through the minimum income guarantee was around 1.74 million. This benefited over 2 million people.

In the Leominster constituency, around 2,100 pensioners are receiving the minimum income guarantee, and around 21,080 winter fuel payments were made last winter.

Source: Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiries, November 1977 and 2001.

27. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on his assessment of trends in the value of funded pensions. [55515]

Mr. McCartney: Figures showing a rise in pension fund assets of £111 billion from 1997 to 2000 were released by the Office for National Statistics on 16 May 2002. They also show that pension fund assets stood at £776 billion in 2000, the latest year for which figures are available.

This shows that the value of pension fund assets remain strong. This is supported by figures given in the answer to the questions asked by the hon. Member for Havant, showing increases in contributions to pension funds of £27 billion from 1997 to 2001.

These figures emphasise that the basic structure of pensions in this country is right. We will continue to build on the changes we've already made, such as the introduction of state second pension, stakeholder pensions and pension Credit which are tackling pensioner poverty and widening pension saving.

And proposals we will make later this year following three wide-ranging reviews of the pension system will make it easier for people to save more for their retirement.

Resettled Offenders

28. **Jim Knight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to help resettled offenders to find work. [55516]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: As part of our strategy to combat social exclusion, we are committed to helping resettled offenders overcome the barriers they face in getting work. Ex-offenders who are in work are half as likely to re-offend as those without a job.

We offer ex-offenders a wide range of help to move into work, including early access to employment programmes such as New Deal and work based learning for adults. Last October we introduced Freshstart, a £3 million initiative to improve the links between prisons and jobcentres and ease the transition from custody into work. In addition, we are also looking to draw resettled offenders who have recovered from drug misuse into our progress2work initiative. Progress2work pathfinders are already up and running in 27 areas and will be rolled out nationally next year.

This autumn we will be piloting further support for ex-offenders, giving them the specialist help they need to make best use of our welfare to work initiatives such as the New Deals.

Long-term Unemployed

29. **Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to help the long-term unemployed into employment in areas of deprivation. [55517]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Our welfare to work initiatives are helping people into work in all parts of the country. The New Deals have already helped well over 600,000 people into jobs.

We introduced Employment Zones to help long-term unemployed people in deprived areas get and keep work. Up to March 2002, the 15 zones had helped over 22,200 people move into work. We are in the process of extending the contracts of existing Employment Zones up to March 2004.

Action Teams for Jobs are also helping tackle joblessness in the most employment deprived areas in the country. Up to April 2002, over 30,000 people had moved into work through action teams. The team in my hon. Friend's constituency started work in mid-October 2001 and covers the five most employment-deprived wards in Halton. To the end of April this year, the team had already engaged 392 people and helped 126 of them into work.

We are building on action teams' success. In the Budget, the Chancellor announced the introduction of a new Transport Projects Fund worth £5 million a year. Action teams can bid for additional money from this fund to support innovative transport projects that will benefit their local community.

Older People (Discrimination)

30. **Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to reduce discrimination against older people. [55518]

Mr. McCartney: We are committed to reducing discrimination against older people. The Department is responsible for promoting the business case for non-ageist employment practises to all employers and individuals across Great Britain. Through our Age Positive campaign, we are working to challenge ageist employment practices leading up to the implementation of age legislation covering employment, vocational training and guidance in 2006.

Evaluation of the impact of our Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment indicates that since it was launched in 1999, the number of companies using age criteria in recruitment has halved from 27 per cent. to

13 per cent., and the number of companies with policies against employing older people has also halved from 14 per cent. to 7 per cent.

One of our Public Service Agreement targets is to increase the employment rate of people aged 50 and over, reducing the difference between that rate and the overall employment rate. By tackling discrimination and offering a range of back to work help, including New Deal 50-plus, the employment rate for people aged 50 to state pension age has increased each year for the last four years, faster than the overall rate.

Pension Entitlements

31. **Lawrie Quinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on his information campaigns to promote take-up of pension entitlements by the over-60s. [55519]

Mr. McCartney: As part of the Government's commitment to combating poverty and providing security and independence for people aged 60 or over, new measures have been introduced to automatically identify pensioners who might be entitled to Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) and encourage them to claim. These measures build on the successful Take Up campaign which ran from May to November 2000, and contacted 2.4 million potential MIG customers. It generated approximately 1 million responses. Further mail shots in March 2001 coincided with the increase in capital limits from £8,000 to £12,000.

From April 2002, all customers contacting the RP Teleclaims Centre are offered information on MIG and asked if they would like someone to call them back to provide them with more information and pursue a claim. Those customers who do not wish to claim MIG via the RP Telecentre are sent a MIG information leaflet with their RP claim pack.

From April 2002, all customers who have claimed RP since November 2000 (the end of the last MIG take-up campaign) who have been identified as having a potential entitlement to MIG are being issued with a mailshot letter and leaflet to encourage them to claim. Around 100,000 pensioners will receive a mailshot over the April-June period.

Further (Key Life Event) MIG triggers have been introduced. Departmental data matching techniques are now being used to identify other new and existing pensioners with potential entitlement to MIG. These triggers identify customers who have a match with one or more predetermined 'key life events', which may indicate a potential entitlement to MIG, for example, when customers aged 60 and over receive a new award of one or more benefits, such as attendance allowance, industrial injuries benefit or housing benefit. A mailshot comprising a letter explaining the possible entitlement and inviting customers to claim along with a MIG1L leaflet is sent to all customers identified in this way.

In order to ensure take up of winter fuel payments, an information campaign ran throughout 2001, including advertisements in national and local press, a leaflet and poster made available in a variety of venues, including social security offices, post offices, supermarkets and doctors surgeries, a dedicated winter fuel payment helpline and information on the internet.

Through all of the above measures we intend to ensure that as many potentially eligible people over the age of 60 as possible do not miss out on the additional source of income MIG can provide them with.

Child Benefit

34. **Mrs. Spelman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to adjust the receipt of child benefit in accordance with new requirements. [55522]

36. **Lynne Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the practicalities of imposing conditions for the receipt of child benefit. [55524]

Malcolm Wicks: The Government are considering a number of measures to combat truancy. We are therefore looking at ways of ensuring parents meet their responsibilities in bringing up their children.

Pensioner Income

37. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on pensioner income. [55525]

Mr. McCartney: The Government want all pensioners to have a decent and secure income in retirement and to share fairly in the rising prosperity of the country. The Government's first priority has been to help the poorest pensioners.

The Government introduced the minimum income guarantee and are committed to raising this in line with earnings throughout this Parliament, ensuring that pensioners share in rising prosperity. The Government have introduced winter fuel payments for older people. The winter fuel payment was doubled to £200 a year in winter 2000–01 for qualifying households and will continue to be paid at £200 for the lifetime of this Parliament. The Government have also introduced free TV licences for the over-75s, worth £104. Both the WFP and TV licences are non-means tested and tax-free.

The Government have made above-inflation increases in the basic state pension in both 2001 and 2002. In April 2002 the basic state pension rose by £3 for single pensioners and £4.80 for couples. In April 2003, it will rise by at least £100 a year for single pensioners and £160 for couples, and in subsequent years by either 2.5 per cent. or by inflation, whichever is highest.

Around 1.8 million of the poorest pensioner households are now over £1,000 a year better off in real terms as a result of the Government's tax and benefit reforms.

In the constituency of Altrincham and Sale, West, around 2,400 pensioners are receiving the minimum income guarantee. There were also around 19,000 winter fuel payments made last winter and there are 7,500 pensioner households who could benefit from a free TV licence.

From 2003 the pension credit will ensure that it pays to have saved, with those entitled standing to gain an average of around £400 a year.

Benefit Fraud

38. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures he is taking to prevent fraudulent claims of unemployment benefits. [55526]

Malcolm Wicks: Our strategy for combating benefit fraud focuses on getting it right, keeping it right and putting it right: making correct benefit payments in the first place; ensuring payments are adjusted as circumstances change and detecting when payments go wrong and taking prompt action to correct them with appropriate penalties to prevent a recurrence.

As part of getting it right, front-line staff have been made more aware of the risk of fraud and encouraged to take responsibility for ensuring that claims are correct at the gateway.

Jobcentre Plus will provide a more comprehensive and integrated service for all benefit claimants. One-to-one interviews will create a personal environment where the full and accurate details of a claim can be established and customers can be reminded of their responsibility to notify us of changes to their circumstances.

From last month, new powers in the Fraud Act 2001 became available for putting it right, by making it easier to catch fraudsters and give greater punishments to those who persistently abuse the system. Benefit fraud investigators can now require organisations like banks, insurance companies and utility companies to provide information about customers where fraud is suspected. Under the "two strikes" provisions, a person convicted of one or more benefit offences in two separate sets of proceedings within a three-year period may be disqualified from receiving benefit.

We know that our strategy is working. By March last year we had reduced fraud and error in income support and jobseeker's allowance by 18 per cent.—nearly double our first milestone of a 10 per cent. reduction, a year ahead of schedule.

Work-related Illnesses

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many claims for work-related illness were settled by his Department in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was in compensation; [56090]

(2) how many employees of his Department retired through work-related ill-health in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was to the Department; [56091]

(3) how many days of sick leave were taken by employees in his Department in the last year for which records are available; what proportion of those were due to work-related illness or injury; and what the cost was to the Department. [56092]

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many days of sick leave were taken in his Department last year; how many related to employees suffering *(a)* stress and *(b)* other mental health problems; and what the cost was to his Department. [56487]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is not held and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Such information as is available can be found in "Cabinet Office—Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service—calendar year 2000", which is available in the Library.

Mesothelioma

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what advice he has received from the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council on the question of dual diagnosis in mesothelioma cases. [56093]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: From March 2002, the Department's Chief Medical Adviser has advised Medical Services doctors that the diagnosis and assessment of mesothelioma should, in the majority of cases, be based solely on the documentary evidence of the sufferer's consultant. This change in procedure was not referred formally to the Industrial Injuries Advisory Council for advice. However, the council has given its full support to the change.

Retirement Income

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will set out the basis for the estimate in the Pensions Green Paper of the proportions of retirement income coming from state and from private sources; and what his latest estimate is of those proportions. [57511]

Mr. McCartney: The 1998 Green Paper contained estimates of the proportions of retirement income coming from the state and private sources for the year 1998 and also projections of the same proportions for the future years, 2025 and 2050.

The estimates of the proportions for 1998 were made by using data from the Government Actuary's Department (GAD) and DWP data on state spending on pensioners and Office for National Statistics (ONS) estimates of the size of private pensions in payment.

The projections of the proportions for future years were made using GAD projected expenditure for national insurance benefits, i.e. the basic state pension and state second pension, and DWP projections of income-related benefits. The projections for income from private sources were based on figures from ONS for current pensions in payment. These were uprated by PENSIM estimates of the growth in private pensions in payment until 2025 and then by estimates of GDP growth thereafter. PENSIM estimates are based on data from three different surveys conducted in 1988. These were the Social Change and Economic Life Initiative, the Retirement Survey and the Family Expenditure Survey.

Since the 1998 projections were made, private pension income has increased and we remain committed to promoting saving for retirement. The introduction of secure, value for money stakeholder pensions last year and other measures we are taking mean that we are on track to achieve this.

We do not have more recent projections for future years because, as highlighted in the Performance and Innovation Report on modelling in Government Adding it Up (2000) there are numerous problems with PENSIM. Therefore, the Department is currently developing an entirely new dynamic micro-simulation model, Pensim2.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent research [illegible] has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the retirement incomes of women who are married compared to [illegible] retirement incomes of women who are cohabiting; and [illegible] he will make a statement on the equal treatment implications of the research. [55326]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 10 May 2002]:* There are a number of studies that seek to compare pensioners' incomes. These include the Pensioners' Income Series (1999–2000) which is produced by the Department for Work and Pensions and the Cabinet Office's Individual Income (1996–97 to 1999–2000). Both draw on data from the Family Resources Survey.

Tables 4.2 to 4.4. of the latter contain data on weekly individual income by marital status and family type for all women. The sample size is not sufficient to enable comparison of the incomes of married women who are in a pensioner couple with the incomes of cohabiting women in a pensioner couple.

Beyond this, we have not commissioned any specific research to compare the incomes of women that are married against those that are cohabiting.

Jobcentres

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to improve the physical environment of jobcentres. [55496]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The first 56 Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices, which are already open, embody an entirely new physical environment. They are predominantly open plan, with substantially improved facilities and technology, providing a much more accessible and personalised service for customers.

We intend to extend this environment progressively to cover the whole of Great Britain over the next four years, starting with a further 225 offices in 2002–03.

33. **Vera Baird:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to increase the level of personal advice available to unemployed people at jobcentres. [55521]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Jobcentres now form part of the newly established Jobcentre Plus agency. Jobcentre Plus was launched as a national organisation on 1 April, replacing the Employment Service and the working age functions of the Benefits Agency, and providing services to around five million people. Jobcentre Plus aims to deliver further improvements in customer service throughout its entire network of jobcentres and social security offices.

56 Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices are already providing the integrated and work-focused service which we will, over time, offer right across the country. We plan to open around 225 more integrated offices by April 2003. As part of this upgrade to the service, everyone of working age who is making a new or repeat claim for benefit in these offices will participate in a work-focused interview with a personal adviser and be offered their continuing support.

Social Fund (Funerals)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how much has been spent on contributions towards funeral costs from the social fund in each of the past five years; what was the average payment; and how much it would cost to reimburse clergymen for the fees in addition to other current costs; [44090]

(2) how many grants towards funeral expenses have been paid from the social fund in each of the past five years; and how many have subsequently been reclaimed. [44096]

Malcolm Wicks: The numbers of social fund funeral payments awarded, annual expenditure and the average payments for the last five years are in my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's Annual Reports on the Social Fund 1996–97 to 2000–01. Copies of the reports are in the Library.

Information on the number of awards recovered is not held, but the amounts recovered each year are also in the reports.

Funeral payments cover the cost of specified items, which include the fees levied by the burial authorities and crematoria, where payable. In addition, £600 is available for the person arranging the funeral to select any extra items or services they consider appropriate. Not everyone uses or has to pay for the services of a minister of religion. However, any fee or donation in respect of such services may be met from within this additional £600. We have no estimate of how much it would cost to reimburse clergymen for their fees.

Pensions Increments

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) for what reason increments to the basic state pension were up-rated by a lower percentage than the rest of the basic pension in April 2001; and for what reason the increments will be up-rated by the same percentage as the rest of the basic state pension in April 2002; [44088]

(2) if the commitment to raise the state pension by at least 2.5 per cent. even when inflation is lower than this covers *(a)* basic pension increments, *(b)* the graduated pension and *(c)* SERPS. [44094]

Mr. McCartney: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is required each year by section 150 of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 to review the level of benefits in light of movements in RPI. As part of this consideration the Government had announced that the basic state pension will rise in the future by at least 2.5 per cent. or the rate of increase in the RPI if that is greater.

Special Advisers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the number and expected cost to his Department of special advisers in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [43282]

Mr. McCartney: At 13 March, there are three special advisers in the Department. On cost, I refer the hon. Member to the answer that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister gave to him on 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 325W.

Jobseeker's Allowance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what arrangements are in place to ensure that the receipt of linked benefits does not make jobseeker's allowance claimants better off out of work than in work. [43245]

Malcolm Wicks: We are taking a single approach to work and benefits to make work pay, make work possible and to support those who cannot work. This service will be delivered through Jobcentre Plus—a personal service with one goal: helping people of working age to live independent lives.

People receiving working families tax credit or disabled person's tax credit with net income of around £11,740 a year or less are eligible for a tax credit national health service exemption certificate. This entitles them to free national health service prescriptions, dental treatment, wigs, fabric supports, sight tests, full value optical vouchers and help with the cost of travel to hospital for national health service treatment. For those with a child under one year old baby food is available at a reduced price.

In addition, anybody in work who has a low income can claim help with the cost of national health service treatment provided they have savings of less than £8,000 (£12,000 if aged 60 or over; or £19,000 if they live permanently in a residential care or nursing home). Depending on their income people may be eligible for either a full (HC2) or partial (HC3) Department of Health exemption certificate. The HC2 certificate entitles the person to free NHS services; the HC3 certificate entitles the person to some help towards NHS charges.

People receiving working families tax credit or disabled person's tax credit (where the amount of tax credit is paid in full or reduced by £70 or less) and who have a close relative, or partner, in prison can get help with the cost of travel to visit them. Help is also available in these circumstances for people who hold a Department of Health HC2 or HC3 certificate.

Housing benefit and council tax benefit are available to people in work to help pay their rent and council tax. Part of their income is disregarded when assessing the amount of benefit payable to guarantee that a person is better off in work than out of work.

Sure Start maternity grants are available if a person or their partner is in receipt of working families tax credit or disabled person's tax credit. And help with funeral payments is available through the social fund for the person who is responsible for the funeral if they are receiving working families tax credit, disabled person's tax credit, housing benefit, or council tax benefit.

From April 2003 we will introduce two new tax credits. The child tax credit will offer a single, seamless system of support for families with children, while the working tax credit will help to improve the financial gains to work. The working tax credit will, for the first time, extend in-work support through tax credits to people without children.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the cost of benefit fraud in Wales has been in each year since 1997; [50633]

(2) what the cost of benefit fraud has been in each year since 1997 in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* the North West. [50639]

Malcolm Wicks: Our most recent estimate is that £2 billion is lost annually through benefit fraud in Great Britain. This estimate cannot be broken down by country or region.

We have set firm targets for reducing the amount of fraud and error in Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance and we have already achieved a reduction of 18 per cent., nearly double our first milestone, a year ahead of schedule.

Social Fund

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to review the removal of social fund applications and their processing from local benefits offices. [34426]

Malcolm Wicks: Procedures for the handling of Social Fund applications are being considered following the launch of our two new agencies, Jobcentre Plus and the Pension Service.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the total savings to public funds of the Private Finance Initiative contract for the Private Sector Resource Initiative for management of the estate by comparison with a non-Private Finance Initiative alternative. [49660]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given to him on 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 697W.

Sunset Clauses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which Bills introduced by his Department in the last five years have contained sunset clauses; and what plans he has for the future use of such clauses. [49614]

Malcolm Wicks: Since it came into being in June 2001, the Department for Work and Pensions has not introduced a Bill containing a sunset clause. The Department would include such provisions in future Bills in circumstances where this appeared appropriate.

Benefits

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people were in receipt of means-tested benefits or tax credits, by region, as *(a)* a percentage of population and *(b)* a total number, in descending order according to percentage figures in 2000. [30610]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 30 January 2002]:* The information on recipients of income-related benefits is in the table. Tax credits are the responsibility of the Inland Revenue.

Recipients of income-related benefits by Government office region—May 2000

Region	*Recipients (Thousand)*	*Percentage of the regional population*[1]
England (north-east)	400	19
Scotland	740	18
England (north-west)	940	17
England (London)	940	16
Wales	370	16
England (Yorkshire and Humberside)	620	15
England (west midlands)	630	15
England (east midlands)	430	13
England (south-west)	470	12
England (east)	470	11
England (south east)	620	10

[1] Percentage of the regional population aged over 16.

Notes:

1. Key income related benefits are jobseeker's allowance, income support, minimum income guarantee, housing benefit and council tax benefit.

2. The data refers to recipients of income-related benefits which may be a single person, a member of a couple or a member of a family.

3. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10,000.

Source:

Client Group Analysis of DWP Information Centre 5 per cent. statistical samples—May 2000, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System annual 1 per cent. sample taken in May 2000. Population figures are provided by Office for National Statistics, Population Estimates Unit.

Benefit Decisions

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many decisions on benefits taken by decision makers were reversed by *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials in (i) 1998, (ii) 1999, (iii) 2000 and (iv) 2001; and if he will make a statement. [55828]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 13 May 2002]:* Ministers do not reverse or change decisions of decision makers. The number of decisions which have been revised by decision makers are shown in the table.

Benefit	*2000*	*Approximate caseload*	*2001*	*Approximate caseload*
IS	14,424	3,800,000	17,157	3,900,000
JSA	23,774	1,100,000	21,741	1,000,000
IB, MA and SDA	27,536	2,700,000	26,214	2,700,000
LTB (RP, WB and BB)	1,699	11,300,000	1,684	11,300,000
IIDB	2,479	280,000	2,276	n/a
ICA	828	406,000	1,264	376,200
AA	11,282	1,200,000	9,718	1,200,000
DLA	33,979	2,160,000	32,444	2,200,000
CHB	3,363	6,900,000	4,492	6,900,000

Child Benefit

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what guidelines his Department issues on the timescale for switching over to the other parent, as the children's primary carer, as the new recipient of child benefit in cases of marital breakdown or spousal desertion. [53777]

Malcolm Wicks: The rules governing the transfer of child benefit from one person to another are statutory, and are contained in the Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992. Generally, child benefit cannot be transferred from one person to another in any circumstances until three weeks after the week in which a competing claim is received, for example following a marital breakdown or spousal desertion.

However, where someone has been receiving child benefit on the basis that a child has been living with them, absences from one another are disregarded for up to eight weeks in any 16-week period. Following a separation therefore, both parties will continue to meet the "living with" condition for a short period, and in default of an agreement between them it falls to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in his discretion to determine which of them is entitled for this period.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he last met the Low Pay Commission to discuss the minimum wage. [55208]

Maria Eagle: My right hon. Friend has not met the Low Pay Commission. The minimum wage is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Criminal Offences

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many criminal offences have been *(a)* created and *(b)* abolished by his Department since 1997. [55426]

Malcolm Wicks: Nine offences have been created since 1997 and four have been abolished.

The offences created in the Social Security (Fraud) Act 1997 were modified by the Social Security Fraud Act 2001. The modification involved repeal and redraft of four of the offences.

Benefit Tribunals (Doctors)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what guidance he has given concerning the independence of doctors serving on benefit tribunals since 2000. [55305]

Maria Eagle: It is not appropriate for my right hon. Friend to issue guidance to the panel members who are appointed by the Lord Chancellor to sit on appeal tribunals within the Appeals Service. The panel members, and the tribunal decisions they make, are independent of the Department for Work and Pensions. Guidance for panel members is a matter for the president of appeal tribunals.

Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of non-resident parents who have had their driving licences removed by the courts since April 2001 as a result of the provisions introduced under the Child Support, Pensions and Social Security Act. [54514]

Malcolm Wicks: In the period from April 2001 to 18 March 2002, the agency made 58 applications to the court for committal/withdrawal of a driving licence.

In 21 cases the non-resident parent is now paying. Two non-resident parents provided information to the agency that resulted in them being assessed to pay nothing. One non-resident parent has had his licence withdrawn and three non-resident parents have a suspended disqualification from driving order. In a further 22 cases the magistrates imposed a suspended committal sentence. The rest of the cases are still with the courts, with three non-resident parents the subject of tracing action by the agency.

Carers

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of carers *(a)* entitled to and *(b)* being credited into the state second pension. [54517]

Mr. McCartney: We estimate that up to 2 million carers could benefit from the state second pension. However, as entitlement to state second pension is based on complete qualifying years, the first of which is 2002–03 tax-year, we have no figures currently for the number of people who are entitled in respect of that year.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answers of 24 April 2002 to the hon. Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown), *Official Report*, columns 343–44W, on backdated winter fuel payments, what information the Government collect on people who are entitled to winter fuel payments but who do not receive the money automatically. [56448]

Mr. McCartney: Most people who are entitled to a winter fuel payment receive their payments automatically. However, others have to make a claim. From winter 2000–01, the claim details recorded are used to make further payments automatically, unless the individual's circumstances change. This procedure ensures that people do not have to provide their details more than once.

Publicity aims to ensure that the people who need to claim are aware of the position. It is then up to the individual to choose whether or not to claim.

Adult Disadvantage

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer of 21 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 528W, on the age positive campaign, what budget his Department has allocated for the age positive campaign in each of the next three years. [47590]

Maria Eagle: The current planned budget for 2002–03 and 2003–04 is £900,000 per annum. As with all departmental programmes, budgets for 2003–04, and the subsequent two years, will be reviewed as part of the Spending Review 2002 process, the settlement of which will be received in July 2002. In addition, in line with financial management regimes, all budgets are reviewed internally during the course of the financial year.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

BT Lines

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many of BT's lines have been handed over to competitors as a result of local loop unbundling. [44779]

Ms Hewitt: Currently more than 300 local loops have been unbundled. Operators are able to place orders with BT for unbundled local loops on a 'business as usual' basis.

Universal Bank

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress in establishing the Universal bank. [54023]

Mr. Alexander: The Department of Work and Pensions, together with the Inland Revenue and the Northern Ireland Social Security Agency, have agreed contractual terms with Post Office Ltd. for the provision of the Card Account and are working on implementation. A lot of detailed work is being carried out on implementing universal banking services and the plan remains to deliver in advance of the migration of benefit payment to ACT from 2003.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when and for what reasons the Universal bank has been renamed the New Direct bank; whether all benefit claimants will have access to the New Direct bank; when she expects the New Direct bank to be established; if she will list the *(a)* banks and *(b)* building societies that have agreed to deliver the New Direct bank services; and with which company a contract has been signed for the benefit payment card account. [54510]

Mr. Alexander: The Government's plan for universal banking services continues to be based on two key elements: post office access to the banks own basic bank accounts (which have a variety of operating brand names); and a simple Card Account which will allow benefits claimants without bank accounts to access their benefits in cash at post offices using a Post Office account instead of an order book or giro. We have no plans to rebrand any of this as "the New Direct bank".

Wind Farms

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she will take to find other sites for offshore wind farms should any of the present sites be rejected on grounds of possible interference with military radar. [55576]

Mr. Wilson: The sites in the first round of offshore windfarm developments were selected by developers who then made applications for site leases to the Crown Estate, as landlord of the seabed within territorial waters. Of the 18 projects there are no Ministry of Defence objections to 13. The Ministry of Defence are in dialogue with the remaining five developers and would hope to bring the matter to a successful conclusion.

The Department is working closely with a wide range of organisations to develop a strategic framework for the next stage of windfarm development and hope to issue a consultation document in the autumn. Part of the programme of work will seek to identify potential areas of the sea for further windfarm developments, taking into account a range of factors, although ultimate site selection must be a commercial decision for the developer. Each windfarm development would be subject to the usual consenting process.

We are also working actively with the Ministry of Defence on several collaborative projects which are designed to address the specific problem of wind turbines on radar, and siting issues more generally.

High Active Liquor Storage

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the security implications of sensitive sites in nuclear installations, with special reference to high active liquor storage, being identified on non-secure websites. [55325]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 10 May 2002]:* The Government's policy of openness stresses the importance of providing as much information as possible of legitimate public interest. It is balanced by non-disclosure of sensitive information. The protection of sensitive information in the civil nuclear industry is one aspect of required security arrangements at civil nuclear installations kept under continuing review by the Director of Civil Nuclear Security, the security regulator. I am satisfied that stringent security measures apply at all civil nuclear sites in respect of both the sites and the materials held within the sites.

Ofgem

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she last met Ofgem to discuss the introduction of competition into electricity services connection. [56135]

Mr. Wilson: Callum McCarthy and I meet on a regular basis to discuss a range of issues. Competition in electricity connections is a matter for Ofgem. I understand that it is making progress on this issue.

Export Licences

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will respond to export licence application number 32368 made on 7 March by Pultrex Limited of Colchester. [55716]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 13 May 2002]:* Licences to export arms and other items whose export is controlled for strategic reasons are issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry acting through the Export Control Organisation (ECO).

The company regrettably failed to provide complete end user documentation. This has now been obtained and a decision will be taken as quickly as possible consistent with the need to give full consideration to the issues involved.

End of Life Vehicle Directive

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department took to make people aware of the implications of the End of Life Vehicle Directive. [56420]

Mr. Wilson: DTI published a consultation document on the end of life vehicles (ELV) directive in August last year, issuing 2,000 copies initially, and a further 500 copies during the three-month consultation period. This document was also made available on UK online and on the DTI website, where a summary of the replies received by the Department is now available. Further information on the implementation of the ELV directive will be made available in the same way, when decisions are taken.

Small Businesses

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps the Government are taking to help small businesses with increased insurance costs following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. [56181]

Nigel Griffiths: Government provides a range of assistance of small firms experiencing difficulties, for whatever reason:

The SBS launched its Company Rescue Pilot scheme in September 2001, and has so far helped 37 businesses (as at 8 May 2002);

The Business Link network provides advice and support for businesses suffering as a result of a recent crisis including advising on a range of disaster management issues;

The National Business Debtline is in place to help Micro Businesses in England and Wales facing debt problems to obtain free, confidential and impartial advice. It handles an average of 1,500 queries a quarter; and

The recently established Civil Contingencies Secretariat (CCS) will provide improved anticipation, preparation, prevention and resolution to improve the UK's resilience to disruptive challenges at every level in future.

Miners' Compensation

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much money has been paid in fees to solicitors representing miners in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* the United Kingdom who are suffering from respiratory disease and vibration white finger in the last three years. [56446]

Mr. Wilson: In the last three financial years the Department has made payments broken down as follows to solicitors representing miners in Wales and United Kingdom:

£ million

	Wales	United Kingdom
Respiratory Disease		
April 1999 to March 2000	0.4	2.0
April 2000 to March 2001	3.4	16.5
April 2001 to March 2002	9.1	32.4
VWF		
April 1999 to March 2000	1.3	6.6
April 2000 to March 2001	1.4	11.1
April 2001 to March 2002	3.3	28.2

Respiratory Disability

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total value is of offers made by her claim handlers AON IRISC Claims Management, following the medical assessment procedure examination where COPD respiratory disability has been diagnosed; how many such offers were made in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland; how many such offers were accepted and what was their total value in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland; what the total value is of such offers paid out by the Department *(a)* in England, *(b)* in Wales and *(c)* in Scotland on a full and final basis and how many cases are involved; what the value of the interim payments made in such cases is; and how many cases are involved in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* Scotland. [56410]

Mr. Wilson: An analysis of full and final offers and acceptances broken down by region is as follows:

	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Total*
Offers made:				
Number	7,080	624	3,321	11,025
Value (£ million)	113.8	10.0	53.3	177.1
Offers accepted and paid:				
Number	1,505	129	1,075	2,709
Value (£ million)	20.2	2.2	22.9	45.3

In the time available it is not possible to distinguish offers accepted but not yet paid. Offers accepted would be slightly higher than in the table.

The Department does make interim payments in the course of assessing a claim. However, when a full and final offer has been made no further interim payments are offered because we consider it is for the claimants' solicitors and our claims handlers to agree a final settlement. Although, in deserving cases, such as those with a short life expectancy, the Department has made such interim payments and will consider doing so on a case by case basis.

P.W. Pains Wessex Defence

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many export licences have been granted to P.W. Pains Wessex Defence in the past two years; and for what products they were issued. [56571]

Nigel Griffiths: Such information is not normally released because of commercial confidentiality. However I have asked the company if they will waive this. I will write to the hon. Member in the light of its response, and will place a copy of that letter in the Libraries of the House.

Dounreay Nuclear Plant

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will support the introduction of a community fund levy on new contracts awarded for the decommissioning and site restoration work at the Dounreay nuclear plant in Caithness; and if she will make a statement. [56585]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 15 May 2002]:* The decommissioning of Dounreay is expected to generate large economic as well as environmental benefits for the local region, and I have asked UKAEA to maximise the potential for these benefits where it is cost effective to do so. I do not believe that an additional levy on new contracts is justified.

Nuclear Waste

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with the UKAEA regarding *(a)* disposal and *(b)* transport of nuclear waste from Dounreay. [56880]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* None.

Correspondence

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) of 8 March, regarding US tariffs on imports of menswear from the United Kingdom. [56852]

Mr. Alexander: I have replied today.

Selby Coalfield

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to undertake a study of the *(a)* economic and *(b)* geological prospects of the Selby coalfield. [56687]

Mr. Wilson: IMC Group Consulting Limited has been commissioned by the Department to undertake a review of the Selby Mine Complex. This will consider both the economic and geological prospects of the complex. The review is scheduled to be completed by mid June, and its findings will be published.

Anglo-Italian Meetings

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on how many occasions in the last six months members of her Department have met their Italian counterparts; and what subjects were discussed. [56884]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* DTI Ministers are regularly in touch with the Italian Government bilaterally and in EU and other multilateral fora on a range of issues. For example, my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Small Business visited Rome in November 2001 where he had meetings with, among others, his Italian opposite number. DTI Ministers meet their Italian counterparts at EU Internal Market, Consumer Affairs and Tourism Councils four times a year and at Industry and Energy Councils, Research Councils, Employment Councils and Telecomms Councils twice a year. Officials are frequently in touch with their Italian counterparts at all levels, on a wide range of subjects.

Confectionery (Safety)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 19 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1202W, whether her Department's research considered the incidence of domestic episodes not notified to doctors involving children placing in their mouths small parts from toys embedded in confectionery. [57269]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The research analysed non-fatal and fatal choking cases over a ten-year period (1986–1996) involving children under four years of age who were seen in an A&E department of a hospital participating in my Department's Home Accident Surveillance System. The research also analysed data from the Home Accident Death database. It would not be feasible to collect data about every single incident in the UK that does not result in a visit to a hospital A&E department.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 19 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1202W, what evidence her Department has collated on the impact embedding a toy within chocolate products has on its odour; and if she will make a statement. [57310]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The manufacturer of the leading brand has provided the Department with research which confirms that the smell of the chocolate does not migrate to the toy because of the capsule contained within the egg.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 19 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1203W, what action she intends to take in cases where manufacturers breach DTI safety labelling guidelines. [57309]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Day-to-day enforcement of safety legislation is undertaken by trading standards officers who have the appropriate powers to take action if the necessary labelling is not present.

Energy Review

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received as part of the consultation process on the Government's Performance and Innovation Unit energy review, published on 14 February. [57325]

Mr. Wilson: The Government launched the consultation on energy policy on 14 May, following the publication of the energy review earlier this year. No representations have been received since the launch of the consultation but as work proceeds we shall be posting any replies we receive (unless otherwise requested) and notes of key meetings on the DTI's and DEFRA's websites.

Consignia

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her objectives will be when entering discussions with Consignia and the Post Office Ltd. to determine the future of support branches of the Post Office in rural communities. [55287]

Mr. Alexander: Advice from the Postal Services Commission will inform future discussion on support for the rural post office network. The Government are currently considering that advice on transitional financial assistance.

Employment Regulations

Mr. Alan Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make an announcement on the Fixed Term Employees' (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002. [58082]

Alan Johnson: The Fixed Term Employees' (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002 will not be coming into force on the 10 July 2002, as intended, since the Employment Bill (which contains the regulation-making power) has not yet received Royal Assent. We intend to lay the regulations once the Bill has received Royal Assent and aim to bring them into force on 1 October. This will give businesses and employees ample time to prepare for these new regulations, in line with the Government's better regulation guidelines.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will estimate the annual additional employment costs of work-related regulations introduced since 1997. [55508]

Alan Johnson: Costs and benefits of employment legislation are estimated and published in regulatory impact assessments, which are available in the Libraries of the House. The annual costs to business of employment legislation implemented by the Department since 1997 are estimated to be approximately £5 billion per year. The vast majority of these costs arise through the provision of enhanced terms and conditions of employment.

Websites

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the savings which will arise for each Government Department as a result of the website www.ukonline.gov.uk. [51514]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

Ukonline.gov.uk is an architecture on which multiple Government websites can be built and deployed quickly and cheaply without incurring separate hosting costs.

When ukonline.gov.uk was refreshed in January 2002, it was built in a modular way so that its components can be offered to Departments and local authorities. To this end, the architecture that supports ukonline.gov.uk is now being offered to Departments and local authorities so that they can deploy their web presences more rapidly at reduced cost.

Estimated cost savings are £5 for every £1 spent by each Department using the UK online infrastructure.

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research has been carried out to assess the level of *(a)* awareness in the population analysed by socio-economic group, *(b)* usage by the population analysed by socio-economic group, *(c)* repeat usage by the population and *(d)* satisfaction of users with respect to the website www.ukonline.gov.uk; and what the findings were. [51559]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

(a) There is no specific piece of research that measures awareness of the website www.ukonline.gov.uk. However, the Office of the e-Envoy commissions an annual tracking study to measure the progress of the overall UK online campaign. These results showed that the overall awareness of UK online increased from 33 per cent. to 45 per cent. between January 2001 and February 2002. These results are also available by socio-economic group.

(b) A new statistical analysis solution for ukonline.gov.uk was implemented in January 2002. This shows that usage of www.ukonline.gov.uk has risen from 14,000 unique users per week in January peaking at over 80,000 in April. Visits (a series of page views) have likewise increased from 50,000 in January peaking at over 170,000 in April. We do not have this data broken down by socio-economic group.

(c) The statistical analysis does not cover session cookies, therefore repeat usage figures are not available. However, we closely monitor customer feedback via our customer management programme. A dedicated team has been set up to handle customer queries in real-time and to analyse the feedback from members of the public.

PRIME MINISTER

Data Protection Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library copies of each version of the internal guidance which have been drawn up by his Department since 1 January 1999 to assist staff in his Department to answer subject access requests under the Data Protection Act 1998. [53390]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office today.

Gurkhas

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Prime Minister what representations he has received from the Prime Minister of Nepal during his visit to the UK concerning *(a)* the future of the Gurkhas in the British Army, and *(b)* the case made by the Gurkha Army Ex-Serviceman's Organisation for pay and pension equality for Gurkhas who are serving or who have served in the British Army. [57809]

The Prime Minister: I met the Nepalese Prime Minister on Monday 13 May along with my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for International Development and the Minister of State for the Armed Forces. The main focus of our discussions was internal issues in Nepal, and what the UK could do to help. The issue of Gurkha pensions was raised briefly by the Nepalese Prime Minister at the end of the meeting. The Brigade of Gurkhas remains an integral and much valued part of the British Army and will remain so for the foreseeable future.

Policy Seminars

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister (1) whether the No. 10 policy seminar on criminal justice addressed by the Director General of the Prison Service was an official function; and if he will make a statement; [57544]

(2) what policy seminars attended by persons outside Government have been held at No. 10 Downing Street since Christmas; and by whom each was attended. [57545]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 15 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 712–14W.

SCOTLAND

Concessionary Fares

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to her answer of 13 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 990W, what the outcome of the discussions between the Government and the devolved Administrations was regarding the provision of half-price fares to older and disabled passengers on scheduled long-distance coach journeys across Britain. [56123]

Mr. Foulkes: Discussions are continuing between the Government and the devolved Administrations, as are discussions with the industry.

Press Releases

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many press releases were issued by her Department *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [40038]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. Since then, the following number of press releases have been issued:

	Press releases
1999[1]	98
2000	317
2001	265

[1] 1 July to 31 December

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the annual budget for communications activities, including press, public relations, marketing and internal communications, was for her Department for each financial year from 1997–98 to 2001–02. [39912]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999. Since that date expenditure on communications activities has been as follows.

Year	£
1999–2000[1]	70,939
2000–01	422,134
2001–02	336,579

[1] Part year

This includes expenditure on electoral registration and voter publicity of £26,861 in 1999–2000, £270,494 in 2000–01; and £186,564 in 2001–02.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Criminal Offences

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many criminal offences have been *(a)* created and *(b)* abolished by his Department since 1997. [55423]

Jane Kennedy: A comprehensive and exhaustive list of new and abolished offences could be provided only at disproportionate cost. We can, however, provide the following information about the following Northern Ireland Office measures which have been enacted since 1 May 1997.

Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998: two new offences (obstructing Ombudsman's staff and disclosure of information).

Criminal Justice (NI) Order 1998: one new offence (breach of sex offender order).

Criminal Justice (Children) (NI) Order 1998: three new offences (harbouring or concealing child, assisting escape of child, and obstructing inspection of attendance centres and juvenile centres).

Criminal Evidence (NI) Order 1999: two new offences (making false statements and giving false evidence).

Police Ombudsman

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many complaints have been made against the Police Ombudsman's Office by *(a)* members and *(b)* ex-members of the RUC/PSNI: how many legal actions are outstanding against her or her investigators; in how many cases she has carried out a successful prosecution; how many times she has had to pay out compensation and the amount paid out; and how many cases she has undertaken relating to matters for which the Director of Public Prosecutions or Attorney General has directed that there be no prosecution. [48854]

Jane Kennedy: The Police Ombudsman advises that since the opening of the Police Ombudsman's Office on 6 November 2000 until 3 May 2002:

1(a) Eight serving members of the police force have made complaints against the Police Ombudsman's Office.

1(b) No ex-members of the police force have made complaints against the Police Ombudsman's Office.

There are currently 11 legal actions outstanding against the Police Ombudsman or her investigators:

Industrial/Fair Employment—7

Judicial Reviews—4

The Police Ombudsman does not prosecute cases; the Director of Public Prosecutions is responsible for deciding on prosecutions.

No orders for compensation have been made against the Police Ombudsman by the courts.

To date the Ombudsman's Office has referred 93 case files to the Director of Public Prosecutions. In two cases where the Ombudsman's Office has recommended prosecutions the DPP has directed no prosecution, and 33 files are awaiting the DPP's direction.

Prisons

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the *(a)* condition and *(b)* use of the premises of the former HMP Maze is. [56125]

Jane Kennedy: The information is as follows:

(a) Since its closure in 2000, parts of Maze prison, comprising three accommodation blocks and a number of ancillary premises, have been maintained in warm storage and are in very good condition.

A small number of other buildings are still in use on the site, but these are mainly portable type accommodation and, while in good repair, are nearing the end of their lifespan. The condition of the remaining buildings on the site, including those on the adjacent Maze compound site, range from fair to derelict.

The mechanical and electrical services are in fair condition but have reached the stage where a substantial capital investment would be required to upgrade these to meet current regulations.

(b) The section of the Maze which is being maintained in warm storage will serve as emergency accommodation should the need arise. Other premises on the site are being used for control and restraint training and to accommodate the Prison Escort Group and its vehicle fleet. The firing range is also used occasionally for training.

However, the Government have recently given a commitment to hand the site to the Northern Ireland Executive. The timescale has yet to be agreed but the Northern Ireland prison service is actively looking for alternative ways to accommodate the functions listed above.

Sick Leave

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many days of sick leave were taken in his Department last year; how many related to employees suffering *(a)* stress and *(b)* other mental health problems; and what the cost was to his Department. [56476]

Jane Kennedy: The Cabinet Office publishes an annual report entitled "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service". The most recently published figures are for the calendar year 2000. For home civil servants (HCS) in the Northern Ireland Office the working days absence per staff year were as follows:

Certified sick absence—7.5

Self-certified—1.8

Total—9.3

Figures are not held in a comparable format for the Northern Ireland civil servants (NICS).

The number of days relating to stress and other mental health problems and the cost could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The Northern Ireland Office is committed to the effective management of sick absence and our current service delivery agreement (SDA) sets out our proposal to reduce sickness absence rates over the planning period for HCS staff. It will seek similar reductions for the NICS group in the Department in conjunction with other Northern Ireland Departments.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Gibraltar

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the circumstances in which the Government would enter into agreements regarding Gibraltar, without the agreement of the Government of Gibraltar. [53952]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave in response to a question from the hon. Member for North Dorset (Mr. Bob Walter) on 16 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 451.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what assessment his Department has made of the growth potential for Gibraltar's airport; [57467]

(2) what plans he has to increase the capacity of *(a)* passenger flights and *(b)* freight in and out of the airport in Gibraltar. [57466]

Peter Hain: The Government agrees that development of the airport would be of great economic and commercial benefit to the people of Gibraltar and the neighbouring regions of Spain, and agrees with the noble Lord Howe's comments in another place on 12 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 1393, that it is unfortunate that the implementation of the 1987 Airport agreement was blocked by the reluctance of the Gibraltar legislature to see it through.

Apart from aviation safety and security, the operation of the civil airport terminal is a defined domestic matter for the Government of Gibraltar, but the airport has excess capacity, and could handle an increase in flights if the commercial demand arises. The agreement we are seeking with Spain under the Brussels Process would, if implemented, remove all the obstacles which currently prevent the full development of the airport.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will deposit in the Library the current draft proposals under discussion with Spain on the future of Gibraltar. [57886]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave in response to a question from the hon. Member for Rayleigh (Mr. Mark Francois) on 12 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 865W.

Middle East

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of allegations of control by the Palestinian Authority of suicide bombers in Israel. [55431]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have seen the Israeli dossier alleging President Arafat's involvement in terrorism, but cannot verify its authenticity. The EU Commissioner for External Affairs, Chris Patten, has made it clear that he has seen no hard evidence corroborating its claims about the misuse of EU funds. The Palestinian Authority has denied its allegations.

President Arafat must make all possible efforts to prevent terrorist attacks. Both sides have a responsibility to end the cycle of violence and engage in a political process which offers their people a peaceful way forward.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will discuss with the EU the allegations by the Israeli Government that sums contributed by the EU to the Palestinian authorities have been directed to funding members of Fatah and of the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. [57031]

Mr. Bradshaw: The allegations made by the Israeli Government about the misuse of European development funds relate to budgetary support provided by the European Commission (EC). The EU Commissioner for External Affairs, Chris Pattern, has made it clear that he has seen no hard evidence corroborating claims about the misuse of EU funds. The EC attach strict conditionality to the direct budgetary assistance provided to the Palestinian Authority (PA). The conditions mainly reinforce the need for transparency on the PA's public finances, strengthening the prudent management of the budget, and encouraging progress on overall financial and administrative reform. We are satisfied that the EC, with the assistance of the IMF, is ensuring the conditions are met.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much money the EU has provided to the Palestinian authorities in each of the past three years; what measures are taken by the EU to ensure that the money is spent on the issues to which they are directed; and if he will make a statement. [57030]

Mr. Bradshaw: Between 1994–2001 (figures most recently available), EC aid to the Palestinian Authority and to Palestinian refugees totalled euro 1.466 billion. The UK share of this is an estimated euro 245 million.

The EC attach strict conditionality to the direct budgetary assistance provided to the Palestinian Authority (PA). The conditions mainly reinforce the need for transparency in the PA's public finances, prudent management of the budget and progress on overall financial and administrative reform. We are satisfied that the EC, with the assistance of the IMF, is ensuring the conditions are met.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the meetings held between *(a)* UK diplomatic staff in the middle east and *(b)* staff from his Department with representatives of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine since 1 September 2000; and if he will make a statement. [55995]

Mr. Bradshaw: British diplomats in Damascus, Beirut and Jerusalem meet DFLP representatives on an occasional basis, including at diplomatic receptions. They have had no contact with the DFLP this year.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the military objectives that Israeli armed forces have achieved by their siege of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. [56576]

Mr. Bradshaw: Israel's stated military objective was to root out terrorists. But neither side can achieve lasting security through force. Actions by both Israel and the Palestinian Authority have contributed to the crisis. Israel must withdraw from Palestinian controlled areas and act in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions including SCR 1402 and international humanitarian law. The Palestinian Authority must do everything in its power to stop the violence against Israelis.

European Community

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what precedents and rules have been adopted by institutions of the European Community in coming to a decision as to whether actions are better achieved by national or Community action, with reference to Article 5 TEC. [56633]

Peter Hain: The treaty of Amsterdam annexed to the treaty establishing the European Community a Protocol on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality to define more precisely the criteria for applying them and to ensure their strict observance and consistent implementation by all institutions. Legislative proposals must be explicitly justified in terms of subsidiarity. The choice of legal instrument employed is also subject to the subsidiarity test.

The Government welcome the opportunity, afforded by the Convention on the Future of Europe, to examine the question of subsidiarity and the delimitation of competencies between the Union and the member states. We support the Amsterdam Protocol, but will be seeking ways to embed this principle more robustly within the EU's system of institutions, and to consider mechanisms that will monitor—and enforce—subsidiarity and proportionality more effectively.

General Affairs Council

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the outcome was of the General Affairs Council held in Brussels on 13 May; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [57003]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I represented the UK at the General Affairs Council (GAC) in Brussels on 11 May. Conclusions were agreed by consensus and no formal votes were taken.

Preparation of the Johannesburg Summit on sustainable development

> The Council noted progress made in preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), which will take place in Johannesburg on 26 August to 4 September 2002. The Council instructed relevant Council bodies to prepare a substantive contribution on the EU's role in the WSSD process, to be approved at the GAC on 17 June and endorsed at the Seville European Council.

Annual Policy Strategy 2003

> The Council endorsed the Commission's three main priorities for 2003: achieving enlargement successfully, continuing to ensure security for EU citizens, and developing a sustainable and inclusive economy. The Council agreed that the Commission's suggested budgetary allocations would be studied in the framework of the Preliminary Draft Budget examination for 2003. The Council recommended that future versions of the Annual Policy Strategy should be presented as early in the year as possible to improve the coherence of the budgetary process.

Effectiveness of the Union's external action

> The Council noted work in hand and heard presentations on improving cross-pillar cooperation, strengthening the EU's role in international organisations, budgetary issues, development aid and the EU decision-making process. Commissioner Patten briefed Ministers on pilot studies aimed at improving the impact of EU external assistance and on the process of evolution of responsibilities to Commission delegations.

Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with ACP countries

> The Council welcomed the Commission's proposal for a mandate to negotiate EPAs with the ACP countries, recalling that the ultimate purpose of the negotiations was poverty eradication and integration of ACPs into the world economy. It also addressed questions of ACP market access and WTO compatibility. The discussion will continue in the Permanent Representatives' Committee, with a view to adopting the mandate at the June GAC.

Renewal of mandates and financing of EU Special Representatives (EUSRs)

> Recalling the essential role played by EUSRs, the Council agreed to extend the functions and funding for FYROM and Afghanistan EUSRs and asked the relevant bodies to study financial formulae to make this possible.

Middle East

> The Council discussed the possibility of convening an international conference and welcomed the end of the Church of the Nativity crisis in Bethlehem. It thanked the Cypriot Government for its assistance and thanked member states for provisionally offering the 13 Palestinians involved temporary residence on humanitarian grounds.

European Security and Defence Policy

> The Council welcomed the participation of Defence Ministers, meeting as the GAC for the first time, and noted progress towards establishing the Capability Development Mechanism (CDM). It also acknowledged recent advances made in European military capabilities and discussed possible means of resolving current shortfalls with a view to meeting the headline goal.

Western Balkans

> The Council conducted its annual review of the stabilisation and association process for south-eastern Europe (SAP), endorsed the conclusions of the Commission's first annual report on SAP, and confirmed the SAP countries' status as potential candidates for EU membership. The Council called on the SAP countries to devote adequate attention and resources to implementation of EU recommendations, with particular reference to strengthening the rule of law and judicial systems and visa and entry policies. The Council invited the Commission to assess progress made at its next annual review in March 2003. The Council proposed to establish a new ministerial-level political forum, linking the EU with the SAP countries. It also highlighted the need for a greater EU public information effort to foster greater understanding of the SAP. Crisis management in the Balkans, including the future EU police mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina and a possible mission in Macedonia, was also discussed.

Iran

> The Council noted that broad agreement had been reached on substance and objectives for developing EU relations with Iran. In addition to commercial matters, it was felt important that this include dialogue on terrorism, proliferation and regional stability. It instructed officials to pursue discussions with a view to a decision at the next GAC on a negotiating mandate for a Trade and Cooperation Agreement with Iran.

Angola

> The Council welcomed recent encouraging developments in Angola, including the signing of an MOU by the Angolan Armed and Unita forces culminating in a ceasefire. The Council, while expressing support for positive initiatives undertaken by the Angolan Government, called on the authorities to allocate the necessary resources to; reintegrating Unita and Angola armed soldiers into the armed forces, police and civil society; demining; and reconstruction of social and civil infrastructure. It also requested that the Angolan Government do its utmost the assist humanitarian needs.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with other EU states bordering the Mediterranean on additional steps to take to control the illegal entry of asylum seekers into the EU. [56912]

Peter Hain: The Government take very seriously the need to control the illegal entry of asylum seekers into the EU. At the request of Italy, the General Affairs Council of 15 April discussed the issue of illegal immigration, and adopted conclusions which have been placed in the Library of the House. In particular, Foreign Ministers considered how to deal more effectively with problems arising from illegal immigration particularly at sea borders, including by using all the instruments available in the framework of the Union's external relations to encourage countries of origin and transit to take action. Foreign Ministers also called for rapid implementation of the comprehensive action plan to combat illegal immigration and trafficking of human beings adopted by the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 28 February.

Pakistan

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 3 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 649–50W, what response has been received from the Pakistan authorities. [57443]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have not received a substantive response to our requests for information from the Pakistani authorities. Senior officials at the British high commission are continuing to pursue this with their Pakistani counterparts.

EU Unemployment

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress made since the European Council's meeting at Lisbon towards the target to halve unemployment among 18 to 24-year-olds by 2010 throughout the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [57258]

Peter Hain: The Lisbon European Council set the objective of halving the number of 18 to 24-year-olds not in further education and training by 2010. In March 2000 the figure was 18.7 per cent., in March 2002 it was 17.7 per cent.

Law Enforcement Agencies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what law enforcement agencies and prosecuting authorities designated with legislation there are within the responsibility of his Department; and what complaints procedure is available for each. [57126]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 16 May 2002]*: None.

Anglo-Italian Meetings

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions in the last six months *(a)* he and *(b)* his officials have met their Italian counterparts; and what subjects were discussed. [56888]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 16 May 2002]*: FCO Ministers are regularly in touch with the Italian Government bilaterally and in EU and other multilateral fora on a range of issues. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and I meet our Italian counterparts at EU European Councils every six months and at General Affairs councils (GAC) on average once a month. We last met Prime (and Foreign) Minister Berlusconi at the Brussels GAC on Monday 13 May. In addition, the Prime Minister and I attended a bilateral summit on 15 February in Rome with Prime Minister Berlusconi and my Italian counterpart, Minister Antonione. Officials are frequently in touch with their Italian counterparts at all levels on a wide range of subjects.

Overseas Hotels

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many overseas hotel rooms have been booked on behalf of other Government Departments in the last two years; what the total cost was; and how many were not occupied. [57832]

Mr. MacShane: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office book a large number of overseas hotel rooms on behalf of other Government Departments, who also make large numbers of overseas hotel bookings directly. In some cases the Foreign and Commonwealth Office meets the costs and then passes the charges onto the Department concerned. In other cases, other Government Departments meet their own costs directly. No central records are held of bookings made, costs or occupancy rates. The answer to this question can therefore be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Work-related Illness

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many employees of his Department retired through work-related ill health in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost to the Department was. [56073]

Mr. Bradshaw: There were five ill-health retirements from the FCO in 2001. None of them were through work-related ill health.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many claims for work-related illness were settled by his Department in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost in compensation was. [56072]

Mr. Bradshaw: In the period April 2001 to April 2002, six claims for work-related injuries were settled and £44,777.00 paid out in compensation by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office takes the issue of health and safety seriously; its commitment to ensuring the health and safety of its staff goes beyond simply complying with legislative requirements. We aim to embed our approach to managing health and safety in all we do. We continue to work towards targets for reducing the number of working days lost to work-related illness and injury set by the revitalising health and safety strategy of June 2000 and, in 2001, exceeded agreed targets for general sickness.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many days of sick leave were taken by employees in his Department in the last year for which records are available; what proportion of those were due to work-related illness or injury; and what the cost to the Department was. [56074]

Mr. Bradshaw: An average of 5.9 days of sickness absence was taken by members of staff in this Department in 2001. Information on the proportion that were due to work-related illness or injury and the cost to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office could be supplied only at disproportionate cost. The Foreign and Commonwealth

Office is committed to reducing sickness absence, as set out in our service delivery agreement. We have recently streamlined procedures for recording and monitoring sickness absence and pursued more active case management.

Lockerbie

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise the matter of Professor Hans Koechler's report on the appeal proceedings at the Scottish Court in the Netherlands in the United Nations General Assembly. [57130]

Mr. Bradshaw: No.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to his answer of 14 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 547W, on Lockerbie, whether the UN Secretary General sent *(a)* Professor Hans Koechler and *(b)* other representatives of the Internal Progress Organisation to observe the Scottish Court in the Netherlands. [57497]

Mr. Bradshaw: No. The United Nations Secretary General advised a number of non-governmental organisations of the opportunity to observe the appeal hearings. The International Progress Organisation took advantage of this opportunity. But its participation was neither requested nor funded by the United Nations. The United Nations did not ask Professor Koechler or any other members of the International Progress Organisation to report back.

Bangladesh Murder

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make representations to the Government of Bangladesh regarding the case of Surat Miah, a former constituent, beaten to death in Dhaka's international airport after refusing to pay a bribe; and if he will ask them *(a)* when and *(b)* why those arrested in connection with the murder were released. [57277]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our High Commission in Dhaka have raised the case of Surat Miah with the Bangladeshi authorities many times, most recently on 23 April 2002. The four suspects arrested in connection with the murder were released on 23 October 2001. We understand they were acquitted because of a lack of evidence. As Surat Miah was not a British national we are unable to make consular representations to the Bangladesh Government. However, our High Commission have continued to make known the widespread concern in Britain over the case.

Europe Day

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list Europe Day activities that were arranged by his Department; and what the objective was of each. [57911]

Peter Hain: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office held an open day on 9 May to mark Europe Day.

The Europe Day event was a part of the Government's EU information campaign, aiming to raise awareness of the work of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, British membership of the EU, current and future countries of the EU, and to provide an opportunity for the public to view the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's historic buildings.

Correspondence

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he intends to reply to the letter dated 13 March from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. [56677]

Mr. Bradshaw: I replied on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on 9 May. As I said in my letter, I apologise for the delay in responding, which is due to the very heavy volume of correspondence this subject generates.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Solicitor-General what the estimated level of losses to fraud and corruption was in *(a)* her Department's Vote 1 budget and *(b)* her Department's Vote 2 budget for (i) 1999–2000 and (ii) 2000–01. [54699]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 8 May 2002]*: The Crown Prosecution Service is funded by a single vote. There were no losses to fraud and corruption in 1999–2000. Losses in 2000–01 totalled £1,088.75.

No other losses were recorded from the budgets of the Law Officers' departments.

Ministerial Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Solicitor-General how much has been spent by her Department on training in leadership skills for Ministers and officials in each of the last five years. [52714]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 26 April 2002]*: Nothing has been spent by my Department on training in leadership skills for Ministers.

In relation to those departments for which the Attorney-General is responsible, the Treasury Solicitor's Department and Serious Fraud Office only have figures for the last three years. The figures are as follows:

Treasury Solicitor's Department

Year	£
1999	3,240
2000	1,175
2001	2,150

Serious Fraud Office

Year	£
1999–2000	2,775
2000–01	24,975
2001–02	7,100

Crown Prosecution Service

Leadership training undertaken by the senior management team in the Crown Prosecution Service has been carried out in two areas. Training in a one-to-one coaching programme began in March 2000 and finished in September 2000, the cost of this initiative was £30,000. A Chief Crown Prosecutors Management and Leadership programme began in September 2001 and finished in February 2002, the cost of this programme was £211,000.

While officials at HMCPS Inspectorate have received leadership training, this has not resulted in any cost to the Department.

IT Contracts

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Solicitor-General what has been the total expenditure of his Department on IT systems and support in each year from May 1997 to date; how many IT contracts have been let in each of those years; of the other main contracting party in each of those contracts, how many have been *(a)* companies whose registered office is in (i) England and Wales, (ii) Scotland and (iii) Northern Ireland and *(b)* foreign companies; and what are the names of the companies falling within category (a). [33692]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 7 February 2002]:* The total expenditure of the CPS on IT systems and support from May 1997 to date was:

	£ million
1997–98	4.28
1998–99	9.83
1999–2000	7.36
2000–01	21.74
2001–02	21.82

Records show that a total of 40 contracts were let during this period, as follows:

	Number of contracts
1997–98	9
1998–99	10
1999–2000	9
2000–01	6
2001–02	6

The 34 businesses that are the main contracting parties in each of the contracts, all have their registered offices in England and Wales. None of the main contracting parties have their registered office in Scotland, Northern Ireland or foreign countries.

The names of the companies that are within category *(a)* are:

ACG Computer Consultants

Action Computers Ltd.

Admiral Computing Ltd.

Anite Group Ltd.

Bull Information Systems Ltd.

Cable and Wireless
CMG UK Ltd.
Computacenter plc
Computer People Ltd.
Cornwell Affiliates plc
CSI
DBI Consulting Ltd.
DCS Computers Ltd.
Elan Computing Ltd.
Equanet Ltd.
Ericsson Mobile Communications (UK) Ltd.
Ernst and Young Ltd.
Global Crossing Communications Ltd.
Hedra Ltd.
Integris Ltd.
Kermon Ltd. (Xansa)
Kudos Partnership
Logica UK Ltd.
Lorien plc
Macline Ltd.
Network Designers Ltd.
Oakley Computer Ltd.
P and P Corporate Systems
Parity Resources Ltd.
Pentos Systems plc
Sema Group Ltd.
Simdell Ltd.
Vantagepoint Hardware Services Ltd.
Yale Data Management Consultants Ltd.

The Serious Fraud Office's total expenditure on IT systems and support in each year from May 1997 to date was as follows:

	£
1997–98	807,000
1998–99	988,000
1999–2000	1,090,000
2000–01	1,920,000
2001–02	1,930,000

The number of IT contracts let in each of those years was:

	IT contracts let
1997	—
1998	1
1999	—
2000	—
2001	1
2002	—

These contracts were signed with companies registered in England and Wales. One of them was negotiated with IBM (UK) plc, the other was with Cedar Group plc.

Although the Serious Fraud Office negotiated other contracts for IT services, these were small and the costs of researching the details of the companies involved would be disproportionate.Since May 1997 the Treasury Solicitor's Department's expenditure on IT systems including telecoms has been as follows.

	IT Systems	Telecoms	Total £
1997–98	475,531	124,740	600,271
1998–99	647,711	147,707	795,418
1999–2000	523,361	140,600	663,961
2000–01	1,052,515	160,380	1,212,895
2001–02	924,267	130,829	[1]1,055,096

[1] Year to date.

In addition the Department incurred the following paybill expenditure on staff to support and develop IT systems.

	£
1997–98	248,468
1998–99	326,400
1999–2000	449,200
2000–01	558,852
2001–02	[1]497,681

[1] Year to date.

The Department has used framework contracts under the aegis of the Office of Government Commerce (OGC): GCat for the supply of IT goods; and S-CAT for the supply of IT services. The Department routinely sources hardware, software and IT services under these contracts and such purchases do not constitute separate contracts in their own right.

Purchases of equipment, software and services have been made from a variety of suppliers under both framework contracts, the main ones being:

Compaq Computer Ltd.

Dell Computer Corporation Ltd.

Specialist Computer Centres Ltd.

Computacenter (UK) Ltd.

PC World Business Direct

Cedar Group plc

Cathedral Consortium (HEDRA) Ltd.

Elan Computing Ltd.

Insight Consulting

Methods Application Ltd.

Parity Solutions Ltd.

Yale Data Management Consultants Ltd.

In addition to its use of the OGC framework contracts, the Treasury Solicitor's Department has let IT contracts to the following companies, all of whose registered offices are in England and Wales:

1998—Sirsi Ltd.

1999—Grant Thornton Ltd.

2002—TSL Ltd.

The Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers total expenditure on IT systems and support in each year from May 1997 to date was as follows:

	£
1997–98	92,625
1998–99	35,992
1999–2000	30,492
2000–01	37,576
2001–02	40,387

The number of IT contracts let in each of those years was:

	Number of contracts
1997	—
1998	1
1999	—
2000	1
2001	—
2001	—

These contracts were signed with companies registered in England and Wales. One of them was negotiated with 4Front Networks and the other with Selection Services.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Disclosure of Interests

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what rules apply to the disclosure of interests on the part of those serving on public bodies which are responsible to the Lord Chancellor's Department. [56454]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Executive and advisory non-departmental public bodies are required to adopt a board members' code, based on guidance produced by the Cabinet Office, and they should have registers of interests. The definition of interests is ultimately for individual Departments since they are best placed to decide what might be thought to influence members of each of their NDPBs.

Information on the executive NDPBs sponsored by this Department is as follows:

The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service, which was set up last year, has a Code of Best Practice and a register of interests.

The Information Commissioner makes a statement as set out in FRS 8 in her annual accounts confirming that she had no personal or business interests which conflict with her responsibilities. The Commissioner's accounts are audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General.

The Legal Services Commission has a Code of Best Practice for LSC members with rules of conduct to report conflicts of interest. The commission also maintains a register of members' financial, business and other interests which is available for public inspection through the commission's secretariat department and is published in its annual report.

The Department's advisory NDPBs also have codes and registers.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

New Wembley Stadium

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many seats will be available to the general public in the proposed new Wembley stadium; who made the decision to change the number of seats available to the public; what her policy is on a reduction in seats available to the general public; and what impact a reduction in seats has on the Lottery agreement. [53785]

Tessa Jowell: The current Lottery Funding Agreement requires Wembley National Stadium Ltd. (WNSL) to make available 75,000 seats to the general public. Any change to that agreement to reflect the current project is a matter for Sport England, the FA and WNSL.

I understand that following the publication of the English National Stadium Review's interim report on 19 December 2001 [HC 479], WNSL asked Sport England to consider the need to change the balance between general public and premium seats in order to support efforts to secure financing for the project. The request was supported by a revised business plan and by thorough market research carried out by WNSL. The Council of Sport England has considered the revised business plan presented by WNSL and following discussions with WNSL has agreed to reduce the number of general public seats which WNSL must make available to 71,200. This 71,200 figure compares with approximately 73,000 seats available to the general public at the current stadium.

The change to the number of general public seats will be incorporated as an amendment to the Lottery Funding Agreement.

Disclosure of Interests

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what rules apply to the disclosure of interests on the part of those serving on public bodies which are responsible to her Department. [56449]

Dr. Howells: All advisory and executive non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) are required to adopt a board members' code, based on guidance produced by the Cabinet Office, and they should have registers of interests. All DCMS NDPBs have such codes and registers.

Film Industry

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what bilateral discussions she has had with *(a)* the Foreign Secretary and *(b)* the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry regarding raising the profile of the British film industry overseas; and if she will make a statement. [56607]

Dr. Howells: None, but officials from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Trade Partners UK and the British Council in posts overseas and at home have worked closely with DCMS officials and the Film Council, for example in the development of the British Film Office in Los Angeles.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the mandate of the Committee on the export of cultural goods is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56788]

Dr. Howells: The terms of reference of the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art, which is an advisory non-departmental public body, are to advise the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on the principles which should govern the control of export of works of art, antiques etc.; to consider all cases where refusal of an export licence for a work of art or antique is suggested on grounds of national importance; to advise in cases where a special Exchequer grant is needed towards the purchase of an object that would otherwise be exported; and to supervise the operation of the export control system generally.

The committee has met on 11 occasions in the last 12 months. It has eight members, drawn from across the UK, who are appointed by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport provides the committee with an annual budget of £20,000-£23,000. The cost of departmental staff support is approximately £75,000 per annum. The committee's current business arises from its terms of reference and includes consideration of cases where the deferral of a decision upon granting an export licence for an object is suggested on grounds of national importance (39 cases in the last 12 months), related policy issues and the preparation of an annual report.

The committee has adopted the Model Code of Practice for Advisory Non-Departmental Public Bodies, issued by the Cabinet Office, and its annual report is presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. According to Cabinet Office requirements, DCMS is currently undertaking a quinquennial review of the committee's operation.

National Lottery

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much funding has been granted to Sport England from the National Lottery in each of the last three years, broken down by the sports which have received funding. [56599]

Mr. Caborn: I have arranged for the information requested to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Sport England

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what funding has been granted by Sport England in each of the last three years to *(a)* local authorities for sports facilities and *(b)* independent sports clubs. [56598]

Mr. Caborn: The information requested is set out below:

£ million

	Local authorities	*Sports clubs*
1999–2000	26.99	26.93
2000–01	44.82	45.46
2001–02	37.57	24.76

Departmental Staff (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many and what percentage of *(a)* Civil Service, *(b)* executive agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public body jobs under the remit of her Department are located in Scotland; and how many of each have been relocated to Scotland since May 1997. [56318]

Dr. Howells: There are no civil service or executive agency staff under the Department's remit in Scotland. There are currently 67 non-departmental public body jobs in Scotland; this is less than a per cent. of all jobs in non-departmental public bodies sponsored by the Department. No staff have been relocated to Scotland since May 1997.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Deportation Powers

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received from *(a)* police (i) forces and (ii) organisations, *(b)* organisations with a reporting line to his Department and *(c)* official body concerned with immigration about further powers which may be required in relation to deporting those who pose a security threat to the UK. [52550]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* I have received no recent representation on this matter.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter of 30 January 2002 from the hon. Member for West Chelmsford on behalf of Mr. Taylor of Chelmsford; and if he will make a statement on the reasons underlying the time taken. [55833]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* A reply to the hon. Member was sent on 13 May 2002. The delay was caused by an error in the checking system. New procedures have now been put in place to ensure this situation does not re-occur.

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter of 19 March 2002 from the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire on behalf of Miss Huta. [56013]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 13 May 2002]:* I wrote to the right hon. Member on 17 May 2002. I am sorry he did not receive an earlier reply.

Asylum Seekers

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have committed offences and received custodial sentences of more than two years in each of the last five years. [53739]

Angela Eagle: In 2000 there were 677 court recommendations for deportation. Of these 514 (76 per cent.) related to sentences of two years or more. The records do not show whether convicted foreign nationals who were also immigration offenders were asylum seekers or not. This information will be available in the future.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers being supported by NASS live within a 20 mile radius of each of the sites under consideration for the proposed asylum accommodation centres; and what proportion of the total of asylum seekers so supported this represents. [56574]

Angela Eagle: Information is not available in the form requested.

The table shows the number of asylum seekers (including dependants) who were living in the same region as the proposed locations for the accommodation centres as at the end of December 2001.

Asylum seekers supported by the National Asylum Support Service (nass) as at end December 2001

Site for accommodation centre	*Region*	*In receipt of accommodation only*	*Supported in NASS accommodation*	*Total*	*Percent of NASS supported asylum seekers (percentage)*
Royal Air Force (RAF) Hemswell, Lincolnshire	East Midlands	500	3,220	3,720	6
RAF Newtonm, Nottinghamshire[1]	East Midlands	500	3,220	3,720	6
Air West Edinburgh, Edinburgh[1]	Scotland	240	4,750	4,990	8
Defence Storage and Distribution Centre Bicester, Oxfordshire	South Central	3,150	800	3,950	6
Sully Hospital, South Glamorgan	Wales	140	700	840	1
Qinetiq, Pershore, Worcestershire[1]	West Midlands	520	6,930	7,450	11

[1] It was confirmed on 14 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 597W that planning notifications would be submitted in respect of these sites.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 2 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 898W, on asylum seekers, who the experts referred to were. [56539]

Angela Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend for Leyton and Wanstead (Mr. Cohen) on 15 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 705W.

Asylum Accommodation Centres

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the legal status will be of public inquiries that his Department will arrange to examine the proposed asylum accommodation centres; and who will conduct those inquiries. [54034]

Angela Eagle: If a local authority were to object to a notification, the procedure for considering that objection would be a matter for My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Byers).

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has decided which sites should be taken forward to public inquiry as possible sites for asylum accommodation centres. [57114]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* I announced on 14 May 2002 the sites at which we will be submitting planning notifications, including one in the hon. Member's constituency. Once such a notification is submitted, it is a matter for the local planning authority. If a local authority were to object to such a notification, the procedure for considering that objection would be a matter for My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Byers).

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the sites that were considered as possible locations for asylum accommodation centres in preparing the short-list of sites, along with the reasons for the rejection of each site. [57333]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 13 May 2002]:* As yet there has been no formal evaluation of the education provision for children at Harmondsworth. The provision has only needed to be in operation since towards the end of last year. The performance of the centre's operator, UKDS, is monitored closely by on-site Home Office officials. I am confident that the dedicated team of UKDS education staff at Harmondsworth provides an excellent and very professional service, which takes account of the academic and emotional needs of the children who stay at the centre.

Asylum and Immigration

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with EU partners on ensuring that the asylum and immigration process ensures equivalent standards of reception and accommodation throughout the European Union. [55577]

Angela Eagle: The European Commission presented a proposal for a Council Directive laying down minimum standards in the reception of applicants for asylum in member states in May of last year. The Directive imposes equivalent standards for accommodation, access to health care, employment and education. Following detailed negotiations a general approach agreement was achieved at the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 24–25 April 2002. Political agreement is expected by June 2002. European Union member states are to adopt this and other minimum standards measures on Asylum Procedures, Refugee Qualification and a mechanism for establishing which member state is responsible for an asylum claim by 2004.

National Asylum Support Service

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what performance indicators were set for the National Asylum Support Service in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02; and how NASS performed against such performance indicators in each year. [54102]

Angela Eagle: In 2000–01 the published performance indicator for the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) was to "process asylum support claims within agreed time scales (from date of receipt)—70 per cent. within two days and 100 per cent. within seven days". In 2001–02 the published performance indicator was to "reduce by 20 per cent. the average time taken to decide applications for support from destitute asylum seekers".

In 2000–01, 15 per cent. of applications were decided in two days and 30 per cent. in seven days. Figures for actual performance in 2001–02 are not yet available.

The performance of NASS in 2000–01 was unacceptable. In 2001 NASS reviewed and refined its procedures with the intention of speeding up response times and improving the quality of decision making.

Yalcin Kaya

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to take a decision on the application for naturalisation as a British citizen of Yalcin Kaya (Home Office ref: K1020805). [56523]

Angela Eagle: A decision in Yalcin Kaya's case will be taken as soon as possible. Inquiries have to be made in all applications for British citizenship, to ensure that the statutory requirements specified in the British Nationality Act 1981 are met. The length of time taken to complete these inquiries can vary considerably and they are still under way in Mr. Kaya's case.

Sick Leave

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many days of sick leave were taken in his Department last year; how many related to employees suffering *(a)* stress and *(b)* other mental health problems; and what the cost was to his Department. [56480]

Angela Eagle: Information on sickness absence can be found in the annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service" published by the Cabinet Office. The most recently published figures are for the calendar year 2000 and show that the average number of lost working days per person in the Home Office was 11.2 days.

Information on sickness absence and compensation payments for stress and other mental health problems is not collated centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Prisoner Numbers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women under the age of 20 years were serving a prison sentence in England and Wales as of 1 May. [55198]

Beverley Hughes: Provisional information shows that on 31 March 2002 (the latest available data) there were 5,355 males and 294 females under the age of 20 who had been sentenced to detention in a young offenders institution or were serving a detention and training order in a prison service establishment in England and Wales.

Child Passports

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if it is his policy to cancel the passport of a child in circumstances where one parent of an estranged couple refuses to transfer it to the parent with sole custody of that child; and if he will make a statement. [55700]

Angela Eagle: The resolution of such issues is a matter for the family courts. The United Kingdom Passport Service advises parents in such circumstances to seek legal advice with a view to obtaining a court order to transfer the passport.

Sentencing (Manslaughter)

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the range of sentence lengths is and what was the average sentence for *(a)* women and *(b)* male prisoners convicted of manslaughter. [55279]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested, relating to persons sentenced for manslaughter in England and Wales in 2000, is contained in the table.

Statistics for 2001 will be published in the autumn.

Persons sentenced to immediate custody for manslaughter by gender and sentence length, England and Wales, 2000

Length of sentence	*Males*[1]	*Females*[1]	*Total*[1]
Four months or under	1	—	1
Over four months up to six months	—	—	—
Over six months less than a year	1	—	1
Total under one year	2	—	2
One year	3	1	4
Over one year up to 18 months	4	1	5
Over 18 months up to two years	7	2	9
Over two years up to three years	26	7	33
Over three years less than four years	7	1	8
Total one year and under four years	47	12	59
Four years	28	5	33
Over four years up to five years	30	1	31
Over five years up to seven years	48	1	49
Over seven years up to 10 years	21	2	23
Over 10 years	4	—	4
Life	16	1	17
Total four years or over	147	10	157
Grand total	196	22	218
Average sentence length in months	61.9	46.3	60.2

[1] Number of persons sentenced

"Secure Borders, Safe Haven"

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to what extent he has conformed to Criterion 6 of Cabinet Office guidelines on written consultations in relation to his consultation on the White Paper, "Secure Borders, Safe Haven"; and if he will make a statement. [55401]

Angela Eagle: Responses from organisations to the White Paper 'Secure Borders, Safe Haven' have been placed in the Library. We are acknowledging all responses and welcome the many constructive and detailed comments received. The Government are setting out clearly their decisions on those areas which require legislative change through the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill which is currently before Parliament. Comments on issues which do not require legislative change are being considered as part of policy development in those areas.

Exclusion Orders

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons individuals are subject to exclusion orders. [55483]

Angela Eagle: The Secretary of State can personally direct that a person is excluded from the United Kingdom if it is deemed that their presence here is not conducive to the public good. This will usually be on the grounds of national security, public order or foreign relations with another country, although there is no restriction on that power.

Linguistic Tests

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what linguistic tests are made of those claiming asylum to verify their country of origin; and if he will make a statement. [55443]

Angela Eagle: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) on 30 October 2001, *Official Report,* column 617W.

Yarl's Wood

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether *(a)* he, *(b)* a Minister and *(c)* an official from his Department will attend the select committee inquiry of the Bedfordshire county council into the Yarl's Wood fire; and if he will make a statement. [55983]

Angela Eagle: I can confirm that a senior Home Office official will attend the Bedfordshire county council inquiry.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department's inquiry into the incident at Yarl's Wood will convene; what its terms of reference will be; whether it will be held in public; and if he will make a statement. [55978]

Angela Eagle: The inquiry being conducted by Stephen Moore into the events at Yarl's Wood convened in February 2002 and is ongoing. The terms of reference for the inquiry are to inquire into the events at Yarl's Wood removal centre on the night of 14–15 February 2002 and their causes and to make recommendations designed to minimise the risk of recurrence on the Immigration and Nationality Directorate custodial estate in relation to contracts and agreements with service providers, the operation of removal centres, building design and construction, and any other matters considered relevant.

The inquiry will take full account of the inquiries being undertaken by Bedfordshire police, Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service and Group 4, and will be conducted in a way which does not impede any criminal investigation. In addition, the inquiry will have available expert advice from Her Majesty's Prison Service on matters to do with the above matters.

Although not a public inquiry, observations and concerns may be expressed direct to Stephen Moore. The findings of the inquiry will, however, be published.

Experience Corps

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the consents he has given to the Experience Corps under the terms of Paragraph 17 of the Financial Agreement. [56337]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* The number of consents given under Paragraph 17 in the Financial Agreement will be covered in the Experience Corps Company's annual report, which it is obliged to produce and publish no later than 30 September of each financial year.

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many new volunteers were recruited by the Experience Corps in the year to 31 March. [56339]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* The Experience Corps Company is obliged to produce and publish an annual report, which includes audited accounts, no later than 30 September of each financial year.

The report will give a description of the past year's activities assessed against the objectives and targets in Annexe 2 of the Financial Agreement and the annual business plan along with any other supporting material to substantiate the assessment.

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the Experience Corp's annual business plan for 2001–02. [56341]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* The Experience Corps business plan for 2001–02 will be discussed and commented against in its annual report.

The Experience Corps Company is obliged to produce and publish an annual report, which includes audited accounts, no later than 30 September of each financial year.

A copy of the report will be placed in the Library on publication.

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many full-time equivalent animators were recruited by the Experience Corps by 31 March. [56338]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* The Experience Corps Company is obliged to produce and publish an annual report, which includes audited accounts, no later than 30 September of each financial year.

The report will give a description of the past year's activities assessed against the objectives and targets in Annexe 2 of the Financial Agreement and the annual business plan along with any other supporting material to substantiate the assessment.

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he intends to publish the statement of actual expenditure incurred by the Experience Corps. [56340]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* Any statement of expenditure, whether for a company or charity, only becomes a matter of public record once it has been audited.

The Experience Corps Company is obliged to produce and publish an annual report, which includes audited accounts, no later than 30 September of each financial year.

Mr. Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department agreed with the Experience Corps its annual business plan for 2002–03; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [56342]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* The annual business plan for 2002–03 was agreed with the Home Office in March 2002.

The Experience Corps business plan for 2002–03 will be discussed and commented against in its annual report. The Experience Corps Company is obliged to produce and publish an annual report, which includes audited accounts, no later than 30 September of each financial year.

A copy of the report will be placed in the Library on publication.

Hepatitis C

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evidence he collates as to the incidence of Hepatitis C and treatment programmes for that condition within the prison population. [56334]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* Among health care data regularly submitted by Prison Service establishments to the Prison Health Policy Unit are the number of new cases of Hepatitis C diagnosed each month and the number of prisoners known to be suffering from Hepatitis C at the end of each month. The Prison Health Policy Unit has recently entered into a new contract with the Prison Health Laboratory Service for a communicable disease data collection and monitoring service.

Information about the number of prisoners receiving treatment for hepatitis C is not collated centrally. However, unless their time in custody is so short as to make it impractical, prisoners who are diagnosed with Hepatitis C are referred to national health service specialists for further assessment and treatment, as clinically appropriate.

Women Prisoners

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women with young children were serving a prison sentence in England and Wales and had their child with them on 1 May. [56297]

Beverley Hughes: The Prison Service provides accommodation for babies to remain with their mothers in four prisons: Askham Grange, Holloway, New Hall and Styal. There are 68 places in total and occupancy figures are collected each Monday. On 29 April 2002, 60 of these places were in use.

Departmental Staff (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what percentage of *(a)* Civil Service, *(b)* executive agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public body jobs under the remit of his Department are located in Scotland; and how many of each have been relocated to Scotland since May 1997. [56301]

Angela Eagle: Home Office staff figures in each region and nation of the United Kingdom are published in "Civil Services Statistics" year on year and placed in the Library.

As at 14 May 2002 the numbers and percentage of Home Office staff in Scotland are set out in the table:

Area	*Staff in Scotland*	*All*	*Proportion*[1]
(a) Core Home Office	144	18,542	0.77
(b) Executive Agencies[2]	281	3,138	8.9
(c) NDPBs[3]	46	243	18.9

[1] Percentage

[2] United Kingdom Passport and Criminal Agency

[3] Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority; Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeals Panel

Maladministration

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many findings there have been of maladministration by ombudsmen with responsibility for agencies under the remit of his Department since 1997. [56302]

Angela Eagle: Information on the handling of complaints is set out in tabular form by the Parliamentary Ombudsman each year as an attachment to his Annual Report. For those complaints where there was evidence of maladministration which warranted a full investigation, the table sets out how many complaints were upheld as being fully or partially justified. Copies of the Parliamentary Ombudsmen's Annual Report for the period 1997–98 to 2000–01 inclusive can be viewed in the Library, or on the Parliamentary Ombudsman's website at www.ombudsman.org.uk/publications.

Rural Awareness

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department will have rural proofing embedded in policy-making procedures as set out in the Countryside Agency's report, "Rural Proofing in 2001–02". [54431]

Angela Eagle: The Government has made a firm commitment to rural proof all relevant policies and for performance to be monitored independently by the Countryside Agency. This innovative approach—described as "courageous" by the Agency's Chairman Ewen Cameron, when his first report was published on 11 April this year—applies across Government and to agencies and other Government bodies.

The first report concludes that a great deal has been achieved since this approach was proposed in the Rural White Paper in November 2000, but that much more needs to be done to make rural proofing fully effective. The report sets out details of the checklist devised by the Countryside Agency as an appendix.

Following the decision to implement the strong rural agenda set out in the White Paper, a number of other changes have taken place. In June 2001, the new Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) came into being. For the first time, there is a Minister of State for Rural Affairs and a Director General within DEFRA backed by a team with a clear focus on rural social and economic issues and on implementation of the Rural White Paper. A Cabinet Sub-Committee, chaired by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for DEFRA (Mr. Meacher) has a specific focus on rural affairs. My right hon. Friend has met Ministerial colleagues across Government to discuss the challenges of delivering services in rural areas.

The Rural Services Standard, as set out in the Rural White Paper (Our Countryside: the future (Cm4909)) sets targets for the individual services delivered by Government. It is monitored for DEFRA by the Countryside Agency, and its content is currently being reviewed.

The Home Office reports regularly on the targets in the Rural White Paper for which it is responsible. It is currently reviewing and updating its policymakers checklist to include guidance to all staff on best practice and on cross-cutting issues to address in formulating policy on rural matters. Discussions are being held with the Countryside Agency on how they can assist the Department to develop training to support the guidance.

Racial Equality

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 8 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 229W, what proportion of consultees on the CRE's draft code of practice on the duty to promote racial equality responded to the consultation broken down by the major categories of consultee; and which public and voluntary sector organisations *(a)* were invited to and *(b)* participated in the CRE's promotional and consultative conferences. [56182]

Angela Eagle: The following table sets out the breakdown of the responses (by major category) as a proportion of the total consulted:

Major categories	*Number of responses*	*Proportion of total consulted*
Central Government	15	0.03
Local government	218	0.48
Health	55	0.12
Police/criminal justice	24	0.05
Schools	403	0.89
Further/higher education	70	0.15
Non-departmental public bodies	27	0.06
Voluntary sector	18	0.04
Trade unions	8	0.01
Other	23	0.05
Unclassified	113	0.25

With regard to the number of public and voluntary sector organisations invited to, and participating in, conferences, the exact figures are not available as the individual conference organisers retain delegate lists.

However, I understand the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) has worked in partnership with a range of event organisers to put on over 20 conferences since December 2001, some of which were national and some of which were regional. A number of the conferences targeted all public sector organisations while others were sectoral in focus, for example health sector, criminal justice sector, education sector, local government, and police. Attendance at the conferences has varied from 50 to 200 delegates. The highest levels of participation were by representatives from the local government, health, police, criminal justice and education sectors.

With regard to the voluntary sector, the CRE has commissioned the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) and the Council for Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations (CEMVO) to run 26 half-day seminars on issues for the voluntary sector. The seminars target both mainstream voluntary sector organisations and ethnic minority voluntary organisations. I understand the seminars will run until June 2002.

Dangerous Driving

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been given custodial sentences for dangerous driving in the last year for which figures are available; and what the average length of sentence given was. [56268]

Beverley Hughes: Information for 2000 (latest available) is given in the table.

Number of persons given custodial sentences[1] for the offence of dangerous driving[2] by type of court, England and Wales, 2000

Type of court	*Total immediate custody*	*Average custodial sentence length (months)*
Magistrates court[3]	675	4.5
Crown court	1,063	9.7
All courts	1,738	7.7

[1] Includes unsuspended imprisonment, secure training orders, detention in a young offender institution, detention and training orders (from April 2000) and at the Crown court secs 90–92 of the Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000 (PCC(S)A00) (sec 53 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 was repealed on 23 August 2000 and its provisions were transferred to secs 90–92 of PCC(S)A00).

[2] An offence under the Road Traffic Act 1988 sec 2 as amended by the Road Traffic Act 1991 sec 2. Only persons for which the principal offence falls into this category are counted.

[3] Staffordshire police force were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates courts for the year 2000. These data are robust enough to be included in the table.

Criminal Records Bureau

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will investigate administrative arrangements put into place by the Criminal Records Bureau in respect of its pilot schemes affecting Stoke on Trent, including variations on date of commencement; what guidance was issued; and what compensation is available to those whose business is affected by delays in processing. [53331]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 2 May 2002]:* Organisations which took part in the Criminal Record Bureau's (CRB) pilot phase did so on a voluntary basis. These included Stoke city council which along with others received written briefing and an informal presentation at CRB headquarters in Liverpool.

The organisations taking part in the pilot phase were supplied with application forms to be completed whenever a police check under the (then) current arrangements was required. Police forces agreed to use these to undertake checks and then to pass them to CRB. The forms were produced especially for the pilot phase and it was made clear in all briefing that they could not be used after commencement of the live Disclosure Service.

The pilot phase continued until the commencement of the Disclosure Service on 11 March 2002. This was an extension to the original timescale of 1 March 2002. Any person who agreed to take part in the pilot by completing a Disclosure application form supplied for that purpose would not have been able to submit it after the pilot phase had ended, but were able to continue to submit them to be received by 10 March 2002.

CRB will consider any claims for compensation for loss of earnings caused by any delays as a result of proven errors by the CRB.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer from the Foreign Secretary of 15 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 129W, what progress has been made in the investigation initiated by his Department in conjunction with UK officials in Harare into the treatment of Mr. Gerald Mutekiwe. [31702]

Angela Eagle: I wrote to the right hon. Member on 18 February 2002. I apologise for the delay in responding.

Work-related Illness

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many days of sick leave were taken by employees in his Department in the last year for which records are available; what proportion of those were due to work-related illness or injury; and what the cost to the Department was. [56062]

Angela Eagle: Information on sickness absence can be found in the annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service" published by the Cabinet Office. The most recently published figures are for the calendar year 2000 and reports that the average number of lost working days per person in the Home Office was 11.2 days.

Information on sickness absence and compensation payments for work-related illness or injury is not collated centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The Department has introduced new guidelines, policies and procedures with a view to meeting its target to reducing sickness absence, published in its service delivery agreements for April 2001 to March 2004.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many claims for work-related injury or illness were settled on behalf of the *(a)* police force, *(b)* fire service and *(c)* prison service in the last year for which figures are available; and what the total cost in compensation was. [56063]

Beverley Hughes: Information in respect of the police service and fire service is not collected centrally. For the prison service, 255 staff compensation claims for work-related injury or illness were resolved in 2000–01 at a total cost of £2,257,666.

Better Quality Services Initiative

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which of the services of his

Department have not been reviewed under the Better Quality Services initiative; and when they will be reviewed. [49471]

Angela Eagle: The Better Quality Services (BQS) programme was launched in 1998 and adopted by the Cabinet Office in the Modernising Government White Paper of 1999 as a means of delivering continuous improvements in the quality and effectiveness of Government activities and services. It required all Government Departments to review every activity and service over a five-year period starting in October 1999.

The scheme covered all activities in Departments, agencies and executive non-departmental public bodies, and is similar in remit to the Best Value programme in local government. Reviews of the departmental activities and services under the scheme started in April 2000 and have covered the following areas: Information Technology Systems, National Probation Service Estates, and the Prison Service (Security Group, Prison Shops, Prison Industry and Farms Group, Sentencing Management Group and six prisons).

Within the Department's service delivery agreement, we have a target to review 60 per cent. of its business by March 2003 and to review 100 per cent. by March 2004. We will use BQs and other management tools to conduct the reviews.

Prison Service

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action is being taken to address discontent within the Prison Service in *(a)* Boston and Skegness and *(b)* the rest of England and Wales. [56200]

Beverley Hughes: I have not been informed of discontent among the Prison Service in Boston and Skegness. If the hon. Member can be more specific about any complaint, I will be pleased to answer him as fully as possible.

Airguns

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what conclusions the Government have reached with regard to the report from the Firearms Consultative Committee which it received earlier this year with particular reference to airguns. [56105]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Government welcome the Firearms Consultative Committee's advice on how the misuse of air weapons might be dealt with, and in particular their proposals for a programme of education on the safe and responsible handling of these weapons. We will be considering their recommendations in conjunction with any other approaches which may be helpful in tackling this problem, including possible use of antisocial behaviour orders to prevent use of airguns by unsuitable persons.

HMP Albany

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 8 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 239W, when the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight was notified of proposals for additional places of prison accommodation at HMP Albany. [56242]

Beverley Hughes: The Director General of the Prison Service wrote to the hon. Member about these proposals on 14 May 2002. (His letter explains the need for additional places at Albany and gives details of the accommodation to be provided.)

Police Complaints Authority

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what further appointments he has made to the Police Complaints Authority. [58072]

Mr. Denham: I have recently appointed Mrs. Wendy Towers to the position of second deputy chair of the Police Complaints Authority (PCA). Her appointment took effect on 1 May 2002.

Wendy Towers has served as a member of the PCA since 2000, with responsibility for both supervision and misconduct aspects of the PCA's work. She was previously a full-time member of the Parole Board for six years, and prior to that worked in the private sector as a human resources consultant and personnel director.

Passports

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time taken was between *(a)* approval of visa applications and *(b)* the subsequent issue of a decision and the return of passports to applicants by the ICD in (i) April 2001 and (ii) April 2002; and if he will make a statement. [57123]

Angela Eagle: Once an application has been granted, it is normally despatched by first class recorded delivery. Depending on Post Office delivery it should normally take one to two days after despatch to be received. The other requested information is not centrally recorded.

TREASURY

EU Nationals (Employment)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of EU nationals (excluding UK passport holders) who are permanently employed in the UK. [57302]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Peter Duncan, dated 20 May 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the number of EU nationals who are permanently employed in the UK.

In the three month period ending February 2002, there were an estimated 441,000 non-UK EU Nationals, with both a place of residence and a place of work in the UK, who were either self-employed or employed in permanent jobs.

This estimate is from the Labour Force Survey and is not seasonally adjusted.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will list for each of the last five years the total amount of money spent by Ministers in his Department on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for official entertainment purposes; [47211]

(2) how much was spent by departmental special advisers on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for entertainment purposes in each of the last five years. [46837]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answers 10 April 2002]:* The information is not held in the form requested and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Gold Sales

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much gold has been sold by the Bank of England since he directed the bank to sell gold; on what dates it was sold; and what price was secured for each transaction. [57032]

Ruth Kelly: The Government has sold 395 tonnes of gold as part of the restructuring of the United Kingdom's foreign currency reserves announced in May 1999. The gold sales programme was completed following the last auction in March 2002.

The date of, the amount of gold sold and the allotment price at each of the 17 gold auctions is set out in the table.

Date	*Amount sold (Ounces)*	*Allotment price ($/Ounce)*
6 July 1999	804,000	261.20
21 September 1999	804,000	255.75
29 November 1999	804,000	293.50
25 January 2000	804,400	289.50
21 March 2000	804,400	285.25
23 May 2000	803,600	275.25
12 July 2000	804,000	279.75
19 September 2000	803,600	270.60
7 November 2000	803,600	264.30
23 January 2001	803,600	268.00
14 March 2001	803,600	266.00
15 May 2001	644,400	268.00
11 July 2001	643,600	267.25
12 September 2001	644,400	280.00
27 November 2001	644,400	273.50
16 January 2002	643,600	283.50
5 March 2002	644,400	296.50
Total/average price	12,707,600	274.95

Customs and Excise

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the key operating divisions of HM Customs and Excise are; and how many full-time equivalent staff are engaged in each. [57542]

Mr. Boateng: The key operating divisions of HM Customs and Excise are their three businesses:

Business Services and Taxes

Full-time equivalent staff in post—10,979 on 1 May 2002

Law Enforcement

Full-time equivalent staff in post—7,531 on 1 May 2002

Support Services

Full-time equivalent staff in post—3,776 on 1 May 2002.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the responsibilities *(a)* added to and *(b)* removed from HM Customs and Excise since 1997. [57541]

Mr. Boateng: *(a)* Responsibilities added:

Money Laundering Regulations—responsibility as regulators for Money Service Businesses (MSBs).

Climate Change Levy—administration 1 April 2001.

Aggregates Levy—administration 1 April 2002.

(b) Responsibilities removed:

None.

Work-related Illness

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many claims for work-related illness were settled by his Department in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was in compensation. [56087]

Ruth Kelly: No claims were made for work-related illness in 2001. The Treasury has a legal obligation to provide a safe working environment for all employees and is committed to minimising the number of working days lost generally due to work-related injuries and illness.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many days of sick leave were taken by employees in his Department in the last year for which records are available; what proportion of those were due to work-related illness or injury; and what the cost was to the Department. [56089]

Ruth Kelly: The latest published information on sick absence covering 2000 is contained in the annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service" published by the Cabinet Office. That report shows an average number of working days sickness absence per staff year of 9.9 days for non-industrial civil servants. The Treasury figure was 3.9 days per staff year. Information on the extent to which those figures are purely work-related and on costs are not held and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost. The Treasury has a legal obligation to provide a safe working environment for all employees and is committed to minimising the number of working days lost generally due to work-related injuries and illness.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received from *(a)* motorists and *(b)* motoring organisations in relation to motorists who did not qualify for VED rebate because their VED was purchased before the qualifying date of 1 November 2000. [57275]

Mr. Boateng: The Government extended the reduced rate of VED following consultation with motoring organisations who were generally supportive of the move.

Following its introduction the Government have received representations from motorists on a wide range of issues including the extension of this scheme, which ensured that an additional five million cars attracted the reduced rate of VED.

Emissions

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent estimate he has made of reductions in emissions of *(a)* carbon dioxide, *(b)* methane, *(c)* nitrous oxide, *(d)* hydrofluorocarbons, *(e)* perfluorocarbons and *(f)* sulphur hexafluoride which are attributable to the climate change levy. [57446]

Mr. Boateng: The most recent estimate of the carbon emission savings attributable to the Climate Change Levy is published in EFSR 2002 (Table 7.2, page 142). These emission savings related solely to carbon dioxide. No estimate has been made of reductions in the other five greenhouse gases.

Credit Unions

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been spent on the promotion of credit unions in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* England and Wales by (i) central and (ii) local government since 1979. [57166]

Ruth Kelly: This information is not readily available. However, research by Liverpool John Moores University in 1999 estimated that total public investment in credit unions in Britain could be in the range of £15–20 million per annum.

Customs Officers

Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many complaints have been made about the behaviour of customs officers in each of the last five years; how many have been *(a)* upheld and *(b)* referred to the independent adjudicator; and what proportion of referrals have been upheld by the adjudicator. [49773]

Mr. Boateng: Figures for the total number of complaints against HM Customs and Excise for the financial years 1997–98 to 1999–2000 are contained in the Department's annual reports for those years. The total number of complaints against HM Customs and Excise in 2000–01 was 10,092. The complaints upheld for the financial years 1997–98 to 2000–01 is as follows:

Year	*Percentage*
1997–98	45
1998–99	48
1999–2000	51
2000–01	70

Note:
Figures for 2001–02 are not yet available.

Figures for the number of complaints against HM Customs and Excise received by the Adjudicator and the number upheld are published in the Adjudicator's annual report.

Maladministration

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many findings there have been of maladministration by ombudsmen with responsibility for agencies under the remit of his Department since 1997. [56300]

Ruth Kelly: Information on the handling of complaints is set out in tabular form by the parliamentary ombudsman each year as an attachment to his annual report. For those complaints where there was evidence of maladministration which warranted a full investigation, the table sets out how many complaints were upheld as being fully or partially justified. Copies of the parliamentary ombudsman's annual reports for the period 1997–98 to 2000–01 inclusive can be viewed in the House Library, or on the parliamentary ombudsman's website at *www.obmudsman.org.uk.*

Global New Deal

Tony Baldry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if the Treasury will publish annual projections of market borrowing in relation to global economic growth under the Global New Deal; [56401]

(2) when the Government expect to reach 0.4 per cent. ODA/GNI as proposed in the Global New Deal; [56395]

(3) what the relationship will be between the Global New Deal and the usual channels of ODA; [56396]

(4) what, under the Global New Deal, will be the lending conditions; when these will be published; and what representations he has made to DAC donors on the lending conditions in particular to the US and Japan; [56402]

(5) what role the *(a)* Bretton Woods Institutions and *(b)* UN Statistical Office take on assessing progress towards the MDGS in relation to the Global New Deal; [56405]

(6) if the Global Health Deal will focus on specific MDGs; [56398]

(7) if the Global New Deal will focus resources on those developing countries struggling most to meet the MDGs; [56399]

(8) how ODA flows will be controlled after 2015 for sub-Saharan African countries once the Global New Deal fund expires; [56400]

(9) what the accountability will be of the Global New Deal's dispersal of the ODA in respect of *(a)* developed countries' institutions and *(b)* developing countries' Governments in receipt of financial aid; [56403]

(10) if the Global New Deal will propose that ODA from all DAC donors below 0.4 per cent. ODA/GNI will be used to finance the fund. [56397]

Mr. Boateng: The Government remain focused on its long-term goal of helping to tackle global poverty and achieve the internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). These include halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty, providing universal access to primary education, reducing child and maternal mortality and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other fatal diseases.

To advance these goals the Government are promoting a significant increase in development aid from all donor countries and international institutions to build capacity and address the long-term causes of poverty in the poorest countries. To tackle global poverty the Chancellor has proposed a Global New Deal as a modern Marshall plan for the developing world. As part of the Global New Deal the Government have proposed an international development trust fund to pool contributions and build on the work of the World bank, IMF and the Regional Development banks.

However, creating new channels for distributing aid would impose unnecessary costs and burdens on developing countries. We therefore believe that any additional aid from the international development trust fund should be distributed in a balanced way through existing bilateral, multilateral and civil society mechanisms used in supporting poverty reduction strategies in developing countries.

No specific target for ratio of overseas development assistance (ODA) to gross national income (GNI) has been proposed as part of the Global New Deal. However, the UK is committed to the target of raising ODA to 0.7 per cent. of national income, and has increased the budget for the Department for International Development by 45 per cent. in real terms between 1997–98 and 2003–04. Moreover, we have made clear that we will significantly raise the amount of our aid, and raise its share of national income, in our next spending round covering the years up to 2005–06.

There are no plans to propose that ODA from all Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donors below 0.4 per cent. of GNI is used to finance an international development trust fund. However, at the meeting of European Finance Ministers on 5 March 2002 the Chancellor of the Exchequer proposed that the European Union (EU) should commit to reach an ODA/GNI ratio of 0.39 per cent. by 2006. At the EU Council Meeting in Barcelona on 15–16 March 2002, just before the United Nations conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, EU members committed to increase their collective ODA to 0.39 per cent. of GNI by 2006 as a step towards the 0.7 per cent. target. Within this, all member states would strive to attain at least 0.33 per cent. by 2006, with other member states above that ratio maintaining or improving their levels of aid.

Clearly the international community will need to debate how any additional aid flows are used to greatest effect in order to help developing countries tackle global poverty and achieve the internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). To that end the UK has consistently argued that resources should be focused on the poorest countries.

In terms of the prospective accountability of developing countries receiving assistance from such a fund a major step forward has been the establishment of the poverty reduction strategy process. It includes consulting widely with civil society and producing a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) as a framework for IMF, World bank and other donor support. These PRSP's must be clearly linked to the MDGs and provide a budgetary framework to allocate Government revenue, aid and debt relief so that the impact on poverty reduction is maximised.

The Government believe that any lending conditions must be set so that we never return to a situation where countries build up unsustainable burdens of debt. So the very poorest and most vulnerable countries should receive investment help primarily in the form of grants to partner their soft IDA loans and all other low-income countries should be offered interest-free loans. Assistance to middle-income countries should be given via interest-reduced loans conditional upon implementing agreed poverty reduction strategies and engaging civil society.

The extent to which an international development trust fund might have to leverage funds from international financial markets would depend on a wide range of factors, including donor contributions, interest rates, the total amount disbursed and the proportions and terms of any grants and loans within that total. If such a fund were to cease dispensing ODA in 2015 the total volume of ODA would then depend on other bilateral and multilateral ODA flows at that time.

The Government have not proposed a separate Global Health Deal but regards achievement of all the Millennium Development Goals in all developing countries as essential to combating global poverty.

Following the 2000 United Nations Millennium Summit, the United Nations is charged with the task of reporting on progress towards the millennium development goals at the global and country levels, coordinated by the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and UNDP, respectively. Reporting is based on two principles:

1. Close consultation and collaboration with all relevant institutions, including the United Nations Development Group (including WHO and UNCTAD), other United Nations departments, funds, programmes and specialized agencies, the World bank, IMF and OECD, and regional groupings and experts; and
2. The use of nationally owned poverty reduction strategies, as reported in poverty reduction strategy papers, United Nations common country assessments and national human development reports, which emphasise a consultative process among the development partners.

An annual report is to be submitted by the UN that will chart progress, made or not made, in fulfilling the Millennium commitments, and highlight particular themes of special significance for that year. Every five years a comprehensive progress report will be submitted.

Beer Duty

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his statement of 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 584, on the decrease in beer duty for smaller brewers, what plans he has to monitor the effect on consumer prices. [56506]

Mr. Boateng: The impact of all Budget measures is closely monitored.

European Union

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for each year since 1997, *(a)* contributions and *(b)* receipts between each member state and the European Community, and figures relating thereto, as were published in (i) the *Official Report*, 19 February 1997, columns 573–76W and (ii) those of 17 December 1998, *Official Report*, columns 757–60W. [56635]

Ruth Kelly: Updated versions of the tables provided on 17 December 1998 are as follows. Information relating to UK gross contributions to, abatement and public sector receipts from the EC Budget from 1996 to 2000, broken down by the various elements asked for on 19 February 1997, in current prices, can be found in Table 3 of the White Paper, European Community Finances (Cm 5173).

Table 1—Net contributions by member states 1997–2000

euro million

Member state	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Belgium[1]	1,427.5	1,275.5	1,457.1
Denmark	192.3	144.6	87.8
Germany	10,465.7	11,359.0	11,708.4
Greece	–4,566.3	–3,640.9	–4,145.2
Spain	–6,482.6	–6,656.1	–4,315.1
France	1,718.3	1,164.4	2,407.6
Ireland	–2,134.8	–1,822.6	–1,524.2
Italy	2,110.6	1,751.7	289.7
Luxembourg[1]	133.7	114.0	105.4
Netherlands	3,046.6	3,358.0	3,303.1
Austria	822.4	836.0	721.7
Portugal	–2,824.4	–2,677.4	–1,934.6
Finland	228.6	310.1	–137.9
Sweden	1,122.5	1,226.9	1,469.1
UK	5,659.0	5,290.0	6,181.2

[1] A negative figure indicates the member state is a net recipient.

The table above has been compiled from the annual reports of the European Court of Auditors and the European Commission's publication, Allocation of 2000 EU Operating Expenditure by Member State. These reports do not attribute all EC spending between members states and do not provide a full picture of net contributions. In particular, the effects of administration spending are understated. Most EC administration spending is disbursed in Belgium and Luxembourg. The figures for these countries must therefore be treated with considerable caution.

Source:

Court of Auditors Reports and European Commission publication, Allocation of 2000 Operating Expenditure by Member State.

Table 2—Percentage of member states GDP accounted for by the net contribution or receipt

Member state	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Belgium*	0.64	0.55	0.59
Denmark	0.12	0.09	0.05
Germany	0.54	0.57	0.58
Greece	–4.21	–3.11	–3.41
Spain	–1.24	–1.18	–0.71
France	0.13	0.09	0.17
Ireland	–2.77	–2.08	–1.48
Italy	0.20	0.16	0.02
Luxembourg*	0.82	0.63	0.51
Netherlands	0.87	0.90	0.82
Austria	0.44	0.42	0.35
Portugal	–2.83	–2.50	–1.70
Finland	0.20	0.26	–0.10
Sweden	0.53	0.54	0.60
UK	0.45	0.39	0.40

* See note in Table 1 regarding Belgium and Luxembourg net contribution.

Note:

A negative figure indicates the member state is a net recipient.

Source:

GDP figures taken from European Commission publication: European Economy No. 72 (2002).

Net contributions as in Table 1.

Table 3—Net contribution per capita by member state

£ sterling

Member state	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Belgium*	93.9	82.1	86.6
Denmark	24.4	17.9	10.0
Germany	85.7	91.1	86.9
Greece	–291.5	–227.6	–239.6
Spain	–110.5	–111.2	–66.6
France	19.1	12.6	24.1
Ireland	–386.8	–320.3	–245.3
Italy	24.6	20.0	3.1
Luxembourg*	210.4	173.5	146.3
Netherlands	130.2	139.8	126.5
Austria	68.3	68.0	54.2
Portugal	–190.2	–176.4	–117.8
Finland	29.8	39.5	–16.2
Sweden	85.1	91.2	100.9
UK	64.1	58.5	63.1

* See note in Table 1 regarding Belgium and Luxembourg net contribution.

Note:

A negative figure indicates the member state is a net recipient.

Source:

Population figures taken from European Commission publication: European Economy No. 72 (2002).

Conversion to £ sterling using the annual average £/€ exchange rate.

Net contributions as in Table 1.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the mandate of the European Securities Committee is; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56765]

Ruth Kelly: The role and responsibilities of the European Securities Committee are set out in the resolution of the European Council on more effective securities market regulation in the European Union of 23 March 2001 and Commission Decision COM 2001/1493.

Since the start of May 2001 the European Securities Committee has met five times. Each member state has appointed a representative and alternate to the Committee. Officials from HM Treasury represent the UK.

The information regarding the annual cost of the Committee's work to public funds can be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

The items currently under consideration by the European Securities Committee include: implementing the Lamfalussy process; post-Enron issues; and the activities of the Committee of European Securities Regulators.

The regular EU scrutiny process ensures transparency to Parliament; where the Commission issues a depositable text as a result of the Committee's work, the document along with an Explanatory Memorandum are examined by the Parliamentary Scrutiny Committees.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on value added tax is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56792]

Mr. Boateng: The legal base of the Advisory Committee on value added tax is set out in Article 29 of the Sixth VAT Directive (EC Directive 77/388). The Committee has a mandate to discuss any questions relating to the application of the Directive.

Since the beginning of May 2001 the Committee has met on three occasions.

The UK is normally represented by one or two officials from HM Customs and Excise.

Travel expenses for one official are reimbursed by the Commission. The usual cost of overnight accommodation and subsistence per day per official is 217.95 euro (£134.70).

Items under consideration concern any questions on the application of the Community provisions on value added tax.

Accountability and transparency to Parliament is ensured by the regular EU scrutiny process.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of the committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (COM (2001)783) Final.

As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agenda and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the mandate of the Committee on Excise Duties is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56716]

Mr. Boateng: The legal base of the Excise Committee is set out in Article 24 of Council directive 92/12/EEC on the general arrangements for products subject to excise duty and on the holding, movement and monitoring of such products.

The committee has met twice since May 2001.

The UK is normally represented by two officials of HM Customs and Excise.

Travel expenses for one official are reimbursed by the Commission. The usual cost of overnight accommodation and subsistence per day per official is 217.95 euro (£134.70).

Items under consideration concern interpretation and application of the EC provisions on excise duties and procedures.

Accountability and transparency to Parliament is ensured by the regular EU scrutiny process.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council decision 1999/468/EEC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of the committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com(2001)783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the mandate of the Customs 2002 Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56789]

Mr. Boateng: The legal base for the Customs 2002 committee is set out in Council decision 105/2000/EC. It has a mandate to manage the application of the Customs 2002 programme.

The committee has met twice in the last 12 months.

Representation is normally two officials from HM Customs and Excise.

Travel expenses for one official are reimbursed by the Commission. The usual cost of overnight accommodation and subsistence per day per official is 217.95 euro (£134.70).

Items under consideration at present are the evaluation of the current programme, which ends in December this year, and the establishment on a replacement Customs 2007 programme.

Accountability and transparency to Parliament is ensured by the regular EU scrutiny process.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of the committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783) Final.

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agenda and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the mandate of the committee on administrative co-operation in the field of indirect taxation, including the Fiscalis programme (SCAC), and considering anti-fraud (SCAF) measures is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [56794]

(2) what the mandate of the committee on administrative co-operation in the field of indirect taxation, including the Fiscalis programme (SCAC), and considering information technology, is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [56715]

(3) what the mandate of the committee on administrative co-operation in the field of indirect taxation, including the Fiscalis programme (SCACF), and considering training measures, is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56714]

Mr. Boateng: The legal base for the Standing Committee on Administrative Co-operation (SCAC) is set out in Article 10 of Regulation 218/93. It also operates as the committee referred to in Article 9 of Council Directive 77/799/EEC and in Article 11 of Decision 888/98/EC.

The committee has the authority to establish sub-committees and working parties to assist it with its work. Three sub-committees have been established:

SCAT, which deals with training issues such as developing standards for indirect tax audits and computer audits;

SCAF, which discusses and develops anti-fraud measures; and

SCIT, which advises on technical issues in respect of EU information exchange in the indirect tax area.

The main committee has met twice since the end of May 2001 and each of the subcommittees between one and three occasions.

Depending on the agenda, the UK is represented by either one or two officials from HM Customs and Excise.

Travel expenses for one official are reimbursed by the commission. The usual cost of overnight accommodation and subsistence per day per official is 217.95 euro (£134.70).

Accountability and transparency to Parliament is ensured by the regular EU scrutiny process.

Together with member states, the commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this decision, the commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of the committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783) Final.

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agenda and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the mandate of the Contact Committee on certain schemes for collective investment in securities is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56764]

Ruth Kelly: The role and responsibilities of the Undertakings for Collective Investment in Transferable Securities (UCITS) Contact Committee are set out in Article 53 of Council Directive 85/611/EEC.

Since the start of May 2001, the UCITS Contact Committee has met on two occasions. In accordance with Article 53 of Council Directive 85/611/EEC, member states each appoint representatives to the Committee; the UK is represented by officials from HM Treasury and the Financial Services Authority.

The information regarding the annual cost of the Committee's work to public finds can be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The items currently under consideration by the UCITS Contact Committee are harmonised implementation of Directives 2001/107/EC and 2001/108/EC amending Directive 85/611/EEC.

The regular EU scrutiny process ensures transparency to Parliament; where the Commission issues a depositable text as a result of the Committee's work the document along with an Explanatory Memorandum are examined by the Parliamentary Scrutiny Committees.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the mandate of the Insurance Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56750]

Ruth Kelly: The role and responsibilities of the Insurance Committee are set out in Council Directive 91/675/EEC. While the Committee has comitology powers these have never been used to date.

Since the start of May 2001, the Insurance Committee has met on two occasions. In accordance with Article 1 of Council Directive 91/675/EEC, member states each appoint representatives to the Committee: the UK is represented by an official from HM Treasury and an official from the Financial Services Authority.

The information regarding the annual cost of the Committee's work to public finds can be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

The items considered at the last meeting of the Insurance Committee in April 2002 included reinsurance supervision; issues relating to financial conglomerates, insurance groups and credit risks; terrorism; environmental liability; and enlargement. The Committee also considered its own rules of procedure, and the application of the new rules on public access to documents under Regulation (EC) 1049/2001. The regular EU scrutiny process ensures transparency to Parliament; where the Commission issues a depositable text as a result of the Committee's work, the document along with an Explanatory Memoranda are examined by the Scrutiny Committees.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the mandate of the Committee on mutual assistance for the recovery of claims is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56793]

Mr. Boateng: The legal base for the Committee on mutual assistance for the recovery of claims is set out in Article 20 of Directive 76/308 as amended by Directive 2001/44 EC. The committee may examine any matter concerning the application of this directive.

The committee has met three times since May 2001.

The UK is typically represented by two officials of the Revenue Departments.

Travel expenses for two officials are reimbursed by the Commission. The usual cost of overnight accommodation and subsistence per day per official is 217.95 euro (£134.70).

The main item under discussion is the implementation of the revised Mutual Assistance for the Recovery of Debts Directive.

Accountability and transparency to Parliament is ensured by the regular EU scrutiny process.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Com(2001)783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the mandate of the Customs Code Committee dealing with customs valuation is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [56773]

(2) what the mandate of the Customs Code Committee dealing with customs procedures with economic impact is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [56775]

(3) what the mandate of the Customs Code Committee dealing with duty free arrangements is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [56783]

(4) what the mandate of the Customs Code Committee on the recovery of claims is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [56786]

(5) what the mandate of the Customs Code Committee dealing with recovery of claims is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [56772]

(6) what the mandate of the Customs Code Committee dealing with customs warehouses and free zones is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [56774]

(7) what the mandate of the Customs Code Committee dealing with general customs rules is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [56771]

(8) what the mandate of the Customs Code Committee dealing with counterfeit and pirated goods is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [56776]

(9) what the mandate of the Customs Code Committee dealing with tariff and statistical nomenclature is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [56784]

(10) what the mandate of the Customs Code Committee dealing with the movement of air or sea passengers' baggage (technical problems) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [56779]

(11) what the mandate of the Customs Code Committee dealing with transit is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56780]

Mr. Boateng: The legal basis for all sections of the Customs Code Committee is set out in Article 247 of the Community Customs Code (Council Regulation EEC 2913/92). The mandate of the committee is to examine any questions relating to the implementation of this regulation.

The following table shows the frequency of meetings for all sections of the Customs Code Committee.

Name of section[1]	*Meetings in last year*
Tariff Quotas	3
Customs Warehouses and Free Zones	12
Duty Free Arrangements	1
Customs Valuation	7
Customs Procedures with Economic Impact	7
General Rules	2
Counterfeit and Pirating	4
Tariff and Statistical	24
Transit	12
Movements of Air and Sea passengers	[2]—

[1] There is no such section of the Custom Code Committee dealing with recovery of claims.

[2] No meetings.

The UK is normally represented by one official from HM Customs and Excise.Travel expenses for one official are reimbursed by the Commission. The usual cost of overnight accommodation and subsistence per day per official is 217.95 euro (£134.70).

Items considered by the sections of the committee all relate to the implementation, interpretation and application of Community Customs Code.

Accountability and transparency to Parliament is ensured by the regular EU process. EC documents which fall within the Scrutiny Terms of Reference are deposited with Parliament along with an Explanatory Memorandum for examination by the Scrutiny Committees.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com(2001)783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the mandate of the Banking Advisory Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56748]

Ruth Kelly: The role and responsibilities of the Banking Advisory Committee are set out in Title VI of Council Directive 2000/12/EC. While the Committee does have comitology powers these have not been exercised for some years.

Since the start of May 2001 the Banking Advisory Committee has met on four occasions. In accordance with Article 57 of Council Directive 2000/12/EC, member states each appoint representatives to the Committee: the UK is represented by an official from HM Treasury and two officials from the Financial Services Authority.

The information regarding the annual cost of the Committee's work to public funds can only be obtained at a disproportionate cost.

The items considered at the last meeting of the Banking Advisory Committee in March 2002 included issues relating to the work of the Basel Committee on Banking Supervision; Bank accounting and auditing; accession countries (enlargement) and financial stability. The Committee also considered its own internal rules including the application of the new regulation on public access to documents under Regulation (EC) 1049/2001 of 30 May 2001, and the comitology function of the Committee.

The regular EU Scrutiny process ensures transparency to Parliament; where the Commission issues a depositable text as a result of the Committee's work, the document along with an Explanatory Memorandum are examined by the Scrutiny Committees.

Together with members states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com(2001) 783 Final. As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Gender Pay Gap

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average gap between men's and women's pay is in Bolton. [57170]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Brian Iddon, dated 20 May 2002:

> As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question on the average gap between men's and women's pay in Bolton. (57170)
>
> The New Earnings Survey (NES) provides earnings data for Great Britain for full-time employees on adult rates of pay. In April 2001, the latest date for which figures are available, the average hourly earnings in Bolton were £9.36 for men and £8.98 for women.

Taxation (Northern Ireland)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what were the estimated amounts of tax revenue attributed to Northern Ireland in each of the last 20 years, broken down by each principal category of *(a)* income tax, *(b)* corporation tax, *(c)* value added tax, *(d)* national insurance, *(e)* excise duties, *(f)* inheritance tax and *(g)* other. [57153]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The information is not readily available and could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what conventions and methods are used for calculating the Northern Ireland attributed share of UK taxes. [57152]

Mr. Andrew Smith: With the advent of devolution in Northern Ireland in December 1999, Northern Ireland's attributed share of United Kingdom taxes is no longer calculated for the purposes of determining Exchequer funding to the Northern Ireland Consolidated Fund. Instead, the Northern Ireland Executive receives block grants in accordance with Section 58 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Finance Bill

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if statutory instruments under clause 19 of the Finance Bill will be subject to the affirmative procedure. [57339]

Mr. Boateng: Clause 19 provides that Schedule 5 to the Bill shall have effect. Under the provisions of Schedule 5, affirmative resolutions will be required where regulations are to be made:

> requiring a supplement to be payable (where not otherwise payable) when a licence expires and is not renewed before the end of a specified period;
>
> as to the time at which a supplement is payable (where payable earlier than it would otherwise be payable) and by whom it is payable (where payable by a person who would not otherwise have to pay it);
>
> to increase the amount of a supplement (which may vary according to the period between expiry of a licence and renewal of payment of the supplement.

Rural Policy

Mr. Breed: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason no information relating to the banking regulations was passed to the Countryside Agency for its Rural Proofing report; and if he will make a statement. [57460]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury was happy to work with the Countryside Agency to produce its Rural Proofing report, and provided relevant information on how the Treasury had considered the rural dimension on new policies, where that did not pre-empt policy in the process of development. The Treasury takes Rural Proofing very seriously and has appointed a full-time secondee from the Countryside Agency to rural proof the 2002 Spending Review. That commitment is well demonstrated in the area of banking, where the "Universal Bank", a project on which the Treasury has been closely involved, is planned to make bank accounts accessible to all at post office counters by April 2003. This will be of particular benefit to those living in rural areas, where post offices are far more numerous thank bank branches: 93.5 per cent. of households in rural England live within 2 km of a post office.

Yaba

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what weight of the drug yaba was seized by Government officials last year in the UK; [57688]

(2) what steps he is taking to tackle illegal imports of the drug yaba into the UK. [57689]

Mr. Boateng: HM Customs and Excise is responsible for combating illegal importations of controlled drugs. Customs undertake enforcement action at the UK frontier by seizing all prohibited drugs found. They also prosecute offenders through the courts.

Yaba is a street term of methyl-amphetamine, a Class B synthetic drug. 34 kilos of methyl-amphetamine were seized by UK police and Customs during the calendar year 2001.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he has asked his officials to conduct assessments on the five economic tests for membership of the euro. [57852]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 19 December 2001, *Official Report,* column 330W.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the economic models through which the five economic tests will be assessed. [57885]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 7 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1144W.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list those *(a)* advisers and *(b)* departments within the Treasury, that will be responsible for analysing the five economic tests on the Euro; what outside experts will be consulted; and if he will make a statement. [57857]

Ruth Kelly: The assessment has not yet started, but the necessary preliminary analysis—technical work that is necessary to allow us to undertake the assessment within two years as promised—is under way. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Mr. Taylor) on 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 755W.

European Council Decisions

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the reasons underlying Council Regulation 134/2002, on minimum reserves of the European central bank. [57909]

Ruth Kelly: Council Regulation (EC) 134/2002 amends Council Regulation (EC) 2351/98, on the application of minimum reserves by the European central bank, by increasing the period available to the ECB Governing Council to review decisions by the ECB executive board to impose sanctions for non-compliance with minimum reserve requirements.

Neither Regulation 134/2002, nor Regulation 2351/98, applies to the United Kingdom.

National Insurance

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what *(a)* amount and *(b)* proportion of the estimated total revenue to be raised in 2003–04 from the increases in national insurance contributions on (i) employees and (ii) the self-employed announced in the Budget he estimates will be raised from individuals who have salaries below the upper earnings/profit limit. [56470]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 14 May 2002]*: The NIC changes announced in the Budget are shown in table A.1 of the April 2002 Financial Statement and Budget Report (page 154), a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

The proportions of the additional NIC revenue split between those with incomes below and above the upper thresholds are estimated in the following table.

Percentage

	Class 1 primary	*Class 4*
From individuals with earnings/profits below the UEL/UPL	56	40
From individuals with earnings/profits above the UEL/UPL	44	60

Taxation

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 1 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 880W, on taxation, what the annual income to the Inland Revenue from forward contracts was for each year since 1988; and whether those who have benefited from forward contract arrangements which have ended are paying taxation in the normal way. [55478]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 15 May 2002]*: The number of cases in which agreements of this sort have applied is small. In some instances the identities of the taxpayers involved are or might in the future become public, for example in the course of court proceedings. In these circumstances, it would not be right to give details of the amounts involved, because of taxpayers' entitlement to confidentiality about levels of income and tax.

When agreements end, tax is paid in the normal way.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to extend the reduction in corporation tax, extended to incorporated companies in the last Budget, to unincorporated businesses. [57232]

Dawn Primarolo: We have no plans to extend the reduction in corporation tax to unincorporated businesses. In appropriate cases the Government have introduced specific incentives which apply to all businesses. But the profits of unincorporated businesses are liable to income tax, as part of the income of their proprietor, rather than to corporation tax, and in general unincorporated businesses and companies are not directly comparable. Companies are distinct legal entities, separate from their owners, and are subject to the obligations laid down in the Companies Act. It is right that there is a system of taxation specific to them.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer following implementation of the Budget, what corporation tax will be payable by *(a)* an incorporated and *(b)* an unincorporated company with turnover of £99,000 and with taxable profits of £40,000. [57233]

Dawn Primarolo: The corporation tax payable by a company with profits of £40,000 for an accounting period ending 31 March 2003 would be £7,125 (assuming it is entitled to marginal relief from the small companies' rate but no further reliefs such as double taxation relief). Unincorporated businesses are not taxed separately from their proprietors and it is not possible to give a figure for the income tax payable as that will depend on the allowances and reliefs to which the proprietor is entitled and the extent of any other income.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* individuals and *(b)* enterprises have negotiated forward payment contracts with the Inland Revenue for income and corporation tax in each year since 1996. [53476]

Dawn Primarolo: Since 1988 the Inland Revenue have entered into arrangements of this sort in a small number of cases. Typically, these arrangements were made on the basis that they were sensible practical solutions that gave a broadly accurate measure of the tax due where there would otherwise be particular difficulties in establishing an exact figure.

In the years since 1996, seven such agreements were made in cases concerning individuals, one in each of the years 1996 and 1999, three in 1997 and two in 2000. In three of these cases the agreements were renewal agreements where the original was entered into prior to 1996. All such agreements have concerned individuals, though some have included corporate aspects as a secondary matter.

These numbers differ from those in my answer of 1 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 880W because that question and the response to it concerned forward contracts involving fixed regular payments only.

National Insurance Records

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many records of individuals stored in the national insurance record system were removed because the identities concerned were found to be bogus in 2000–01. [54724]

Dawn Primarolo: Records of individuals with bogus identities are not removed from the National Insurance Recording System. The process is to flag the accounts via the Department of Work and Pensions National Identity Fraud Unit so that activity on the accounts can be monitored.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been spent in each year for which figures are available on administering payments of the working families tax credit, broken down by *(a)* costs associated with direct payment of the working families tax credit and *(b)* costs associated with payment via employers. [56419]

Dawn Primarolo: During the 12 months to March 2001 the cost to the Inland Revenue of administering working families' tax credit was £133.8 million. In the previous six months the cost was £36.1 million.

The Department does not record separately the costs of payment directly to the recipient and payment via the employer.

Government Statistics (Longevity)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to revise Government statistics to take account of recent research into human longevity. [56913]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Gordon Prentice, dated 20 May 2002

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking what steps are being taken to revise government statistics to take account of recent research into human longevity. (56913)

The Office for National Statistics keeps abreast of international research into shifts in aging, and is able to increase the analytical understanding we have through publishing measures of healthy life expectancy. We are also a significant contributor to the major UK social research programme into influences on aging.

Population projections for the United Kingdom and its constituent countries are prepared by the Government Actuary's Department at the request of the Registrars General of England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The assumptions used for these are agreed in consultation with the statistical offices of the four constituent countries. A range of projections are then published, based on agreed variations in the assumptions made about mortality, fertility and migration.

The Government Actuary's Department last year carried out a review of the methodology for projecting mortality in these projections as part of the National Statistics Quality Assurance review programme.

The review report, published in December 2001 (available of the National Statistics website at www.statistics.gov.uk/methods—quality/quality—review/population) compares the performance of several methods of projecting future mortality and concludes that the method currently used outperformed the other methods assessed in terms of accuracy. However, several recommendations were made to improve the current methodology. The Government Actuary's Department will take the recommendations of the review and the findings of all relevant recent research into account when setting the assumptions for future population projections.

Children's Credit

Ms Oona King: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made on developing payment systems to ensure that the main carer of a child, even if she or he does not have a bank account, can be paid children's credit from April 2003 onwards. [57206]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue will provide advice in the tax credits application pack on what types of bank accounts can be used for Child Tax Credit payments. The options are current accounts, basic bank accounts or the card account that the Post Office is currently developing and which should be available from April 2003. The Inland Revenue are also making it clear in the material they issue that main carers who do not wish to use an existing joint or sole account to receive payments of their Child Tax Credit can open another account for those payments if they wish.

Tax Returns

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what help is available for *(a)* people and *(b)* people over the age of 75 who experience difficulties in completing their tax returns; and if he will make a statement. [57172]

Dawn Primarolo: There are five main ways in which the Inland Revenue provides help for people who experience difficulties in completing their Tax Returns.

1. The Tax Return Guide, issued to tax advisers annually, or with the Tax Return to people who do not have a tax adviser.
2. The national Self Assessment Telephone Helpline 0845 9000 444 is open seven days a week. This line has a MINICOM facility.
3. The Inland Revenue website www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk has a specific area for Self Assessment and provides on-line help and guidance notes.
4. People can telephone any tax office or contact centre for information.

5. People can visit any Inland Revenue Enquiry Centres (IREC) across the UK—most of these are open from 8.30am to 5pm weekdays.

How to get this help is shown on the front page of each Tax Return and help is available when people need it and not just during office hours. While we do not have help aimed specifically at people aged over 75, local offices will arrange home visits, on request, to help anyone complete their tax return who has difficulty going to a tax office, such as pensioners, the elderly, the sick or disabled.

We also have a range of leaflets that are available to customers on request form the IRECs and we provide separate specialist telephone Helplines for subjects such as Disabled Persons Tax Credit or Trusts.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to simplify *(a)* the tax system and *(b)* tax returns; and if he will make a statement. [57171]

Dawn Primarolo: Budget 2002 contained a number of measures to simplify tax including measures to ease the impact of VAT on small business and implementing the recommendations of the Carter Review of Payroll Services.

Poverty

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his definition of poverty is; and what plans he has to alter his definition. [57190]

Dawn Primarolo: There is no single definition of poverty as it is a complex and multi-dimensional problem. The Government's annual "Opportunity for all" publication sets out the strategy for tackling poverty and social exclusion and monitors progress against a range of indicators.

On 18 April 2002, the Department for Work and Pensions published a consultation document on child poverty measurement looking at how best to build on the Government's existing indicators for the measurement of child poverty in the long-term, seeking views on a range of approaches proposed by academics and poverty experts from the UK and overseas. The consultation period ends on 10 July 2002.

Commonwealth Education Fund

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) when he expects to announce the details of the scope and distribution of the Commonwealth Education Fund; [38816]

(2) what calculations he has made *(a)* inclusive of tax relief and *(b)* exclusive of tax relief of the cost of the Commonwealth Education Fund; [56394]

(3) if the Commonwealth Education Fund will be applied to a fund separate from DFID's budget; [56438]

(4) what representations to United Kingdom industry the Treasury has made in relation to the Commonwealth Education Fund; [56391]

(5) who the trustees of the proposed Commonwealth Education Fund will be; [56392]

(6) for how long the Treasury expects the Commonwealth Education Fund to be operational. [56393]

Mr. Boateng: The Government launched the Commonwealth Education Fund (CEF) on 12 March to mark Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee year. The CEF will help Commonwealth developing countries to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in education, so that by 2015 every child will be able to enrol in and complete primary school, and by 2005 gender equity in enrolments can be reached.

At present 75 million primary school-age children in the Commonwealth do not attend school.

Since 1997 the Government have committed over £650 million to support the development of sustainable, quality primary education systems, mainly in Commonwealth sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia.

Under the chairmanship of Sir Edward George, the Governor of the Bank of England, the CEF will raise resources from business and individuals to support this objective. The Governor is currently working with the administering NGOs to establish the formal umbrella board of the fund, determine trustees, and will make a number of representations to UK industry over the course of this year.

The CEF will have three financing windows:

(i) A strategic fund that will be administered jointly by ActionAid, Oxfam and Save the Children. This will be the largest element of the CEF.

The strategic fund will strengthen the capacity of low-income Commonwealth countries to ensure that the poorest and most marginalised children are able to enrol in and complete good quality primary education. Activities will cover three broad areas:

Strengthening civil society participation in the design and implementation of national and local education plans and frameworks. Particular priority will be given to supporting initiatives that can accelerate progress towards gender equity in education;

Enabling local communities to monitor Government spending on education, both at the national and local levels;

Supporting innovative ways for civil society to ensure that all children, especially girls and the most vulnerable and disadvantaged (including street children, former child soldiers and nomadic children) are able to access quality education.

The Government will provide a grant of £10 million to kick-start the fund. In addition moneys raised in 2002 by business for the CEF will be matched by the Government pound for pound (including tax relief). Funding from the CEF will commence from mid-2002 and be made available over three and a half financial years, ending in December 2005 (coinciding with the gender equity Millennium Development Goal).

The strategic fund will concentrate on low-income Commonwealth countries identified by ActionAid, Oxfam and Save the Children as being seriously under-resourced in relation to education provision, and in which one or more of them has existing capacity to provide support to local organisations and to monitor and evaluate outcomes and impact. The potential 17 countries are: Bangladesh, Cameroon, Gambia, Ghana, India, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

(ii) The Government will also match, pound for pound (including tax relief) funds raised for primary education in Commonwealth developing countries through Comic Relief's

'Sport Relief'. Comic Relief will manage these funds independently, and they will disburse funds via UK based NGOs.

(iii) The Government will expand its work to develop links between schools in Commonwealth developing countries and the UK, to raise awareness and understanding of international development issues and strengthen the global dimension in the life and work of schools.

The CEF will be separately administered by the three NGOs according to a framework agreed with Government. The Government's £10 million endowment and matching funds will be channelled as a grant to the NGOs through DFID, whose existing budget will be increased accordingly. The precise cost of the matching funds will not be known until the end of 2002. Tax relief can be claimed by corporate donors and Comic Relief (in respect of donations from private individuals) at the appropriate tax rate.

Employees' Accommodation

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the tax implications for an employee of a company which makes accommodation available for key workers recruited from a different part of the country and working away from their normal home base. [57268]

Dawn Primarolo: Where an employee is supplied with free or cheap living accommodation by reason of his or her employment a tax charge can arise under section 145 of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act (ICTA), subject to the exemptions from charge of that section. But for an employee who is sent away from their normal work place to work at a temporary work place for a period not expected to last more than two years, the cost of accommodation at or near the new work place is exempt under the employee travel rules in section 198 ICTA.

Pensioners

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of (i) pensioners and (ii) pensioner households (A) paying income tax and (B) entitled to the minimum income guarantee. [57201]

Dawn Primarolo: It is estimated that there will be some 4.9 million taxpayers over state retirement pension age in 2002–03 and this is some 45 per cent. of the 10.9 million pensioners. The taxpayer estimates are based on the survey or personal incomes and are consistent with the April 2002 Budget. The population estimates were provided by the Government Actuary's Department.

Based on the family resources survey it is estimated that there are some eight million families where at least one person is over pension age, 4.2 million of these families contain a taxpayer in 2002–03.

Estimates for those entitled to the minimum income guarantee are not available in the format requested. Estimates for the number of single pensioners and pensioner couples in receipt of MIG and those entitled to but not in receipt of MIG are presented in "Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take Up in 1999–2000". A copy of the publication is available in the Library of the House.

Federation of Small Businesses

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from the Federation of Small Businesses regarding the implications of the Budget for small firms. [58121]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have received a number of representations from a variety of organisations regarding the Budget.

Unincorporated Small Businesses

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the implication of the Budget for unincorporated small businesses. [58120]

Dawn Primarolo: Unincorporated small businesses benefit from a number of Budget 2002 measures including measures to ease the impact of VAT on small business and implementing the recommendations of the Carter review of payroll services.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Planning (North-West)

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he intends to publish his response to the recommendations of the panel that conducted the Public Examination of Draft Regional Planning Guidance for the North-West; and if he will make a statement. [58148]

Ms Keeble: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is today publishing for public consultation proposed changes to the Draft Regional Planning Guidance for the North-West (RPG13). They are based on the recommendations of the independent panel that held a Public Examination into Draft RPG13 in February and March 2001.

Draft RPG was prepared and published by the North-West Regional Assembly (NWRA). Its overall strategy is to establish a broad framework for the preparation of development plans by the North-West's local planning authorities up to 2016. It aims to achieve greater economic competitiveness and growth with associated regional progress; to secure an urban renaissance in the cities and towns of the North-West; to sustain the region's smaller rural and coastal communities; to create an accessible region; to assure the prudent management of the region's environmental and cultural assets; and to secure environmental quality. We support this and, as recommended by the panel, we are proposing changes to ensure that the strategy is more clearly expressed and relates clearly to the policy chapters. It is important that the implications for development plans and other strategies are clear and unambiguous in order to make a real difference on the ground.

A key issue for the region is to bring about the renaissance of the urban areas by encouraging economic growth and regeneration in a sustainable way. To achieve this we are promoting the renewal of the region's urban areas by concentrating resources upon the selective refurbishment, conversion and redevelopment of outworn building stock, and the comprehensive improvement of older and unpopular neighbourhoods. At the same time, we are proposing to include a reduction in the annual rate of provision of totally new housing (unrelated to clearance) by 15 per cent., and increase the proportion of housing provided on previously used (brownfield) land from 65 per cent. to 70 per cent. The proposed changes give added weight to avoiding any premature release of greenfield land which would undermine attempts to promote the use of recycled land and the redevelopment of existing housing areas.

The proposed changes set out projected annual housing provision rates in Table 5.1 and policy on housing provision in Policy UR7. We expect RPG to bring forward an integrated approach to housing renewal at regional and sub-regional level, recognising that the development of sub-regional strategies should look beyond purely housing considerations, and allow for holistic approaches, which include economic, environmental and social elements and mechanisms. We also expect that in developing and implementing sub-regional strategies there will also be a need to have respect for local area/neighbourhood diversity.

Tackling low demand and abandonment lies at the heart of the revised strategy. In underlining the importance of these proposed changes I also wish to draw to attention to the pathfinder initiative "Action to Tackle Housing Abandonment" announced by the Secretary of State on 6 April 2002. Pathfinders will be formed in Greater Manchester (Manchester—Salford, Oldham—Rochdale), Merseyside (Liverpool, Sefton and Wirral), East Lancashire (Blackburn, Hyndburn, Burnley and Pendle). The role of the Regional Assembly, the North-West Development Agency and local planning authorities working with housing and other partners is to pursue a fully integrated response to these issues of low demand, high vacancy rates, falling housing numbers and abandonment, wherever they are to be found. We would welcome views on whether the proposed changes provide an adequate planning framework for tackling low demand and on the sub-regional approach to housing renewal set out by Policy UR6. In particular, we welcome views on whether the proposed changes are sufficient to prevent the unnecessary release of greenfield land for housing. Alternatively, we need to consider whether there should be further changes to reflect the recommendation made by the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee that no new planning permissions should be granted for greenfield sites.

The panel recommended the merging of the original Core Strategy/Development Principles and Spatial Development Framework chapters. After careful study we have decided that it would be better to keep the two chapters apart but re-draft them. In so doing I believe that we have kept true to the spirit of what the original draft intended but added a Core Development Principle (on economic competitiveness with social progress), and expressed the Spatial Development Framework with greater clarity. I would particularly welcome views on the proposed priority for urban renaissance resources (set out in Policy SD1) as suggested in the panel's report (R5.6a).

The panel recommended the development of Table 11.1 in Chapter 11 on Monitoring, Implementation and Review. While attempting to set out targets and indicators in the form suggested by the panel there is a need to develop these further and views on this would be particularly welcome. To help progress this in line with the panel's recommendations, there will be a seminar for stakeholders during the consultation period and assistance from the assembly will be invaluable in this matter. As part of that deliberation an action plan will be considered in line with the panel's recommendation (R13.2).

During the Public Examination it was acknowledged that there is a considerable amount of further work that needs to be done and a range of issues that will require an early review of both RPG and the Regional Transport Strategy by the NWRA. Specifically, guidance will need to take into account the findings of a number of studies including those on Air Service; Multi-Modal Transport Studies; Public Transport Accessibility Profiling; Regional Freight; Regional Park and Ride Sites; Renewable Energy Resources; Transport Demand Management; Regional Park Resources; Regional Waste Facility Requirements; Regional Derelict Land Survey; Assessment of distribution and effectiveness of a variety, of Waste Minimisation Initiatives across the Region; Review of Urban Potential Studies; and the implications of reviews of PPG 25, MPG6 and the Proposed Policy Guidance on the Extraction of Minerals from the Seabed.

In considering these proposed changes and carrying out future review of RPG13 it is important that account is taken of the principles set out in the Planning Green Paper[1], in particular the need to make RPG shorter and more strategic; more regionally specific; and more integrated and coordinated with other regional strategies; the increasing importance of introducing sub-regional policies within RPGs will also need to be addressed; and ensuring that the RPG process does not avoid making difficult decisions. Such a review is intended to help develop RPG13 and I am sure that the NWRA will continue to embrace the challenge of helping to implement and develop the Guidance. Consequently, while the proposed changes to the policies in this Draft RPG should be the focus of attention, views are also invited on the changes to the supporting text, including on the extent to which there is any scope for it to be shorter, clearer, and more regionally focused. We intend to revisit this issue following the period of consultation.

There will now be a 13-week consultation period on the proposed changes which will end on Friday 16 August. Copies of the relevant documents have been placed in the Libraries of the House and provided to all of the region's MPs.

[1] Planning: delivering a fundamental change. Published February 2002.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans the Government have for housing development in Lancashire in the next 10 years. [57280]

Ms Keeble: The Secretary of State's Proposed Changes to draft Regional Planning Guidance for the North West indicate that the annual average rate of housing provision for Lancashire, net of clearance, should be 2,690 dwellings.

Social Housing

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many council houses have been transferred to RSLs and other private bodies since 1997. [57271]

Ms Keeble: In the five years since January 1997, it is estimated that approximately 365,000 council houses in England have been transferred to RSLs and other private bodies.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many council houses have been *(a)* built and *(b)* sold in each local authority since 1997. [57270]

Ms Keeble: The number of council dwellings built has been falling for many years. Of the 354 local authorities, only 48 reported completing any council dwellings since April 1997. These are given in the following table. These figures are based on monthly numbers reported by local authorities and have not been adjusted for incomplete returns. Figures for the number of dwellings completed each year are published in the Department's Local Housing Statistics.

Tables showing reported information on council houses sold by each local authority in England, along with national and regional summaries, for each year since 1979–80 are available in the Library.

New council dwellings built between April 1997 and March 2002

Local authority	*Council dwellings built*
Ashford	9
Bedford	8
Bristol	17
Broadland	6
Bromsgrove	21
Canterbury	11
Cotswold	54
Derwentside	6
Derby	1
Durham	3
Eastbourne	8
East Hampshire	26
East Hertfordshire	4
East Lindsey	1
Eden	1
Erewash	12
Hackney	34
Hertsmere	1
Hillingdon	37
Islington	5
Kennet	11
Leeds	17
Leicester	130
Litchfield	21
Mansfield	10
Milton Keynes	7
Mole Valley	12
North Hertfordshire	1
Nottingham	15
Reigate and Banstead	2
Rotherham	4
Rushcliffe	17
Sandwell	33
Selby	3
Sevenoaks	1
Shepway	2
South Bucks	29
South Cambridgeshire	55
South Hams	24
South Kesteven	8
South Northamptonshire	1
South Tyneside	11
Stroud	46
Teignbridge	4
Waltham Forrest	282
Waveney	1
West Oxfordshire	3
Worcester	27

Supported Housing

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what safeguards have been put in place to ensure that tenants in supported housing, whose support costs are met in full by housing benefits, will continue to have these costs met in full from April 2003 under the provisions of Supporting People. [57209]

Ms Keeble: Local authorities administering Supporting People from April 2003 are being instructed to pay Supporting People grants where housing benefit is currently covering support costs and are auditing the preparation to make this change. People on housing benefit at 31 March 2003 will see no change.

Affordable Housing

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many affordable empty homes there were in *(a)* rural areas by region and *(b)* England by region in each of the last 10 years. [56974]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* The number of local authority (LA) and registered social landlord (RSL) empty homes in *(a)* rural areas by region and *(b)* England by region in each of the last ten years are set out in the following tables:

Table 1: Number of LA and RSL empty homes in England which are in rural areas by region

Region	*1 April: 2001*	*2000*	*1999*	*1998*	*1997*	*1996*	*1995*	*1994*	*1993*[1]	*1992*
North-east	3,500	3,000	2,800	2,600	2,200	2,200	2,100	1,900	1,700	2,000
North-west	2,400	2,200	2,000	1,700	1,600	1,400	1,200	1,000	1,100	1,000
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,100	1,400	1,100	1,000	800	600	600	600	700	600
East Midlands	1,100	1,300	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200	900	800	800	600
West Midlands	700	900	700	800	700	700	600	600	500	500
East of England	1,300	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,500	1,600	1,200	1,300	1,700	1,200
London	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
South-east	1,300	1,500	1,900	1,700	1,700	1,400	1,300	1,300	1,800	1,200
South-west	1,300	1,600	1,500	1,400	1,600	1,500	1,300	1,300	1,400	1,000
England	12,700	13,400	12,700	11,900	11,300	10,600	9,200	8,800	9,700	8,100

[1] Figures for 1993 are unusually high due to many dwellings bought by RSLs towards the end of the financial year (1992–93) under the Housing Market Package.

Table 2: Total number of LA and RSL empty homes in England by region

Region	*1 April: 2001*	*2000*	*1999*	*1998*	*1997*	*1996*	*1995*	*1994*	*1993*[1]	*1992*
North-east	12,100	12,100	11,400	11,100	10,100	9,400	8,500	7,600	7,700	8,500
North-west	31,500	30,100	26,500	24,500	21,100	19,100	17,100	16,300	19,400	20,500
Yorkshire and Humberside	17,500	17,800	16,600	15,300	14,200	11,800	10,000	10,100	9,900	9,200
East Midlands	8,600	8,700	7,600	7,100	7,300	7,300	5,700	5,300	5,700	4,800
West Midlands	16,100	17,200	14,200	13,200	11,900	10,900	9,600	9,000	9,400	8,800
East of England	5,600	5,900	5,900	5,600	6,000	5,800	5,300	5,400	6,500	4,800
London	18,800	20,200	21,700	22,100	25,100	27,300	26,300	26,600	27,100	23,700
South-east	6,800	7,200	7,600	7,300	7,700	7,200	6,200	6,400	8,000	5,800
South-west	4,600	5,500	5,100	4,700	4,500	4,300	3,900	3,800	3,800	3,500
England	121,600	124,700	116,600	110,900	107,900	103,100	92,600	90,500	97,500	89,600

[1] Figures for 1993 are unusually high due to many dwellings bought by RSLs towards the end of the financial year (1992–93) under the Housing Market Package.

Note:

Figures rounded to the nearest 100

Sources:

For Table 1 and Table 2: DTLR's annual Housing Investment Programme (HIP) returns and the Housing Corporation's annual HAR 10 and Regulatory and Statistical Return (RSR)

Housing Stock Transfers

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the local housing authorities who have transferred their council house stock to date to alternative landlords and give in each case *(a)* the grant from Government to write off debt, *(b)* the total cost to the local authority in professional fees, *(c)* other relevant costs of the transfer and *(d)* the capital receipt. [56695]

Ms Keeble: I have placed in the Libraries of the House lists which show all large scale voluntary transfers completed to date. The details include the four Government one-off payments in transfers where the capital receipt was insufficient to pay off the authority's housing debt, the set up cost for transfer and the capital receipt. Costs to local authorities for professional fees are not held centrally.

Lighting Maintenance

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what has been included in the Single Capital Pot for road, bridge and street lighting maintenance as part of this year's LTP settlement. [57266]

Ms Keeble: All of the block allocation for highway maintenance in the 2002–03 LTP settlement has been included in the Single Capital Pot. The total allocation was £545 million made up of indicative amounts of £189 million for principal roads, £243 million for non-principal roads, and £113 million for bridges. There was no indicative allocation for street lighting. In addition £10 million was allocated for major maintenance schemes greater than £5 million: this sum is not included in the Single Capital Pot.

It is for local authorities to decide how much capital resource from the Single Capital Pot they will spend on highway maintenance in the light of their priorities for this and the other services they provide.

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether an allowance for street lighting will be included in the LTP settlement for 2003–04. [57267]

Ms Keeble: A decision on whether to include an indicative amount for street lighting in the LTP highway maintenance settlement for 2003–04 has not yet been taken. It would depend upon the total resources available and the progress made in other areas of maintenance. The first targets in the 10 Year Plan for Transport are to stop carriageway deterioration by 2004 and to complete bridge strengthening to carry 40 tonne lorries where necessary.

Provision for street lighting replacement is already made within the Highways Maintenance Standard Spending Assessment for Revenue Support Grant. Local authorities are also free to fund street lighting replacement from the Single Capital Pot which has been introduced in 2002–03.

Work-related Illness

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many claims for work-related injury illness were settled on behalf of workers in local government in the last year for which figures are available; and what the total cost was in compensation. [56069]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested is not held centrally, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many employees in local government retired through work-related illness or injury in the last year for which records are available; and what the total cost was to the Department. [56070]

Dr. Whitehead: The information requested is not held centrally, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many claims for work-related illness were settled by his Department in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was in compensation. [56066]

Dr. Whitehead: In 2001–02, this Department settled 15 cases of work-related illness and injury. 13 of these claims were long standing cases relating to ex-PSA staff, mostly for asbestos related disease, amounting to £402,305 in compensation costs. There were two claims for DTLR staff amounting to £8,500.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many employees of his Department retired through work-related ill health in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was to the Department. [56067]

Dr. Whitehead: Records are not maintained by DTLR which enable ill health retirements to be separately identified as work-related. The number of staff retired in DTLR (including its executive agencies) with a medical retirement certificate issued by the civil service pension scheme medical adviser in the year 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 was 56. Benefits provided on medical retirement are as set out in the rules of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme and laid before Parliament. This provides for an immediate payment of an enhanced pension and lump sum. Ill health retirement expenditure is met centrally from the Civil Superannuation Vote and it is not possible to separate out the cost for cases in this Department.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the mandate of the committee on application of the legislation on application of tonnage measurement of ballast spaces in segregated ballast of oil tankers is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56834]

Mr. Jamieson: The committee was set up under Article 7 of regulation (EC) 2978/94/EC on the implementation of IMO resolution A.747(18) on the application of tonnage measurements of segregated ballast tanks in oil tankers. The committee is composed of representatives of member states and is chaired by the European Commission with a remit to assist the European Commission with the application of the regulation. My Department is not aware of any committee meetings in the past 12 months and has incurred no travel or subsistence costs in relation to it.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of the House on 26 February (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the mandate of the Implementation Committee on minimum requirements for vessels bound for or leaving Community ports and carrying dangerous or polluting goods is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56835]

Mr. Jamieson: The Minimum Requirements for Vessels Bound for or leaving Community Ports and Carrying Dangerous or Polluting Goods Committee was established under Article 12 of Council directive 93/75/EEC. The committee is composed of representatives of the member states and is chaired by a representative of the Commission. The remit of the Committee is to consider amendments to the Council directive and vote on them accordingly. This committee has not met in the last 12 months and therefore there has been no cost to the public funds.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the mandate of the Committee for the establishment of conditions for the interoperability of the trans-European high-speed rail system is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55679]

Mr. Jamieson: A regulatory committee, comprised of member states' representatives and chaired by the Commission, was set up under Article 21 of Directive 96/48/EC on the interoperability of the trans-European high-speed rail system. The remit of the Committee has now been extended to include conventional rail in accordance with Directive 2001/16/EC on the interoperability of the trans-European conventional rail system. The "Article 21 Committee" approves technical specifications for interoperability-TSIs—and considers various issues arising from the implementation of interoperability (including the cost-benefit analysis to support the draft TSIs and applications to the Commission for derogations from the TSIs).

The Committee has met four times over the last 12 months—there have also been a number of subordinate working group meetings. The UK is now represented by the Strategic Rail Authority, although officials from DTLR and HM Inspectorate of Railways have also attended. Over the last 12 months, the cost of the main committee's work to public funds has been approximately £7,000.

The Article 21 Committee is currently completing the formal adoption of TSIs for the interoperability of the trans-European high-speed rail system and establishing ground-rules for the preparation of TSIs for the interoperability of the trans-European conventional rail system.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both houses on 26 February (Commission Document 5685–02). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the mandate of the Advisory Committee for the application of legislation on the development of the community railways is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55682]

Mr. Jamieson: The Developing European Railways Committee was established under the provisions of Directive 2001/12/EC. The Committee is composed of representatives of member states and is chaired by the European Commission. The remit of the Committee is to facilitate the implementation of Directives 2001/12/EC, 2001/13/EC and 2001/14/EC, commonly referred to as the 'Railway Infrastructure Package Directives'. The Committee has met twice in the last 12 months. The UK is represented by officials from my Department and the Office of the Rail Regulator. The annual cost of its work to public funds is about £2,500.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both houses on 26 February (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the mandate of the Advisory Committee for the application of legislation on the conditions under which non-resident carriers may operate national road passenger transport services within a member state is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds;

if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55685]

Mr. Jamieson: The Advisory Committee is established under the provisions of Article 10 of the road passenger transport cabotage regulation (Council Regulation (EC) 12–98). The Committee is composed of representatives of the member states and chaired by the European Commission. The remit of the Committee is to advise the Commission on measures intended to resolve a serious disturbance of the internal transport market due to cabotage. As no member state has ever reported such a disturbance to the Commission, the Committee has not been convened.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on measures to be taken in the event of a crisis in the market in the carriage of goods by road and for laying down the conditions under which non-resident carriers may operate national road haulage services within a member state is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55686]

Mr. Jamieson: The Advisory Committee is established under the provisions of Article 7 of Council Regulation (EEC) 3118–93 and Article 5 of Council Regulation (EEC) 3916–90. The Committee is composed of representatives of member states and chaired by the Commission. The remit of the Committee is to advise the Commission on measures proposed to deal with a serious disturbance of the national transport market due to either international haulage or cabotage. As no member state has ever reported such a disturbance to the Commission, the Committee has not been convened.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of the House on 26 February (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Disclosure of Interests

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what rules apply to the disclosure of interests on the part of those serving on public bodies which are responsible to his Department. [56455]

Ms Keeble: All advisory and executive non-departmental public bodies are required to adopt a board members' code, based on guidance produced by the Cabinet Office, and they should have registers of interests. The definition of interests is ultimately for individual Departments since they are best placed to decide what might be thought to influence members of their NDPBs.

The following table lists the NDPBs sponsored by this Department and in each case indicates what the relevant code of practice is and where it is available.

NDPB	*Code of practice*	*Availability*
Advisory Panel on Standards in the Planning Inspectorate	Does not yet have a code of practice	
Audit Commission	The Code of Conduct for Commissioners, which is part of The Commissioners' Handbook.	By appointment at the Audit Commission, 1 Vincent Square, London, SW1P 2PN
Building Regulations Advisory Committee	Members' handbook and register of interests	By appointment at Zone 3/C2, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London, SW1E 5DU
Commission for Integrated Transport	Uses the Cabinet Office's standard code of practice	The register of interests is published in CfIT's annual report and is available on request.
Community Forum	This body was established in January 2002, the code of conduct has not yet been finalised. A register of members' interests will be included in the annual report.	When agreed it will be published on the Community Forum website www.neighbourhood.gov.uk or available from the Community Forum Secretariat, Zone 3/A5, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London, SW1E 5DU.
Civil Aviation Authority	Although the CAA has no formal register of interests, under Paragraph 10, schedule 1 of the Civil Aviation Act 1982, board members are obliged to disclose their interests, and provide this information when requested. The Secretary of State must satisfy himself that members have no prejudicial interests.	
Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee	Code of practice for members in existence. Register of interests being developed.	Available on request
English Partnerships	Code of practice	www.englishpartnerships.co.uk/pdf/codesofpractice.pdf

NDPB	*Code of practice*	*Availability*
Health and Safety Commission	Code of practice, including conflicts of interest for board members.	Available on request from the Commission
Housing Action Trusts	Code of conduct and register of board members' interests.	Available on request from the Trusts
Housing Corporation	Code of best practice for board members of the Housing Corporation.	www.housingcorp.gsx.gov.uk
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for England	Code of practice	www.statistics.gov.uk/pbc
Parliamentary Boundary Commission for Wales	Code of practice currently not available as the Commission are moving their website.	From 1 July, the website will be hosted by the National Assembly for Wales, where the code of practice will be available for viewing.
Property Advisory Group	Code of practice and public register of interests	On request via the Secretariat, Zone 3/G10, Eland House, Bressenden Place, London, SW1E 5DU.
Northern Lighthouse Board	Code of best practice for board members which includes a commitment to the Principles of Standards of Public Life.	On request from Director of Finance and Administration, Northern Lighthouse Board, 84 George Street, Edinburgh, EH2 3DA.
Rent Assessment Panels	Guidance to members on conflicts of interest and a register of interest.	Available on request from RAPCU, Whittington House, 19–30 Alfred Place, London, WC1E 7LR. Parties to cases being dealt with by RAPs are advised of the existence of the register and how it may be inspected.
Standards Board for England	Code of conduct	www.standardsboard.co.uk/board/membersCodeOfConduct
Strategic Rail Authority	Code of conduct currently being prepared, to be formally in place this summer. A register of interests is maintained.	On request from SRA, 55 Victoria Street, London, SW1E 0EU
Traffic Area Networks	No code of conduct or register of interests maintained.	
Trinity House Lighthouse Service	Code of best practice for board members which includes a commitment to the Principles of Standards of Public Life.	On request from Director of Administration, Trinity House Lighthouse Service, Tower Hill, London, EC3N 4DH

Sick Leave

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many days of sick leave were taken by employees in local government in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was. [56071]

Dr. Whitehead: Findings from research carried out by the Employers' Organisation research indicates that the number of days' sick leave taken by local government employees in England for the year April 2000 until March 2001 was approximately 15.9 million—an average of 9.6 days per employee.

The total number of employees in English local authorities (excluding teachers) was estimated in 2001 by the Employers' Organisation as being 1,654,925. A CBI/PPP healthcare survey also for 2001 suggested that sick absence costs the public sector an average £518 per employee per annum. From these surveys the total cost of sick leave taken by employees in local government can be estimated at approximately £857 million.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many days of sick leave were taken by employees in his Department in the last year for which records are available; what proportion of those were due to work-related illness or injury; and what the cost was to the Department. [56068]

Dr. Whitehead: The most recent figures published in the Cabinet Office "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service" are for the calendar year 2000. For the "Environment and Transport Group", the average working days' absence per staff-year was 9.0 days compared with a civil service average of 9.9 days. The total number of days lost were 142,853. DTLR is committed to meeting the target for reducing the number of working days lost due to sick absence in its service delivery agreement by 30 per cent. based on a 1998 baseline by the end of 2003. The Department does not have details of the days lost and associated costs for work-related illness and injury.

Coastguard (Lyme Bay)

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has for the coastguard helicopter serving Lyme Bay in Dorset; and if he will make a statement. [57234]

Mr. Jamieson: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency is currently in discussions with contractors and other organisations about the future helicopter provision for the Lyme Bay area. No firm decisions have yet been taken.

Rural Transport (Cumbria)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what improvements have been made to rural transport in Cumbria to increase access to health services. [57000]

Ms Keeble: Government funding has enabled Cumbria county council to increase the frequency of many rural bus routes facilitating access to health services. Recent community transport enhancements include:

Wigton town service

Cumbria Plusbus (Kirkby Stephen area)

Rural fells project (Caldbeck)

Community buses (brokerage schemes)

Voluntary social car schemes

Rural wheels—an innovative demand responsive service. Pilot being developed in South Cumbria using smartcard technology.

Enhancements to conventional bus services include:

Service X35 (Kendal—Barrow) provides access to both Westmorland hospital in Kendal and Furness general in Barrow.

Service 59 (West Cumbria to West Cumberland hospital) dial-a-ride service for evening visiting.

Service 58 (Maryport—Cockermouth) will be extended shortly to serve the health centre in Maryport; already serves Cockermouth hospital.

Service X12 (Coniston—Ulverston) will extend on request to the hospital/health centre in Ulverston.

Train Traffic (Scotland)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what percentage of the train traffic on the *(a)* Kilmarnock to Dumfries and *(b)* Dumfries to Carlisle railway lines was (i) passenger and (ii) freight in the last 12 months; [54819]

(2) what percentage level of capacity the Kilmarnock to Dumfries railway line has operated in the last 12 months. [54821]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand that current weekday train traffic in each direction is as follows:

Rail line	*Passenger trains*	*Freight trains*
Kilmarnock to Dumfries	10	10
Dumfries to Carlisle	13	10

Over the last year, according to demand, up to 15 or 20 freight services per weekday have operated in each direction over each line. When the maximum number of freight services operate, the Kilmarnock to Dumfries line is operating to its maximum practical capacity.

Rail Franchises

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will make a statement on the rail franchise renewal process; [55770]

(2) if he will list the bidders who have pre-qualified for rail franchise applications. [55771]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan, published on 14 January, includes a report on its franchising programme. A new Chiltern franchise was signed on 18 February. The table lists the parties currently pre-qualified for franchises.

Franchise/Pre-qualified parties

- Merseyrail Electrics
  - Arriva Trains Ltd.
  - Connex Transport UK Ltd.
  - Serco Ltd.
  - Transdev plc jointly with RATP International
  - NS/Dutch Railways
  - Keolis SA
- Northern
  - Arriva Trains Ltd.
  - FirstGroup plc jointly with Keolis SA
  - National Express Group plc
  - Connex Transport UK Ltd.
  - GB Railways Group plc
  - Serco Ltd.
- Wales and Borders
  - Arriva Trains Ltd.
  - Connex Transport UK Ltd.
  - FirstGroup plc
  - GB Railways Group plc
  - National Express Group plc
  - NS/Dutch Railways
  - Serco Ltd.
  - Keolis SA
- TransPennine Express (best and final offers stage)
  - Arriva Trains Ltd.
  - Connex Transport UK Ltd.
  - Keolis SA with First Group plc.

Network Rail

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions who the shareholders are in Network Rail; and what obligations it has to report to the Strategic Rail Authority. [57292]

Mr. Jamieson: Network Rail was incorporated on 22 March 2002 as a private company limited by guarantee. As such, it has no shareholders. At present, Network Rail is a bidder to succeed Railtrack plc as network operator and has no obligations to report to the Strategic Rail Authority.

London Underground

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action is being taken to reduce the number of working days lost through the absence of London Underground staff on medical grounds. [56426]

Mr. Jamieson: Improving attendance is a key part of London Underground's work to improve the reliability of services. Improved staff attendance means fewer cancellations, and a better service for passengers.

LU have taken a number of steps to improve staff attendance. Over the past year, these have resulted in a 2 percentage point increase in station staff attendance, and a 1 percentage point increase in the attendance of train and signalling staff.

Road Bridges (Railways)

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when Railtrack will complete repairs on the road bridge over the railway at Easter Road, Edinburgh to enable it to carry heavy traffic again. [55709]

Mr. Jamieson: As part of the national programme of assessment and strengthening to ensure that road bridges within specified categories can carry loads of up to 40 tonnes, I understand that city of Edinburgh council has carried out an initial assessment of the load-bearing capacity of the bridge; and that Railtrack is awaiting receipt of the council's assessment report.

Blackwall Tunnel

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent reports he has received regarding the safety of the Blackwall tunnel in London; what concerns have been expressed about emergency lanes and escape routes; what response he has made; and if he will make a statement. [55847]

Mr. Jamieson: This is not a matter for the Government; it is a matter for Transport for London (TfL) which is the highway authority for the Blackwall tunnels.

I understand that TfL have recently awarded a £15.5 million contract for extensive refurbishment of the southbound tunnel. They are also planning to undertake a review of the northbound tunnel, which was extensively refurbished in 1992, to identify the need for any further works on that tunnel.

Further information can be obtained from Peter Heather, Director of Operations, TfL—Street Management.

Off-road Motorcycling

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans the Government have to change controls on the use of land for off-road motorcycling. [57323]

Ms Keeble: My Department published research on 12 September 2001 on the impact of provisions relating to the temporary use of land, including for off-road motorcycling. It addressed matters such as impact on local amenity and the environment, for example in terms of litter, noise and relationships with other land uses in the area.

On 24 January 2002 a consultation paper was issued on possible options for change to the current temporary use provisions. The paper put forward six options for change as well as inviting proposals for alternative options. The closing date for responses was 24 April 2002. The views of all those who responded will be considered before any decisions are made on the future composition of the Use Classes Order and the temporary use provisions, including controls on the use of land for off-road motorcycling.

Coaches

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to encourage the use of coaches for long-distance public transport. [57329]

Ms Keeble: Coaches play an important role in the provision of inter-city and commuter transport. They are commercially self-supporting and demand has remained buoyant over the last decade. I am keen to encourage their use. Officials are regularly in touch with coach industry representatives.

The Government are in discussion with the coach industry about proposals to pay bus service operators' grant (formerly called "fuel duty rebate") for scheduled coach services which offer concessionary fares.

Bus Lanes

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has received from Transport for London and the Highways Agency on allowing coaches to use bus lanes. [57330]

Ms Keeble: Coaches are permitted in a large number of existing bus lanes including the vast majority of those in London. Transport for London have powers to make traffic regulation orders on GLA roads and would not need to submit any plans to the Department.

Road Accidents

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his strategy is towards eliminating fatalities [illegible] road crashes. [57121]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* The Government's current road safety strategy, "Tomorrow's roads—safer for everyone", aims to reduce road deaths and serious injuries by 40 per cent. by 2010 compared with the average for 1994 to 1998.

Mobile Phones (Drivers)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what road safety campaigns his Department has supported on the issue of driving while talking on mobile phones. [57537]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highway Code has, for many years, included advice to drivers not to use a mobile phone while driving. In March 1998, newspaper advertising alerted readers to the dangers of killing or injuring yourself or another road user. Leaflets and posters have been made widely available since then. In January 2000, television advertising reminded of the possible tragic consequences of using a mobile phone. We launched new radio advertising this month to demonstrate the distracting effect of using a mobile phone while driving. A public information film for use by TV stations has also been produced, as have new posters, and further publicity is being prepared. We continue to support local campaigns by police forces and local authorities.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether he is planning to introduce a bill prohibiting the use of mobile phones by car drivers. [57293]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government recognise the dangers of using mobile phones while driving. If drivers cannot be persuaded not to use mobile phones while driving, the Government accept that new legislation may be necessary.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Overseas Visits

Mr. Barker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what the cost is to public funds of *(a)* hotel expenses and *(b)* flights for overseas visits made by his Department since 1 June 2001; [57843]

(2) how many overseas visits he has made since 1 June 2001; to where; for what purposes; and at what cost to public funds; [57844]

(3) how many international flights he and his officials have taken since June 2001. [57845]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: All travel arrangements for Ministers and officials are made in accordance with rules set out in the

Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House, and the Civil Service Management Code.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided to the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) on 6 March *Official Report* column 421W.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* officials, *(b)* ministers and *(c)* special advisers from his Department will be travelling to Bali at public cost. [57841]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: It is planned that two officials from the Deputy Prime Minister's Central Policy Group and two from the Performance and Innovation Unit will attend.

Work-related Illness

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many claims for work-related illness were settled by his Department in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was in compensation. [56084]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office, including Government Car Despatch Agency, did not settle any claims for work-related illness in year 2001.

This information requested for the Central Office of Information and the Regional Co-ordination Unit is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The Cabinet Office is aware of its legal obligations to provide a safe and healthy working environment. It is committed to reducing the number of working days lost through work-related injuries and illness. The Government's Revitalising Health and Safety initiative is being used as a supporting framework to achieve this goal.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many employees of his Department retired through work-related ill-health in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was to the Department. [56085]

Mr. Leslie: Records are not maintained by Cabinet Office that enable ill health retirements to be separately identified as work related. The number of staff retired with a medical retirement certificate issued by the civil service pension scheme medical adviser for year 2001 is as follows:

	Number of medical retirements 2001
Cabinet Office	6
COI	1
GCDA	0
RCU	2

Benefits provided on medical retirement are as set out in the rules of the principal civil service pension scheme and laid before Parliament. They provide for an immediate payment of an enhanced pension and lump sum. Ill health retirement expenditure is met centrally from the Civil Superannuation Vote. For the year ending March 2002, provisional expenditure met from the Vote was £310 million in respect of all civil service cases for which an ill health pension has been awarded. These cases number approximately 67,000 and include those who have formerly been ill health retired but who have now reached and exceeded the normal retirement age.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many days of sick leave were taken by employees in his Department in the last year for which records are available; what proportion of those were due to work-related illness or injury; and what the cost was to the Department. [56086]

Mr. Leslie: Cabinet Office publishes an analysis of sickness absence in the civil service each year. The most recently published figures (available on the Cabinet Office website) are for calendar year 2000. Cabinet Office Departments (which included in that year GCDA and COI but not RCU) had an average of 4.6 working days absence per staff year.

The report estimates the overall cost of sickness absence within the civil service but does not provide a breakdown by Department.

Information relating specifically to absence caused by work-related illness or injury is not held and could be obtained only at disproportionate costs.

The Cabinet Office is committed to improving levels of attendance to meet agreed targets and to minimising the number of days absence caused by work-related injury or illness.

Electronic Voting

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what research projects have been commissioned by his Department into electronic voting since June 2000, stating in each case *(a)* the organisation or consortium members carrying out the research, *(b)* the cost, *(c)* the purpose and title, *(d)* the date on which the research was or is due to be delivered to his Department and *(e)* the date or expected date of publication of the results. [54137]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to her by the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead), on 14 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 515W.

Public Bodies

Tony Wright: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the public bodies which are required to report to Parliament. [54244]

Mr. Leslie: Where a public body is under a statutory obligation to report to Parliament, this is set out in the relevant statute.

As set out in "Quangos: Opening the Doors", the Government believe that all advisory and executive non-departmental public bodies should produce and make publicly available annual reports. However, in the case of the small advisory bodies, these need only be short reports with costs of producing them kept to a minimum. The intention is that the next edition of the annual public bodies publication should include, for the first time, summary information on the arrangements that each body has in place for ensuring greater transparency in their work.

Aga Khan Development Network

Kate Hoey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent discussions the Government Office for London has had with the Aga Khan Development Network about sites in London suitable for purchase by it. [55412]

Mr. Leslie: The Government Office for London regularly has meetings with potential site developers in London but it is not the practice to provide details of such meetings in line with exemption 7 and 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Data Protection Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will place in the Library copies of each version of the internal guidance which have been drawn up by his Department since 1 January 1999 to assist staff in his Department to answer subject access requests under the Data Protection Act 1998. [53389]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Mr. Wills), to the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) on 25 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 446W.

HEALTH

External Contracts

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the 30 largest contracts awarded by his Department from *(a)* May 1997 to April 1998, *(b)* May 1998 to April 1999, *(c)* May 1999 to April 2000, *(d)* May 2000 to April 2001 and *(e)* May 2001 to the latest date, indicating in each case the values of the contracts and the companies with which the contracts were placed. [38746]

Mr. Hutton: I apologise to the hon. Member for the time taken to answer his question. Despite considerable research through our records, the information is unfortunately not held centrally in the format requested.

Speech Therapy

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the average annual salaries for NHS *(a)* speech therapists, *(b)* pharmacists and *(c)* clinical psychologists were for each of the past 10 years for (i) males and (ii) females; and if he will make a statement; [46584]

(2) how much money the NHS awarded to female speech therapists in the case against the MSF Union for Speech and Language Therapy; and if he will make a statement; [46582]

(3) how the formula to ascertain the amounts of monetary awards given to female speech therapists in the NHS case against the MSF Union for Speech and Language Therapy was determined; and if he will make a statement; [46579]

(4) how many women originally submitted equal pay claims in the NHS case against the MSF Union for Speech and Language Therapy; and if he will make a statement; [46581]

(5) of the women who received monetary awards from the NHS case against the MSF Union for Speech and Language Therapy, how many were awarded *(a)* £2,500–£5,000, *(b)* £5,000–£10,000, *(c)* £10,000–£20,000, *(d)* £20,000–£30,000, *(e)* £30,000–£40,000, *(f)* £40,000–£50,000, *(g)* £50,000–£70,000 and *(h)* £70,000 or more; and if he will make a statement; [46580]

(6) how much the NHS spent on the case against the MSF Union for Speech and Language Therapy each from 1986 to 2000; and if he will make a statement; [46583]

(7) how much money the NHS spent employing *(a)* lawyers and *(b)* researchers working on the case against the MSF Union for Speech and Language Therapy each year from 1986 to 2000; and if he will make a statement; [46578]

(8) how many *(a)* lawyers and *(b)* researchers were employed by the NHS to work on the case against the MSF Union for Speech and Language Therapy in each year from 1986 to 2000; and if he will make a statement. [46577]

Mr. Hutton: Some 1,800 speech and language therapists in the United Kingdom lodged equal pay claims from around 1985 onwards. Following decisions of the employment tribunal and subsequent out of court negotiations between the Department and Manufacturing and Services Federation, the settlement provided for 370 speech and language therapists to receive retrospective payments totalling £5.8 million[1] broken down as follows:

Amount awarded from NHS £[1]	*Number of women receiving payment*[1]
<2,500	14
(a) 2,500–5,000	49
(b) 5,000–10,000	112
(c) 10,000–20,000	68
(d) 20,000–30,000	48
(e) 30,000–40,000	22
(f) 40,000–50,000	7
(g) 50,000–70,000	26
(h) 70,000 or more	0

[1] All figures are net (less tax, national insurance and pension contributions) and include interest. There may be a personal tax liability on the interest. All figures exclude 24 claims lodged in Scotland in 1980s and receiving payments.

The retrospective payments were based on (i) the decisions of the employment tribunal and findings of independent experts (this applies to the 1980s cases only), (ii) an assessment of the job weight carried out by work assessment experts, (iii) a formula agreed by negotiators to provide a reasonable and fair payment and (iv) the length of relevant claim.

Employers and the Secretary of State were both named as Respondents and the claims were defended centrally on behalf of employers and Secretary of State to minimise costs. The following table shows the estimated total costs to the national health service involved in defending the cases, including legal and research costs (which it is not possible to identify separately). These are the best available estimates but should be treated with caution. A very few employers sought and paid for separate legal and other advice locally.

£000

Year	Cost
1986–97	760
1997–98	440
1998–99	192
1999–2000	9

Two barristers and their juniors were retained by the Treasury Solicitor to represent employers and the Secretary of State to provide legal services as necessary over the lifetime of the cases. It is not possible to pinpoint their input for each year from 1986 to 2000. Three researchers were engaged for several days in 1995 at a total cost of approximately £4,000. A firm of consultants was engaged to assess the work in the 20 lead cases and several analysts shared the assessments.

Estimated total average earnings for speech and language therapists, clinical psychologists and healthcare pharmacists taken from the Department's August 1998, 1999 and 2000 survey are shown in the following table. Similar information for earlier years is not available centrally but advance letters issued to the NHS containing information about the national pay rates for these staff from 1991 to 1997 have been placed in the Library together with the gender breakdown information available for the three professions for the same years. As part of the negotiated settlement of their equal pay claims, a new improved pay and grade structure for speech and language therapists was introduced in May 2000 to take effect from 1 April 2000. The regradings are not likely to have been in place by August 2000 and will not be reflected in the figures in the table.

Average salary and total earnings by sex in 1998, 1999 and 2000 for clinical psychologists, pharmacists, and speech and language therapists

£

	1998		*1999*		*2000*	
Staff group	*Average salary*	*Average earnings*	*Average salary*	*Average earnings*	*Average salary*	*Average earnings*
Speech and language therapists						
Male	19,800	20,600	20,100	20,800	21,400	22,100
Female	19,800	20,400	20,200	20,900	21,200	21,900
Clinical psychologists						
Male	31,200	31,700	31,700	32,400	33,800	34,500
Female	23,800	24,400	24,100	24,800	26,100	26,800
Pharmacists						
Male	27,600	28,500	27,800	28,600	29,100	31,400
Female	23,600	24,300	24,000	25,000	25,800	27,900

Note:

All figures are rounded to the nearest £100.

Source:

Department of Health's August 1998, 1999 and 2000 Earnings Surveys.

The Earnings Survey

The earnings survey is based on payroll data for August of the appropriate year. It covers about half of the NHS trusts in England. It is taken for NHS organisations which use the standard payroll system (SPS), and as such the sample may change from year to year. There is some unevenness in the geographical spread of the organisations included in the survey, but the overall results are broadly representative of all regions and different types of staff. Health authority staff were included for the first time in 2000. Independent contractors (including GPs and their staff) were not included in any of the surveys.

Gross earnings data, i.e. before any deductions, were collected from payroll records. Annual basic salary was read directly from payroll records, and annual equivalent total earnings were calculated using all payments made during August, including e.g. overtime, London weighting, special duty enhancements and other leads/allowances, and multiplying by 12. Average pay figures were calculated by dividing total salaries/earnings by total whole time equivalents.

Health Community/Economy

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his definition is of *(a)* a health community and *(b)* health economy. [47833]

Mr. Hutton: The terms "health economy" and "health community" can be used to describe all statutory and voluntary organisations in one area with an interest in local health service delivery and tackling health inequalities.

The term "health economy" can be used to refer to financial relationships between local health service providers and other key stakeholders. The term "health community" encompasses all local groups and individuals with an interest in all aspects of the health of a local community, including the wider determinants of health. This may include patient groups, carers, primary care trusts, local authorities, voluntary and community groups and the private sector.

Care Homes

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list those medical interventions which would allow an elderly person in need of nursing care to be treated free of charge in an NHS setting. [50851]

Jacqui Smith: If a person's continuing health care needs are of a nature, complexity, intensity or unpredictability that requires regular supervision by a member of the national health service multidisciplinary team then they would be able to receive continuing NHS health care in a hospital, care home, hospice or domiciliary setting. All nursing care provided by the NHS is free of charge.

Polio

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library a risk analysis of infants vaccinated against polio who *(a)* do not travel outside the UK and *(b)* travel outside the UK. [51604]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* I am advised that children who are vaccinated against polio and who do not travel outside of the United Kingdom face extremely small risks from polio, and would only be vulnerable if the vaccine had failed to protect and they were exposed to wild polio virus from a recently arrived infected visitor from an endemic country. Children who have been immunised against polio and who travel abroad are at similarly low risk if visiting another non-endemic country. The risks will increase progressively according to the extent of endemicity of countries visited.

Experts advise that the risk of vaccine associated polio is approximately one in every million doses administered and this will not be affected by travel.

NHS

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were treated, and what the underlying costs to the NHS were, as a result of *(a)* accidents incurred and *(b)* diseases contracted abroad in each of the last 10 years. [52693]

Yvette Cooper: Information on the number of patients treated in the national health service after suffering an accident or contracting an illness while abroad, and the associated costs, is not held centrally.

Waiting Lists

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people were waiting more than eight months to have heart by-pass surgery in Lancashire in each year since 1997; [53106]

(2) how many people were waiting more than eight months to have brain tumour surgery in Lancashire in each year since 1997. [53109]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not available on the basis requested. Waiting list data are collected down to specialty level, but not by specific procedure. Figures are recorded in three-month time bands, so it is not possible to identify people waiting more than eight months.

Breastfeeding

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action the Government are taking to promote the benefits of breastfeeding in the UK; how many and what percentage of women in the UK breastfed their child in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [53521]

Yvette Cooper: The Government are fully committed to the promotion of breastfeeding, which is accepted as the best form of nutrition for infants. Action includes the development and dissemination of the evidence base on good practice, embedding messages into national health service practice and other policies, and ensuring effective monitoring of infant feeding practices.

A total of 79 'best breastfeeding practice' projects have been funded across all regions. The aim is to increase the rates of breastfeeding, both initiation and duration. This is a goal shared by all sure start initiatives and several health action zone programmes. Many of the 'best breastfeeding practice' projects have now obtained mainstream funding from sure start initiatives.

Other related Department activities include support for an annual national breastfeeding awareness week, four main voluntary organisations involved in the promotion of breastfeeding, research into breastfeeding through quinquennial infant feeding surveys, and maintaining close links with United Nations Children's Fund's baby friendly initiative. The forthcoming national service framework for children will cover maternity services and we are considering how best to include breastfeeding within this framework.

The results of the infant feeding survey 2000 showed an increase in the breastfeeding rates between 1995 and 2000: 71 per cent. of the mothers in England and Wales breastfed their infants as compared to 68 per cent. in 1995. In social class V there has been a significant increase in the incidence of breastfeeding from 50 per cent. in 1995 to 59 per cent. in 2000.

Healthcare Audit and Inspection

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department intends to introduce legislation and guidance on the respective division of responsibilities between the Healthcare Audit and Inspection and the new Commission for Social Care Inspection. [53768]

Jacqui Smith: Primary legislation will be required for the establishment and functions of the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection and the Commission for Social Care Inspection. We hope to introduce the necessary legislation as early as possible.

Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated level of losses to fraud and corruption was in *(a)* his Department's vote 1 budget and *(b)* his Department's vote 2 budget for (i) 1999–2000 and (ii) 2000–01. [54721]

Ms Blears: A number of risk measurement exercises have been carried out since the inception of the national health service counter fraud service in 1998. The purpose of these exercises is to show the actual figures for losses to fraud and corruption, and figures for the sums at risk in each area of the NHS (the vote 1 budget). The status and results of these exercises are set out in the table.

Area of measurement	*Current status*	*Fraud measured*	*Completion date*
Pharmaceutical patient fraud	Two full measurement exercises completed	1998–99: £117 million 1999–2000: £69 million A reduction of 41 per cent.	December 2000
Pharmaceutical contractor fraud	First full measurement exercise nearing completion	Data currently with statisticians for analysis	—

Area of measurement	*Current status*	*Fraud measured*	*Completion date*
Dental patient fraud	Two full measurement exercises completed	1999–2000: £40.3 million 2000–01: £30 million A reduction of 25 per cent.	January 2002
Dental contractor fraud	First baseline measurement exercise completed	Sums found to be 'at risk' 1999–2000: £59.7 million	January 2002
Optical patient fraud	First full measurement exercise completed	1999–2000: £13.25 million	January 2002
Optical contractor fraud	Baseline measurement exercise completed	Sums found to be 'at risk' 1999–2000: £20.9 million	February 2002
GMS fraud	Baseline measurement exercise nearing completion	Data currently with statisticians for analysis	—
Health authorities and NHS trusts	Initial work commenced	—	—

The estimated levels of losses to fraud and corruption in the Departments vote 2 budget are as follows:

	£
1999–2000	48,148.81
2000–01	56,831.99

From 2002 work to counter fraud and corruption in the Department of Health vote 2 budget will be the responsibility of the NHS counter fraud service.

Data

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what new data series separated by gender, race, disability and age have been commissioned by his Department since August 1997. [54832]

Ms Blears: The readily available information on new or revised statistical data collections is shown in the table.

Department of Health: Information collections on gender, race, disability or age since August 1997[1]

Title	*Information collected*[2]	*Collection period*
Population surveys[3]		
ONS omnibus survey (Sun exposure 1997, ultraviolet monitor 1999, physical punishment of Children 1998)	Age, gender, ethnicity	Survey is annual, but elements vary—these items may not be included every year
National survey of patient experience	Age, gender, ethnicity, disability (limited information)	Annual
Mental health of children and adolescents in Great Britain 1999	Age, gender, ethnicity, special learning difficulties	Every five years
Adult psychiatric morbidity among adults 16–74 in Great Britain 2000	Age, gender, ethnicity	Period varies, but every few years
Ethnic minority psychiatric illness rates in the community	Age, gender, ethnicity, disability (limited information)	Every 5 years
Mental health of carers	Age, gender, ethnicity, disability (limited information)	Period varies, but every few years
Mental health of children looked after in Great Britain	Age, gender, ethnicity, disability	New survey—likely to be every 5 years
Learning difficulties survey 2003	Age, gender, ethnicity, disability	Feasibility commissioned
Health survey for England—ethnic minority Groups 1999	Age, gender, ethnicity	Annual, but elements vary
Health survey for England—health of older people 2000	Age, gender, ethnicity, disability	Annual, but elements vary
Health care		
Smoking cessation services return	Age, gender, ethnicity	Annual
NHS written complaints	Ethnicity	Annual
NHS performance indicators	Age, gender	Annual
Mixed sex hospital accommodation	Gender	Annual
Social care		
Children looked after by local authorities	Age, gender, ethnicity	Annual
Children in need census	Age, gender, ethnicity, disability (limited information)	Biannual
Children on child protection registers	Age, gender, ethnicity	Annual
Referrals, assessments and packages of care	Age (limited), ethnicity	Annual
Social services staffing return	Gender, ethnicity	Annual

[1] Includes only those collections which started after August 1997, or those previously existing collections that changed after August 1997 to include gender, race, disability or age. "One off" surveys are also not included.

[2] For some collections, the types of information shown have been built up over time; e.g. data on ethnic origin may not have been collected for as long as those for age.

[3] The population surveys listed are commissioned by the Department but carried out by others (eg ONS).

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to maintain the continuity of medical, epidemiological, financial and other data series in respect of *(a)* the former Isle of Wight health authority, *(b)* the former Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire health authority, *(c)* other health authorities which have been abolished since 1997 and *(d)* other health authorities which may be abolished; what his policy is on this matter; and if he will make a statement. [55082]

Ms Blears: Throughout all changes to the structure of the national health service, whether the merger of two health authorities or the major restructuring of the NHS that took place in April this year, the need to maintain sound data systems has been paramount. Throughout the changes, the Department's officials involved in the collation and publication of data have and continue to take action to ensure the continuity of key data streams is maintained.

Since 1 April, primary care trusts have taken on the majority of functions previously carried out by health authorities and will be the focal point locally for improving the health of the community, securing high quality services and integrating health and social care locally. They will become the unit of collection for many data systems.

Horton Hospital Site

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the future of the original Horton hospital site and corrugated iron buildings in Horton Lane, Epsom. [54899]

Ms Blears: Apart from a small area within the site that will continue in national health service use, Horton hospital is surplus to requirements and is programmed to be sold during 2002–03.

The corrugated iron buildings situated at the Old Moat Country Centre are in the ownership of Surrey Oaklands NHS Trust. Departmental officials have been advised that the buildings are mainly empty and the trust proposes they be demolished and the site reused for a use to be finalised.

Foot Care

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the provision of chiropody and podiatry services in the south-east of England in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2000. [54808]

Jacqui Smith: The Government are aware that chiropody and podiatry services play a vital role in helping to maintain people's independence. For older people especially, we see these services as having a strong preventative role in helping them maintain their mobility and may enable them to stay in their homes rather than move prematurely to a residential care or nursing home. Chiropodists and podiatrists have been involved in developing the national service frameworks for older people and diabetes to ensure adequate standards for these services.

The Government recognise that, in common with the rest of the country, the south-east needs more chiropodists and podiatrists. We are committed to recruiting more allied health professionals, which includes chiropodists/podiatrists, through the NHS Plan targets and will build on the 6,500 extra allied health professionals as announced in the 2002 Budget. £3 million was allocated in 2001–02 to modernise allied health professionals education and training programmes. Chiropody and podiatry were among the first group of specialities to be addressed.

Obesity

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department have to increase awareness regarding the dangers of obesity and the need for exercise; how many cases of obesity have been diagnosed in each year since 1997 in *(a)* children and *(b)* adults; what the cost has been of treating obesity since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [54793]

Yvette Cooper: The Government have made policy commitments through the NHS Plan, the Cancer Plan, the coronary heart disease national service framework and the diabetes national service framework to tackle the rising trend in obesity. As required by the coronary hear disease national service framework, local programmes of effective policies on promoting healthy eating and physical activity and reducing overweight and obesity are under way.

We have put in place major cross-Government work. Specifically, this includes a national school fruit scheme and a wider five-a-day programme to increase access to and consumption of fruit and vegetables, supported by £52 million from the New Opportunities Fund (NOF). Also, work is under way with industry to improve the overall balance of diet including salt, fat and sugar in food.

Among children, there has been significant investment in primary physical education and sports facilities, including £581 million from the NOF for a physical education and sports programme.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence has provided guidance on the use of the anti-obesity drugs orlistat and sibutramine.

Information on how many cases of obesity have been diagnosed each year is not held. However, the Department's hospital episode statistics for in-patient admissions in England showed a rise in children (0 to 16-years-old) from 152 in 1996–97 to 240 in 2000–01 and a rise in adults (over 16) from 630 in 1996–97 to 828 in 2000–01.

The National Audit Office report "Tackling Obesity in England", published in February 2001, estimated that in 1998 the direct cost to the NHS was at least £0.5 billion a year, or about 1.5 per cent. of NHS expenditure. It has also estimated a direct cost of £2 billion a year to the wider economy.

Alcohol

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of attendances at accident and emergency departments were alcohol-related in each of the last five years. [54991]

Ms Blears: The data are not available centrally. The Health Education Authority carried out a survey in 1998, which was published in the journal "Alcohol and Alcoholism", which indicated that one in six people attending accident and emergency departments for treatment had alcohol-related injuries or problems, rising to eight out of 10 at peak times.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much central Government funding was allocated to preventative work in relation to alcohol misuse in each of the last five years. [54992]

Ms Blears: Most of the work on the prevention of alcohol misuse is undertaken at local level by national health service health promotion units and primary health care professionals such as general practitioners and practice nurses. It is not possible to separately identify the funds devoted to this alcohol misuse prevention work.

Details of the central funding allocated by the Department to health promotion work on alcohol misuse during each of the last five years are as follows:

	£
1997–98	868,000
1998–99	582,000
1999–2000	500,000
2000–01	500,000
2001–02	400,000

The figures for 1997–98 and 1998–99 also include an element towards the running costs of the health education authority. This element does not appear in the figures for subsequent years.

The Department for Education and Skills provides substance misuse education in schools. Substance misuse education covers alcohol, tobacco and drugs. The Department for Education and Skills has allocated an additional £29.5 million to substance misuse education over the last three years.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent estimate he has made of the percentage of teenagers who *(a)* drink alcohol once a week and *(b)* drink more than the recommended benchmarks for alcohol in (i) each NHS region and (ii) England. [54993]

Ms Blears: The information available is given in the tables. The sample sizes for the 16 to 19 age group are too small to provide reliable results at NHS regional level.

Table 1: Percentage of pupils aged 11 to 15 usually drinking at least once a week, England 2000

Government office region	*Percentage*	*Base*
North-east	22	425
North-west/Merseyside	18	997
Yorkshire and Humberside	19	578
East midlands	17	686
West midlands	16	928
Eastern	22	817
London	11	564
South-east	19	1,318
South-west	18	721
England	18	7,034

Source:

Department of Health school survey, published as "Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England in 2000".

Table 2: Drinking behaviour among adults aged 16 to 19, by gender, England, 2000

Percentage

	Usually drink at least once a week	*Drank more than 3–4 units on at least one day last week*	*Base*
Men	64	48	316
Women	51	34	312

Note:

Current Department of Health advice is that regular consumption of between three and four units a day for men (between two and three for women) will not accrue significant health risk. Regular drinking above these levels is not recommended because of the progressive health risk this carries.

Source:

Taken from the Office for National Statistics General Household Survey, published as "Living in Britain—Results from the 2000 General Household Survey". The percentages have been calculated using weighted data—the bases given are unweighted.

Folic Acid

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce folic acid supplements into flour following the UK Health Department and Food Standards Agency meeting on 18 March. [54999]

Yvette Cooper: A report of the joint stakeholders meeting held on 18 March is posted on the Food Standards Agency (FSA) website: http://www.foodstandards.gov.uk/yourviews/foliacid/folicacidmeetingreport

The FSA Board discussed the issue of folic acid fortification at an open meeting on 9 May 2002. The board took into account the comments made at the stakeholders meeting and from the consultation exercise carried out in 2000. The board paper and a summary of the discussion have been posted on the FSA website: http://www.foodstandards.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/FSA02-05-02.pdf; http://www.foodstandards.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/62488

Health Ministers will consider options for action, taking into account any advice from the FSA and the Health Departments.

Ward Matrons

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if all hospitals in England *(a)* had in 2001–02 and *(b)* have for 2002–03 in place senior sisters or modern matrons with a ward environment budget of over £5,000. [55269]

Mr. Hutton: Ward environment budgets were introduced on 1 October 2000. In 2001–02 each budget was to be worth be worth a minimum of £5,000 and placed under the direct control of a ward sister or charge nurse. The budget can be spent on whatever the ward sisters and charge nurses that manage the ward consider will best enhance and humanise patient care.

It is the responsibility of each trust to allocate ward environment budgets, worth a minimum of £5,000. Trusts also have the freedom to create larger budgets for some or all of their wards.

Primary Care Premises

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer, of 2 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 1003W, on primary care premises, how many separate premises were improved since March 1999. [55406]

Mr. Hutton: Data on refurbished premises only has been collected since April 2000 and 640 were reported in health authority returns up to December 2001.

Nurses (Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells)

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* nurse vacancies there were in and *(b)* nurses left the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust in each of the last three years; and what was the average level of absenteeism in each of these years. [55178]

Ms Blears: Figures on vacancy rates are only available centrally up to 2001. Information for the years 1999–2001 is given as follows:

Department of health vacancies survey vacancies in the specified trusts, for nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff three month vacancy rates[1,2] *and numbers*[3]

	1999		*2000*		*2001*	
	3 month vacancy rates (percentage)	*3 month vacancies*	*3 month vacancy rates (percentage)*	*3 month vacancies*	*3 month vacancy rates (percentage)*	*3 month vacancies*
Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust	—	—	—	—	5.1	70
Qualified	—	—	—	—	5.6	70
Unqualified	—	—	—	—	0.0	0
Kent and Sussex Weald NHS Trust	0.0	0	3.1	20	—	—
Qualified	0.0	0	3.3	20	—	—
Unqualified	0.0	0	0.0	0	—	—
Mid Kent Healthcare NHS Trust	0.0	0	4.9	40	—	—
Qualified	0.0	0	5.5	40	—	—
Unqualified	0.0	0	0.0	0	—	—

Notes:

1. Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents).
2. Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post from the previous September non-medical workforce census (whole time equivalent)
3. Vacancy numbers are rounded to the nearest ten.
4. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.
5. Totals may not equal sum of component parts due to rounding.
6. Kent & Sussex Weald NHS Trust and Mid Kent Healthcare NHS Trust merged in April 2000 to become Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust
7. Not applicable

Source:

Department of Health Vacancies Survey
Department of Health non-medical workforce census

As stated above Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells National Health Service Trust was formed from the merger of Kent and Sussex Weald and Mid Kent Healthcare NHS Trusts in April 2000. For 1999 Mid Kent Healthcare reported a sickness absence rate of 4.68 per cent. Kent and Sussex Weald did not return data. In 2000 Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells reported a sickness absence rate of 5.3 per cent. for the calendar year. Figures for 2001 are not yet available.

NHS Staff (Religion)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will collect statistics on the religious affiliation of staff employed in the NHS with special reference to Muslim women in the work force; and if he will make a statement. [55439]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not collect these data centrally and there are no plans to do so. Ministers are, however, concerned about the treatment of staff as a result of their religion or belief and through the "Positively Diverse" programme are engaged in a service-wide initiative to look at how local employers can best ensure that their work force reflects the communities they serve.

Progress is being supported by local target setting to increase the representation of people from black and minority ethnic communities, in those sections of the work force were they are currently under-represented.

Arthritis

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further plans he has to help sufferers of arthritis. [55273]

Ms Blears: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) issued its guidance on 22 March 2002 which recommended the use of etanercept for the treatment of juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA) and etanercept and infliximab for rheumatoid arthritis (RA).

On 5 December 2001, the Government announced that they would meet their manifesto commitment to ensure that patients receive drugs and treatments recommended by NICE on the national health service if deemed appropriate by their clinicians. Directions have been issued obliging health authorities and primary care trusts to provide appropriate funding for recommended treatments.

People with arthritis will benefit from the emerging expert patients programme which will see the NHS provide training in self-management skills for people with long term chronic conditions. The first pilot phase has recently begun in selected primary care trust sites, with activity to take place both on a generic and a disease-specific basis. Also, the Medical Research Council and the Department's policy research programme is funding major research projects into arthritis.

Orthopaedic Surgery

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to reduce the waiting times for operations for people in need of orthopaedic surgery. [55272]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan sets out the progress we want to make on waiting over the coming years. Each year maximum waiting times will fall so that, by the end of 2005, the maximum in-patient waiting time will be cut to six months and the maximum out-patient waiting time for a first outpatient appointment will be cut to three months. Urgent cases will continue to be treated much faster. All patients will benefit from shorter waiting times as maximum waiting times reduce in the years leading up to 2005.

As a step towards achieving the NHS Plan targets from 1 April 2002 the maximum waiting time for in-patients has been cut from 18 to 15 months and a new maximum waiting time of six months has been established for patients waiting for their first out-patient appointments with a consultant.

The "Action On" programmes have been established by the Government as part of the modernisation of the NHS. They are led by the National Patients' Access Team (NPAT). Their aim is to significantly encourage and disseminate best practice, improve access to care and to reduce variations in waiting times in the four areas with the longest waiting times: cataracts; orthopaedics; ear, nose and throat; and dermatology. Local services are helped to identify their constraints and to find effective solutions.

Mental Health

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what new proposals and additional resources he plans to allocate to deal with mental ill health and *(a)* drug use, *(b)* ethnic minority communities and *(c)* children and youth; and if he will make a statement. [55804]

Jacqui Smith: The mental health national service framework (NSF), published 1999, is a 10-year programme which sets out national standards for mental health. The NHS Plan built on the NSF and provided over £329 million by 2004 to fast forward the NSF and deliver our NHS Plan commitments. Plans for mental ill health are:

(a) drug use—include every health authority area having received a 30 per cent. increase in funding for the drug treatment pool budget for 2002–03 for drug treatment. The national treatment agency for substance misuse are working to reduce drug treatment waiting times around the country to ensure that all drug users who need access to treatment services will receive it. A good practice guide has also been published on dual diagnosis;

(b) ethnic minority communities—a strategy on black and minority ethnic mental health is currently being prepared and will be sent out for consultation later this year; and

(c) children and youth—a strategy for the development of child and adolescent mental health services is on-going with the aim of improving the overall quality and accessibility of local services for children and young people with mental health problems. £85 million has been invested over the last three years across the NHS and local authorities, with each agency receiving funding. A further £20 million is being allocated to local authorities this year.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the increased spending earmarked for mental health has been allocated in the current year. [55628]

Jacqui Smith: The increased funding of £75 million allocated to health authorities in 2002–03, earmarked for mental health, was allocated with baseline health authority allocations. A detailed description how health authority allocations are calculated can be found in the health service circular ref: HSC 2001–024 Health Authority Revenue resource 2002–03.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 29 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 622W, on mental health, if he will make a statement on the range of initiatives being introduced to address issues of inequalities in access to mental health services for people from Asian, black and minority ethnic groups with special reference to how such initiatives are being developed and implemented; and where and when professionals and members of the public can learn more. [55999]

Jacqui Smith: Addressing inequalities in access for minority ethnic groups is recognised as a crucial issue for mental health services. Consultation documents on the black and minority ethnic mental health and women's mental health strategies will be published later this year.

Following publication of these documents, the Department will be consulting with a wide range of key stakeholders, including service users and carers and representative organisations, to develop final implementation strategies.

The strategies will be placed on the Department's website when published.

Also, to assist implementation of mental health policy the National Institute for Mental Health for England (NIMHE) will develop targeted programmes aimed at assisting change within service and improving access to services. NIMHE will disseminate good practice and create and share developing evidence through its research development centres.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the primary care mental health workers he intends to recruit will work in children's and adolescents' services; and if he will make a statement setting out his plans for the recruitment of extra primary care mental health workers for children and adolescents [56323]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* The NHS Plan said that by 2004 "one thousand new graduate primary care mental health workers trained in brief therapy techniques of proven effectiveness will be employed to help general practitioners manage and treat common mental health problems in all age groups, including children". Additional financial resources for their appointment are planned for next year. This year we are concentrating on the establishment of training programmes to support them.

Last year the NHS Modernisation Fund allocated £5 million of targeted funding to improve child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) at primary care level (which could include the recruitment of primary care mental health workers) in accordance with the national CAMHS development strategy. Preliminary results from Departmentally-commissioned research into CAMHS in Primary Care indicate that one third of provider trusts have already developed primary mental health worker posts and one quarter had plans to do so.

Human Rights and Biomedicine Convention

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the Government intend to sign and ratify the European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine 1997. [55632]

Ms Blears: The convention covers a wide range of complex ethical and legal issues, many of which have been, and remain, actively under debate in the United Kingdom over recent years. The Government wish to consider the conclusions of these debates before reaching a final view on signature and ratification of the convention.

Care Homes (Lancashire)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will meet union representatives from Lancashire care homes to discuss the proposed closure of care homes by Lancashire county council. [55787]

Jacqui Smith: I recently met the leaders of Lancashire county council and some hon. Members representing constituencies in the county to discuss the provision of care services for older people in Lancashire. I have previously met the Lancashire care association.

I should be happy to meet union representatives from Lancashire care homes to discuss their co[illegible]ns about the council's plans.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the availability of residential care home places in Lancashire; [57286]

(2) the proposed closure of the Galloway's Home for the Blind, Penwortham, near Preston. [56692]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (David Borrow) on 7 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 17 and 18.

Patient Information Advisory Group

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps have been taken towards setting up the Patient Information Advisory Group; and when it is expected to be operational. [55871]

Ms Blears: The Patient Information Advisory Group has been established and met on 10 December 2001 and 8 March 2002. The membership of the advisory group is as follows:

Chairman

Professor Joan Higgins

Members

Dr. Michael Catchpole
Professor Sir Cyril Chantler
Dr. Tricia Cresswell
Mrs. Helen Darracott
Professor Andrew Haines
Mr. Michael Hake
Ms Barbara Meredith
Ms Helen Miller
Ms Julia Palca
Professor Sir Denis Pereira
Mrs. Shahwar Sadeque
Ms Karen Thomson
Dr. Michael Wilks.

NHS Appointments (Non-attendance)

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he plans to take to reduce the number of failed appointments in the NHS due to non attendance. [55790]

Mr. Hutton: The Government have a number of actions in place that will contribute to reducing the number of failed appointments in the national health service due to non-attendance:

Booked appointments (including in-patient and out-patient visits) have been shown to reduce the number of failed appointments due to non-attendance. By the end of 2005, all out-patient appointments and in-patient elective admissions will be pre-booked;

Alongside this, electronic booking systems are being implemented. They will make booking more convenient for patients and clinicians, allow bookings to be easily changed to take account of changing circumstances and over time they will also enable appointment reminders to be issued via phone, email and other technologies;

All acute hospital trusts now have booking systems in place in at least two specialities/high volume procedures and more than five million patients have now benefited from booked appointments. A fourth wave of the national booking programme, 'moving to mainstream', began in September 2001 and will shift booking to mainstream NHS activity.

The Modernisation Agency's Theatre Project have issued interim guidance which includes a checklist of actions for addressing patient cancellations, including validating lists and telephoning patients near the date of admission to confirm attendance. Pre-operative assessment is being rolled out as part of operating theatres and pre-operative assessment programme and should reduce non-attendance and last minute patient cancellations;

Use of partial booking systems support reducing the level of non-attendance by ensuring patients are contacted before their appointment so that they can agree a convenient date and time.

These initiatives are already starting to make an impact. As the level of booking increases and the guidance from the theatre project is spread across the NHS we will see a reduction in number of failed appointment due to non-attendance.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of appointments at GPs' surgeries were not kept by patients in *(a)* England, *(b)* Bedfordshire and *(c)* Luton in the last 12 months for which figures are available; [55756]

(2) what the level of failed GP appointments as a result of non-attendance was in each PCT in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [55757]

Mr. Hutton: These data are not collected or held centrally.

Consultants (Suspensions)

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many medical consultants *(a)* are suspended and *(b)* have been suspended in each of the last five years. [55691]

Mr. Hutton: National Health Service trusts report suspensions lasting six months or longer to the Department. As at 31 December 2001, the latest date for which figures are available, of the 29 hospital and community medical and dental staff who have been suspended for more than six months, 23 are consultants.

The number of consultants suspended for more than six months in each the last five years is as follows:

Year	*Numbers*
1997[1]	4
1998	16
1999	14
2000	19
2001	18

[1] This information is unlikely to be accurate due to the data collection methods used at the time.

Botulinum Toxin Injections

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding for botulinum toxin injections is available to patients in Fordingbridge; and if he will make a statement. [55901]

Ms Blears: The information is not held centrally.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about *(a)* the effectiveness and *(b)* the availability on the NHS of botulinum toxin injections; and if he will make a statement. [55900]

Jacqui Smith: For several years, botulinum toxin in very carefully timed and measured doses has been used to treat overactive muscles in adults, particularly around the eyes and in the neck. More recently, it has been used as part of the management of spasticity and dystonia sufferers. It is also useful for people with cerebral palsy. It helps relax muscles so they become less stiff—and this helps walking and movement. Botulinum toxin is usually most effective if the condition affects only a limited group of muscles.

A decision on whether botulinum toxin treatment should be given to a particular patient would be made by the clinician at the National Health Service trust to whom the patient was referred. The injections are available in certain neurology, ophthalmology, and ear, nose and throat clinics.

Departmental Staff (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of *(a)* Civil Service, *(b)* executive agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public body jobs under the remit of his Department are located in Scotland; and how many of each have been relocated to Scotland since May 1997. [56308]

Ms Blears: The Department has no offices in Scotland and no staff located in Scotland or relocated to Scotland since May 1997.

The National Radiological Protection Board has 26 staff in Scotland. This represents 8.7 per cent. of its total staff. None have been relocated to Scotland since May 1997.

Children in Care

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children are in care. [56152]

Jacqui Smith: The number of children who were looked after by local councils in England at 31 March 2001 was 58,900.

This figure excludes children looked after under an agreed series of short term placements.

Source:

DH Annual publication—Children Looked After by Local Authorities, year ending 31 March 2001, England

Homeless People

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the percentage of homeless people who have presented themselves at accident and emergency departments where the visit was inappropriate in the last 12 months. [56568]

Ms Blears: Information is not collected on the number of patients who are homeless at the time they attend accident and emergency.

Electrophysiologists

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultant electrophysiologists are employed in the NHS in each of the past five years; and how many are employed in the London region. [56541]

Mr. Hutton: Electrophysiology is not a recognised medical specialty.

Information about consultant clinical scientists working in electrophysiology is not collected centrally.

Cancelled Operations (Eastbourne)

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operations were cancelled at Eastbourne district general hospital in each of the last 36 months. [56583]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 14 February at column 676W which provided information on cancelled operations at Eastbourne Hospitals NHS Trust in the proceeding 60 months. Since then, figures for Quarter 3 of 2001–02 have been published. The number of last minute cancellations for non-clinical reasons at the Trust, in this quarter, was 90.

Health Protection Agency

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects the Health Protection Agency to be operational; what funds will be available to the agency above the aggregated budgets of its component bodies; and if he will make a statement. [57682]

Yvette Cooper: We aim to establish the Health Protection Agency by 1 April 2003, by means of a Regulatory Reform Order. Decisions on budgets for 2003–04 have not yet been announced.

Parliamentary Question

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will answer the question from the hon. Member for Reading, East tabled for answer on 19 July 2001, on the use of bed strap restraints in nursing homes, ref 5538. [57640]

Jacqui Smith: I replied to my hon. Friend by letter on the 11 September 2001. A copy of this letter was placed in the Library, and I have forwarded a further copy to my hon. Friend.

Epilepsy

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what efforts are being made by his Department to raise awareness of epilepsy as a life threatening condition. [56497]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has already undertaken a range of initiatives to raise awareness of epilepsy. For example, we have:

Supported the epilepsy advisory board to produce "Epilepsy Care—Making it Happen", a tool-kit and source of information designed to improve epilepsy services.

Commended the clinical standards advisory group (CSAG) report "Services for patients with epilepsy" to the NHS.

Provided government funding to the joint epilepsy council (JEC) to undertake a project to draw upon the good practice advice in the CSAG report and other recent epilepsy initiatives. The JEC launched its "National Statement of Good Practice for the Treatment and Care of People who have Epilepsy" in May 2002.

Supported the national sentinel audit into epilepsy related death which is being published in May 2002.

Published the chief medical officer's (CMO) Annual Report 2001, on the state of the public health, which included a chapter on epilepsy, "Epilepsy—death in the shadows". The report makes a commitment to putting in place an action plan to lower the number of preventable deaths from sudden unexpected death in epilepsy within three months of publication of the sudden unexpected death in epilepsy audit.

We will continue to raise awareness of epilepsy and are working with the NHS Modernisation Agency to see how its programmes of work could help with this.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is developing a clinical guideline for the diagnosis, management and treatment of epilepsy to help address widespread variations in clinical practice and contribute to the improvement of services. This will be supported by an appraisal of the clinical and cost effectiveness of new anti-epileptic drugs in children and adults, to help promote appropriate uptake and equitable access.

People with epilepsy will also benefit from the expert patients programme, which aims to provide training in self-management skills for people with long term chronic conditions. The first pilot phase in selected primary care group and trust sites will include people with epilepsy.

These initiatives will contribute to raising awareness of epilepsy and specific trigger factors.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to publish the action plan on Epilepsy Death recommended in the Chief Medical Officer's report 2001. [56669]

Jacqui Smith: The Department will consider the findings of the national sentinel audit of epilepsy related death, which is being published on 20 May 2002. We expect to develop and put in place an action plan to reduce the number of avoidable deaths from epilepsy within three months of publication of the audit report.

Mr. Barrie Such

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 151W, at the undertaking given in the Adjournment debate on 7 December 2000, *Official Report*, column 246, if he will make a statement on the progress of the case of Mr. Barrie Such. [57276]

Jacqui Smith: Mr. Barrie Such is currently an in-patient at Evesham Community Hospital. A discharge package for 24-hour care for Mr. Such has been agreed between local health and social services and will be put in place when Mr. Such is discharged from hospital.

The discharge plan includes provision for a family property specially adapted to be built with a separate unit to house Mr. Such and carer. Planning permission has now been approved for this property with building completion expected in about four months.

Smallpox

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 985W, to the hon. Member for Wantage (Mr. Jackson), what the outcome was of the safety and quality control tests performed on vaccine stocks. [44008]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* Since 1979, vaccine batches have been tested on a rolling basis for maintenance of potency.

A three month project of vaccine testing in accordance with the original World Health Organisation recommendations for smallpox vaccine manufacture applicable at the time of production for this vaccine, commenced at the beginning of January 2002.

As the vaccine is a live, biological material, its potency would be expected to decrease over time. Expert advice in September 2001 was that the current stocks of vaccine could still be used. The result of the recent testing show all the current vaccine has a potency at least equivalent to that found in a recent American study to induce adequate clinical and immunological reaction. Further expert advice has confirmed that the findings of the American study can be applied to the United Kingdom's vaccine.

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what impact the 2002 Budget allocation to the NHS will have on NHS dentistry; and if he will make a statement. [55464]

Ms Blears: As a result of the Budget, the national health service in England will receive an annual average real terms growth in resources of 7.4 per cent. for the five years from 2003–04 to 2007–08. Decisions about allocation of this increased funding will be announced later this year.

In the mean time the Government have announced that demonstration sites will be established to test the ideas developed by the options for change group. These sites will look at ways of improving access and oral health.

TB-infected Meat

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to control the entry of TB-infected meat into the human food chain. [56011]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 13 May 2002]:* I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that all carcases are inspected after slaughter for signs of bovine TB by Meat Hygiene Service Inspectors, in accordance with the Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995 (as amended). Those Regulations require the carcases of animals with evidence of generalised tuberculosis to be condemned as unfit for human consumption. Where there is evidence of localised disease the Regulations require the affected parts to be condemned.

In September 2000 the Advisory Committee on the Microbiological Safety of Food reviewed the measures in place to protect the food chain from risks associated with "M.bovis" and concluded that the risk, if any, from the consumption of meat following assessment and action by the NHS staff in UK abattoirs is very low. The committee made recommendations to the Agency to reduce any residual risk still further. These measures included some changes to inspection procedures in slaughterhouses, and a change to national legislation bringing it fully into line with EU requirements. Copies of the ACMSF report were placed in the Library on 1 February 2002. The Board of the Food Standards Agency has accepted the recommendations and they will be taken forward as appropriate.

Prescribed Drugs

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent studies he has commissioned in respect of the number of persons suffering side effects from prescribed drugs; and if he will make a statement; [56015]

(2) how many persons died in the last year for which figures are available from the side-effects of prescribed drugs. [56022]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* A recent pilot study conducted in Liverpool has investigated the frequency of adverse drug reaction-related hospital admissions. The findings of this study suggest that the proportion of such reactions has not altered significantly in the last decade; that is, around 5.5 per cent. of all hospital admissions are due to adverse drug reactions (ADRs). A follow-up study is anticipated which should identify areas in which prescribing issues and practices should be addressed in order to reduce the incidence of ADRs in the United Kingdom.

The ADRs observed during the pilot study were subsequently submitted via the Yellow Card Scheme to the Medicines Control Agency, which is responsible for monitoring the safety of all marketed medicines to ensure that medicines meet acceptable standards of safety and efficacy. Spontaneous reporting schemes, such as the UK's Yellow Card Scheme which has been in operation since 1964, are one of the primary tools used in monitoring drug safety and provide an 'early warning' of previously unrecognised drug safety hazards in association with medicines.

The Committee on Safety of Medicines/Medicines Control Agency receive reports of suspected ADRs from doctors, dentists, pharmacists and coroners and there is a legal requirement for companies to report suspected ADRs to their drugs. Approximately 18,000–19,000 suspected ADR reports are received each year via this scheme. The number of reports received via the Yellow Card Scheme does not directly equate to the number of people who suffer adverse reactions to drugs for a number of reasons, as this scheme is associated with an unknown level of under reporting. It is important to note that the reporting of a reaction does not necessarily mean it was caused by the drug and may relate to other factors such as the patient's underlying illness or other medicines taken concurrently.

Over the last 20 years, suspected ADRs submitted via the Yellow Card Scheme with a fatal outcome account for less than 3 per cent. of these reports. The Office for National Statistics also collates data on deaths certified by doctors and coroners as due to adverse effects of drugs in therapeutic use. The quality of these data may be inconsistent as many thousands of doctors write certificates with a wide variation in knowledge, training and practice. In 2000 a total of 159 deaths were certified as due to adverse effects of drugs in therapeutic use.

Pesticides

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent studies he has commissioned relating to the health dangers from chronic low-level exposure to a mixture of pesticides; and if he will make a statement. [56020]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* The Food Standards Agency asked the Committee on the Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment (COT) to critically review the science of mixtures of pesticides and veterinary medicines and consider the implications for the risk assessment process.

Part of the COT's consideration of this issue has been the compilation and review of information covering a wide number of areas, including scientific data on exposure to mixtures of pesticides. These are considered in detail in the report which will be published in July.

Mid Essex Hospital Trust

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the level of delayed discharges in the Mid Essex Hospital Trust area was for the most recent period for which figures are available. [55740]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* Information on delayed discharges is collected centrally at health authority level. Service and financial framework data for delayed discharges in north Essex health authority for Quarter 3 2001–02 are in the Library.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies there are in the Mid Essex Hospital Trust area for *(a)* nurses and *(b)* doctors. [55739]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

Department of Health vacancies survey, March 2001. Vacancies in NHS trusts by specific NHS trust, specified staff groups—3 month vacancy rates[1,2] *and numbers*[3]

	3 month vacancy rates (percentage)	*3 month vacancies*	*Staff in post (wte)*	*Staff in post (hc)*
All medical and dental staff	1.5	0	130	160
All nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff	1.5	20	1,330	1,730

[1] Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2001 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents).

[2] Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies pluss staff in post from the September 2000 medical and dental and non-medical workforce censuses (whole time equivalents).

[3] Vacancy and staff in post numbers are rounded to nearest 10.

Notes:

1. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.
2. Medical and dental figures exclude staff in training.
3. Due to rounding calculating the vacancy rates using the above data may not equal actual vacancy rates.

Source:

Department of Health Vacancies Survey 2001
Department of Health non-medical workforce census 2000
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census 2000

Broomfield Hospital, Chelmsford

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the latest calculation of the average waiting time at the accident and emergency department at Broomfield hospital, Chelmsford is; and what the equivalent figure was 12 months before. [55733]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* The average waiting time in accident and emergency departments is not collected.

Prescription Charges

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list each prescription drug and medical appliance subject to multiple prescription charges; and if he will make a statement. [54366]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* Tights supplied by hospitals (they are not prescribable by general practitioners) and pairs of elastic hosiery attract a double prescription charge. Otherwise one charge is payable for each type of appliance and each quantity of a drug supplied. This rule applies regardless of whether the different drugs or appliances are supplied in one pack or more. Examples of combination packs where more than one charge is payable are included in Part XVI of the Drug Tariff.

Children's Services

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the names and positions of the senior members of staff who from 1 April have responsibility for children's services in each strategic health authority, PCT and NHS trust. [56160]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* This information is not collected centrally. Strategic health authorities are responsible for ensuring that primary care and acute trusts have in place mechanisms to assure high quality service provision, such as those recommended as part of national documents or standards. Directors of health and social care have a role in overseeing the activities of strategic health authorities.

Sick Leave

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many days of sick leave were taken in his Department last year; how many related to employees suffering *(a)* stress and *(b)* other mental health problems; and what the cost was to his Department. [56481]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* The latest annual report published by Cabinet Office "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service—2000" shows that, in 2000, the Department's unadjusted average working day absence per staff year was 5.5, down from 6.6 in 1999. Figures for 2001 or later years are not yet published.

While the Department collects data on sickness absence, which includes stress, it is not possible to identify if the cause of the recorded 'stress related illness' was work related, or due to other work related mental health problems. It is not possible, therefore, to identify these costs.

The Department is committed to meeting its public sector agreement (PSA) target on reducing sickness absence as agreed with the Cabinet Office and Treasury.

and has a number of procedures in place to help managers and staff to be aware of and to reduce work-related stress. The Department has:

issued guidance for managers and staff in line with health & safety legislation on 'Working Time Regulations'.

has a mental health policy that recognises that stress at work is a significant contributor to mental health problems.

issued guidance to managers and staff on the causes of stress and how to reduce this

provides staff with a free confidential counselling service, "Care First", and

encourages its staff to attend relevant training or discuss any concerns with their line managers.

Hepatitis C

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients received liver transplants under the NHS for conditions related to infection with Hepatitis C in each of the last five years; and what the unit cost of such operations was compared with drug therapies. [56335]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* Liver transplants are only performed on people with Hepatitis C if they have liver failure which is normally due to the development of post hepatitis liver cirrhosis. Each liver transplant cost the National Health Service approximately £66.000 and there is no alternative drug therapy. The number of liver transplant performed in England for Hepatitis C cirrhosis in the last five years is:

	Number
1997	54
1998	60
1999	69
2000	56
2001	59

International Recruitment

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, (1) pursuant to his answer of 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1025W, on international recruitment, what the website address listing will be where those agencies who comply with the Code of Practice on International Recruitment will be published; [56627]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1025W, on international recruitment, which *(a)* international recruitment agencies, *(b)* their representative bodies and *(c)* other stakeholders have been asked to establish arrangements whereby agencies can register their agreement to comply with the Code of Practice on international recruitment; [56628]

(3) pursuant to his answer of 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1025W, on international recruitment, what steps he is taking to ensure that overseas nurses will receive information relating to the compliance of international nurse recruitment agencies to the Code of Practice; [56629]

(4) pursuant to his answer of 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1025W, on international recruitment, how many of his officials have been assigned to implement the Code of Practice on international nurse recruitment. [56630]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* The Department of Health is working closely with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Work Permits UK, Independent Healthcare Association, Recruitment and Employment Confederation, Registered Nursing Homes Association, UNISON, the Royal College of Nursing and other professional bodies to ensure that all potential recruits have access to comprehensive information and to identify commercial agencies who are recruiting healthcare professionals from abroad.

To date the following agencies have been identified:

Areo Allied
BMB International
Cathy Hardy Associates Ltd.
D. P. Healthcare
Drake International
ETI Recruitment
Farochilen Nurses Placement
First Gateway Recruitment Ltd.
First Call Care Ltd.
Geneva Health International
Global Nurses Ltd.
Global Recruitment Associates Ltd.
Health Connections
Health Professionals
Interchange
Jenrick Medical
Kate Cowhig International Recruitment Ltd.
Medic International
Nestor Healthcare Group
Nightingale Nursing
Norman Broadbent International Executive Search
O'Grady Peyton Europe
Prime Time Healthcare
ProCare Ltd.
Professional Connections (UK) Ltd.
Pulse
Recruitment and Employment Confederation
RGN Ltd.
Rutledge Recruitment
Scotnursing Ltd.
Search Medical
Seven Sisters Hospital Services
St. Georges Ltd.
Strand Nurses Bureau
Sugarman Medical Ltd.
WYMAS International Recruitment department
Worldwide Healthcare Exchange
Yorkshire Medical Services.

The final list of agencies who comply will appear on the Department of Health's website at http://www.doh.gov.uk/international-recruitment

The Department of Health has an international recruitment team of six officials and a network of 12 national health service based international recruitment co-ordinators and advisors working to implement the Code of Practice.

Workforce Development Confederations are working with NHS employers to ensure collaborative and ethical international recruitment, including compliance to the Code of Practice, in their area.

Advisory Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the Standing Committee for Veterinary Medicinal Products is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55364]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply

The Committee for Veterinary Medicinal Products (CVMP) was originally established under Article 16 of Directive 81/851/EEC on the approximation of the laws of the member states relating to veterinary medicinal products.

Under Article 27 of Regulation (EEC) No 2309–93 laying down Community procedures for the authorisation and supervision of medicinal products for human and veterinary use and establishing a European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products (EMEA), the CVMP is responsible for formulating the opinion of the EMEA on any question concerning the admissibility of the files submitted in accordance with the centralised procedure, the granting, variation, suspension or withdrawal of an authorisation to place a veterinary medicinal product on the market arising in accordance with the provisions Title III of Regulation (EEC) No 2309/93.

The CVMP met on 11 occasions during 2001 and has met five times so far this year.

There are two UK members on the CVMP. Currently the committee is also chaired by the UK.

The cost of its work is met by the EMEA. There are no direct costs to public funds although the salaries of officials representing the UK and preparing for meetings are met from public funds. Details of its work can be found on the EMEA website and in press releases issued by the EMEA.

As an agency established by Community legislation the CVMP is accountable to the EMEA and ultimately to the European Parliament.

Coolants

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the climate change impact is of using *(a)* HFC 134a and *(b)* 407. [56388]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

Total UK greenhouse gas emissions were estimated to be 664.1 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent in 2000. HFC134a and HFC407c contributed respectively 2.61 million tonnes and 0.35 million tonnes to these emissions. Together, they represented about 0.5 per cent. of the total.

PFI Projects

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the PFI-funded hospital projects started or under construction since 1 May 1997; and what financial assessment has been made relating to the *(a)* saving and *(b)* cost to the public purse in each case. [56104]

Mr. Hutton: A list of all major private finance initiative contracts which have reached financial close since May 1997, showing net present costs of public sector comparator versus private finance option (at the time of signing contracts), has been placed in the Library; as has a table of unitary payments for the same schemes for each of the next 15 years, ie the amount each trust will be paying to its private sector partner.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 21 May 2002

DEFENCE

Harriers

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Harrier GR7 and GR9 will be equipped with ASRAAM. [56195]

Mr. Ingram: ASRAAM will not be fitted to Harrier GR7, nor do we intend to integrate the missile on to the aircraft during the programme to upgrade GR7 to GR9 standard.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress on the Meteor missile programme. [56196]

Mr. Ingram: A finalised draft contract for the Meteor missile was sent to our partner nations at the end of April. Once approval is obtained from each nation we will be in a position to award the Meteor contract to MBDA. This is currently planned for early July.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what capability will be available in 2006 to replace the withdrawn Sea Harriers; and if he will make a statement. [56684]

Mr. Ingram: Royal Navy Task Groups will retain a significant air defence capability after the Sea Harrier is withdrawn from service in 2006, including against sea-skimming missiles, against which Sea Harrier has little capability. This air defence capability will include type 42 anti-air warfare destroyers armed with updated Sea Dart anti-aircraft missiles, type 22 and 23 frigates armed with point defence missile systems (including the enhanced Sea Wolf missile system) and close-in weapon systems. From later this year, the first upgraded airborne early warning Sea King flight will go to sea providing an improved detection capability over land and sea. All task group warships and some support shipping are also equipped with decoy systems against air and surface launched anti-ship missiles. Additionally, the Harrier GR aircraft possess a point defence capability through the sidewinder short range air-to-air missile.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what basis the decision on the timing of the withdrawal of the Sea Harrier was made; and if he will make a statement. [56686]

Mr. Ingram: The Sea Harrier FA2 is being withdrawn by 2006 as to retain it as a viable weapon system beyond the middle of this decade would require significant investment and would also involve significant technical risk.

As the Sea Harrier FA2 is essentially a modified Harrier GR3, an all-metal aircraft that was withdrawn from RAF service in the late 1980s, investment will instead be concentrated on the more modern Harrier GR7 that will be upgraded to GR9 standard to provide an enhanced expeditionary capability for land attack operations from both land and aircraft carriers.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment has been made of the benefits of integrating the Sea Harrier's specific capabilities on to the remaining GR Harriers; and if he will make a statement. [56683]

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what assessment he has made of upgrading the Harrier GR7 to include an advanced air defence radar capable of using AMRAAM; what the cost is estimated to be; and if he will make a statement. [56535]

Mr. Ingram: The role of the Harrier GR7 is in support of force projection. Its air-to-air capability is optimised for its own defence. To integrate the Sea Harrier's specific air defence capabilities on to the GR Harrier would entail the fitting of the Blue Vixen radar and Advance Medium Range Air to Air Missiles (AMRAAM) missiles. While it would, in theory, be possible to do this we currently have no requirement to do so. Therefore no detailed work has been undertaken by the Department into the practicality and cost effectiveness of such a modification.

Such a programme would be at least as complex, lengthy and costly as the Sea Harrier Blue Vixen/ AMRAAM update in the mid-90s. Given the considerable cost, time scale and technical risk involved, and the planned entry into service of the Future Joint Combat Aircraft in 2012, the benefits of integrating the Sea Harrier specific capabilities onto the GR Harrier would be of limited duration and utility.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the *(a)* French, *(b)* Spanish, *(c)* Italian and *(d)* German defence ministers in respect of his decision to withdraw the Sea Harrier from service. [57645]

Mr. Ingram *[holding reply Monday 20 May 2002]:* None. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 2452W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer). These countries will be advised of this change as part of the annual submission to the NATO Defence Planning Questionnaire, and also in the annual update to the european Headline Goal Helsinki Catalogue.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he had with the *(a)* US Defence Secretary and *(b)* NATO Secretary General in respect of his decision to withdraw the Sea Harrier from service. [57644]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* None. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1451W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer). The United States of America and NATO will be advised of this change as part of the annual submission to the NATO Defence Planning Questionnaire.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of continuing the Harrier FA2 in service until 2012 without an engine upgrade; and what estimate he has made of the cost of this. [57231]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* In determining the future strategy for Joint Force Harrier ahead of the introduction of the Future Joint Combat Aircraft in around 2012 a variety of investment strategies were considered for both Harrier GR7 and Sea Harrier FA2. Our recent operational experience, and consideration of likely future threats, led us to conclude that the priority is for carrier-borne aircraft that can fulfil the ground attack role. The Sea Harrier FA2 has an extremely limited ground attack capability and without a new engine, a high risk technical challenge, has major performance limitations. Further, a number of the FA2's avionic and defensive systems are becoming increasingly obsolescent and by the middle of the decade will have significant operational deficiencies. The cost of recovering this obsolescence would be around £250 million. Such a significant investment was deemed incoherent without a more powerful engine that could deliver world-wide year-round embarked capability and when it would only restore elements of the air defence capability. It would do nothing to equip the aircraft to carry current and near term smart offensive weapons, our key future need. This would have required a full replacement of the avionic system which was judged to be unachievable.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to upgrade the air-to-air capability of the Harrier GR7; and if he plans to fit the aircraft with AMRAAM missiles. [57646]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* We have no plans to upgrade the existing air to air capability of the Harrier GR7.

AMRAAM will not be fitted to Harrier GR7, nor do we intend to integrate the missile onto the aircraft during the programme to upgrade GR7 to GR9 standard.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the remaining Harrier GR7s will be upgraded to GR9; and how many GR9s will be in service at the end of the upgrade programme. [57229]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* We currently plan to upgrade all Harrier GR7 aircraft to GR9 standard, up to 68 aircraft in total. The GR7 upgrade programme is due to begin in late 2003 and be completed during 2008.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost is of upgrading the Harrier GR7 to GR9; and what estimate he has made of the cost of upgrading the engine of the Harrier FA2. [57230]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1166–67W.

The integration of the Pegasus Mk 107 engine into 11 Sea Harrier FA2 aircraft was the subject of a feasibility study in 2000. The cost of integration was estimated to be approximately £230 million. The study concluded that there would be significant technical difficulties and that overall the programme did not represent good value for money.

Army Headquarters

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answers of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 340W, and of 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1463W, on Army HQ, when the final assessment of the cost of moving the Army's northern headquarters from York to Edinburgh will have been made. [56640]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1463W. I will, of course, write to him when the assessment is complete and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Arms Sales

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what occasions P. W. Pains Wessex have attended MOD-organised sales and marketing events in the past two years; and what was the nature of their attendance. [56572]

Mr. Ingram: I understand that P. W. Defence Ltd. was formed last September from the amalgamation of several subsidiaries of the Chemring Group plc. Delegates from the company attended the Ministry of Defence's Export Services Organisation's symposium for defence exporters held in March 2002.

Attendance by companies attending or exhibiting at other sales and marketing events organised by commercial organisations is a matter for the organisers concerned.

Military Ethos

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his assessment is of the way in which military ethos has changed since 1997. [56530]

Mr. Ingram: The core values of the armed services have not changed since 1997.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his assessment is of the benefits of a distinct military ethos to the effectiveness of the British Army. [56529]

Mr. Ingram: Military ethos may be defined as:

> "That spirit which inspires soldiers to fight. It derives from, and depends upon, the high degrees of commitment, self-sacrifice and mutual trust which together are so essential to the maintenance of morale".

This was articulated in the pamphlet "Values and Standards of the British Army", which was published in March 2000, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

We believe that the constituent values of military ethos contribute significantly to military effectiveness.

Joint Strike Fighter

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what extra capability the £600 million of UK specific requirement for the Joint Strike Fighter will provide; and if he will make a statement. [56693]

Mr. Ingram: The estimate of £600 million, which was announced in January 2001, will optimise the aircraft's capability for the United Kingdom environment. It represents the costs of providing and integrating certain UK weapons systems, to be selected in due course, securing the Joint Strike Fighter's compatibility with UK Command and Control arrangements and ensuring compliance with our safety and environmental requirements.

Eurofighter

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the impact of a lack of BVRAAM on the Eurofighter's operational ability; and if he will make a statement. [56685]

Mr. Ingram: Eurofighter's primary role is air superiority. Without a BVRAAM, it would be wholly reliant on short-range missiles in this role and would be disadvantaged in medium and beyond visual range engagements. We have therefore assessed that Eurofighter will require a BVRAAM capability. From the outset, it is planned that the aircraft will be cleared to carry and fire the Advanced Medium Range Air to Air Missile (AMRAAM). This capability will be enhanced by the acquisition of Meteor. Meteor's planned In-Service Date is 2012.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the contracted June 2002 delivery date for the Eurofighter will be achieved; and if he will make a statement. [57648]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Moonie) on 30 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 745W. We are now considering the results of this review, including the implications for delivery dates, and will make an announcement shortly.

Trigat

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what off-the-shelf options are being evaluated to replace the Medium Range Trigat; how much they cost; and if he will make a statement. [56688]

Mr. Ingram: Two off-the-shelf medium range anti-tank guided weapon systems are being evaluated to replace the capability which Medium Range Trigat was expected to deliver for use by Light Forces and Mechanised Infantry: Javelin offered by a joint venture between Raytheon and Lockheed Martin and supported by the US Government; and Spike offered by MBDA.

As part of the evaluation the Ministry of Defence is conducting a commercial competition between the two equipments, and as such I am withholding details of the costs in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

European Court of Human Rights

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the financial consequences of the Lewis ECHR case. [57642]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* I assume that the question concerns a case before the European Court of Human Rights, but we do not immediately recognise a Lewis case. I answered a question from the hon. Member on 1 March about that court's judgment in the case of Mr. Morris, *Official Report,* column 1624W, and it may be this to which he is now referring.

Hitherto there have been no quantifiable financial consequences for the Ministry of Defence as a result of this case, apart from legal fees and the award by the court of a proportion of Mr. Morris's costs.

HMS Ocean

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how long HMS Ocean has been at sea on her current deployment; and when she will return to the UK. [57799]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* HMS Ocean has been at sea on her current deployment since 11 February 2002. On current plans she returns to the United Kingdom (Plymouth) in early June 2002.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what technical difficulties HMS Ocean has experienced on her current deployment. [57800]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* HMS Ocean has experienced some minor technical difficulties during her current deployment. These were associated with the propulsion system, air conditioning and chilled water plant, the side ramp and some other equipments and systems. Such difficulties are consistent with a deployment of this duration and nature. The majority have already been resolved and none has adversely affected HMS Ocean's ability to undertake her operational tasks at any stage of her deployment.

Anti-ballistic Missile Treaty

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the contribution of the anti-ballistic missile treaty to strategic stability. [57978]

Mr. Hoon: We have always valued strategic stability between the United States and Russia, a stability to which the anti-ballistic missile treaty made a major contribution throughout the cold war. But it is important to recognise that the strategic context is changing and that it is stability we value rather than one particular means for achieving it. To this end we welcome the progress that the United States and Russia have made towards a new strategic framework, in particular their recent agreement on major reductions in nuclear weapons.

Performance Targets

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Ministry of Defence Police Agency for the financial year 2002–03. [58607]

Dr. Moonie: The following key targets have been set for the Ministry of Defence Police Agency:

Key Target 1:

To achieve at least 65% patrol activity from those officers devoted to patrolling.

Key Target 2:

To achieve a crime-solving rate of 42 per cent. for the investigation of primary crime.

Key Target 3:

By 31 March 2003, to ensure that the force fulfils at least 95 per cent. of its agreed customer taskings at those establishments where the force undertakes security related taskings.

Key Target 4:

By 31 March 2003, to have the appropriate systems in place to evaluate the force's effective contribution to security measures at those establishments where the force undertakes security related taskings.

Key Target 5:

By 31 March 2003, to have implemented the Force Diversity Action Plan, and within the overall recruitment to the force to have recruited 30 per cent. women and 8 per cent. from minority ethnic communities.

Key Target 6:

By 31 March 2003, to reduce the amount of overtime worked by each officer to no more than 48 hours overtime per 28 day period averaged over a 17 week period.

ASTOR

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many ASTOR aircraft he plans to procure. [57805]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* Five aircraft are being procured for the ASTOR programme.

Armed Forces Personnel (Deaths on Military Premises)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what factors are taken into account when determining which organisations investigate the circumstances of a death or serious injury of a member of Her Majesty's armed forces on his Department's property. [56696]

Mr. Ingram: Jurisdiction for the investigation of incidents resulting in death or serious injury will vary depending upon the nature of the incident and whether it occurs in the United Kingdom, overseas or, in the case of the Royal Navy, on board ship. The rules governing jurisdiction are detailed in the Queen's Regulations for each service. In the case of a death in the United Kingdom, primacy for any investigation lies with the local civilian police force, who would usually be supported by the appropriate service police authority or Ministry of Defence police, and other agencies as required. For example, where a death is suspected to have been caused by an accident, an investigation could also be carried out by a service accident investigation team. Cause of death can only be concluded by Her Majesty's Coroner. A service Board of Inquiry would normally be carried out following the conclusion of any associated police investigations.

In cases of serious injury, factors such as the cause of injury, level of severity and any suspicion of criminality would determine whether the civilian police, Ministry of Defence police or service police authorities would investigate. Again, where serious injury is suspected to have been caused by an accident, the relevant service accident investigation team could also be involved. All of these factors would be considered in determining whether a service Board of Inquiry is required.

RAF Portreath

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the volume of waste to be removed from land at RAF Portreath as part of the Ministry of Defence's clean-up operation; what guidance has been issued to local authorities and agencies responsible for the removal and disposal of waste from RAF Portreath; at which locations waste from RAF Portreath will be deposited; and what assurances he has given local residents and local authorities regarding the disposal of waste removed from RAF Portreath in landfill. [57175]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence is currently undertaking the planning process for the voluntary remediation of five dump sites at RAF Portreath. For these purposes it is estimated that the total waste from all five dumps is approximately 100,000 cu m of material, which is likely to be a mix of inert, hazardous and special waste.

On completion of the planning process and the consultation phase, involving the local authorities, residents and interested agencies, MOD will issue the relevant information and guidance.

Landmines

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the British armed forces have *(a)* procured and *(b)* deployed the E100 Series Integrated Grenade System with the fragmentation grenade E105 incorporated into the trip wire mechanism manufactured by PW Defence. [57228]

Mr. Ingram: The British armed forces have never procured or deployed the E100 Series Integrated Grenade System with the fragmentation grenade E105 incorporated into the trip wire mechanism manufactured by PW Defence.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions have taken place between his officials and PW Defence regarding the status of the E100 Series Integrated Grenade System and fragmentation grenade E105 incorporated into the trip wire mechanism under the Landmines Act 1998. [57227]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has not had any discussions with PW Defence regarding the status of the E100 Series Integrated Grenade System and fragmentation grenade E105 incorporated into the trip wire mechanism under the Landmines Act 1998.

Low-flying Areas

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will initiate a system of independent review of decisions concerning low-flying areas. [57306]

Mr. Ingram: Decisions taken in respect of the United Kingdom Low Flying System are already subject to appropriate review. Such reviews may include investigations by the Defence Flying Complaints Investigation Team, consultation across Ministry of Defence and reference to external specialists as necessary.

Type 45 Destroyers

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the planned in-service dates are for each of the ordered type 45 destroyers. [56704]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* The First of Class, HMS Daring, is planned to enter service in late 2007, with the second ship, HMS Dauntless following in 2009. It is planned that the remaining four ships on contract will enter service at intervals up until 2011.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what basis the decision was made to reject the BAE proposal to build all 12 type 45 warships; and if he will make a statement. [57348]

Mr. Ingram: The BAE Systems unsolicited proposal was very carefully considered. However, it was decided not to take it further because of the serious implications it would have for competition downstream for future United Kingdom warships and the very substantial forward commitment it sought on a variety of shipbuilding programmes. The revised type 45 procurement strategy, announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 10 July 2001, should offer better value for money in the longer run, if it enables competition to be pursued on other warship programmes.

Naval Dockyards

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many sites in the UK are capable of assembling a large enough vessel to operate conventional take-off and landing aircraft; what modifications are needed to potential sites to bring them to this capability; and if he will make a statement. [57351]

Mr. Ingram: It is assumed that the question refers to potential sites for the assembly of the United Kingdom's future aircraft carrier. The competing primes on the carrier programme—BAE Systems and Thales—are assessing the capability of a number of sites within the United Kingdom that have the potential to participate in the build (the construction and outfitting of modules or blocks of the vessel) and assembly (the joining together of the blocks into a whole ship in a dry dock of sufficient size). No final decisions have been made on the mix of sites that will be utilised in the ship build programme. A number of potential facilities for assembly have been identified to date, including Harland and Wolff in Belfast, Inch Green on the Clyde, and Swan Hunter on Tyneside. Other potential assembly sites continue to be assessed and much will depend on the design and dimensions of the carrier that is eventually taken forward and the method of construction. The two prime contractors are due to submit proposals on ship procurement towards the end of this year. This will include preferred assembly sites together with an assessment of any required modifications.

Warship Procurement

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects to publish the RAND study into warship procurement; and if he will make a statement. [57347]

Mr. Ingram: Pursuant to my reply to the hon. Member on 16 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 1–2W, RAND have completed their study into alternative procurement strategies for the Ministry of Defence's future warship programme. Interim results from the study helped inform the MOD's decision to proceed with a revised procurement strategy for the type 45 destroyer, as announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 10 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 675–85.

It was originally planned that RAND would publish a report of their findings last autumn. However, it has taken them longer than expected to produce it for a variety of reasons, including a redirection of effort to undertake more urgent work into shipbuilding strategies for the future carrier and disruption caused by the events of 11 September. RAND have also been at pains to produce the best possible report and have accordingly engaged in detailed consultation with interested parties over its content. The report is now very close to being finalised and is scheduled for publication this June.

RAF Bases

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what meetings *(a)* he and *(b)* his officials have held with representatives of local authorities to discuss options for RAF Lyneham. [57238]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* As the first round of the consultation process for the Strategic Review of RAF Lyneham, RAF Brize Norton and RAF St. Mawgan, a meeting was held between officials and representatives of the relevant local authorities and Regional Development Agencies on 29 January. As the review progresses, further meetings will be held. Neither my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence nor I have met any representatives of local authorities to discuss options for RAF Lyneham.

Bases

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where each of the *(a)* Astute class submarines and *(b)* EF2000 will be based. [57647]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The basing of the Astute class submarines is currently being considered as part of a wider review of base-porting and waterfront infrastructure. The review is proceeding to schedule and it is hoped that announcements will be made during the summer of this year. The Eurofighter will be based at RAF Leeming, RAF Leuchars and RAF Coningsby.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the length is of the PFI contracts for *(a)* the River class offshore patrol vessels and *(b)* the RN ro-ros; and what criteria he uses to decide the optimal length of PFI contracts on such ships. [57237]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The River class offshore patrol vessel contract is an operating lease arrangement rather than a pure PFI deal. It has a duration of five years with the option to extend. The ro-ro contract is still being negotiated but the intention is that it will be a service-based PFI running until 2024.

The optimal length of any PFI type contract varies according to the circumstances of the particular deal. In practice this means taking account of the duration and scope of the requirement, the potential asset life and residual value at the end of the deal, and optimising capital financing charges. These key criteria are considered together with the scope for risk transfer to determine the length of contract that is expected to deliver the optimal value for money solution for the project.

Throckmorton Airfield

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on changes in the ownership of land at and adjacent to Throckmorton airfield since 1992 with reference to the Crichel Down rules. [57337]

Mr. Ingram: Since 1992 the Ministry of Defence has not recorded any sales of land at Throckmorton airfield although some leases have been completed in areas of land and buildings. Most of the Throckmorton site, formerly known as DERA Pershore, is now owned by QinetiQ. The remainder of the site, used last year to deal with some of the consequences of the foot and mouth outbreak, is in the final stages of being transferred to the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

All of the property sold to QinetiQ was exempted from the provisions of the Crichel Down rules under provision 14.6 concerning the transfer of Government functions to the private sector.

Nepal

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what military assistance has been provided to Nepal in the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [57179]

Mr. Ingram: Nepal is a long-standing friend of the United Kingdom and our armies have always had close links. Over the past five years, the UK has provided low-level military assistance to Nepal through the provision of places on training courses in the UK, limited training in country with UK experts and the supply of non-lethal equipment. The Royal Nepalese Army personnel have routinely sent students to our Joint Staff College at Shrivenham, on commissioning courses at Sandhurst and to the Royal College of Defence Studies.

All our military courses are undertaken within the framework of the democratic and accountable use of military force in order to improve the general professionalism of the RNA. They include modules on legal use of force, proportionality and respect for human rights.

The UK is also funding infrastructure work being undertaken at the regional peacekeeping centre at Panchkal.

A400M

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will make an announcement about the A400M project. [57240]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Defence gave on 8 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 176W.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what impact the delay to the A400M project will have on his consideration of the future of RAF Lyneham. [57239]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The delay to the A400M project is not expected to have any effect on the conclusions that will be reached by the strategic review on the future roles of RAF Lyneham, RAF Brize Norton and RAF St. Mawgan.

Defence Co-operation

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what funding will be made available for the facilitation of multinational brigades and possible multinational battalions for international operations as agreed in the meeting between the Defence Ministers of Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Norway and the UK in Alesund, Norway; what are the terms of the agreement; and if he will make a statement. [57681]

Mr. Hoon: At the Nordic Defence Ministers' meeting in Alesund, I signed a Letter of Intent that provides the basis for the United Kingdom's co-operation with NORDCAPS (the Nordic Co-ordinated Arrangement for Peace Support). This builds on the co-operative arrangements that we already enjoy with our Nordic partners in the Balkans. Our involvement is on a case-by-case basis. It does not commit the UK to participate in operations, exercises or training, and no additional funding has been made available.

NORDCAPS, and the UK's co-operation with it, is an excellent example of how multinational defence co-operation can enhance overall military capability. It is a pool of Nordic forces (in this case from Denmark, Norway, Finland and Sweden) available for peace support operations by summer 2003.

Infantry Training

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the infantry wastage rate for Army recruits embarking on phase 1 of their infantry training was in each of the last five years; and what measures are in place to combat wastage. [57637]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The figures requested are as follows:

Per cent.

Year	*Wastage rate for infantry phase 1 training*
1997–98	29.6
1998–99	21.2
1999–2000	19.9
2000–01	23.9
2001–02	21.8

Measures in place to combat wastage include:

Training teams at the Recruit Selection Centres to run military activities to motivate and enthuse the candidates. Candidates also receive briefing on what they can expect in training and the opportunity to meet recruits in phase 1 training. This applies to all employment groups.

Phase 1 instructors undergo a two-week induction course designed to give them the skills to deal with new recruits and to help them provide nurturing to recruits during training to minimise wastage.

Infantry phase 1 and 2 training has now been combined into one course at Catterick. Trials conducted last year showed that a considerable reduction in overall wastage could be achieved by allowing training to be more progressive over the combined course, particularly on the physical demands of infantry training. Rehabilitation facilities across the phase 1 training establishments and at

Catterick have been improved to assist those recruits injured during training to recover more quickly and rejoin training.

The adoption of the combined phase 1 and 2 infantry course has enabled mid-course leave and adventure training to be introduced into the syllabus at Catterick; a retention positive measure.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many Army recruits will wait for more than one month until they can be admitted to those waiting to be admitted to phase 1 of infantry training; [57638]

(2) how many soldiers are awaiting training. [57639]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* As at 16 May 2002, there were 2,668 potential recruits in the system who have passed selection (i.e. received a job offer) but have not yet enlisted (i.e. finally accepted the offer). This figure includes those who are awaiting allocation to a training vacancy; those who are already allocated but not yet enlisted because their allocated course is more than 21 days away; those who have chosen to delay entry for personal reasons, such as work or educational commitments; junior entrants whose courses do not commence until July and September this year; and finally a proportion who remain undecided on whether or not to accept the job offer. Of the 2,668, 474 are earmarked for the infantry already; 113 are awaiting a course allocation, 361 are allocated to a course commencing after 16 June 2002.

This figure changes on an almost daily basis as new recruits commence training and others pass selection. The Army Training and Recruiting Agency's Allocation Committee meets weekly in order to plan the loading of recruits onto courses; the aim is always to minimise the waiting time.

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Royal Navy ships and Royal Fleet Auxiliary ships will be involved in events connected with Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee celebrations; and if he will make a statement. [57802]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The key tri-service event is in Portsmouth on 27 June. The following ships will be present during Her Majesty's visit:

	Name of Ship
Aircraft carrier	HMS Ark Royal
Destroyer	HMS Cardiff
Frigate	HMS Cornwall
Frigate	HMS Kent
Frigate	HMS Lancaster
Offshore patrol vessel	HMS Alderney
Mine counter measure vessel	HMS Bangor
Mine counter measure vessel	HMS Cattistock
Mine counter measure vessel	HMS Hurworth
Mine counter measure vessel	HMS Penzance
University RN unit patrol craft	HMS Blazer
University RN unit patrol craft	HMS Dasher
University RN unit patrol craft	HMS Raider
University RN unit patrol craft	HMS Tracker
Royal fleet auxiliaries	RFA Fort Victoria
Royal fleet auxiliaries	RFA Sir Bedivere

Royal Navy vessels will participate in other single Golden Jubilee events elsewhere in the United Kingdom as their constantly changing operational tasking permits.

Cadets

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cadets there are in the *(a)* Army Cadet Force, *(b)* Air Cadets, *(c)* Sea Cadets and *(d)* Combined Cadet Force. [57806]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* As at 1 April 2001, the most recent date for which figures are available, the numbers of cadets was as follows:

	Number
Army Cadet Force	40,573
Air Training Corps	33,177
Sea Cadet Corps	10,662
Combined Cadet Force	40,783
Total	125,195

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what targets are in place for numbers of cadets. [57808]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* There are no targets set by any of the four cadet forces for numbers of cadets. We are constantly encouraging young people to consider the development opportunities offered by the cadets and hope to see as many as possible join in order to benefit from these.

Frigates

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the complement is of each type 23 and type 22 frigate. [57643]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The complement for each type 22 and type 23 frigate is shown in the table.

Ship	*Complement*
Type 22	
Sheffield	234
Cornwall	240
Cumberland	238
Campbeltown	225
Chatham	239
Type 23	
Norfolk	173
Marlborough	167
Argyll	169
Lancaster	169
Iron Duke	169
Monmouth	168
Montrose	168
Westminster	168
Northumberland	171
Richmond	169
Somerset	168
Grafton	168
Sutherland	169
Kent	168
Portland	168
St. Albans	173

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Foot and Mouth

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library copies of *(a)* the minutes of meetings held between departmental ministers and the Chief Veterinary Officer and *(b)* the minutes of meetings and other communications between Ministers and (i) the Environment Agency, (ii) SEAC and (iii) European Union officials, in respect of dealing with foot and mouth, since the outbreak of the disease. [3959]

Mr. Morley: Minutes of meetings between Ministers and others are not normally disclosed.

David Maclean: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the advice which her Department and the Prime Minister received from the Chief Scientist on foot and mouth disease. [5253]

Mr. Morley: Advice which Ministers receive from officials is not normally made public.

Refrigerators and Freezers

Mr. Jack: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library copies of representations received from the UK retail industry from October 2000 about EU Regulation 2037/2000. [34842]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 11 February 2002]:* I will place copies of these representations in the Library within the next week, subject to agreement from the authors.

Professional Indemnity Insurance

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what professional indemnity insurance clause is part of her Department's standard consultants' contract. [50828]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The Department's standard conditions of contract for indemnity and insurance is set out below.

> The Contractor shall indemnify the Department, the Crown, its servants and agents against all actions, claims demands, costs and expenses incurred by or made against each or any of them in respect of any loss or damage (including consequential and indirect loss, loss of profit, goodwill or revenue) or personal injury (including death) which arises out of or in connection with his and any sub-contractor's performance of the Services under this contract.
>
> The indemnity contained in the Condition above shall not apply to the extent that the loss, damage or injury is caused by the negligent or wilful act or omission of the Department, the Crown or any servant or agent of the Crown.
>
> The Contractor shall have in force and maintain and shall require any sub-contractor to have in force and maintain insurance with a reputable insurance company, including (but not limited) to employer's liability, public liability and professional indemnity insurance, for such range of cover as the Contractor deems to be appropriate but covering at least all matters which are the subject of indemnities or compensation obligations under these Conditions in such sum as may be specified in the Contract Letter, or, if no such sum is specified, the sum of not less than £5,000,000 for any one incident and unlimited in total.
>
> The policy or policies of insurance referred to in the condition above shall be shown to the Department whenever it requests, together with satisfactory evidence of payment of premiums.
>
> The terms of any insurance or the amount of cover shall not relieve the Contractor of any liabilities under the Contract.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how often she has made an exception to the professional indemnity requirement of her Department's standard consultants' contract in the last five years. [50831]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* DEFRA came into being on 8 June 2001. The information requested can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received from small businesses about the level of professional indemnity insurance in contracts with her Department; and if she will make a statement about professional indemnity insurance with small contractors. [50832]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* From information held centrally, the Department is unaware of any recent representations received from small businesses about the level of professional indemnity insurance in contracts with the Department.

Departments are expected to set the level of professional indemnity insurance at a level appropriate to the size of the contract and the level of risk involved. The terms of any insurance or the amount of cover shall not relieve the contractor of any liabilities under the contract.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what level of professional indemnity insurance was required by her Department of small businesses contracted with them in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002. [50829]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* DEFRA came into being on 8 June 2001. The information requested can be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

Small Business Contracts

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many small businesses have individual contracts with her Department. [50830]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* DEFRA came into being on 8 June, 2001. From information held centrally, it is estimated that DEFRA has dealings with 2,799 contractors falling to be classed as small businesses.

Agrimonetary Compensation

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much agrimonetary compensation the Government can draw down for *(a)* dairy, *(b)* sheep and *(c)* arable farmers. [52417]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* The Government could have claimed approximately £37 million for the dairy sector and £9 million for the sheep sector. No agrimonetary compensation was available for arable farmers in that package. While we acknowledge the difficulties the livestock sector is facing and are working with them on the recommendations of the Policy Commission on Farming and Food, we have decided not to make a claim on these funds given the many competing demands on the Exchequer at present, particularly as more than eighty per cent. of the £46 million would in effect have to be met by the British taxpayer.

Digital Equipment

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many digital radios are owned by her Department for use in departmental buildings from which Ministers work; and what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* date of purchase of each radio was. [52848]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* DEFRA came into being on 8 June, 2001. From information held centrally, no digital radios are owned by the Department for use in departmental buildings in which Ministers work.

Farming Industry

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what changes have taken place in each of the past 10 years in the value of *(a)* farmland and *(b)* farms and farm buildings. [51281]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* Disaggregated data that distinguish overall farmland values from farms and farm buildings values are not available. Estimates for the valuations of land and buildings together in the UK can be derived on a consistent basis since 1993 from the aggregate agricultural balance sheet.

Estimated UK values—land and buildings[1]

As at December each year	*£ million*
1993	50, 702
1994	56, 286
1995	67, 876
1996	77, 424
1997	84, 038
1998	84, 643
1999	90, 605
2000	93, 665

[1] The valuations of land and buildings are at average market prices. Includes the value of owner-occupied and tenanted land. Includes that proportion of the dwelling house that is attributed to business use.

One important component in determining such values are market prices and the relevant series for England are shown. The tables give the changes that have taken place in *(a)* the value of agricultural land transacted in England and *(b)* the value of land and agricultural buildings in England since 1993 as represented by the average price of land sold in these categories. The data can be supplied only on a consistent basis back to 1993, as since then the category 'agricultural land' refers strictly to "land only", whereas the prior to 1993 it could include dwelling-house attachments. In addition the previous series was calculated on an October–September basis as opposed to a calendar year basis for the series from 1993.

Average price of agricultural land in England

	£ per hectare
1993	3,791
1994	4,229
1995	4,788
1996	6,058
1997	6,448
1998	6,139
1999	6,645
2000	7,051

Average price of land and agricultural buildings in England

	£ per hectare
1993	3,315
1994	3,918
1995	5,125
1996	5,596
1997	6,565
1998	6,300
1999	6,268
2000	7,104

Illegal Logging

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 18 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1064W, which countries other than Indonesia she has *(a)* made approaches to and *(b)* intends to approach for negotiations on illegal logging and associated trade. [53756]

Mr. Meacher: The Government have informally discussed the memorandum with representatives of the United States, Japan, Canada, New Zealand and Malaysia. The Government have also raised the memorandum with EU member states and the Commission at a recent European Union workshop on Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade. The European Commission has recently committed to produce an Action Plan on illegal logging and associated trade by the end of this year.

The Government also plans to raise the memorandum with both timber producing and timber consuming countries at the next Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Bali, 27 May to 7 June) and with African countries at the next African Forest Law Enforcement and Governance (Brazzaville in June) as a possible model for taking forward actions on combating illegal logging on a bilateral basis in support of existing international commitments, for example under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Forum on Forests.

Veterinary Service

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the proportion of her departmental budget allocated to the state veterinary service broken down by main category of expenditure, in each of the last 10 years. [54226]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 7 May 2002]:* The proportion of budget allocated to the state veterinary service has been:

Year	*Administration costs (£ million)*	*Programme costs (£ million)*	*Capital (£ million)*	*Total expenditure (£ million)*	*Total budget (%)*
1995–96	36.7	24.3	0.3	61.3	6.6
1996–97	32.0	35.1	0.5	67.6	6.0
1997–98	33.8	33.6	0.2	67.7	7.2
1998–99	34.2	47.0	1.0	82.3	8.8
1999–2000	35.5	37.2	1.7	74.3	7.6
2000–01	41.1	52.7	1.1	94.9	9.1
2001–02	45.6	48.4	1.0	95.0	1.7

Notes:

1. The expenditure figures reflect the outturns at 31 March each year;
2. Figures for 1992–93 to 1994–95 are not readily to hand and constructing them would involve disproportionate cost;
3. Budgets can fluctuate because of disease outbreaks in certain years (eg foot and mouth) and because of departmental structural changes (eg creation of DEFRA in 2001–02).

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 8 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 162W, on the veterinary service, how many private veterinary surgeons have *(a)* applied, *(b)* received temporary appointments and *(c)* received permanent appointments as local veterinary inspectors broken down by region in each of the last 10 years. [56883]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* Information regarding the number of private veterinary surgeons who *(a)* have applied, and *(b)* received temporary appointments as local veterinary inspectors (LVIs) broken down by region in each of the last ten years could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Numbers of private veterinary surgeons who received new permanent appointments as LVIs broken down by region in each of the last ten years is set out in the table.

Year	*North*	*East*	*West*	*Scotland*	*Wales*
1992	29	61	11	30	11
1993	1,027	1,383	1,006	214	256
1994	190	165	98	56	47
1995	152	147	111	50	84
1996	128	156	97	41	49
1997	188	176	108	63	53
1998	160	195	112	52	42
1999	222	265	119	50	50
2000	195	298	130	52	73
2001	185	205	109	49	56

Note:

Total LVIs permanently appointed on 17 May 2002 are 7,506.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to change the state veterinary service in Scotland. [56325]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 May 2002]:* The State veterinary service is a GB body responsible to all GB Agriculture Ministers. Were any changes to the existing arrangements as they apply to Scotland to be considered, then these would be developed fully with the Scottish Executive.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received regarding the future of the state veterinary service in Scotland. [56324]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 15 May 2002]:* None.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee on agricultural structures and rural development is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55661]

Alun Michael: The European Union's Committee on Agricultural Structures and Rural Development (STAR) covers issues regarding the implementation of the Rural Development Regulation and the Special Accession Programme for Agriculture and Rural Development (SAPARD; an instrument for support of rural development in pre-accession countries). The committee functions as an advisory or "management comitology committee" according to the issue before it.

The committee normally meets monthly and has met 13 times in the last 12 months.

The UK representation at the committee is provided by DEFRA. The Commission pays transport costs for two delegates attending each meeting. Our costs amount to approximately 4,000 (£2,500) per annum.

Current issues under consideration at the committee are:

(a) Annual Modifications to country and regional rural development programmes,

(b) Implementation of SAPARD,

(c) Monitoring and Evaluation of Rural Development Programmes.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Advisory Committee for the implementation of the directive on the reduction of the sulphur content of certain liquid fuels is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56814]

Mr. Meacher: The role of the Advisory Committee is to assist the Commission with matters on which it is required to take a decision under the provisions of the directive such as considering requests from member states for derogations and on the format of reports. There was one meeting of the Committee over the last 12 months at which the UK was represented by an official from my Department at a travel and subsistence cost of about £150. That meeting considered a request from Greece for a derogation; there are no other matters currently under consideration. The annual cost of the work includes the time taken to prepare for and attend meetings and the travel and subsistence costs incurred. Specific information is not available without incurring disproportionate cost.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of legislation on ambient air quality assessment and management is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56810]

Mr. Meacher: The role of the Committee is to decide on amendments to technical measures described in the directive and to assist the Commission in preparing detailed instructions on the forwarding of information. There have been no meetings of the Committee over the last 12 months. The UK would usually be represented by an official from my Department. The annual cost of the work includes the time taken to prepare for and attend meetings and the travel and subsistence costs incurred. Specific information is not available without incurring disproportionate cost. There are no matters currently under consideration.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of the directive on bathing water is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months is; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56797]

Mr. Morley: The Committee for the adaptation to the technical progress on the quality of bathing water is a regulatory committee provided for under Article 10 of the EC bathing water directive.

The Committee has met twice over the last 12 months with the UK incurring £2,150 in annual costs. The UK can be represented by up to four policy officials.

The Committee has recently been considering a revised bathing water policy and reporting arrangements under the existing bathing water directive.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the committee for the adaptation to technical and scientific progress of the Directive on the protection of the environment and in particular of the soil when sewage sludge is used in agriculture is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56839]

Mr. Meacher: Article 14 of Council Directive 86/278/EEC on the protection of the environment, and in particular of the soil, when sewage sludge is used in agriculture, provides for the establishment of a committee to adapt the Directive to technical or scientific progress.

This committee has not met in the last twelve months and has no items currently under consideration. If it were to meet, costs to the public purse would be limited to the cost of any additional work incurred in contributing to its considerations and any travel and subsistence expenses of officials representing the United Kingdom not met by the Commission.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the committee for the adaptation to technical progress of the Directive on air quality standards for nitrogen dioxide is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56812]

Mr. Meacher: This part of Directive 85/203/EEC on air quality standards for nitrogen dioxide has been repealed.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the committee for the adaptation to scientific and technical progress of the Directive on a limit value for lead in the air is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56813]

Mr. Meacher: This part of Directive 82/884/EEC on a limit value for lead in the air has been repealed.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee on the monitoring mechanism of emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the Community is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56729]

Mr. Meacher: The Committee on the monitoring mechanism of emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the Community was established by Council Decision 93/389/EEC of 24 June 1993 (as amended by Council Decision 1999/296/EC of 26 April 1999). The monitoring mechanism is an instrument to assess accurately and regularly the extent of progress being made towards the Community's commitments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol.

The Committee has met twice in the last 12 months. The UK is usually represented by two officials from my Department. The costs incurred by the Department in contributing to the Committee's work are largely travel and subsistence costs of about £650 per meeting, incurred in attending the one day meetings in Brussels, and staff costs of about £700 per meeting. In addition to the time spent at the meetings themselves, officials spend a similar amount of time preparing for and reporting back on the meetings.

Items currently being considered by the Committee include submissions to the UNFCCC on the EU greenhouse gas emissions inventory and a possible revision to the monitoring mechanism decision in the light of the Marrakech Accords.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the adaptation to scientific and technical progress of the Directive on protection of waters against pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56801]

Mr. Meacher: The mandate of the EC Nitrates Regulatory Committee is to assist the European Commission in responding to scientific and technical progress relevant to the requirements of the Nitrates Directive.

The Committee meets twice a year.

Four representatives are permitted from each member state. The Commission pays for one representative to attend from each member state. Additional experts from the UK cost between £300 and £400 per representative per meeting.

Items under consideration for the next meeting include a technical discussion on manure spreading on grassland, discussion of guidelines for monitoring groundwaters for high nitrate concentrations and discussion of criteria used to identify eutrophic waters. The Committee has also recently heard and voted on derogation requests from member states and discussed comparisons of implementation and Action Programme measures between member states.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the adaptation to technical and scientific progress of the air quality limit values and guide values for sulphur dioxide and suspended particulates is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56811]

Mr. Meacher: This part of directive 80/779/EEC on air quality limit values and guide values for sulphur dioxide and suspended particles has been repealed.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Standing Committee for implementation of the Directive on the marketing of biocidal products is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56822]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

The Standing Committee on Biocidal Products (SCBP) has several functions specified in Directive 98/8/EC, including delivering opinions to the Commission on adoption of regulations governing the review of active substances; the inclusion of active substances in Annex I of the Directive; the mutual recognition of biocidal products across member states; the temporary authorisation of products in emergency situations; common conditions and minimum data requirements for authorisations for research and development purposes; and public disclosure and confidentiality of information. The first meeting of the SCBP took place on 18 May 2000. This has been its only meeting to date. There are no items currently under consideration by the SCBP. The UK representation at such meetings would depend on the subject(s) under consideration, and would normally consist of officials of the Health and Safety Executive. The draft rules prescribe that the Commission will cover the expenses of one representative per member state, and so the cost to UK public funds is minimal.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1994/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of the House on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on training in architecture is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56761]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

The mandate of the Advisory Committee on Training and Education in the Field of Architecture (ACETA) is to help to ensure a comparably high standard of education and training for architects throughout the Community and permit free movement of people and provision of services as Single Market objectives. It has met once in the last 12 months.

The UK Delegation consists of one Government official from my Department, the chief executive of the Architects Registration Board, two representatives from the architectural profession, and two representatives from schools of architecture. The costs for the attendance by the Government official to the one day meeting in Brussels are approximately £500. The Committee has recently considered the compliance of university courses on architecture in member states with Directive 85/384/EEC, and in particular a number of Spanish diplomas.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Commission Document 5685–02).

As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee on the control of major accident hazards involving dangerous substances (Seveso II) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56808]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply. The European Commission has established a Committee of Competent Authorities (CCA) for the Seveso Directive under article 19 of the Directive.

The mandate of the CCA is to promote coherent implementation and consistent application of the provision of the Directive throughout the Community. This necessitates close co-operation of the competent authorities of all member states and the European Commission. the CCA consists of representatives of the member states and the Commission services. It discusses issues concerning the implementation of the Seveso II Directive.

The committee meets twice a year and is attended on behalf of the UK by representatives of the Health and Safety Executive and the Environment Agency. Where appropriate officials from other relevant Departments also attend. It is estimated that the annual cost to public funds in the UK is approximately £3,000.

Recent meetings of the CCA have considered the role of the European Commission's major accident hazards bureau, implementation issues of the Seveso Directive in member states, land use planning issues around major hazard installations and relevant research. The comitology committee provided for by Article 22 of the Seveso Directive on the control of major-accident hazards involving dangerous substances has not met over the last 12 months.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the Community framework for co-cooperation in the field of accidental or deliberate marine pollution is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56809]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The Management Committee on Marine Pollution is established under Decision No. 2850/2000/EC of 20/12/2000 of the European Parliament and the Council setting up a community framework for co-operation in the field of accidental or deliberate marine pollution. This framework has been established for the period 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2006. The committee is composed of representatives of member states and is chaired by the European Commission.

The aim of the committee is to:

a) support and supplement member states' efforts;

b) contribute to improving the capabilities of the member states for response in case of incidents;

c) strengthen the conditions for and facilitate efficient mutual assistance and co-operation;

d) promote co-operation among member states in order to provide for compensation for damage in accordance with the polluter-pays principle.

The UK is represented by officials from my Department and the annual cost of its work to public funds is about £1,500. The committee is presently considering training courses in oil pollution for member states.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the adaptation to technical progress and for the implementation of the Directive on contained use of genetically modified micro-organisms is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56820]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

The Committee for adaptation to technical progress and implementation of the contained use of genetically modified micro-organisms (GMMs) Directive (90/219/EEC as amended by 98/81/EC) is mandated to consider information on the

techniques and methods of genetic modification excluded from the Directive;

elements to be considered and procedures to be followed in the assessment of the harmful effects of GMMs;

containment and other protective measures required;

requirements for notification to the Competent Authorities on premises and activities where GMMs are being used; and

the types of GMMs considered to be safe to human health and the environment.

This committee consists of representatives from all member states and the European Commission. Officials from the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) attend on behalf of the UK. This committee meets on an ad hoc basis. There have been no meetings in the last year, and no meetings are timetabled for the immediate future. Considerable effort has already taken place in developing the technical information underpinning this Directive. The secretariat to the committee would be provided by the European Commission, which provides interpreting services etc. The European Commission would also pay the travel expenses of the UK representatives. Any potential costs to UK public funds would therefore consist largely of the accommodation costs for the staff attending meetings and their salary costs.

If any changes to the Directive were proposed, HSE would seek advice from the Health and Safety Commission's tripartite Advisory Committee on Genetic Modification (ACGM). Agendas and papers for ACGM meetings are fully available to the public.

Also, together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agenda and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the Directive relating to the availability of consumer information on fuel economy and carbon dioxide emissions in respect of the marketing of new passenger cars is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56816]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The mandate of the committee is set out in Article 9 of Directive 1999/94/EC which deals with the availability of consumer information on fuel economy and CO2 emissions in respect to the marketing of new passenger cars. The function of the committee is to deliver prompt adjustment of the detailed requirements of the Annexes to the Directive regarding the format of consumer information labels and guides, and the inclusion of fuel economy and CO$_2$ data in advertising.

The committee has not met since the adoption of this Directive, and therefore there has, so far, been no cost to public funds. The annual cost of the committee to public funds would be restricted to staff time, their travel and subsistence costs. UK representation would normally be by officials of the Department's Vehicle Standards and Engineering Division.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com(2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Fluorocarbon

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to prohibit the use of partly and fully fluorinated hydrocarbons and sulphur hexafluoride in commercial and industrial processes and consumer products; and if she will make a statement. [56041]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 13 May 2002]:* The UK Climate Change Programme published in November 2000 set out our position on hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons and sulphur hexafluoride. Currently, there are no plans to prohibit the general use of fluorinated gases.

Under the European Climate Change Programme (ECCP), the Environment Council, at its meeting of 12 December 2001, "Welcomed the intention of the (European) Commission, as announced in the ECCP Communication, to make a proposal for a Framework Directive on fluorinated gases, including containment of emissions from stationary and mobile sources, monitoring of quantities of fluorinated gases being placed on the market as well as marketing and use restrictions, where appropriate, for relevant applications where viable alternatives are available and if improvement of containment is not feasible, taking into account existing voluntary initiatives by some fluorinated gases industry sectors, where the development of alternatives is still ongoing."

Composting Licences

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list new licences granted for the composting of waste in the last 12 months. [56034]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 13 May 2002]:* In England and Wales, the Environment Agency issued 7 new waste management licences to composting installations between November 2000 and November 2001. The installations were located in Hertfordshire, Lancashire (2), Leicestershire, Somerset, Surrey and the West Midlands. There are 67 licensed composting sites in total, with over 600 smaller installations registered as exemptions. Information on licensed composting installations will shortly be updated to 1 April 2002. Household composting is excluded from any licensing requirement.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the draft EU Regulation on Animal By-Products will come into force; and if she has given consideration to the early implementation of those parts of the draft regulation which relate to composting. [56035]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 13 May 2002]:* The draft Animal By-Products Regulation has yet to be adopted and it is not clear when it will come into force. However, we expect it to apply in member states in the first half of 2003. We have commissioned a risk assessment on the risks to public, animal and plant health from the land spreading of composted catering waste and animal by-products. In the light of that assessment we will review our current legislation and consider whether this should be amended in advance of the EU Regulation coming into force.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to facilitate the granting of composting licences. [56037]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 13 May 2002]:* When an establishment chooses to apply to the Environment Agency for a composting site license the agency has a series of application and working plan guidance notes to assist in understanding the licensing process. The agency has also issued guidance and risk assessment procedures to help those operating smaller establishments who wish to register exemptions. In addition, the agency recently issued a standard waste management licence pack to those applicants with a low risk impact green waste composting proposal. This allows the use of a simplified application process that results in a speedier processing of the licence application. Finally, the agency has consulted on technical guidance for composting that will be published later this year.

Livestock Premiums

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people are making claims for *(a)* sheep and *(b)* cattle premiums, by regional service centre, broken down by claims for (i) minimum threshold number, (ii) minimum threshold number to 10 animals and (iii) minimum threshold number to 20 animals. [56012]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 May 2002]:* The number of claims received broken down by regional service centre is set out in the table. Cattle premiums are not subject to minimum threshold numbers. For sheep the minimum threshold number is 10 animals.

Latest available number of claims by administrative region

	Sheep premiums			*Cattle premiums*				
	Number of claims for SAPS (2002)		*Number of claims for BSPS (2001)*	*Number of claims for EPS (2001)*		*Number of claims for SPS (2001)*		*Number of claims for SCPS (2001)*
RPA site	*10 animals*	*11–20 animals*		*Simplified*	*Standard*	*Adult*	*Veal*	
Bristol	42	225	3,771	1,178	1,771	—	—	1,654
Cambridge	30	144	1,758	481	681	1,747	4	1,115
Carlisle	32	168	4,796	2,073	2,501	6,404	295	2,514
Crewe	41	210	3,852	1,119	1,515	3,014	247	1,827
Exeter	38	219	6,152	1,673	3,869	9,538	104	3,090
Northallerton	41	229	4,989	1,833	1,912	6,303	18	2,893
Nottingham	42	167	3,592	961	1,634	3,555	57	2,019
Reading	49	257	3,014	1,233	1,599	905	5	1,917
Worcester	52	261	2,935	902	1,511	1,380	6	1,669
Total	367	1,880	34,859	11,453	16,993	32,846	736	18,698

Water Quality

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what the level of nitrates were in rivers in each year since 1990, broken down by *(a)* region and *(b)* river; and if she will make a statement; [56554]

(2) what assessment has been made by her Department of nitrate levels in rivers; and if she will make a statement. [56556]

Mr. Meacher: In England and Wales the Environment Agency's general quality assessment (GQA) scheme is used to classify water quality in rivers and canals. Figures showing changes in quality against a baseline of 1990 are published each year by the Environment Agency. Results for Scotland are collected by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and in Northern Ireland by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland.

Chemical quality is assessed on the basis of biochemical oxygen demand and concentrations of dissolved oxygen and ammonia. Stretches of rivers and canals are classed as good, fair, poor or bad based on different degrees of chemical quality.

Phosphates and nitrates are measured to determine the average concentrations of nutrients in rivers. Each monitored river stretch is assigned one of six grades from 1 (very low) to 6 (excessively high for phosphate, very high for nitrate). The grade assigned to the water is based on three years of sampling.

Since the Environment Agency monitors water quality at about 7,000 sites representing 40,000 km of rivers and canals in England and Wales it would be impractical to list the results in the detail requested. However, they can be supplied electronically on application to the Environment Agency. In addition the Environment Agency website has a section called "What's in your backyard" which enables anyone with an interest in a particular river to obtain all available monitoring results for the particular stretch from 1990 to 2000. The website address is www.environment-agency.gov.uk.

The following table summarises the results of assessments since 1990.

percentage length

GQA: nutrient status—nitrate	*1995*	*2000*
1	17.6	15.7
2	14.7	12.6
3	19.7	21.1
4	17.7	18.8
5	15.1	15.9
6	15.2	15.8
High	30.3	31.7

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will make a statement on *(a)* the levels of phosphorous in and *(b)* the quality of rivers in each year since 1990; if she will break the information down (i) by region and (ii) by river; and if she will make a statement; [56559]

(2) what assessment has been made by her Department of levels of phosphorous in rivers; and if she will make a statement. [56560]

Mr. Meacher: In England and Wales the Environment Agency's general quality assessment (GQA) scheme is used to classify water quality in rivers and canals. Figures showing changes in quality against a baseline of 1990 are published each year by the Environment Agency. Results for Scotland are collected by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and in Northern Ireland by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland.

Chemical quality is assessed on the basis of biochemical oxygen demand and concentrations of dissolved oxygen and ammonia. Stretches of rivers and canals are classed as good, fair, poor or bad based on different degrees of chemical quality.

Phosphates and nitrates are measured to determine the average concentrations of nutrients in rivers. Each monitored river stretch is assigned one of six grades from 1 (very low) to 6 (excessively high for phosphate, very high for nitrate). The grade assigned to the water is based on three years of sampling.

Since the Environment Agency monitors water quality at about 7,000 sites representing 40,000 km of rivers and canals in England and Wales it would be impractical to list the results in the detail requested. However, they can be supplied electronically on application to the Environment Agency. In addition the Environment Agency website has a section called "What's in your backyard" which enables anyone with an interest in a particular river to obtain all available monitoring results for the particular stretch from 1990 to 2000. The website address is www.environment-agency.gov.uk.

The following table summarises the results of assessments since 1990.

		percentage length	
GQA: nutrient status—phosphate	*1990*	*1995*	*2000*
1	8.0	14.8	14.0
2	17.7	22.7	21.4
3	10.3	11.0	10.1
4	13.1	13.3	15.1
5	28.0	27.4	28.9
6	22.9	10.9	10.6
High	64.0	51.6	54.5

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment *(a)* has been and *(b)* is being made of the impact of the water framework directive and what measures will be required as a result; and if she will make a statement. [56553]

Mr. Meacher: An assessment of the costs and benefits of implementing the directive was set out in the first consultation paper issued jointly by the then Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the National Assembly for Wales in March 2001. This partial regulatory impact assessment estimated total costs for England and Wales in the range of £2 billion to £9.2 billion: benefits in the range of £1.6 billion to £6.2 billion. A copy of the paper is in the House Library.

We will consult on measures necessary under the directive in a second consultation paper this year.

An updated regulatory impact assessment will form part of a third consultation paper on implementation of the directive in England and Wales, planned for 2003.

Implementation of the directive in Scotland and Northern Ireland, and with respect to the devolved functions in Wales, are matters for the Scottish Executive, the Northern Ireland Executive and the National Assembly for Wales.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment has been made by her Department of the quality of rivers; and if she will make a statement. [56557]

Mr. Meacher: In England and Wales the Environment Agency's General Quality Assessment (GQA) scheme is used to classify water quality in rivers and canals. Figures showing changes in quality against a baseline of 1990 are published each year by the Environment Agency. Results for Scotland are collected by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and in Northern Ireland by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland.

The GQA also reports on the aesthetic quality of rivers. This includes: litter on the banks and in the river; sewage derived waste such as sanitary towels and cotton buds; the colour and smell of the water; oil, scum, foam, sewage fungus and ochreous deposits; and dog fouling.

Biological quality is assessed by comparing the populations of macroinvertebrates found in samples taken twice a year at each sampling site, with the population that would normally be found in unpolluted waters with the same physical characteristics. Stretches of rivers and canals are classed as very good, good, fairly good, fair, poor or bad.

GQA: Summary results for England and Wales

	A	*B*	*C*	*D*	*E*	*F*	*Good or Fair*	*Poor or Bad*
GQA: chemistry quality (percentage length)								
1990	17.6	30.2	23.2	14.0	12.7	2.3	84.9	15.1
1995	26.9	32.7	21.0	10.3	8.1	1.0	91.0	9.0
1996	27.2	31.2	21.3	10.4	8.8	1.0	90.2	9.8
1997	26.3	30.5	21.4	10.8	9.9	1.0	89.0	11.0
1998	27.6	31.5	20.2	10.7	9.3	0.7	90.0	10.0
1999	29.1	34.2	19.6	9.2	7.5	0.6	91.9	8.1
2000	31.9	35.8	18.9	7.7	5.4	0.4	94.2	5.8
GQA: biological quality (percentage length)								
1990	24.0	31.6	21.6	9.8	7.3	5.7	87.0	13.0
1995	34.6	31.6	18.4	8.1	5.4	1.9	92.6	7.4
2000	34.6	32.3	19.8	7.6	4.8	0.9	94.3	5.7

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library a copy of the speech she made to Water UK on 2 May on the Water Framework Directive; and if she will make a statement. [56548]

Mr. Meacher: A copy of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's speech to Water UK was placed in the Library today. During her speech my right hon. Friend announced the Government's response to the consultation on the draft Water Bill, a copy of which was placed in the Library on 2 May.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what European Directives relate to levels of nitrates in groundwater; what steps *(a)* have been taken and *(b)* are planned to meet the deadlines of such Directives; and if she will make a statement. [56558]

Mr. Meacher: The Nitrates Directive and Water Framework Directive both relate in part to levels of nitrate in groundwater.

The Nitrates Directive aims to protect waters from nitrate pollution from agricultural land. It requires identification of groundwaters that contain, or could contain if preventative action is not taken, more than 50mg/l nitrates. In 1996, England designated 59 Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs) specifically for the protection of groundwaters. Since 1998, farmers within NVZs have been required to apply Action Programme measures to limit organic manure and inorganic nitrogen fertiliser use.

A European Court of Justice (ECJ) judgment in 2000 held that the UK had failed to designate sufficient NVZs for the protection of all waters. A recent consultation outlined two options for implementing the Nitrates Directive, both of which would extend the protection of groundwater in England. We are currently carefully considering the responses made to this consultation and will announce a decision in due course.

In the future, the Water Framework Directive will add further force to this protection because it requires that member states aim to achieve good groundwater status for all bodies of groundwater within 15 years of the Directive coming into force. The Commission is currently developing specific measures to prevent and control groundwater pollution, which will complement the provisions of existing Directives.

Recycling

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what role recycling credits have in ensuring businesses meet recycling targets; what assessment her Department has made of their impact on local authorities, businesses and charitable organisations; and if she will make a statement; [56562]

(2) what representations her Department has received from *(a)* local authorities, *(b)* the Association of Charity Shops and *(c)* businesses; and what discussions it has had with other organisations regarding the role and impact of recycling credits in meeting recycling targets; and if she will make a statement. [56561]

Mr. Meacher: Under section 52 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 waste disposal authorities are required to pay waste collection authorities recycling credits for all waste which the latter recycle. The value of the recycling credit should be equal to the saving the disposal authority makes through not having to dispose of the recycled material.

Local authorities have the option (but not a duty) to pay recycling credits to third parties (businesses, charities and community groups) collecting waste for recycling. Practice among local authorities varies, but I am aware that a number have a policy of not paying recycling credits to businesses.

I have had no specific representations from, or discussions with, the groups mentioned on the issue of recycling credits, nor has my Department carried out an assessment of their impact on them. However, "Waste Strategy 2000" recognised that the current scheme in England and Wales might in some cases work against the closer working relationships between collection and disposal authorities and other interested parties which the national strategy advocates. The Government are committed to reviewing the recycling credits scheme to see whether incentives for the promotion of recycling can be improved. In so doing we will consult fully with relevant parties, including those listed.

Water Industry

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what changes she proposes to the regulation of the water industry; if her preparatory work included consideration of their effect on sustainable development; and if she will make a statement. [56549]

Mr. Meacher: The main changes proposed to the regulation of the water industry are contained in the draft Water Bill, which has sustainability as a central theme. The Government response to the consultation was published on 2 May and the Bill will be introduced as soon as parliamentary time allows.

The Water Bill contains changes to the water abstraction authorisation system to ensure that water is used sustainably. It also aims to put consumers at the heart of regulation of the water industry, through mechanisms such as the creation of an independent Consumer Council for Water and requiring companies to make clear any links between directors' pay and company performance. The Bill also includes proposals to give the Director General of Water Services a specific sustainable development duty.

Any future regulatory measures that are needed to ensure compliance with obligations in new European Community water quality legislation will be fully consulted on with the water industry and other stakeholders.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what consultations *(a)* have been undertaken and *(b)* are planned by her Department relating to the water industry; and if she will make a statement. [56550]

Mr. Meacher: Since May 2001 there have been the following formal consultations relating specifically to the water industry:

How should England implement the 1991 Nitrates Directive? (February 2002)

Draft Guidance on the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 2000 (March 2002)

Water Grid PPP: Removal of Restrictions on British Waterways Statutory Powers (May 2002).

The Department also intends over the coming months to undertake further formal consultations on the following subjects:

competition in the Water Industry

revisions to the Vulnerable Groups Scheme

implementation of the Water Framework Directive

requirements in Article 16 of the Water Framework Directive regarding the Priority List daughter directives

implementation of the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive in respect of certain water resource projects

water industry and environment policy document.

Aside from formal consultations, Ministers and officials from DEFRA have frequent contact and discussions with a wide range of stakeholders in the water industry.

Sick Leave

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many days of sick leave were taken in her Department last year; how many related to employees suffering *(a)* stress and *(b)* other mental health problems; and what the cost was to her Department. [56486]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* Records are not yet available for the number of days sickness absence in 2001. In 2000, the latest year for which records are available, an average of 9 days per staff year were taken by employees in what was then the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, including its agencies. These figures are published in the Cabinet Office annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service", copies of which are placed in House Libraries.

The report does not separately identify stress and other mental health related absences, and the Department is able to obtain these figures and put a cost to these cases only at disproportionate cost.

The Department is committed to meeting its targets for reducing the number of working days lost due to sickness absence, which are contained in the published Service Delivery Agreement. The Department is also committed to reducing the number of working days lost from work-related injury and ill health arising from the Government's Revitalising Health and Safety initiative.

EU Meetings

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on how many occasions in the last six months *(a)* she and *(b)* her officials have met their Italian counterparts; and what subjects were discussed. [56886]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* My ministerial colleagues and I regularly meet with our Italian counterparts at meetings of the Agriculture, Fisheries and Environment Councils. Similarly, my officials have regular contacts with their Italian counterparts at meetings in Brussels. Two of my senior officials travelled to Rome earlier this month for a meeting to discuss CAP reform and the forthcoming mid-term review of Agenda 2000.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to discuss reform of the Common Agricultural Policy with her French counterpart; and if she will make a statement. [56972]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has written to her new French counterpart congratulating him on his appointment and suggesting an early meeting to discuss this and other key issues. She also looks forward to meeting him in the Agriculture Council on 27 May.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the Spanish presidency regarding the agenda for her meeting with her EU counterparts in Mallorca; and if she will make a statement. [56975]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* No DEFRA Ministers, including myself, have had discussions or meetings with the presidency regarding the informal meeting of Environment Ministers on 24–26 May in Mallorca. The presidency decides the topic for informal ministerial meetings and has chosen soil protection. Its paper "Policy for the integrated protection of soil quality" will steer the discussion, but this has yet to emerge. Although my officials have not had a meeting with the presidency to discuss the agenda for the informal meeting of Ministers, they met on 4 April to discuss the Thematic Strategy for Soil. This will be an output of the sixth Environmental Action Programme, which is expected to be adopted shortly.

Temporary Staff

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost to her Department was of employing staff in *(a)* London and *(b)* the south-east from employment agencies in each year since 1997. [56508]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* The Department has only been in existence since June 2001, so does not have such historical information. Constructing it retrospectively would involve disproportionate cost.

Imported Meat

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what imports of meat there were in the last 12 months into the United Kingdom from nations which have not adopted equivalent legislative controls to those banning the use of certain growth promoters within the European Union; and what controls are in place to prevent the importation of such meat. [56597]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* In accordance with harmonised Community legislation, the importation into the EU of fresh meat derived from animals which have been treated with certain substances, including hormonal growth promoters, is not permitted.

All meat imported into the UK from third countries must enter at designated UK Border Inspection Posts (BIPs) where it is subject to veterinary inspections. All consignments are subject to documentary and identity checks and at least 20 per cent. of consignments undergo physical checks, which may include sampling. These ensure import conditions are met and that the products remain in a satisfactory condition during transport.

Work-related Illness

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many claims for work-related illness were settled by her Department in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was in compensation. [56078]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The most recent statistics available are for the year 2000 and relate to the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) and its agencies; the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) was not created until June 2001.

Records show that in the core Department, there was one case where compensation was awarded for work-related illness, at a cost of £2,000. There were no cases in the Central Science Laboratory (CSL) and the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) agencies. There was one case in the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA).

Letter from Professor Steven Edwards to Mr. Michael Clapham, dated May 2002:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question on how many claims for work-related illness were settled by her Department in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was in compensation.

The VLA is committed to providing a safe and healthy working environment for staff, is proactive in monitoring procedures and ensures that comprehensive advice and guidance is available to all staff and managers.

VLA is also committed to meeting targets for reducing the number of working days lost generally to work related injuries and illness arising from the Government Revitalising Health and Safety initiative.

No claims for work-related illness were settled in 2000.

One claim for a work-related accident was settled in 2000. The total cost of this compensation case was £56,073.09—broken down as follows:

	£
Settlement	30,000.00
Costs	26,000.00
Additional travel costs and interest	73.09

Letter from Professor Mike Roberts to Mr. Michael Clapham, dated 21 May 2002:

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has asked me to reply, in respect of the Central Science Laboratory, to your question concerning how many claims for work-related illness were settled in the last year for which records are available, and what the cost was in compensation.

There were no claims for work-related illness at CSL in the last year.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many days of sick leave were taken by employees in her Department in the last year for which records are available; what proportion of those were due to work-related illness or injury; and what the cost was to the Department. [56080]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* In 2000, the latest year for which records are available, an average of nine days per staff year were taken by employees in what was then the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, including its agencies. These figures are published in the Cabinet Office annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service", copies of which are placed in House Libraries.

The Department does not hold figures on the proportion of these absences that were due to work-related illness or injury, or the cost of these absences, and these could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The Department is committed to meeting its targets for reducing the number of working days lost due to sickness absence, which are contained in the published Service Delivery Agreement. The Department is also committed to reducing the number of working days lost from work-related injury and ill health, in response to the Government's Revitalising Health and Safety initiative.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many employees of her Department retired through work-related ill-health in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was to the Department. [56079]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* Records are not maintained by the Department which enable ill health retirements to be separately identified as work-related. The number of staff retired with a medical retirement certificate issued by the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (PCSPS) medical adviser for the period 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001, was 20. Benefits provided on medical retirement are as set out in the rules of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme and laid before Parliament, and provide for an immediate payment of an enhanced pension and lump sum. Ill-health retirement expenditure is met centrally from the Civil Superannuation Vote. For the year ending March 2002, provisional expenditure from the vote was £310 million in respect of all civil service cases for which an ill-health pension has been awarded. These cases number approximately 67,000 and include those who have formerly been ill-health retired but who have now reached and exceeded the normal retirement age.

This reply covers staff of the Intervention Board and the former MAFF and its agencies who joined DEFRA in June last year following Machinery of Government changes, but does not include the former DETR staff who are now part of DEFRA.

New Forest National Park

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she intends to call a local inquiry to consider the Designation Order for a New Forest National Park. [58528]

Margaret Beckett: Under schedule 1 to the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949, an inquiry must be held into the Designation Order if a local authority has objected and the objection has not been withdrawn. Several local authorities have lodged objections, which are being maintained. A letter is being sent to all those who have made objections or representations, advising them that a local inquiry is to be held and what the scope of the inquiry will be. A copy of the letter is in the Library of the House. The inquiry is expected to start in October.

Sewage Treatment

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will take steps to clarify the powers which local authorities have to act in respect of smell nuisance from sewage treatment works. [32065]

Mr. Meacher: Pursuant to the answer given to my hon. Friend on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 749W, the information provided should be properly clarified. Local authorities are not able to use their powers under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 as previous case law has deemed that public sewers and sewage treatment works cannot be considered "premises" within the context of that Act. My officials are exploring the available legislation and existing controls as a possible means to deal with odour nuisance from sewage treatment works in the future.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Parliamentary Staff

Mr. McNamara: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), representing the House of Commons Commission, how many specialist advisers have been employed since 1997 by each select committee; what was the duration of their contract and scale of remuneration; in each case, whether the post was openly advertised; what the total cost of special advisers was, broken down by committee; and if he will break down the numbers of special advisers by *(a)* sex and *(b)* ethnic origin. [57159]

Mr. Kirkwood: Lists of specialist advisers appointed by each select committee in the last Parliament and their cost are contained in the Sessional Returns ordered to be printed by the House on 25 January 1999 (HC142), 16 December 1999 (HC1), 5 February 2001 (HC100) and 20 July 2001 (HC1). The equivalent information so far in the current Session is being assembled and will be placed in the Library.

The arrangements for the selection of candidates are the responsibility of individual select committees, not of the House of Commons Commission. Committees normally appoint specialist advisers for a particular subject or a particular inquiry. Typically, an appointment remains valid until the end of a Parliament in case a committee returns to a subject. Specialist advisers are not House employees but are paid as contractors. Details of duration of their appointment and scale of remuneration are collated by each committee separately. Daily rates, which are currently under review, range up to £150. As specialist advisers are not employees of the House, we have no separate record by gender and ethnic origin.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Malawi

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with her EU colleagues regarding the EU's response to the food shortages in Malawi. [56970]

Clare Short: My officials in Lilongwe are in regular contact with the two other member states represented in Malawi (Denmark and Germany) as well as the EC delegation. The Danes are withdrawing from Malawi and have not therefore been active in helping to provide food. Neither have the Germans (who argue that their contribution is through the EC).

The EC have now agreed to purchase 40,000 tonnes of maize from the local market to replenish National Food Reserve Agency stocks. This will be held until the lean season (starting October) and then released for distribution to those in need. A further 10,000 tonnes will be purchased internationally. The EC are preparing a proposal seeking financial contributions from all member states to finance another 30,000 tonnes of maize to be procured internationally.

Nepal

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what development programmes and financial support have been provided to Nepal in the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [57178]

Clare Short: UK development assistance to Nepal in each of the last five years is as follows:

	£000
1997–98	17,280
1998–99	16,627
1999–2000	15,989
2000–01	17,165
2001–02	20,400

Note:

The figure for 2001–02 is provisional

This development assistance has been spent on programmes to:

(i) Improve governance, through a programme to strengthen governance and build pressure for change, through support to implement effectively the Government's decentralisation programme, and for effective management of public finances.

(ii) Enhance human development, through support for secondary education and community literacy, and through support for safer motherhood services, commodity support to the national TB programme and to family planning, and programme support to polio eradication in Nepal and to the national AIDS programme.

(iii) Strengthen approaches to rural livelihoods including better physical access, through programmes to enhance rural access, agricultural productivity, community forestry management, by strengthening capacity to tackle deep-seated problems such as bonded labour, and through community-based and area-based poverty alleviation projects.

The worsening conflict situation in Nepal has restricted some development activities, though work is continuing in many areas. Over the past six months my officials have been developing a number of short-term initiatives to deliver development benefits to people in conflict-affected areas.

Illegal Logging

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial support she gives to developing countries to help them combat illegal logging. [55292]

Clare Short *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* Worldwide we spend just under £20 million from DFID's country programme budgets on helping countries improve their forest governance and move towards more equitable and sustainable forest management. This strengthens the capacity of Governments, NGOs and local communities to enforce forest law.

Roughly 5 per cent. of this support specifically targets better documentation and understanding of the problem of illegal logging, as well as the establishment of improved monitoring and transparency in countries.

Over the past three years we have also contributed a total of about £450,000 from our central policy budget to supporting global dialogue and information exchange on the underlying causes of deforestation, some of which is caused by illegal logging, and helping countries come together to agree policy action.

We are providing £300,000 to Global Forest Watch, which is based in the World Resources Institute. Last year we were active in sponsoring, jointly with the US State Department and the World Bank institute, a regional ministerial conference on forest law enforcement and governance in Indonesia, where the private sector, East Asia Governments and civil society came together to generate political will and agree policy action. We contributed £39,464 to the costs. We will jointly sponsor similar initiatives in Africa and Latin America over the coming two years.

Afghanistan

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will place in the Library the report from UNMAS on their programme of visits to sites where cluster bombs were dropped in Afghanistan; and if she will make a statement. [57699]

Clare Short *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* We understand from the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) that there is no specific report currently available on its programme of visits. Field survey data is currently being collected on behalf of UNMAS as access becomes available. This information is available to humanitarian demining personnel in Afghanistan on the Mine Action Centre for Afghanistan (MACA) database.

Middle East

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the UK contribution to European Union and World Bank activities in Israel has been for each of the past 10 years *(a)* by monetary value, *(b)* in terms of percentage of activity total and *(c)* in terms of percentage of her Department's annual spending total; and if she will make a statement. [58294]

Clare Short: Israel's level of economic development is relatively high. Israel is not therefore a recipient of UK, EC or World Bank development assistance.

WALES

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales, pursuant to the answer of 10 April, *Official Report*, column 6W, what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of unpaid advisers who have assisted the work of his Department since June 1997 but are not included in the Cabinet Office's annual report 'Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews 2000–01'. [57035]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department came into existence on 1 July 1999. It has not had any assistance from unpaid advisers.

Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the estimated level of losses to fraud and corruption was in *(a)* his Department's Vote 1 budget and *(b)* his Department's Vote 2 budget for (i) 1999–2000 and (ii) 2000–01. [54706]

Mr. Paul Murphy: No losses have been identified for these years.

Access to Information

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the administrative manuals and internal guidance which his Department has made public as required by Part 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information; and which of these were first made available after May 1997. [45443]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Wales Office has very few executive functions and so has published no supplementary material. It is producing a Publication Scheme under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Affordable Housing

15. **Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures he is taking to increase the supply of affordable housing in London. [5554[illegible]]

Ms Keeble: Increasing the supply of affordable housing is a key priority of the Government, and the problem in London is of particular concern.

The Government has recently announced that the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme (ADP) allocation for London will be £545 million. This includes an additional £95 million which will fund an extra 1,363 units. London will also receive £146 million of the Starter Home Initiative funding, which will help 4,600 of London's key workers.

Abandoned Properties

10. **Dr. Ladyman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to help local authorities deal with privately owned abandoned properties. [55536]

Ms Keeble: The Government are taking action to deal with empty and abandoned properties in areas of both high and low demand. The measures in place, which are set out in detail in our recent response to the Select Committee report on empty homes, include: funding the Empty Homes Agency to help local authorities bring empty properties back into use; reforming private sector renewal legislation; and introducing pathfinder projects, backed by £25 million of investment, to tackle low demand where the problem is most acute.

Parish Councils

11. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent representations he has received concerning the new arrangements for registration of interests by parish councillors. [55537]

25. **Mr. Heathcoat-Amory:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent representations he has had from parish councils about the introduction of the new code of conduct. [55554]

Dr. Whitehead: Since the New Year, there have been 268 representations received by my Department about the model code of conduct for parishes.

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures the Government are undertaking to encourage public participation in parish councils. [57328]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government are encouraging public engagement with, and participation in local democracy across, all tiers of local government, including parish councils.

The consultation paper on Quality Parish and Town councils took forward a key aim of the rural White Paper "Our Countryside: the Future—a Fair Deal for Rural England", that is to help parish councils develop a new role in giving the communities they serve the opportunity to help shape their future. In order to gain quality status, we are proposing that parish councils will need to pass six tests, for instance to show that their seats have been filled by members who have been democratically elected and that they are holding a minimum number of open council meetings.

The Government are also providing £5 million to help 1,000 rural communities develop town or village plans that will set out the facilities and services they need.

Rail Services, Hassocks

12. **Mr. Flight:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress in his negotiations with the train operating companies on railway services to Hassocks, West Sussex. [55538]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority is currently negotiating the new South Central franchise agreement and hopes to reach a conclusion to these negotiations by September 2002.

Local Government Finance

13. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what weighting factors will be given to poverty and health factors in the new local government financing system. [55539]

Mr. Raynsford: We are working to develop options for a fairer and more intelligible grant distribution system. We will consult on options over the summer and will consider the detailed responses when we come to take decisions.

21. **Mr. Michael Foster:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress is being made towards replacing the Standard Spending Assessment. [55550]

Dr. Whitehead: We are working to develop options for a fairer and more intelligible grant distribution system. We will consult on options over the summer and will consider the responses when we come to take decisions.

37. **Paddy Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he last met representatives of the F40 group of authorities to discuss the grant distribution system for 2003–04. [55566]

Dr. Whitehead: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met representatives of the F40 group of authorities on Tuesday 14 May 2002 to discuss this issue.

Uniform Business Rate

14. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to reform the uniform business rate. [55540]

Dr. Whitehead: Our proposals for business rates in England are set out in the Local Government White Paper "Strong Local Leadership Quality Public Services", published on 11 December. It includes among other proposals our new schemes for rate relief for small businesses and Business Improvement Districts.

Regional Planning Authorities

16. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to extend the role of regional planning authorities. [55542]

Ms Keeble: We propose to strengthen regional planning by replacing Regional Planning Guidance with Regional Spatial Strategies. These would have statutory status and focus on strategic issues. These will be more fully integrated with other regional strategies and have an important sub-regional dimension.

Downing Street Transport Seminar

17. **Richard Ottaway:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions to what extent the seminar in No. 10 Downing Street chaired by Ms C. Booth QC in February has assisted in the formulation of transport policy; and if he will make a statement. [55543]

Mr. Spellar: The Downing Street lectures are not policy-making seminars, and Mrs. Blair does not chair them. I attended the lecture given by Jeremy Acklam (Smart Economy, Smart Transport) and welcomed his thoughts on the potential gains from better transport information and technology.

For general information on the lectures, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Lewes (Mr. Baker) on 15 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 712–15W.

Regional Airports (Rail Links)

18. **Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to improve rail links to regional airports. [55546]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) is working with a number of airport operators, and in the case of Glasgow and Edinburgh airports alongside the Scottish Executive, in the development of proposals to improve rail links to regional airports.

Regional Assemblies

19. **Mr. Rosindell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the financing of regional assemblies. [55548]

Dr. Whitehead: Our policy on the financing of regional assemblies was set out in chapter 5 of our White Paper, "Your Region, Your Choice", which was published on Thursday 9 May 2002.

24. **Mr. Cameron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the introduction of regional assemblies. [55553]

28. **Mr. Kevan Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on regional assemblies. [55557]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government's policy on establishing elected assemblies in the English regions was set out in the White Paper "Your Region, Your Choice" (Cm 5511), which was published on 9 May.

33. **Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on the role of regional assemblies in respect of development policies. [55562]

Dr. Whitehead: Our policy is set out in Chapters 2 and 4 of the White Paper, "Your Region, Your Choice", which was published on 9 May.

27. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimates he has made of the cost of introducing regional government in England; and if he will make a statement. [55556]

Dr. Whitehead: The cost of establishing elected regional assemblies was discussed in paragraphs 5.12 to 5.16 of our White Paper, Your Region, Your Choice, published on 9 May.

Light Railway Systems

20. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to fund the installation of tram and light railway systems in smaller towns. [55549]

Ms Keeble: As I explained to the hon. Member at our meeting on 1 May, our ten-year plan reflects our commitment to light rail in major cities. Whether light rail offers the most appropriate and cost-effective response to transport needs in other circumstances is a matter, in the first instance, for the local authorities concerned to consider in formulating and reviewing their local transport plans. Thereafter, any light rail scheme or other major transport project would need to undergo rigorous appraisal and examination under any relevant statutory procedures before funding approval could be considered.

Regeneration

22. **Mr. Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to regenerate areas of deprivation. [55551]

Ms Keeble: We are continuing to tackle deprivation. The National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal has gathered widespread acceptance from all key stakeholders. Even though the strategy is a long-term initiative, we are already beginning to see early wins for our poorest communities through programmes such as Neighbourhood Wardens, Street Wardens and the New Deal for Communities.

Aviation Industry

23. **Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on projected growth in passenger and flight numbers in the aviation industry over the next 10 years. [55552]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department's latest air traffic forecasts for the UK published in 2000 show the total passenger demand at UK airports increasing by 6 per cent. a year from 160 million passengers in 1998 to 276 million in 2010. The Department does not make forecasts of the number of flights.

Planning Reform

26. **Mr. Francois:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he intends to introduce legislation to reform the planning process. [55555]

Ms Keeble: Following consideration of the responses to the Green Paper consultation we would hope to press ahead as soon as possible with those reforms requiring legislation, subject to parliamentary time being available.

Children's Play Facilities

29. **Ms Ward:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals he has for improving children's play facilities in towns and cities. [55558]

Ms Keeble: The Urban Green Spaces Taskforce, which was set up in January 2001 to provide advice on policies for improving urban parks, play areas and green spaces, published its final report: Green Spaces, Better Places on Tuesday 7 May 2002. We will respond to the conclusions and recommendations of this report in a policy statement later this summer.

Local Authority Housing Stock Transfers

30. **Alan Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much has been set aside for debt write-off connected to large scale transfers of council housing stock *(a)* in respect of properties already transferred and *(b)* to cover planned transfers. [55559]

Ms Keeble: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) on Friday 12 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 628W.

Public Transport (Heathrow)

31. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his assessment is of the impact Terminal 5's extra passengers will have on M4 traffic to the west of Heathrow; and how he intends to improve public transport to Heathrow from the west. [55560]

Mr. Jamieson: Public transport access and impact on the road network were considered at length during the Terminal 5 inquiry. In approving Terminal 5, the Secretary of State decided that questions about widening the M4 in the Heathrow area and improving Junctions 3 and 4 should be referred to the London to Reading Multi-Modal Study. The Strategic Rail Authority is actively working with BAA to develop proposals for rail service improvements including the possibility of new and improved rail links to the west.

Housing Market Renewal Fund

32. **Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made in setting up a housing market renewal fund. [55561]

Ms Keeble: We are making excellent progress in pursuing our objective to turn round the incidence of low demand by 2010.

Last month my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions announced that we are inviting nine areas to work with the Government in developing pathfinders to tackle low demand and abandoned housing.

Last Thursday my right hon. Friend announced that £25 million was being made available from the Capital Modernisation Fund for investment in the nine pathfinder areas. This will enable each pathfinder to start early the process of preparing a strategic plan and inform future investment.

Local Election Turnouts

34. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what evaluation has been made of pilot schemes to encourage higher turnout in local elections. [55563]

Dr. Whitehead: The Electoral Commission began its evaluation of the pilot schemes on 3 May and will report to the Secretary of State by 2 August 2002. The evaluation will provide a detailed assessment of the impact of new voting methods on election turnout and voting.

Early indications are that postal voting has boosted turnout and the various electronic means of voting have been positively received.

Council Tax

35. **Dr. Pugh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has for the reform of the operation of council tax. [55564]

Dr. Whitehead: In our White Paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services", published last December, we set out our plans for the council tax. These include first revaluation in 2007 with 10-yearly revaluations thereafter; giving local authorities discretion on discounts and exemptions; and not using the reserve capping powers for high performing authorities.

Road Works

36. **Mr. Beard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to regulate road works on major roads. [55565]

Ms Keeble: We are introducing a range of regulatory measures to deal with disruption to road users caused by works on the street. In particular, last April we introduced powers allowing highway authorities to levy charges on utility works which are not completed to deadline. We are also piloting powers allowing authorities to levy "lane rental" on utilities for the whole duration of their works.

As to maintenance work carried out on trunk roads, the Highways Agency aims to keep to a minimum disruption caused by such works; for example, wherever possible routine maintenance is undertaken outside peak hours.

London Underground

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assumptions underlie the capital value of the London Underground public-private partnership capital value as stated in table C18 of Financial Statement and Budget report 2002 (HC592); and if he will make a statement. [53391]

Mr. Jamieson: The Financial Statement and Budget report 2002 as a whole is of course a matter for HM Treasury. Table C18 of the report refers to the £16 billion of investment and maintenance in the tube that the London Underground public-private partnerships are expected to deliver over the next 15 years. This estimate, which is in April 2002 prices, is consistent with the preferred bids for the PPP contracts. The figure is also consistent with the guidance for reporting the information in table C18 as set out in Treasury Taskforce Policy Statement (Number 5).

Local Government Officers

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will make a statement on progress made on the review of political restrictions on local government officers; [54216]

(2) if he will make a statement on his proposals to alter the political restrictions on local government officers in England and Wales. [54217]

Dr. Whitehead: We will shortly be starting the review process looking at political restrictions on local government officers and intend to publish a consultation paper containing proposals later this year.

Infrastructure Charging Research

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, (1) pursuant to his answer of 30 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 675W, on infrastructure charging research, if he will publish figures for the cost of research commissioned by his Department, or the DETR, in each year since 1997; if he will publish the estimated cost for the forthcoming year; and if he will publish a summary of the work so far on *(a)* user acceptance, *(b)* social-spatial inclusion and exclusion, *(c)* trade-off between practical and optimal cordon congestion charging and *(d)* economic geography of congestion charging; [55263]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 30 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 675W, on infrastructure charging research, when the commissioned work will terminate; and what the estimated cost of such research is up to the termination date; [55265]

(3) if he will make a statement on the assessment he has made of the effect of congestion charging on social-spatial inclusion and exclusion. [55264]

Mr. Byers: The annual spend, total spend and likely termination date for the projects listed in the answer of 30 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 675W is given in the following table:

£000

Project title	*Actual annual spend*					*Forecast spend*				
	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*	*2004–05*	*Totals*	*End*
Demonstration of Interoperable Charging and Telematics Systems	—	—	—	—	2,600	7,000	9,000	3,400	22,000	December 2004
Dynamic Freight Analysis	—	—	—	—	11	32	12	—	55	April 2004
Economic Geography of Congestion Charging	—	—	12	13	16	4	—	—	45	December 2003
Trade-off between practical and optimal cordon congestion charging	—	—	—	6	5	6	—	—	17	December 2003
Charging Appraisal Frameworks	—	—	7	10	19	14	7	—	57	December 2004
Scheme Design and User Acceptance	—	—	8	16	10	18	—	—	52	December 2002
Measuring the impacts of road user charging and the workplace parking levy on social-spatial inclusion and exclusion	—	—	—	4	9	116	—	—	129	March 2003

The research project summaries requested by the hon. Member are:

Scheme Design and User Acceptance

The research seeks to help local authorities select the most appropriate form of road user charging scheme for an urban area, taking into account local economic, social and environmental circumstances. To do this an "options decision matrix" has been developed; its practical validity will be assessed by applying it to a number of case study areas.

Measuring the impacts of road user charging and the workplace parking levy on social-spatial inclusion and exclusion

This work looks at the effects of road user charging and the work place parking levy on social inclusion and social exclusion, both generally and in terms of gender, ethnicity, and age. It includes contracts with the universities of Oxford and Lancaster worth a total of £116,000. The aim of the research is to provide material and advice which will assist local authorities in assessing the possible social impact of particular congestion charging scheme options.

Trade-off between practical and optimal cordon congestion charging

The research examines the balance between congestion reduction and public acceptance of cordon charging schemes. It partly involves formulating a mathematical representation of an urban charging cordon. However, it seeks to ensure that the model has practical relevance by incorporating the results of a survey of six UK local authorities. This survey looks at the design of charging cordons and their objectives and effects, and public response to them. The overall aim is to assist local authorities in the design of such schemes.

Economic Geography of Congestion Charging

The project is examining the possible links between congestion charging and the long-term use and development of land. It is assessing the effects on a case study area of various different assumptions about charging, the use of the charging revenues, and other forms of traffic restraint. Here too, the aim is to help local authorities assess the implications of possible congestion charging schemes.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the mandate of the Technical Adaptation Committee on the minimum safety and health requirements for improved medical treatment on board vessels is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55229]

Mr. Jamieson: This committee has never functioned.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this decision, the commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the mandate of the committee on the reciprocal recognition of national boatmasters' certificates for the carriage of goods and passengers by inland waterways is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55684]

Mr. Jamieson: The committee's mandate is to review technical aspects relating to the mutual recognition of boatmasters' licences. The UK is not represented at the committee's meetings. There is no cost to public funds.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this decision, the commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the mandate of the committee on application of the legislation on the minimum level of training for seafarers and the recognition of certificates issued by training institutes or administrations of third countries (STCW) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56833]

Mr. Jamieson: The regulatory committee set up under Article 23 of Directive 2001/25/EC on the minimum level of training for seafarers has met twice in the last 12 months. The committee is composed of representatives of member states and is chaired by the European Commission. The remit of the committee is to oversee the implementation of the directive and its main focus is the recognition of non-EU certificates of competency. The UK is represented by officials from my Department and the annual cost of its work to public funds is about £1,600. The committee will next consider a revision of the maritime training directive to improve the procedure for the recognition of certificates of competency issued by non-EU countries.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this decision, the commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Postal Ballots

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many allegations of fraud are being investigated in connection with the use of postal ballots in the local elections; and if he will make a statement. [55715]

Dr. Whitehead: It is for the police locally to investigate any allegations of fraud. Records of such investigations are not centrally recorded. Should either the Electoral Commission or local electoral administrators identify any issues of particular concern in relation to fraud or the procedures for processing postal votes, they will alert us.

Rail Access Charges

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if contractual provisions will be made to offer rail freight operators the same protection against increased access charges as train operating companies. [55785]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave him on 2 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 901W and 7 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 28W.

New Homes (South-East)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the proportion of new homes in the south-east that will be required as a result of *(a)* migration from other regions and *(b)* immigration from overseas. [55714]

Ms Keeble: No estimate has been made of the proportion of new homes required in the south-east as a result either of migration from other regions or immigration from overseas. In determining the overall level of housing provision in the south-east, as set out in Regional Planning Guidance for the south-east (RPG9), the Secretary of State took account of a number of factors and these are referred to in RPG9.

e-Government

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to promote e-Government at parish council level; and what funds are available to parish councils to achieve this. [55823]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government's target to see all local government services electronically enabled by 2005 only applies to principal local authorities and fire authorities, and does not apply to parish and town councils.

As they are not subject to this target, parish councils are not being funded directly under the £350 million Local Government On-Line (LGOL) Programme. The national strategy for local e-government, which is currently being subject to wide consultation, makes clear that successful local e-government and customer focused services depend upon the interaction of local authorities with a range of other public, voluntary, community and private sector bodies. Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs) are potential leaders in joining up e-enabled access channels and service delivery at the local level. Parish councils, as their tier of government closest to local communities, have a significant role to play in these LSPs.

We are making available up to £75 million over two years to support the development of local and regional partnerships between councils, and other local service providers such as the police and the health service. Parish councils will also be able to tap into the knowledge and skills already being developed under LGOL.

Martin Sixsmith

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 1 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 1569W, on civil servants, on what basis the termination payment to Martin Sixsmith was made. [55748]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made to the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 9 May 2002.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what formula was used to calculate the value of compensation paid to Mr. Martin Sixsmith. [56423]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the statement made to the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 9 May 2002.

Departmental Staff (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many and what percentage of *(a)* civil service, *(b)* executive agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public body jobs under the remit of his Department are located in Scotland; and how many of each have been relocated to Scotland since May 1997. [56306]

Dr. Whitehead: I would refer the hon. Member to the Cabinet Office reports "Civil Service Statistics", published on the Cabinet Office website and also available in the Libraries of both Houses. These reports give a regional breakdown of the total number of staff employed by my Department including agencies.

I am unable to say how many are employed within non-departmental public bodies, as this information is not held centrally by my Department. Since 1997 the centre of the Department has not relocated any jobs to Scotland. Information on relocation is also not held centrally for the agencies and NDPBs.

Sick Leave

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many days of sick leave were taken in his Department last year; how many related to employees suffering *(a)* stress and *(b)* other mental health problems; and what the cost was to his Department. [56472]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* The most recent figures published in the Cabinet Office "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service" are for the calendar year 2000. For the 'Environment and Transport Group', the average working days absence per staff year was 9.0 days compared with a civil service average of 9.9 days. The total number of days lost was 142,853.

The Department does not have details of days lost and associated cost for stress or other mental health problems.

Consultation

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many consultation documents and consultative drafts of legislation have been issued by his Department since January 2001; and what proportion of these have observed criterion 5 of the Code of Practice on Written Consultation. [57007]

Dr. Whitehead: According to central records the Department has issued 88 consultation documents since January 2001. In 10 cases the period for consultation agreed was less than the 12-week standard minimum period recommended in criterion 5 of the Code of Practice on Written Consultation, but in all cases the procedures in the code were complied with in full.

Local Election Dates

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions under what mechanism the date of the local elections was moved to 8 May in 1996; whether this mechanism will be implemented in May 2003; and if he will make a statement. [56843]

Dr. Whitehead: The local elections in 1996 took place as usual on the first Thursday in May. Section 37 of the Representation of the People Act 1983, as amended by section 18(2) of the Representation of the People Act 1985, provides authority for the Secretary of State to change the normal day of polling from the first Thursday in May to another day by order made no later than 1 February in the year preceding the year in which the order is to take effect. It is thus now too late to alter the date for local elections in May 2003 by this means. Postponement in any other circumstances would require primary legislation as happened for the local elections in 1986 and 2001.

Audit Commission

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many staff were employed in the Audit Commission at 1 April; and what proportion of those staff have clinical contact with NHS patients. [56861]

Dr. Whitehead: The number of staff employed by the Audit Commission was 2,114 at 1 April. No Audit Commission staff carry out a clinical role with respect to NHS patients as part of their employment with the Commission.

Edinburgh Airport

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what recent discussions he has had with representatives of BAA on safety standards at Edinburgh airport; [57311]

(2) when Government safety inspectors last visited Edinburgh airport; and when the next scheduled inspections will take place. [573[illegible]]

(3) what were the main findings of Government safety inspectors when they last visited Edinburgh airport with specific reference to *(a)* staff turnover, *(b)* staff working hours and *(c)* staff morale. [57313]

Mr. Jamieson: My Transport Security Inspectors have regular discussions with BAA management at Edinburgh airport on security matters, and carry out regular inspections. The last inspection was earlier this month. Inspections are unannounced for maximum effect and it would be inappropriate to indicate when the next inspections will take place. Staff management issues are for BAA to address. The CAA does not have any safety concerns regarding staff at the airport.

Key Workers

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what definition he employs of the term key worker; and what plans he has to change the definition. [56689]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* There is no national definition of the term key worker, although it is generally understood to be someone whose services are essential to the local community. In assessing local housing needs, it is for local authorities to decide upon those key worker groups in need of affordable housing who contribute to essential service provision.

The Starter Home Initiative is assisting key workers, particularly teachers, police, nurses and other health workers, to buy their first home. Bids for Starter Home Initiative funding were also invited to assist other key workers, and as a result social workers, fire fighters and transport workers are also being assisted.

London Stations (Access)

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures are being undertaken to improve accessibility to London's overground rail stations. [57331]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) has issued a Code of Practice, "Train and Station Services for Disabled Passengers", setting out the standard of facilities required to meet the travel needs of disabled passengers. The SRA has asked all station operators to identify where facilities currently fall short of these standards. In the light of this, a programme of work will be drawn up.

Environmental Impact Assessments

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if the circular 18/84 proposed development procedures require a Government Department to provide an environmental impact assessment for a development that is within Schedules 1 or 2 of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999; [57342]

(2) if he will make a statement on the compatibility of Circular 18/84, Development by Government Departments, with European directives on environmental impact assessments. [57340]

Ms Keeble: The position on environmental impact assessment in relation to Crown development is detailed in paragraph 157 of DETR Circular 02/99. Environmental impact assessment is required for all proposed development falling within Annexe I to the EIA directive, as amended, and for proposed development falling within Annexe II if it is likely to have a significant effect on the environment. A Crown body proposing such development will submit an environmental statement to the local planning authority when consulting it under the arrangements set out in Part IV of the Memorandum to Circular 18/84.

Housing Construction Guidelines

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidelines there are governing the minimum size and amount of living space to be provided in new housing; and if he will make a statement. [57272]

Dr. Whitehead: The Building Regulations in England and Wales make no requirements with regard to the minimum size or amount of living space that should be provided in new homes. The Housing Corporation require registered social landlords (RSLs) to comply with the Scheme Development Standards as a condition of Social Housing Grant funding for new build schemes. Although the Scheme Development Standards do not specifically set a minimum size and amount of living space to be provided in new housing, they do require RSLs to adopt good space planning and room layouts.

Telecommunications Masts

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which elements of the Stewart report *(a)* have been and *(b)* will be implemented by his Department. [57590]

Mr. Byers: On 22 August last year, taking into account the recommendations in the Stewart report published in May 2000 and following our public consultation, we introduced changes that significantly improved the planning procedures and guidance for telecommunications mast development. Our changes:

strengthened public consultation requirements on mast proposals of 15 metres and below so that they are the same as for planning applications

increased the time for an authority to deal with prior approval applications to 56 days

underlined that school governors must be consulted on all proposals for new masts on or near a school or college; and

increased fees to enable authorities to carry out full public consultation.

We have no plans to amend further the planning arrangements for telecommunications development.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many appeals he has received from mobile phone companies to erect transmission masts in the last 12 months; and how many appeals were upheld. [57589]

Mr. Byers: Information is not held centrally about appeal decisions for mobile phone masts.

QE II Centre

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 14 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 516W on the QE II Centre, if the relevant Government policies include the climate change policy; and whether the financial assessment will be on the basis of the whole life costs including energy efficiency of the air conditioning chiller. [58262]

Dr. Whitehead: Yes.

Housing Estates

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will list the deprived local authority housing estates and the local authority and local authority wards that those estates fall into, referred to in DETR, Housing Research Summary No. 65 (1997); [57568]

(2) which of the deprived local authority housing estates referred to in DETR Housing Research Summary No. 65 (1997) have subsequently been part of a stock transfer to housing associations. [57569]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The publication referred to in these questions is the DoE report on "Mapping Local Authority Estates Using the Index of Local Conditions" No.65 (1997).

The study was designed to show the probable distribution and concentration of deprived local authority estates at the regional level. The main report explains that the Department cannot publish the list of estates on which the study was based, or provide specific details on the particular local authority wards which they are in.

There are two reasons for this. Firstly, the analysis was based on one specific definition of deprived estates. It used the 5 per cent. of Census Enumeration Districts with the highest scores on the Index of Local Conditions which had more than 50 per cent. of households renting from the local council. The report stressed that the study did not produce a definitive list of deprived estates. Alternative definitions could be used, based on other data, which could produce different lists. Secondly, the Department wanted to avoid creating or contributing to the stigmatisation of estates.

Both these reasons for non-disclosure are still valid and therefore DTLR cannot provide a list of the estates.

Public Information

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what right of access members of the public have to information on *(a)* building control, *(b)* environmental health, *(c)* drainage and *(d)* highways from local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [57705]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 and the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) Regulations 2000, gives the public significant general rights of access to local authority meetings and related papers.

There are also certain service specific rights, including for

(a) building control

the right under the Town and County Planning Act 1990 to inspect an authority's planning register;

(b) environmental health

the right for the public, under the Environmental Regulations 1992, to have access to environmental information held by a local authority;

(c) drainage

a right pursuant the Water Industry Act 1991, for the public to inspect drainage maps held in local authority offices; and for

(d) highways

the right for the public, under the Highways Act 1980, to inspect a list of highways in the area which are maintainable at the public expense, and under the New Road and Street Works Act 1991, a register of street works executed or proposed to be executed in the streets in the area.

Crown Immunity

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had on the removal of Crown immunity from prosecution for health and safety offences; and if he will make a statement. [58036]

Dr. Whitehead: I have had discussions with external bodies and officials on this matter from time to time.

Union Health and Safety Representatives

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had on improving the effectiveness of union health and safety representatives; and if he will make a statement. [58037]

Dr. Whitehead: Union safety representatives play a vital role in securing improved health and safety in the workplace. I hold regular meetings with trade unions, where the role of safety representatives is discussed.

Airport Policing Costs (Bristol)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to change the designation of Bristol airport so that the extra costs of policing the airport since 11 September 2001 are met by the airport authorities rather than Avon and Somerset police; and if he will make a statement. [56536]

Mr. Jamieson: I have no plans to designate Bristol airport at present. My Department is currently reviewing its policy on designation, specifically as regards what criteria to use to decide whether an airport should be designated where the airport operator and police authority are unable to agree.

Independent Rail Accident Investigation Body

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the consultation exercise on the establishment of an independent rail accident investigation body will begin; and what the deadline is for *(a)* completion of the exercise and *(b)* the report to his Department. [58174]

Mr. Byers: We expect to consult this summer on proposals for the establishment of an independent rail accident investigation branch. The consultation exercise will run for 12 weeks from the date of publication, as set out in the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on written consultation. Responses to the consultation will be carefully analysed following this period, and in advance of primary legislation.

Local Government White Paper

Ms Coffey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on implementing the Local Government White Paper. [55544]

Mr. Raynsford: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State published an implementation plan on the Department's website on 10 April setting out the key milestones and planned dates for completion. It is updated monthly.

Neighbourhood and Street Wardens

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what effect neighbourhood and street wardens are having on curtailing antisocial behaviour in towns and cities. [55545]

Ms Keeble: Since 2001, 84 Neighbourhood Warden schemes have become active. This year we are bringing forward 123 Street Warden schemes.

Most schemes have curtailing antisocial behaviour as one of their key objectives. Wardens are having an increasing effect on curtailing antisocial behaviour through their deterrent value, their relationship with local communities and enabling the relevant agencies to respond to incidents.

Green Belt

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans his Department has to change planning law with regard to the green belt. [55547]

Ms Keeble: None. Planning Policy Guidance note 2: "Green Belts" continues to require that local authority development plans include a strict presumption against inappropriate development in the green belt.

Grant Clawback (Newcastle)

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made to meet the request by Newcastle city council to identify situations where clawback of grant in relation to past regeneration schemes will be waived; and if he will make a statement. [58820]

Ms Keeble: On 1 May 2001, my right hon. Friend the then Minister of State for Local Government and the Regions (Hilary Armstrong), announced the signing of a local public service agreement with Newcastle city council, *Official Report*, column 594.

One of the Government commitments made in that local PSA, in return for a commitment from the council to increase the level of regeneration, was to have discussions about alterations to the arrangements for clawback of regeneration grants on change of use or disposal of an asset.

The council have argued that for some older regeneration schemes, where any clawback which might apply would be small, that the costs of delay—administratively and in terms of starting valuable projects—would be disproportionate to the sums that might be recovered. The Government have concluded that for regeneration schemes that are now closed, in respect of transactions where receipts are relatively low (and thus the maximum potential level of clawback is also low), and where Government can have confidence that any receipt which might have been due to the Government is recycled into further regeneration consistent with the Government's regeneration objectives, it can offer value for money to offer a waiver of clawback.

In view of the council's undertaking to achieve the enhanced regeneration objectives set out in the local PSA, the Government undertook to consider what scope there is to assist and encourage the council to achieve its targets by waiving the council's contingent liability to repay grant under certain discontinued grant regimes.

The council was seeking a waiver of my Department's right to clawback in both situations where a liability to repay grant can arise, namely (1) where there is a change of use of an asset constructed or acquired wholly or partly out of funds paid under a relevant grant scheme; and (2) where there is a disposal of such an asset. It was the Council's intention to use any proceeds that might have arisen from the waiver to further its regeneration objectives in the East End and West End Going for Growth areas of Newcastle.

After careful consideration, I have concluded that my Department can waive its entitlement to claw back grant under the terms of the former Urban Programme and City Challenge grant schemes:

in order to assist and encourage the council to deliver its regeneration targets under the local PSA;

in relation to assets constructed or acquired using grant given for regeneration activities in the East End and West End Going for Growth areas of Newcastle, as defined in the respective regeneration plans published by the council in July 2001;

so far as liability to repay grant can arise from a disposal of an asset, including land, only where the potential for grant clawback derived from a disposal is £100,000 or less;

so far as liability to repay grant can arise from a change of use of an asset, including land, only where a new use of an asset continues to further the objectives of the grant scheme or wider Government regeneration objectives 2, 3, 4 and 5 published in the DTLR Business Plan 2001; and

for disposals agreed or changes of use effected on or after the date that the Council accepts the terms of the waiver and before 31 March 2004 (the date on which the local PSA expires), unless the waiver is withdrawn before that date on the grounds that it is not being applied properly.

Accordingly, my Department has written to the council today.

For transactions in which potential clawback could exceed £100,000, a full analysis of whether any clawback is due will continue to be required from the council, together with a calculation of the amount due, and waivers will be considered on a case by case basis.

The Government are prepared to consider requests for similar treatment from other local authorities who might propose local PSA targets for regeneration, where it is appropriate in the circumstances of the authority.

PRIME MINISTER

Galileo

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the military applications of Galileo; and what discussions he has had on this subject. [57900]

The Prime Minister: Galileo is a civil programme under civil control. European Transport Ministers reaffirmed this when giving the go-ahead for the development phase of the programme on 26 March.

Referendums

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Prime Minister if (1) he will make a statement on his policy towards the role of Whitehall officials in referendum campaigns; [57918]

(2) if he will make it his policy not to increase the budget to departmental information campaigns in the run-up to a referendum on UK participation in the single currency; and if he will make a statement. [57916]

The Prime Minister: Civil servants' involvement and expenditure on departmental information activities in referendum campaigns would be conducted in accordance with the requirements of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000.

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 620W, what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of unpaid advisers who have assisted the work of his Department since June 1997 but are not included in (i) the Cabinet Office's annual report "Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews 2000–01" and (ii) his previous answer. [57038]

The Prime Minister: I have made no other appointments than those listed in my answer of 25 March to the right hon. Gentleman.

Czech Republic

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 25 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 429W, on the Czech Republic, whether he discussed the proposed offset deal with the Czech Prime Minister. [58173]

The Prime Minister: Yes. The Czech Prime Minister did raise the issue of offset arrangements during my visit of 8 April.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 25 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 429W, on the Czech Republic, how many jobs in the United Kingdom would be protected and created if the bid by Gripen International to sell fighter/trainer aircraft to the Czech Air Force goes ahead. [58170]

The Prime Minister: If the contract worth around £250 million to the UK, is successfully completed it will directly benefit the company which will help to secure British jobs and strengthen the British economy. The UK defence industry is highly successful, employing around 180,000 directly and 160,000 in associated industries.

European Treaties (France)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Prime Minister if he will have discussions with France on their adherence to the European treaties that require the free movement of goods between member countries of the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [57599]

The Prime Minister: Government Ministers, including myself, have made representations to France on the problems affecting the free movement of goods through the channel tunnel. We remain in close contact with the French Government about the action that is required to enable normal rail freight to resume.

The Commission has also invoked the Free Movement of Goods Regulation in this case and we are following this closely.

Devolved Assemblies (Voting Systems)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Prime Minister when he intends to carry out a review of the voting systems used to elect the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly; and if he will make a statement. [56230]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on Tuesday 3 July 2001, *Official Report*, column 93W.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Data Protection

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will place in the Library copies of each version of the internal guidance which have been drawn up by her Department since 1 January 1999 to assist staff in her Department to answer subject access requests under the Data Protection Act 1998. [53376]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department gave to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) on 25 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 446W. Additionally, I am placing in the Libraries of the House an extract referring to subject access requests that appears in my Department's internal guidance on the Data Protection Act 1998.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on Common Rules for Exports of Products is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55346]

Ms Hewitt: The Advisory Committee on Common Rules for Exports of Products is established under Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2603/69 for the purpose of consultation between member states and the Commission on any requests for taking protective measures on exports, to examine the effects of any such measures that may be taken, and on their amendment or termination. Its only activity in recent years has been to exercise surveillance of market trends as regards the export of copper scrap to certain third countries—for which it last met, briefly, on 8 May 2001—with UK representation by a DTI official. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds on the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee on the Specific Programme for Research, Technological Development and Demonstration on Promotion of Innovation and Participation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55354]

Ms Hewitt: The Committee on the Scientific Programme for Research, Technologic Development and Demonstration (RTD) on the promotion of Innovation and Participation of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises is one of seven comitology committees established in relation to the management of the EU 5th Framework programme.

It has met on five occasions over the last 12 months: on 16 May 2001, 4 July 2001, 26 September 2001, 21 November 2001 and 6 March 2002.

Officials from the Office of Science and Technology, Department of Trade and Industry provide the UK representation.

The UK usually sends one delegate to meetings of this committee, which are held in Luxembourg. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost. paltems under consideration concern the ongoing implementation of the Framework 5 Innovation/SME programme, in particular the third call for innovation projects and the appraisal of Innovation Relay Centres' performance across the EU.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

Following Council Decision 1999/468/EC, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of the House on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783 Final).

As part of the review process, the Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be made accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee on the Directive on Names and Labelling of Textile Products is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55370]

Ms Hewitt: This committee was created under Article 5 of directive 96/73/EC on certain methods for the quantitative analysis of binary textile fibre mixtures (OJ L32, 3.2.97, p.1). The committee is convened periodically to consider adaptations to technical progress of testing methods for fibre mixtures and additions and to the table of textile fibres and the list of agreed allowances used to calculate the mass of fibre contained in a textile product in annexes 1 and 2 respectively of directive 97/74/EC on textile names (OJ L32, 3.2.97, p.38). The committee last met in 1996. UK representation consists of one official from my Department. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost. The Commission reimburses the travelling costs of national representatives. There are no items currently being considered by the committee. However, a technical expert working group on textile labelling met recently to consider the application by two textile fibre manufacturers for the addition of two new fibres to the aforementioned annexe 1.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of House on 26 February (COM(2001)783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the Adaptation to Technical Progress of the Directive on the Removal of Technical Barriers to Trade in Measuring Instruments and Methods of Metrological Control is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55213]

Ms Hewitt: The mandate of the committee is to consider changes needed to a number of directives on measuring instruments adopted subsequent to Council directive 71/316/EEC to bring them into line with technical developments. The committee has not met for many years. Consequently it has not been necessary to designate a UK representative, and there has been no cost to public funds.

Together with member states the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of the House on 28 February 2002 (COM(2001)783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of the directive on the removal of technical barriers to trade in electric materials used in an explosive atmosphere is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55374]

Ms Hewitt: It is my understanding that the hon. Member is referring to the Committee on the adaptation to technical progress set up under Article 6 of directive 76/117/EEC on the approximation of laws of the member states concerning electrical equipment for use in potentially explosive atmospheres. This committee has not met for several years because directive 76/117/EEC is being superseded by directive 94/9/EC and will be repealed on 1 July 2003 when directive 94/9/EC comes fully into force.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee on Defence against Obstacles to Trade which Affect the Market of the Community or a Non-member Country is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55399]

Ms Hewitt: The Committee on Defence against Obstacle to Trade is established under Council regulation (EC) No. 3286/94, for the purposes of consultations between member states and the Commission on complaints by Community enterprises, industries or individual member states of alleged breach of international trade rules by a third country resulting in adverse trade effects. As appropriate, the committee also considers the results of investigations which the Commission may undertake in relation to such complaints and any follow-up action it may propose to take with the country concerned. As provided for in the regulation, details of both the opening of any such investigations and of any commercial policy measures that may eventually be taken are published in the Community's Official Journal.

The committee has met on four occasions since 1 May 2001: representation is by a DTI official. It is not possible to calculate the annual cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council decision 1999/268/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of the Houses on 26 February (COM (2001)783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the Adaptation to Technical Progress of the Directive on the Removal of Technical Barriers to Trade in Cosmetics is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55217]

Ms Hewitt: The Committee on the Adaptation to Technical Progress of the Directives on the Removal of Technical Barriers to Trade in the Cosmetic Sector (CATP) was set up to deliver opinions on draft proposals relating to the safety of cosmetics put forward by the Commission. It also considers other issues submitted for information or an exchange of views. The CATP consists of representatives of member states with a representative of the Commission as chairman. The UK is represented at meetings by officials from the Consumer and Competition Policy Directorate of DTI. The CATP has met once in the past 12 months. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the Committee without incurring disproportionate cost. The main focus of the Committee's work of late has been consideration of the 26th Adaptation of the Cosmetics Directive in relation to ingredients which can/cannot be used in cosmetics.

Together with member States, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to 'simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission'.

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of House on 26 February (COM(2001)783Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Standing Committee for the Approximation of the Laws of the Member States Concerning Pressure Equipment is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55362]

Ms Hewitt: The mandate of the Standing Committee is contained in Article 7.2 of the Pressure Equipment Directive 97/23/EC. The provisions of this Article have not yet been put into effect so the committee has never met.

An informal 'Working Group on Pressure' has been convened, however, under the auspices of Article 17 of the Directive. The Commission chairs these meetings with a view, among other things, to developing guidelines in order to ensure that there is uniform interpretation of these measures throughout the European Union and also to ensure that any technical barriers to trade within the Single Market are removed. In the last 12 months this Committee has met on four occasions. Representation from the United Kingdom is led by officials from the Department of Trade and Industry with a technical expert from the Health and Safety Executive to provide technical advice. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the Committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

Items under consideration vary between meetings but usually include issues of standardisation in the field of pressure equipment and specific issues of interpretation of the Directive. As this is only an advisory committee without decision making power its work is handled at official level. My officials do, however, publish a record of each meeting which is available to any interested party inside and outside government upon application to officials in my Department and is also posted on our web-site.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of the House on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on Common Rules for Imports of Products from Third Countries is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55348]

Ms Hewitt: The mandate of this Committee is to cover, when necessary, in particular the terms and conditions of imports, import trends and the various aspects of the economic and commercial situation of specific products, and to discuss any required safeguards measures. It has met three times in the last four months to discuss the United States steel safeguards measures and the European Community response. This was the first time it had been convened in the last five years. A Department of Trade and Industry official represents the UK. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost. The Committee is currently continuing its consideration of the United States steel safeguards and the European Community response. Any European Community legislation resulting from this Committee is already subject to the Parliamentary scrutiny procedures.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February COM(2001)783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Advisory Committee for Implementation of the Community Market Access Strategy is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55396]

Ms Hewitt: The Advisory Committee for the Implementation of the Community Market Access Strategy is established under Council Decision (98/552/EC) for consultation among members states and the Commission to assist the Commission in its activities to implement the Council's market access strategy. It has met once in the last 12 months, with UK representation by a DTI official. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

Details of the Market Access Strategy, including how to access the EU Market Access Data Base, a key component of the Strategy and which the Commission are as a present priority endeavouring to make a more effective and more user friendly tool for traders, are available on-line at http://europa.eu.int/comm./trade/mkaccess/indexen.htm.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/268/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee on Conformity Assessment and Surveillance of the Telecommunications Market is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55356]

Ms Hewitt: The mandate of the Telecommunication Conformity Assessment and Market Surveillance Committee (TCAM) is contained in Articles 13, 14 and 15 of Directive 95/5/EC, The Radio Equipment and Telecommunications Terminal Equipment (RTTE) Directive. In particular, the Committee shall be consulted on matters covered by specified Articles of the Directive and shall express its opinion on draft measures submitted by the Commission. The Committee has met three times during the last 12 months. Items currently under consideration include the relation of the RTTE Directive with the Medical Devices Directive; coverage by the Directive of equipment containing an RTTE component; and market surveillance.

The UK representation on the Committee comprises officials from the Department of Trade and Industry and OFTEL, and a technical expert. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the Committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of the House on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on Common Rules for Imports of Products from Certain Third Countries is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55400]

Ms Hewitt: This Committee meets, when required, as part of the "Commercial Questions Group". Its mandate is to manage the policy on the EC's licensing control regimes for the import of non-textile products from non-market economies. The Group as a whole has met six times over the last year. A Department of Trade and Industry official represents the UK. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost. This Committee is currently considering the on-going EC policy on imports. Any EC legislation resulting from these Committees is already subject to the Parliamentary scrutiny procedures.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Standing Committee for the Approximation of the Laws of the Member States Relating to Lifts is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55360]

Ms Hewitt: The mandate of the Standing Committee is contained in Article 6.3 of the Lifts Directive 95/16/EC. In essence it is convened to consider matters of interpretation which are brought to its attention by member states. It has, however, only met in its capacity as an advisory committee. Officials of the European Commission chair these meetings with a view to providing advice based on consensus in order to ensure that there is uniform interpretation of these measures throughout the European Union and also to ensure that any technical barriers to trade within the Single Market are removed. In the last 12 months this Committee has met twice. Representation from the United Kingdom is led by officials from the Department of Trade and Industry with a technical expert from the Health and Safety Committee to provide technical advice. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the Committee without incurring disproportionate cost. paltems under consideration vary between meetings but usually include issues of standardisation and interpretation.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of the House on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Quota Administration Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55347]

Ms Hewitt: The mandate of this Committee is to manage the EC import licensing control system under the EC's Chinese non-textile imports regime. It has met twice over the last year. A Department of Trade and Industry official represents the UK. It is not possible to calculate the cost of its work to public funds without incurring disproportionate cost. This Committee is currently considering the management of the licensing regime for imports of certain Chinese non-textile products for 2003. Any EC legislation resulting from these committees is already subject to the parliamentary scrutiny procedures.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Standing Committee on the Approximation of the Laws of the Member States Relating to Machinery is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55368]

Ms Hewitt: The mandate of the Standing Committee is contained in Article 6.2 of the Machinery Directive 98/37/EC. It has, however, only met as an advisory committee. In essence it is convened to consider matters of interpretation which are brought to its attention by member states. The Commission chairs these meetings and delivers an opinion in order to ensure that there is uniform interpretation of the Directive throughout the European Union and also to ensure that any technical barriers to trade within the single market are removed. In the last 12 months this Committee has met twice. Representation from the United Kingdom is led by officials from the Department of Trade and Industry with a technical expert from the Health and Safety Executive to provide technical advice. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the Committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

Items under consideration vary between meetings but usually include issues of standardisation in the field of machinery and specific issues of interpretation of the Directive. My officials publish a record of each meeting which is available to any interested party inside and outside Government on request.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on Standardisation in the Field of Information Technology (SOGITS) is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55359]

Ms Hewitt: The mandate establishing SOGITS was set out in Council Decision 87/95/EEC of 22 December 1986. The Committee has not met for over two years and there are no issues under consideration at present. Discussions are currently taking place to reactivate this committee.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee on Implementation of the Multi-annual Programme for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship in particular, for small and medium-sized enterprises is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55353]

Ms Hewitt: The mandate of the Enterprise Programme Management Committee is to assist the European Commission in carrying out the measures and actions necessary for the implementation of the Multi-annual Programme for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship, in particular for SMEs. The work of the Committee includes agreeing the annual work programme and corresponding budget allocations, the criteria and content of invitations to tender exceeding Euro 100,000, and the performance indicators for evaluating the actions needed to achieve the programme's objectives.

The Committee meets four times each year for the duration of the programme. The UK is represented by an official from the European section of the Small Business Service. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the Committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

At its last meeting, the Committee looked at:

progress on the implementation of the work programme for 2001;

budgetary issues related to individual programme projects;

amendments to the work programme for 2002, in particular three new priority projects on environmental management systems, improved institutions for technology transfer to enterprises, and restructuring bankruptcy and a fresh start;

the opening of the programme to candidate countries.

The UK supports fully the purpose of the Multi-annual Programme for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship which aims to enhance growth and competitiveness, promote entrepreneurship, improve the regulatory and administrative framework, improve the financial environment for SMEs and provide easier access to Community support services. The programme is based on targeted financial measures and well-focused projects underpinned by the principle of exchange of good practice. It has the potential to help deliver some of the key aims of the European Small Firms Charter, the central plank for the development of enterprise policy in the European Union.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of the committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the Adaptation to Technical Progress of the directive on the removal of Technical Barriers to Trade in Protective Equipment and Systems for Use in Explosive Atmospheres is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55375]

Ms Hewitt: I understand that the hon. Member is referring to the Standing Committee set up under Article 6 of directive 94/9/EC on the approximation of the laws of the member states concerning equipment and protective systems intended for use in potentially explosive atmospheres. The mandate of the Standing Committee is contained in Article 6 of that directive. It is an advisory committee, which aims to provide advice based on consensus to facilitate a common interpretation of the directive throughout the European Union. Officials of the European Commission chair these meetings. During the last 12 months this Committee has met twice. Representation from the United Kingdom is led by officials from the Department for Trade and Industry, with a technical expert from the Health and Safety Executive. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the Committee without incurring disproportionate cost. Items under consideration vary from meeting to meeting, but include issues of interpretation and technical standardisation. Current issues include questions of scope and detailed application of the technical requirements of the directive.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of the House on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the

Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the Harmonisation of Credit and Insurance Provisions for Transactions with Medium and Long-term Cover is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55393]

Ms Hewitt: The Committee for the Harmonisation of the Main Provisions concerning Export Credit Insurance for Transactions with Medium and Long-term Cover is a comitology committee covering the work of the European Council Working Group on Export Credits.

Comitology procedures only exist for a very limited number of issues, and the Committee has had no reason to meet in the past 12 months.

If a meeting of the Committee was convened, the UK would be represented by our delegation to the Council Working Group comprising officials (usually numbering three) from the Export Credits Guarantee Department. The Council Working Group meets on a monthly basis with no meeting in August. Meetings last one or two days. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the Committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

The purpose of the Working Group is to develop policies within the EU which achieve a more level playing field on which all of our exporters can compete for business. The framework for these discussions is provided by the OECD arrangement on Officially Supported Export Credits, which constitutes the major body of international rules governing export credits for project exports.

The UK delegation reports back after each Working Group meeting with a note which is circulated widely within ECGD and around other interested Government Departments. Progress against ECGD's international objectives is regularly reported to the Export Guarantees Advisory Council and summarised in ECGD's annual report.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of the House on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Standing Committee on Technical Rules and Standards including Rules Relating to Information Society Services is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55365]

Ms Hewitt: The mandate of the Committee is contained in Articles 5 and 6 of directive 98/34/EC, as amended (the technical standards and regulation directive). In particular, the Committee shall express its opinion on the communications and proposals submitted to it by the Commission and must be consulted, for example, when the Commission is reviewing the operation of the system set up by the directive. The Committee has met three times during the last 12 months. On two occasions it met for part of the meeting in a specific composition to examine questions relating to information society services and twice it met with representatives of the European and national standards bodies in accordance with provisions of Article 6 of the technical standards and regulations directive. The United Kingdom representation on the Committee comprises officials from my Department and representatives of the British Standards Institution attend when the Committee meets with national standards bodies. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the Committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

The Committee regularly considers notifications by member states of draft technical regulations and proposals from the Commission to request the European standards institutions to draw up a European standard within a given time limit. Current issues also include:

(a) the introduction of a new technical regulations information system for communications between the Commission and member states;

(b) the possible participation of candidate countries in the technical regulations notification procedure;

(c) the confidentiality of detailed opinions made by the Commission or member states;

(d) initial discussions on a possible extension of the notification requirements to services other than information society services;

(e) formal objections from The Netherlands and the United Kingdom in respect of standards relating to gas appliances;

(f) progress of work relating to standards mandated in support of directives;

(g) follow-up of the Council resolution of 28 October 1999 on the role of standardisation in Europe.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the Adaptation to Technical Progress of the Directive on the Removal of Technical Barriers to Trade in Aerosol Dispensers is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55379]

Ms Hewitt: The Committee on the Adaptation to Technical Progress of the Directive on the Removal of Technical Barriers to trade in Aerosol Dispensers was set up to deliver opinions on draft proposals relating to the safety of Aerosol Dispensers put forward by the Commission. The UK is represented at meetings by officials from the Consumer and Competition Policy Directorate of DTI. The Committee has not met in the last 12 months. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the Committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

The main focus of the Committee's work of late has been consideration of appropriate test methodologies to assess the flammability of products expelled from aerosol dispensers.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to 'simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission'.

As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of the House on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Advisory Committee for the technical adaptation of the community procedure to improve the transparency of gas and electricity prices charged to industrial end-users is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55648]

Ms Hewitt: The Advisory Committee for the technical Adaptation of the community procedure to improve the transparency of gas and electricity prices charged to industrial end-users was set up to assist the Commission should any changes be made to the Annexes of the Directive (90/377/EEC), which deal with the methodology. This Committee has not met since 1996. Should the Committee meet in the near future it is envisaged that DTI officials would represent the UK.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of the House on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the harmonisation of national measures on the indication by labelling and standard product information of the consumption of energy and other resources by household appliances is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55646]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

Council Directive 92/75/EEC on the Indication by Labelling and Standard Product Information of the Consumption of Energy and Other Resources by Household Appliances is intended to enable the harmonization of national measures on the publication, particularly by means of labelling and of product information, of information on the consumption of energy and of other essential resources, and additional information concerning certain types of household appliances, thereby allowing consumers to choose more energy-efficient appliances. A Committee composed of representatives of member states and chaired by the Commission has been established to assist the Commission in the delivery of the requirements of this Directive.

The Committee has met four times in the last 12 months. The UK is formally represented on the Committee by officials from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The cost of attending this Committee over the last 12 months was approximately £3,000.

The main issues currently being considered by this Committee are the up-rating of energy labels for domestic cold appliances, a draft proposal for a Framework Directive on Minimum Energy Efficiency Requirements for End-use Equipment, the energy labelling of televisions and the review of Directive 92/75/EEC.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the

Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on the labelling of household appliances is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55649]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

There is no committee with responsibility for all the labelling issues which might arise in connection with household appliances. There is however a committee which is concerned with "the harmonisation of national measures on the indication by labelling and standard product information of the consumption of energy and other resources by household appliances

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the Adaptation to Technical Progress of the Directive on the Removal of Technical Barriers to Trade in Agricultural and Forestry Tractors is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55210]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The mandate of the Committee is set out in Articles 11 to 13 of Framework Directive 74/150/EEC, which, together with separate directives on components and systems, deals with the type approval of Agricultural and Forestry Tractors. The Committee's function is to deliver prompt adjustment, reflecting technical progress, of the technical requirements in the annexes to the Framework Directive and, unless otherwise provided for, to the provisions of the separate component and system directives. It has not met in the last 12 months. The UK representation is normally by officials of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. The annual cost to public funds would be restricted to staff time, their travel and subsistence costs.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001)783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the Adaptation to Technical Progress of the Directive on the Removal of Technical Barriers to Trade in Explosives for Civilian Uses is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55378]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

The remit of this committee is set out in Article 13 of Council Directive 93/15/EEC (harmonization of the provisions relating to the placing on the market and supervision of explosives for civil uses). This says that:

> "The Committee shall examine any matter concerning the application of this Directive raised by its chairman either on his own initiative or at the request of a representative of a member state."

The Committee has met once in the last 12 months, in December 2001. The UK representatives at the meeting were the Health and Safety Executive's Head of Mines, Quarries and Explosives Safety Policy Section and the Head of the GB Explosives Notified Body.

The secretariat is provided by the European Commission, which also pays a proportion of travel expenses. The costs to UK public funds are therefore the balance of the travel costs and the accommodation costs for the staff attending (less than £830 in total) and their salary costs.

The Committee is currently considering a number of issues where there are differing interpretations of the application of the Directive. These include the on-site mixing of explosives, the definition of pyrotechnics and the acceptability of manufacturer's test data.

HSE would seek to ensure that there was consultation on any proposals to amend the requirements of the Directive. Any changes which required new regulations, or amendments to regulations, would be subject to formal consultation and then approval by the Health and Safety Commission and by Ministers. The draft regulations would ultimately be laid before Parliament.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the Adaptation to Technical Progress of the Directive on the Removal of Technical Barriers to Trade in Motor Vehicles and their Trailers is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55211]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The mandate of the committee is set out in Article 13 of Framework Directive 70/156/EEC, which, together with separate directives on components and systems, deals with the type approval of motor vehicles and their trailers. The committee's function is to deliver prompt adjustment, reflecting technical progress, of the technical requirements in the annexes to the Framework Directive and, unless otherwise provided for, to the provisions of the separate component and system directives.

Since 1 May 2001, the committee has met four times. Officials from the Department's Vehicle Standards and Engineering Division represent the UK. The annual cost to public funds varies depending on the matters under consideration but is of the order of £5,000.

The next meeting of the committee is due to consider:

the EC's position concerning the adaptation to technical progress of several United Nations Economic Commission for Europe regulations on vehicle standards;

a Commission directive adapting to technical progress Council Directive 70/220/EEC relating to measures to be taken against air pollution by emissions from motor vehicles; and

a Commission directive adapting to technical progress Council Directive 97/27/EC relating to the masses and dimensions of certain categories of motor vehicles and their trailers.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001)783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Standing Committee on the Approximation of the Laws Relating to Construction Products is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55367]

Dr. Whitehead: I have been asked to reply.

The mandate of the Standing Committee on Construction (SCC) is to remove technical barriers to trade in construction products between member states in the European Economic Area (EEA). It has met three times in the last 12 months. The UK delegation to it consists of two Government officials from my Department and a representative from the UK construction industry. The costs for the attendance by the two Government officials to the two-day meetings in Brussels are approximately £3,000. The committee has an extensive work programme for the year 2002 to progress the internal market for construction products through CE marking. Among the items under consideration are:

Implementation of the CPD through agreeing technical specifications, notified bodies to carry out attestation procedures and market surveillance.

Enlargement including PECA-CPD implementation.

Competitiveness related issues.

Eurocodes.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Commission Document 5685/02).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the multi-annual Community programme to stimulate the establishment of the information society in Europe is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56733]

Ms Hewitt: The programme was originally known as STIMULIS (STIMULating the Information Society) but adopted the name PROMISE (PROMoting the Information Society in Europe) subsequently. The mandate of the Information Society Committee (also known as the PROMISE Management Committee) is to ensure that the European Commission implements the programme according to the requirements agreed with the Council and set out in Council Decision 98/253/EC of 30 March 1998. Essentially, this involves the approval of the annual work programme and the content of any Calls for Proposals, providing financial support of euro 200,000 (£125,000) or more to proposals, the terms of reference for external assessment and by budgetary adjustments between different parts of the programme. The committee has met twice over the past 12 months. The UK is normally represented by one DTI official.

It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

The items under consideration include the results of the benchmarking activities related to the eEurope initiative, identifying and disseminating best practice on Information Society activities, the allocation of the budget, an analysis of the result of the programme to date and approval of the 2002 work programme.

The programme was the subject of two Explanatory Memorandums; No. 12934/96 submitted by the DTI on 3 February 1997 covered the original proposal and No. 11421/97 covered the revised proposal. The programme underwent a mid-term review which was the subject of a further unsigned explanatory memorandum No. 10557–01 of 13 September 2001. The programme was then refocused towards eEurope activities, principally the benchmarking of national activities.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line

with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of the House on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Accounting Directives Contact Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56768]

Ms Hewitt: The Accounting Directives Contact Committee is mandated by European accounting directives to:

(a) facilitate, without prejudice to the provisions of articles 169 and 170 of the treaty, harmonised application of the directives through regular meetings dealing in particular with practical problems arising in connection with their application;

(b) advise the Commission, if necessary, on additions or amendments to the directives.

The committee is currently considering modernisation of the European accounting directives and their alignment with international accounting standards, and related issues.

The committee's role is merely advisory. Any proposals arising from its advice would be taken forward by the European Commission itself.

The committee has met twice over the last 12 months. The UK is normally represented by two officials from the Department's Company Law and Investigations Directorate and a departmental lawyer. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee on checks for conformity with the rules on product safety in the case of products imported from third countries is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56751]

Ms Hewitt: The mandate of the committee under Regulation (EEC) 339/93 is to assist the Commission by giving its opinion on measures adopted by the Commission in accordance with Article 9 of the regulation. The purpose of the regulation is to reduce the risk of unsafe products from third countries entering into free circulation in the Community.

The committee has not met in the last 12 months. The UK is represented on the committee by the Department of Trade and Industry and by Customs and Excise. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of the House on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783 Final). As part of this review, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agenda and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Ministerial Accommodation

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what publicly owned accommodation is made available to her in her official role; how many nights she has been in residence at each of these properties in the last 12 months; and what the total cost was of maintaining each of these properties in the last 12 months. [55098]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 9 May 2002]:* None. I refer the hon. Member to the replies given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1443W, and my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) on 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 599W and 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 91W.

Budget

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from business groups regarding the effect of the 2002 Budget on the *(a)* competitiveness and *(b)* productivity of UK businesses. [55907]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 15 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 661W.

Businesses and their representatives have welcomed the cuts in corporation tax, the tax exemption for substantial shareholdings and the new regime for giving tax relief for intangible assets, all of which contribute to the competitiveness of UK companies. Increased innovation and workforce training are both important components in improving productivity. Businesses have therefore also welcomed the large company tax credits for research and development, the additional details on the skills pilot schemes and the targeted support for smaller organisations to reach the IIP standard.

Enterprise Bill

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received regarding the new powers to be given to the Office of Fair Trading in the Enterprise Bill; and if she will list them. [57459]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department received 72 written responses to the White Paper "Productivity and Enterprise—A World Class Competition Regime" (Cm 5233) published in July 2001. The White Paper included discussion of the OFT's duties and powers.

The Department also received 49 written responses to the consultation paper "Proposed New Structure for the Office of Fair Trading" published in September 2001.

The Department subsequently received one representation on OFT's new powers from the Federation of Electronics Industry on 18 February 2002.

Temporary Staff

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost to her Department was of employing staff in *(a)* London and *(b)* the south-east from employment agencies in each year since 1997. [56513]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* The information at the disaggregated level requested is not held and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The Department maintains records on the total expenditure on employment agency staff only from 1998–99 onwards. The table shows details of this expenditure, which represents between 3 and 4 per cent. of staff costs for each respective year.

Outturn	*£million*
1998–99	7.2
1999–2000	7.7
2000–01	7.2
2001–02[1]	8.2

[1] Provisional

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 399W, what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of unpaid advisers who have assisted the work of her Department since June 1997 but are not included in the Cabinet Office's annual report 'Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews 2000–01'. [57040]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the right hon. Member to my answer of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 398–99W. Ministers in this Department have not appointed any unpaid advisers other than those accounted for in the list of task forces, reviews and other ad hoc advisory groups.

Freight Movement (Channel Tunnel)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations her Department has made to the European Commission in connection with the free movement of freight through the channel tunnel; and if she will make a statement. [57600]

Alan Johnson: The Commission has invoked the Free Movement of Goods Regulation in this case. They have kept the Department fully informed about their actions. The Government remains in close contact with them and with the French Government about the action that is required to resolve the problems affecting rail freight traffic through the channel tunnel.

Online Services

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the level of electronic access to the main basic public services; and if she will make a statement. [57552]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

Over half of all central Government services are now e-enabled. The latest Office for National Statistics data show that 3.84 million citizens use the internet to use or access Government services.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Sick Leave

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many days of sick leave were taken in her Department last year; how many related to employees suffering *(a)* stress and *(b)* other mental health problems; and what the cost was to her Department. [56483]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* The Cabinet Office publishes an annual report "Analysis of Sickness absence in the Civil Service". In the 2000 report for the Department for Culture Media and Sport the working days absence per staff year figures were:

Absence	
Certified sickness	3.9
Self-certification	2.2
Total	6.0
Staff years	404

Records are not maintained by DCMS which enable sick leave to be separately identified as work related. There is no known record of anyone having had a work-related injury.

DCMS is committed to meet targets arising from the Government's revitalising health and safety initiative, for reducing the number of working days lost due to sickness absence generally and due to work-related injuries and illness.

Work-related Illness

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many employees of her Department retired through work-related ill-health in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was to the Department. [56101]

Mr. Caborn: Records are not maintained by DCMS which enable ill-health retirements to be separately identified as work related. For DCMS there was one member of staff retired with a medical retirement certificate issued by the civil service pension scheme medical adviser for the last year. Benefits provided on medical retirement are as set out in the rules of the principal civil service pension scheme and laid before Parliament, and provide for an immediate payment of an enhanced pension and lump sum. Ill-health retirement expenditure is met centrally from the Civil Superannuation Vote. For the year ending March 2002, provisional expenditure met from the Vote was £310 million in respect of all civil services cases for which an ill-health pension has been awarded. These cases number approximately 67,000 and include those who have formerly been ill-health retired but who have now reached and exceeded the normal retirement age.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many claims for work-related illness were settled by her Department in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was in compensation. [56100]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* Records are not maintained by DCMS which enable sick leave to be separately identified as work related and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

DCMS has a legal obligation to provide a safe working environment for employees. The Department is committed to meeting targets for reducing the number of working days lost generally due to sickness absence and due to work related injuries and illness arising from the Government's revitalising health and safety initiative.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many days of sick leave were taken by employees in her Department in the last year for which records are available; what proportion of those were due to work-related illness or injury; and what the cost was to the Department. [56102]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The Cabinet Office publishes an annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service". The most recently published figures are for the calendar year 2000. For DCMS the working days absence per staff year figures were:

Absence	
Certified sickness	3.9
Self-certification	2.2
Total	6.0
Staff years	404

Records are not maintained by DCMS which enable sick leave to be separately identified as work-related. There is no known record of anyone having had a work-related injury.

DCMS is committed to meet targets arising from the Government's revitalising health and safety initiative, for reducing the number of working days lost due to sickness absence generally and due to work-related injuries and illness.

Sports Action Zones

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to establish another round of sports action zones; and if she will make a statement. [57923]

Mr. Caborn: Sport England has now begun the process of designating a further 18 Sport Action Zones. To ensure that the most needy areas of the country are supported in developing bids, regional development teams have been established in each region to oversee the submission of bids and to ensure that decision making is kept as close to local communities as possible. Each team will be taking a strategic view of its region's needs and will encourage and facilitate bids where realistic and discouraging those less so.

Explicit criteria against which bids will be assessed have been established that, among other things, will ensure that there will be at least one action zone in each region and that there will be zones of similar types to enable comparisons to be made. The factors which will be taken into account in designating the new zones will be the degree of deprivation and sporting need, the partnership arrangements and the presence of other complimentary initiatives in the area. Bidding for Action Zone designation is in two stages with the first stage due to be completed by 3 July and the second stage by 20 November leading to final decisions by Sport England by February 2003.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much was spent by her Department on paying pensions to retired employees of her Department in 2001–02; if she will estimate the corresponding amounts to be spent in *(a)* five years' time, *(b)* 10 years' time, *(c)* 20 years' time and *(d)* 30 years' time; if she will estimate in each case the proportion of such liabilities which will arise from (i) unfunded pension schemes and (ii) pre-funded pension schemes; and in the case of pre-funded schemes, if she will estimate the value of the corresponding pre-funded funds in each of these years. [57360]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* Civil servants are eligible for membership of an occupational pension scheme. The Cabinet Office is responsible for this occupational pension scheme—the principal civil service pension scheme (PCSPS), and pays the pensions of retired members of the scheme centrally.

English Heritage

Ms Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she intends to publish the report of the quinquennial review of English Heritage. [58525]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. and noble Friend Baroness Blackstone yesterday placed in the Libraries of both Houses copies of the report of the quinquennial review of English Heritage. The report is also available on-line at the DCMS website www.culture.gov.uk. The report affirms the value of English Heritage and its statutory functions. It also highlights a number of areas which need further work, in particular reviews of English Heritage's:

(1) property management function including consideration of alternative options for the management of its properties;

(2) national, regional and local roles leading to a new structure which will equip the organisation to deliver its statutory and leadership responsibilities in a cost-effective and consistent manner;

(3) research programme leading to the adoption of a targeted strategy linked to priorities for the sector as a whole.

English Heritage already has much work under way as part of its modernisation programme. My right hon. and noble Friend has therefore asked them to integrate the review's findings and recommendations into the process. DCMS and other interested Departments will work closely with English Heritage to ensure that the recommendations in the report are implemented quickly.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Convention on the Future of Europe

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the allocated budget is for entertainment for the Praesidium of the Convention on the Future of Europe; what representations he has made thereon; and if he will make a statement. [57896]

Peter Hain: Of the Convention's euro 10.5 million (approximately £6.49 million) budget (which includes administrative costs and travel expenses), euro 150,000 (approximately £92,700) has been set aside for 'representational expenses'. An inter-institutional agreement provides for regular reports on expenditure of the Convention to be provided to the institutions, including the Council.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will make a statement on his policy within the discussions on the Convention on the Future of Europe as concerns development of *(a)* the Common Defence Policy, with particular reference to existing provisions for possible development of communal defence, *(b)* Justice and Home Affairs matters, *(c)* the Common Foreign Policy, *(d)* extension of qualified majority voting, *(e)* repatriation of powers, *(f)* the establishment of a set determination of powers and *(g)* extension of Social Chapter material; [57884]

(2) if he will make a statement on his policy on discussions on *(a)* environmental issues, (b)(i) incorporation and (ii) extension of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, (c) treaty simplification, (d) introducing sunset clauses into EU legislation, (e) common fisheries policy, (f) common agricultural policy, (g) the role of national Parliaments, (h) implementation and development of subsidiarity, (i) fiscal harmonisation, (j) employment law, (k) education, (l) culture, (m) budgetary control, (n) election of Commissioners and (o) ratification through referendums in the Convention on the Future of Europe. [57861]

Peter Hain: We are in the early days of the Future of Europe Convention, which is currently in a 'listening phase'. Our overall objective is an EU which is better understood, more democratic and which delivers the benefits out citizens expect. Details of Convention discussions can be found at www.european-convention.eu.int.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on proposals he is seeking to include for discussion at the Convention on the Future of Europe for increased parliamentary participation in the legislative programme at European level. [57915]

Peter Hain: The Laeken Declaration noted the contribution of national Parliaments to the legitimacy of the European project. We wish to promote open debate about how this might be achieved.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his Department's planned role in publicising the *(a)* activities, *(b)* conclusions and *(c)* variety of opinions of the Convention on the Future of Europe. [57903]

Peter Hain: Discussions and all official documents of the Future of Europe Convention are in the public domain. Progress can be followed, and submitted documents can be consulted, via the Convention's website (http://european-convention.eu.int). The FCO website (www.fco.gov.uk) also provides information on the Future of Europe.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has *(a)* made and *(b)* received on the establishment of an agenda for discussions at the Convention on the Future of Europe. [57914]

Peter Hain: The Laeken Declaration, agreed by Heads of State and Government of all the member states, convened the Future of Europe Convention and established its agenda—"to consider the key issues arising for the Union's future development and try to identify the various possible responses".

European Union Institute for Security Studies

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of the European Union Institute for Security Studies. [57867]

Mr. Bradshaw: The European Union's Institute of Security Studies' main responsibility is to conduct academic research and analysis on issues related to the Common Foreign and Security Policy. Specifically, it produces and commissions research papers and arranges seminars. The Institute maintains a network of exchanges with other research institutes and think-tanks both inside and outside the European Union.

Eurozone

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) which states applying to join the EU have indicated *(a)* willingness and *(b)* desire for an opt-out, with respect to accession to the Eurozone; [57883]

(2) if he will make a statement on the obligations of applicant EU states with regard to accession to the Eurozone upon attaining membership. [57902]

Peter Hain: A candidate is not required to adopt the euro before acceding to the EU. Rather, upon accession, new EU member states will be granted a derogation from the adoption of the euro. Candidates have agreed to aim towards the adoption of the euro as an eventual objective and no candidate has requested an opt-out.

Zimbabwe Embargo

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when EC 310/2002, on the prohibition of export to Zimbabwe of items which could be used in internal repression, was first *(a)* tabled and *(b)* discussed in permanent Council committees. [57870]

Mr. MacShane: Discussions of EC Regulation 310/2002 began following the decision of 28 January 2002 by the General Affairs Council (GAC) of the European Union to implement targeted sanctions against Zimbabwe if the Government of Zimbabwe failed to act on specific EU concerns about Zimbabwe, such as political violence, election observers, and free internal media access.

The regulation imposing the embargo on the sale or supply of items which might be used in internal repression was submitted to the parliamentary scrutiny committees in draft on 12 February 2002.

The General Affairs Council agreed the regulation at its meeting of 18 February.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the nature of restraints permitted for export to Zimbabwe following EU sanctions agreement. [57874]

Mr. MacShane: EC Regulation 310/2002 of 18 February 2002 places inter alia an embargo on the sale or supply to Zimbabwe of equipment which might be used for internal repression. Annexe II of the regulation establishes a list of such goods to be subject to the embargo. These goods include "leg-irons, gang-chains, shackles and electric shock belts, specially designed for restraining human beings; except handcuffs for which the maximum overall dimension including chain does not exceed 240 mm when locked".

This embargo is in addition to the full scope arms embargo imposed by the Council Common Position (2002/145/CFSP).

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reason Annex II of EC 310/2002 of 18 February 2002 permits exports of bombs and grenades not other than those specially designed for military use; and if he will make a statement. [57871]

Mr. MacShane: EC Regulation 310/2002 of 18 February 2002 places inter alia an embargo on sale or supply to Zimbabwe of equipment which might be used for internal repression. Annex II of the Regulation establishes a list of such goods to be subject to the embargo. These goods include "bombs and grenades, other than those specially designed for military use, and especially designed components".

Export of bombs and grenades specially designed for military use are subject to the full scope arms embargo imposed against Zimbabwe by the Council Common Position (2002/145/CFSP).

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on paragraph I of Annexe II of EC 310/2002 in the context of Article 7. [57872]

Mr. MacShane: Article 7 of Regulation 310/2002 imposes an embargo on the sale or supply to Zimbabwe of equipment which might be used for internal repression as set out in Annexe II of that Regulation.

This embargo is in addition to the full scope arms embargo imposed by the Council Common Position (2002/145/CFSP). In the UK this is implemented by prohibiting the export of goods and technology on the Military List which forms Part III of Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, as amended.

Meetings With Embassy Staff

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the criteria are for meeting a British ambassador or commercial secretary by business people seeking endorsements in relation to commercial contracts. [37726]

Mr. Straw: It is part of every ambassador and commercial secretary's job to promote UK commercial interests. In determining whether to meet business figures seeking endorsements in relation to commercial contracts, diplomatic staff are expected to consider the benefit to the UK, including the effect on British commercial, economic and foreign policy interests.

Majority Voting

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times a decision has been taken by majority voting in the European Council this year. [57165]

Peter Hain: The European Council does not at present take decisions qualified majority voting (QMV), but agrees its conclusions by consensus.

Overseas Hotels

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the criteria are for booking overseas hotel accommodation for *(a)* Ministers, *(b)* officials and *(c)* special advisers when on publicly funded visits. [57833]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* Generally Ministers, officials and special advisers will be accommodated in a hotel identified by our diplomatic mission, often in consultation with the host country, as being a non-luxury, business hotel located relatively close to the mission and suitable for representational officers. In some countries, a second class of hotel is used for officials with no representational duties. During conferences the host nation may well limit delegations to particular hotels for security, protocol and logistical purposes.

Juan Carlos Gonzalez Leiva

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he will make to the Cuban authorities concerning the case of the imprisoned human rights campaigner, Juan Carlos Gonzales Leiva. [57812]

Mr. MacShane: We are aware of parliamentary and public interest in the case of Juan Carlos Leiva. We regularly raise human rights issues with the Cuban Government and we have raised this case with the Cuban MFA.

Lebanon

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met representatives from the Lebanon; when a minister next plans to visit that country; and if he will make a statement. [57851]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will meet the Lebanese Ambassador, His Excellency Jihad Mortada, at a lunch they are attending on 22 May hosted by the Council of Arab Ambassadors. The Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri's planned visit to the UK was postponed because of The Queen Mother's funeral. We hope that the visit will be reinstated soon.

I visited Lebanon on 24 July 2001 and had a number of meetings, including with the Prime Minister, the President (Emile Lahoud) and the Speaker of Parliament (Nabi Berri). I also met the Lebanese Minister responsible for Public Works and Transport (Muhammad Najib Miqati) in London on 5 April.

There are no current plans for Ministers to visit Lebanon.

Kashmir

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in Pakistan and India concerning recent attacks on Indian army personnel in Kashmir. [57641]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs telephoned his Indian counterpart, Jaswant Singh, shortly after he heard news of the 14 May attack in Jammu. The Secretary of State also issued a statement on 14 May condemning the attach and expressing his condolences to the relatives of those killed and to those injured. In the statement, he called on all countries in the region to condemn the attack.

Europe Day

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the budget was for Europe Day events signposted on the dedicated website; and if he will make a statement on the maintenance of political neutrality thereon. [57912]

Peter Hain: The total cost of the Europe Day event held at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 9 May is anticipated to be less than £23,000. All other events listed on the Europe Day website were self-funded.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Public Service Agreement commits the Government to promote increased support for and better understanding of the merits of European Union membership. The Europe Day event was a part of the Government's EU information campaign to raise awareness of our membership of the EU, the countries of the EU and the countries that will be joining.

Trans-EU Political Parties

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the state of developments for the funding of trans-EU political parties; and what his position is thereon. [57860]

Peter Hain: The Government strongly support the Commission's proposal for a statute to regulate the funding of European political parties, to make it more transparent. The conclusions of the Nice European Council in December ensured that in the future no money going to European political parties would be transferred, either directly or indirectly, to national political parties.

Information Moneys

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy towards the European Commission spending of information moneys in applicant states, with respect to impartiality. [57901]

Peter Hain: In the candidate countries for accession to the European Union, information activities are carried out by the European Commission's delegations. The overall strategy has been endorsed by the council and implementation on the ground takes place in full consultation with the national Government concerned as well as with the embassies of the member states in the relevant capital.

Departmental Website

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy towards monitoring public contributions to his Department's website. [57910]

Mr. MacShane: The guidelines for moderating public contributions to the FCO website are published on the site itself under "Acceptable Use Policy".

EU Information Campaigns

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a list of organisations external to the European Communities which receive Communities funding for information campaigns (budget lines under B3). [57893]

Peter Hain: Chapter B3 of the European Communities budget covers a wide range of activities including European Resource Centres, training for librarians, the SOCRATES programme, the Leonardo programme and promoting minority languages. Providing a full list of the several hundred organisations who receive funding for information initiatives could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mr. Hunter) of 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 196W, if he will list expenditure on his EU Information Campaign broken down by publication and project. [57888]

Peter Hain: The total cost to date of the EU information campaign for the financial year 2001–02 is £246,819.

Major EU information initiatives included:

	£
FCO website, Europe Day website and other new media initiatives	52,203
Opinion polls	25,477
Grants	40,000
Regional visits, display materials, consultancy research and other initiative costs (transport, accommodation etc.)	82,833

The cost of each publication follows:

	£
EU newsletter	5,377
Britain: a Champion of EU Enlargement booklet	8,758
Europe Day promotional flyers, posters and cards	5,057
"Heard about European Law?" booklet	2,244
"What has the EU ever done for us?" leaflet	450
"The EU: What's in it for you?" leaflet	880
The Stockholm European Council leaflet	1,458
"The European Treaties in under 300 words" leaflet	2,465
Information posters and flyers regarding the introduction of euro notes and coins	16,425
"The EU: Fighting Crime and Promoting Justice" leaflet	1,068
The Treaty of Nice leaflet	2,124

Liaison Officers

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 26 March, to the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Mr. Vaz), *Official Report*, column 815W, if he will list the pay grades of those liaison officers identified; and if he will identify companies involved. [57889]

Mr. MacShane: In accordance with good employer practice and under exemptions 8a and 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, it is not appropriate to release such information into the public domain.

Companies are not involved; liaison officers are employed on a freelance basis.

EU Directives

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many EU *(a)* directives and *(b)* regulations have been incorporated into UK law in each year since 1997. [57879]

Peter Hain: We estimate that the number of EU directives incorporated into EU law is as follows:

1997: 85;

1998: 109;

1999: 100;

2000: 91; and

2001: 83 (until end November).

It would require a disproportionate cost to compile the number of regulations incorporated over the same period.

Gibraltar

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the red lines which Britain will not cross in its negotiations with Spain on the future of Gibraltar under the Brussels Process; and if he will make a statement. [57550]

Peter Hain: Our objectives under the Brussels Process remain to preserve Gibraltar's way of life, establish greater self-government, deliver lasting practical benefits and a stronger economy, and secure a lasting agreement on sovereignty so that Gibraltarians can enjoy security for their way of life. Negotiations continue.

Chechnya

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the report of the Parliamentary ombudsman into the complaint received from the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) on behalf of Mrs. Louisa Petschi (Case No. C974/01) concerning his Department's handling of a news report received on Sunday 6 December 1998 about actions affecting British nationals held hostage in Chechnya. [58710]

Mr. Bradshaw: I welcome the fact that the ombudsman found no evidence of maladministration by officials in the way in which the decision to discount the report was taken, and therefore no basis for questioning the merits of that decision. However, in view of the possible confusion over the timing of the handling of the report by FCO officials, reflected in statements by Ministers at the time, the Permanent Under-Secretary, on the Ombudsman's recommendation, wrote to Mrs. Petschi and her Member of Parliament on 21 March to offer his apologies for the lack of clarity as to the sequence of events.

To the extent that this touches on the statement of the then Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central (Mr. Lloyd), to the House on 9 December 1998, *Official Report*, column 322, I wish to confirm that the Minister's answer reflected the judgment of officials at the time that the news report did not represent an advance warning of a rescue attempt. This remains our view.

Chemical Weapons

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the states that he described in his letter of 19 March to José Bustani as OPCW's main member states were. [58331]

Mr. Bradshaw: In this context, the 41 member states drawn from all regional groups represented on the Executive Council—the executive organ of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what complaints were made by the Chief Financial Officer of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in respect of the financial management of the organisation. [58320]

Mr. Bradshaw: There is no post with the title of Chief Financial Officer at the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). However, the former Director-General, as Chief Executive Officer of the OPCW Technical Secretariat did, on occasions, criticise the staff working under him in the financial areas of the Secretariat.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the differences between OPCS's main member states and José Bustani referred to by the Foreign Secretary in his letter to Mr. Bustani dated 19 March were. [58330]

Mr. Bradshaw: The differences between Mr. Bustani and states represented on the Executive Council of the OPCW, centred on the financial and administrative management of the organisation.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent complaints were made about the Chief Financial Officer to member states of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons in respect of the financial management of the organisation. [58307]

Mr. Bradshaw: There is no post of Chief Financial Officer at the Organisation for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). However, a number of complaints about the former Director-General—the Chief Executive Officer of the OPCW—were published by the United States. These mainly related to the failure to monitor expenditure in 2000, leading to a deficit; failure to explain financial problems arising in 2001; and presentation of unrealistically high budgetary bids.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what occasions Dame Rosemary Spencer made representations to José Bustani on behalf of Her Majesty's Government that were critical of his stewardship, or the direction, of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons during her period as ambassador. [58308]

Mr. Bradshaw: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer below (UIN 58306).

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what occasions the UK ambassador to the Hague made representations to José Bustani that were critical of *(a)* his stewardship and *(b)* the direction of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons prior to the latter's dismissal. [58306]

Mr. Bradshaw: The then British ambassador (Dame Rosemary Spencer) joined other major financial contributors in a call on Mr. Bustani, on 23 February 2001, to express our concern at his decision to apply major cuts to the verification programme. On 6 April 2001, the UK representative to the OPCW Executive Council took part in a similar call, urging a more co-operative approach, pressing for assurances that financial controls had been put in place to correct evident shortcomings, and requesting revision of Mr. Bustani's 2002 budget proposals. The UK representative on the Executive Council had made similar points in a private meeting with Mr. Bustani on 5 April 2001. The current British ambassador (Colin Budd) met with Mr. Bustani on 15 March 2002 to inform him that the UK believed that it would be in the best interests of the OPCW and the chemical weapons convention if he were to resign.

Middle East

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) when meetings have taken place since 1 April between members of his Department and *(a)* Israeli officials and *(b)* members of the Israeli diplomatic staff in the United Kingdom; what topics were discussed on each occasion; and if he will make a statement; [58295]

(2) when meetings have taken place since 1 April between members of the British diplomatic staff in Israel and Israeli officials; what topics were discussed on each occasion; and if he will make a statement. [58293]

Mr. Bradshaw: Officials in London and our embassy in Tel Aviv have regular, almost daily, contact with their Israeli counterparts. These cover a number of issues, but the Israeli-Palestinian crisis predominates. Contact with the Israelis is a key part of the international effort to secure progress in the peace process.

Delegations (Scottish Representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reason no devolved Administration Minister attended the 2425 European Union Council of Ministers meeting (General Affairs) on 13 May; which particular suggestions and matters of concern from the Scottish Executive were raised in their absence by the United Kingdom Government delegation; and what information and evidence was provided by his Department to enable post-council security by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [58305]

Peter Hain: Decisions on Ministerial attendance at Council meetings are taken on a case-by-case basis by the lead UK Minister. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I attended this meeting, representing all parts of the UK.

It is the responsibility of the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament to scrutinise the Scottish Executive's involvement in preparations for and follow-up to EU Council meetings. These arrangements are a matter for the Committee and the Scottish Executive. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office provides information to Scottish Executive officials as part of that process.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Child Sex Offenders

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will publish the protocols for cross-border information-sharing on child sex offenders and child abusers. [55286]

Jane Kennedy: The protocols currently being developed for information sharing on a variety of subjects including child sex offenders and child abusers will be confidential to the participating agencies. They have no plans to publish.

Motor Fuel

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many successful prosecutions there have been in each year since 1997 for smuggling motor fuel products into Northern Ireland; and what penalties were imposed. [54294]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

For the number of prosecutions each year since 1997 I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on 20 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 266W.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) which umbrella bodies registered with the Criminal Records Bureau do not charge a fee for processing applications for disclosures from volunteers; and if he will make a statement; [55450]

(2) what criteria the Criminal Records Bureau uses to define umbrella bodies as *(a)* open and *(b)* closed; [55449]

(3) if he will list by *(a)* region and *(b)* county the number of open voluntary sector umbrella bodies registered with the Criminal Records Bureau; [55452]

(4) what arrangements his Department has made to obtain information on the fees charged to process applications for disclosures by umbrella bodies registered with the Criminal Records Bureau. [55451]

Mr. Keith Bradley: An "open" umbrella registered body is an organisation in the public, private or voluntary sector that is prepared to countersign applications for higher level disclosures at the request of others outside their own circle or sector. A "closed" umbrella registered body is one that provides the countersignatory service to those within its circle or sector only.

Information is not kept as to the charging of fees by umbrella bodies, and there are no plans to collect such information. In guidance for umbrella bodies, the Criminal Records Bureau urges that any such charges are kept to a minimum. Those wishing to use the services of an umbrella body would be well advised to ask whether charges are made and, if so, compare charges.

As at 10 May 2002 the number of open voluntary sector bodies was as follows:

Open voluntary sector bodies

	Number
(a) By area	
East Midlands	7
Eastern	8
Greater London	6
Merseyside	1
Mid Wales	0
North East	5
North Wales	0
North West	6
South East	12
South Wales	0
South West	4
West Midlands	10
Yorkshire	2
(b) By county	
Buckinghamshire	2
Cumbria	1
Derbyshire	4
Dorset	2
Durham	1
East Sussex	1
Essex	4
Gloucestershire	1
Greater London	7
Greater Manchester	3
Hampshire	3
Hertfordshire	1
Humberside	1
Kent	4
Lancashire	2
Merseyside	1
Norfolk	1
Nottinghamshire	3
Shropshire	1
Somerset	1
South Yorkshire	1
Staffordshire	1
Suffolk	2
Teesside	2
Tyneside	2
Warwickshire	3
West Midlands	5
West Sussex	1

Sentences

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* detention and training orders and *(b)* referral orders have been imposed in each police force area in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [55854]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is contained in the table.

Statistics on detention and training orders for 2001 will be published in the autumn.

Offenders given detention and training orders or referral orders by police force area, 2000 and 2001, England and Wales

Police force	*Detention and training orders*[1,2]	*Referral orders*[3,4]
Avon and Somerset	67	—
Bedfordshire	53	—
Cambridgeshire	44	—
Cheshire	80	—
Cleveland	86	—
Cumbria	65	—
Derbyshire	86	—
Devon and Cornwall	22	—
Dorset	31	—
Durham	71	—
Essex	107	—
Gloucestershire	47	—
Greater Manchester	445	—
Hampshire	193	—
Hertfordshire	52	—
Humberside	72	—
Kent	114	—
Lancashire	139	152
Leicestershire	120	—
Lincolnshire	27	—
London, City of	—	—
Merseyside	193	—
Metropolitan police	738	115
Norfolk	27	—
Northamptonshire	29	—
Northumbria	158	—
North Yorkshire	81	—
Nottinghamshire	164	867

Offenders given detention and training orders or referral orders by police force area, 2000 and 2001, England and Wales

Police force	*Detention and training orders*[1,2]	*Referral orders*[3,4]
South Yorkshire	159	—
Staffordshire[5]	—	—
Suffolk	42	408
Surrey	27	—
Sussex	74	—
Thames Valley	132	415
Warwickshire	47	—
West Mercia	86	—
West Midlands	525	—
West Yorkshire	234	—
Wiltshire	35	436
Dyfed-Powys	10	—
Gwent	35	—
North Wales	60	—
South Wales	221	339
Total England and Wales	4,998	2,732

[1] Introduced 1 April 2000

[2] All areas, 1 April 2000 to 31 December 2000

[3] Piloted in seven areas from April 2000—to be introduced nationally from May 2002. Figures are approximate as orders made in August and September 2001 have been estimated.

[4] Pilot areas, 1 April 2000 to 31 December 2001

[5] Staffordshire police force were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust enough at a detailed level and have been excluded from the table.

Prison Service

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many Prison Service pay queries have been outstanding at the end of each month since July 2001; [55729]

(2) how many Prison Service personnel have been *(a)* incorrectly paid and *(b)* unpaid following the implementation of Payfact. [55728]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 13 May 2002]:* Payment of Prison Service personnel is handled by the Home Office Pay and Pensions Service. This service operates 28 payrolls for 69,000 employees. Of these over 40,000 are in the Prison Service. Up until now, the Pay Service has not kept figures for the number of Prison Service pay queries outstanding at the end of each month. However, ways of measuring the number of pay queries on a month by month basis are currently being developed and therefore this information will be available in the future.

Pay Service's priority must be to concentrate on paying personnel correctly, accounting for the disbursement of funds from the payroll and providing financial management information. Pay Service does not retain statistics specifically related to the number of people paid incorrectly or unpaid each month. However, the feasibility of doing so is currently being examined. It does retain statistics for the number of payments made outside payday, both for manually calculated payments and those made through the Payfact system. The figures provide a good indicator of where there are problems. The figures include the numbers of advances of overtime requested by individuals and advances of salary for new entrants; as such, they cannot be used to indicate the number of personnel who have been unpaid or paid incorrectly each month.

Month	*Number of prison service personnel*	*Combined total of manual payments and advances*
2001		
July[1]	45,024	219
August	46,943	588
September	45,074	953
October	45,551	780
November	46,358	1,185
December	44,870	737
2002		
January	45,148	648
February	45,609	1,001
March	45,408	636

[1] Date from when Payfact went live.

Court Escapes

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people escaped from a court in the United Kingdom in each of the last three years. [56298]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Information relating to Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for my right hon. Friends the Secretaries of State for Scotland (Helen Liddell) and Northern Ireland. (Dr. John Reid).

Drink Driving

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were convicted of drink driving offences and ordered to retake their driving tests in the last 12 months by courts in England and Wales. [56296]

Mr. Keith Bradley: The number of people ordered to retake their driving test following conviction for drink driving offences for the year 2000 (latest available) was 665.

Juvenile Detention

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what progress has been made with the Youth Justice Board's review of methods of physical control and restraint in juvenile secure accommodation; [56158]

(2) when the physical control and care methods which are used in secure training centres will be introduced uniformly across the juvenile secure estate. [56159]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) commissions and purchases secure accommodation for juveniles from the prison service, private sector and local authority secure children's homes, and sets and monitors standards.

During the first six months of 2000, the YJB reviewed the control and restraint methods used in the local authority secure children's homes where it places young people. It concluded that it would be inappropriate to prescribe one method across all homes because of variations in size, ratio of welfare to criminal justice placements, and age groups. However, through its contracting arrangements the YJB requires homes providing criminal justice placements to use the control and restraint methods approved and specified by the Department of Health for use in that particular home.

The board does not plan to extend the physical control and care methods used in secure training centres (STCs) to the rest of the juvenile secure estate for essentially similar reasons. Custodial facilities vary significantly in size, age groups, staff/trainee ratios and individual operational circumstances. But all facilities operate to the governing principle that their control and restraint methods should minimise the risk of injury to the young person, staff, and other residents.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many detention centres for children aged 12–15 he plans to build; in what circumstance children will be referred to the new detention centres; who will run the new detention centres; what activities will take place within them; and if he will make a statement. [52149]

Beverley Hughes: The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales (YJB) is responsible for commissioning and purchasing secure accommodation for juveniles from the prison service, private sector and local authority secure children's homes, and for setting and monitoring standards.

The YJB began a building programme in March 2001 to provide 400 new independent sector secure training centre (STC) places by 2005. These places will result from the expansion of two of the existing STCs, Rainsbrook and Medway, and the creation of five new STCs in areas of shortfall across England and Wales. The new STCs will be operated by private providers under private finance initiative contracts managed by the YJB in the same way as the existing centres. In addition, all STCs are governed by the secure training centre rules 1998.

The majority of young people detained in STCs are those sentenced to a detention and training order. However, STCs may also accommodate remandees and those who are subject to detention under s90 or s91 of the Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000 for murder and other specified serious offences.

The aim is to provide a safe and secure environment where young people have structured, individually tailored training plans. These include 25 hours a week of education; one hour a day to tackle offending behaviour; regular practical tuition in social and life skills; and the opportunity through award schemes and constructive leisure time to develop new interests both in custody and upon transfer to the community. Regular contact with family and friends is encouraged and weekly family visits are funded by the YJB.

Prison Deaths

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support is provided by his Department to the families of prisoners who have died in Her Majesty's prisons. [56854]

Beverley Hughes: Prison service practice seeks to provide support to the family of the deceased in a number of ways. These include the provision at an early stage of the factual details of the circumstances of the death; an offer of a visit to the prison; and a letter of condolence from the governor of the prison which will include the notification of a named contact point at the prison.

Prisons also forward to families a leaflet that contains details of INQUEST (an independent support group) who are available to offer advice and support; the prison may offer, where appropriate, to make a contribution to the payment of funeral services; and any personal property is handed over.

Following completion of an investigation into the death, the investigating officer offers to meet with the family and disclose the investigation report to them, with the coroner's consent, in advance of the inquest.

Juvenile Crime

Mr. Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of those convicted of criminal offences against young people were themselves young people in each of the last three years. [55045]

Mr. Keith Bradley *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* In 1998 and 1999, 10 per cent. of those convicted of criminal offences against young people where the age of the victim is known from the description of the offence were themselves young people. In 2000 the figure was 9 per cent.

Statistics for 2001 will be published in the autumn.

HMP Brixton

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the terms of reference are of the Review of Deaths in Custody in HMP Brixton; who has been appointed to conduct this review; when he expects a report; and if he will lay the report before the House. [57205]

Beverley Hughes: The Area Manager for London has asked the Governor of Wandsworth prison to conduct the review. The final report is due by mid-August 2002. I will place a copy of the report in the Library, subject to constraints of security and confidentiality.

The terms of reference are to review and report:

1. The profiles of all the prisoners who have died or self harmed at Brixton since 1998 to establish any common themes or if particular groups of prisoners present a higher than normal risk.
2. The profiles of all prisoners who have registered any complaints during the last two years to the race relations liaison officer, via the request/complaint procedure or by any other means and the results of any subsequent investigations.
3. The profiles of prisoners over the same period who have undergone adjudications, segregation, control and restraint (C&R) removal or have had injuries registered on F213 forms.
4. The nature and number of staff grievances during the last 12 months and any common themes.
5. Any examples of best practice evident at Brixton.
6. Any other relevant matters that come to light during the course of inquiries.

Prison Statistics

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what estimate he has made of the *(a)* capacity of the English prisons system and *(b)* the number of actual prisoners in the English prisons system in each year since 1980–81; [56221]

(2) how many people have been in prison in England in each reporting period since 1979; and if he will make a statement. [56235]

Beverley Hughes: I have placed in the Library tables showing the population in prisons in England and Wales from January 1979 to March 2002, the In-use Certified Normal Accommodation (uncrowded capacity), and the population in prisons in England from January 1989 to March 2002 (the latest data available).

Prisoners

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what proportion of the prison population in *(a)* HMP Brixton and *(b)* England and Wales are non-literate or at severe disadvantage as a result of their literacy skills; what measures are being taken to address this disadvantage; and what targeting is in place to address those groups disproportionately affected by non-literacy. [57204]

Beverley Hughes: 40 per cent. of prisoners screened for basic skills at Brixton prison last year were found to be non-literate, and a further 43 per cent. were found to have serious literacy problems. This compares with 24 per cent. of non-literate prisoners nationally and a further 56 per cent. with serious needs. In addition to screening tests we will be introducing a diagnostic assessment for basic skills, and will fund purpose built or modified accommodation in local prisons to support assessment. We will then expect prisons to ensure that identified needs are addressed in an appropriate way, including support for prisoners with learning difficulties. Our basic skills strategy, which includes the widening of education targets at national and establishment level, is ensuring that we can address needs at all levels. New funding for classrooms adjacent to workshops will help to integrate basic skills into other prison activities. And we will ensure that teachers and trainers in prisons have the same access to training as their mainstream colleagues including in the new curriculum standards for English for Speakers of Other Languages.

Asylum Seekers

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to questions refs 54013 and 54019, what happened to those asylum seekers from Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Romania from 1997 to 2001 who were not granted asylum, granted extended leave to remain, or had their application refused. [56447]

Angela Eagle: It is not possible to determine how many persons, refused asylum from 1997 to 2001, have subsequently appealed and/or been removed, and/or left the country voluntarily. This information, where available, could be obtained only by examination of individual case files at disproportionate costs.

The available information is given in the tables. Appeals and removals do not necessarily relate to decisions made in 1997 to 2001.

Asylum appeals and removals in the United Kingdom, for nationals of Slovakia[1,2]

Principal applicants

	Appeals sent to the IAA	Total appeals determined	Appeal outcomes Allowed	Appeal outcomes Dismissed	Appeal outcomes Withdrawn	Removals[3]
1997	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	120
1998	90	125	5	80	40	240
1999	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2000[4]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2001[4,5,6]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	25

n/a = not available

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 5.

[2] Removals do not necessarily relate to appeals dismissed in the same period.

[3] Includes persons departing 'voluntarily' after enforcement action had been initiated against them, and may include some persons leaving under Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes run by the International Organisation for Migration.

[4] Provisional figures, subject to change.

[5] April to September.

[6] Removals figures for April to September are estimated.

Asylum appeals and removals in the United Kingdom, for nationals of the Czech Republic[1,2]

Principal applicants

	Appeals sent to the IAA	Total appeals determined	Appeal outcomes Allowed	Appeal outcomes Dismissed	Appeal outcomes Withdrawn	Removals[3]
1997	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	110
1998	105	130	5	100	25	170
1999	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2000[4]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2001[4,5,6]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	425

n/a = not available

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 5.

[2] Removals do not necessarily relate to appeals dismissed in the same period.

[3] Includes persons departing 'voluntarily' after enforcement action had been initiated against them, and may include some persons leaving under Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes run by the International Organisation for Migration.

[4] Provisional figures, subject to change.

[5] April to September.

[6] Removals figures for April to September are estimated.

Asylum appeals and removals in the United Kingdom, for nationals of Romania[1,2]

Principal applicants

	Appeals sent to the IAA	*Total appeals determined*	*Appeal outcomes*			*Removals*[3]
			Allowed	*Dismissed*	*Withdrawn*	
1997	340	540	5	490	45	305
1998	470	665	5	620	45	335
1999	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2000[4]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
2001[4,5,6]	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	235

n/a = not available

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest 5.

[2] Removals do not necessarily relate to appeals dismissed in the same period.

[3] Includes persons departing 'voluntarily' after enforcement action had been initiated against them, and may include some persons leaving under Assisted Voluntary Return Programmes run by the International Organisation for Migration.

[4] Provisional figures, subject to change.

[5] April to September.

[6] Removals figures for April to September are estimated.

Information on asylum appeals and removals is published quarterly. The next publication will cover the period up to March 2002, and will be available from 30 May 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Contraception

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent efforts his Department has made to make access to contraception easier, cheaper, and provided with relevant advice. [56266]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

Contraceptives are available free of charge from the national health service on prescription. One of the aims of the Sexual Health and HIV Strategy, which was published for consultation in July 2001, is to improve access to contraception and to advise on sexual health. In addition, we have also provided funding to 14 areas to enable them to develop schemes for the free NHS supply of emergency contraception in pharmacies using a patient group direction.

The Government's Teenage Pregnancy Strategy recognises the importance of helping young people resist peer pressure to have early sex, while seeking to ensure that those who are sexually active have easy access to high quality contraceptive advice. A series of guidance notes have been issued to local teenage pregnancy co-ordinators on improving contraceptive and advice services for young people. Local co-ordinators have audited youth contraceptive services in clinics and general practice against these criteria for effective services in order to identify gaps in service provision and to plan improvements. We are also working closely with the Royal College of General Practitioners and the Royal College of Nursing to improve young people's access to contraceptive advice within general practice.

Teenage Pregnancies

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions have taken place with *(a)* religious groups and *(b)* youth organisations to agree a strategy to reduce teenage pregnancies. [56267]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

Development of the teenage pregnancy strategy was informed by consultation with individuals and organisations representing both young people and a wide range of faiths.

To ensure ongoing dialogue with faith groups during the implementation of the strategy, the teenage pregnancy unit has established an inter-faith forum involving individuals and organisations from diverse faiths. The forum meets twice a year.

The teenage pregnancy unit has established a national young people's forum to advise on implementation, which meets three times a year, and undertakes targeted consultations with specific groups of young people. The unit also works closely with voluntary sector organisations representing the interests of young people through its forum for non-statutory organisations.

Local teenage pregnancy strategies, developed for each top tier local authority area, are also actively involving young people and the wider community. Guidance on involving young people was published and distributed to local teenage pregnancy co-ordinators in 2001. A resource is currently being developed for local teenage pregnancy co-ordinators on working with those from different faiths and cultures, which will be published in the autumn.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what has been done since 1997 to reduce the number of teenage pregnancies in the UK. [56265]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

After research by the social exclusion unit into the complex causes of teenage pregnancy, a comprehensive, cross-Government teenage pregnancy strategy was launched in 1999. This sets a target to halve the under-18s conception rate by 2010 and aims to increase the participation of teenage parents in education and training to reduce their long term risk of social exclusion.

The strategy is informed by the best available evidence of what works. This encompasses a multi-faceted approach to help young people resist peer pressure to have early sex, improve sex and relationship education, increase access to effective contraception and sexual health services and support parents in talking to their children about sex and relationship issues.

The teenage pregnancy unit has been established to implement the strategy. Every top tier local authority area has a local teenage pregnancy strategy and reduction target to underpin the delivery of the national strategy. Local strategies are managed by a teenage pregnancy partnership board, with a lead teenage pregnancy co-ordinator and representation from the local authority, primary care trusts and other key local partners, including the voluntary sector. Over £60 million has been invested across Government during the first three years of implementation. Early signs of the strategy's impact are encouraging with figures for 2000 showing a 6.2 per cent. reduction from 1998 in both under-18 and under-16 conception rates.

Almost all of the strategy's action points have now been implemented but further work needs to be done to ensure that early progress is sustained. The strategy's independent advisory group has published its first annual report setting out 49 recommendations for further action to underpin implementation of the strategy and delivery of the targets. The Government will publish their response to this report in the summer.

Action on teenage pregnancy relating to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland is a matter for the devolved Administrations.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Access to Information

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the administrative manuals and internal guidance which her Department has made public as required by Part 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information; and which of these were first made available after May 1997. [45399]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Since the Department was constituted in June last year, no internal guidance or administrative manuals have been published.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the mandate of the Leonardo da Vinci Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56719]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The purpose of the Leonardo da Vinci Committee is set out in the Council decision 1999/382/EC of 26 April 1999, which established the second phase of the Leonardo programme. The Leonardo Committee has met three times over the last 12 Months. Travel expenses were met from Commission resources. Two officials from the UK attend the meetings. The subsistence cost incurred by this Department was £1,560.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com(2001)783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56720]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Advisory Committee on Vocational Training (ACVT) was established by Council Decision no. 63/266/EEC dated 2 April 1963 which laid down general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy across the EU. Its purpose is to offer advice and submit opinions to the European Commission on vocational training policy which the Commission is obliged to take account of. It has met twice in the last 12 months.

The UK is represented by two officials from the Department for Education and Skills, the Trade Unions Congress (TUC) and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI).

Costs to UK public funds were limited to the officials' expenses, approximately £2,660, less any reimbursements provided by the European Commission.

At its next meeting, ACVT is considering a number of vocational training and related items.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com(2001)783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Stewart Report

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress she has made on implementing the Stewart report recommendations on the beam of greatest intensity from mobile phone masts and schools on their grounds. [57095]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* We have agreed with the network operators that they will provide schools, on request, with information on the level of intensity of radio frequency radiation from a mast on or near their premises. Schools and parents can then make an informed decision as to whether to give their agreement to that operation. We have informed local education authorities and schools of this.

Sick Leave

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many days of sick leave were taken by *(a)* primary and secondary school teachers and *(b)* other staff in those schools in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was. [56059]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* In the calendar year 2000, full-time teachers in the English maintained schools sector took 2,392,400 days of sick leave[1], and part-time teachers in the English maintained schools sector took 301,970 days of sick leave. These figures cannot be broken down by phase.

Provisional 2001 data will be published on 30 May 2002.

The estimated cost of this lost teacher time[2] is £430 million.

The Department does not collect information on sick leave taken by non-teaching staff in schools.

School Exclusions

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the financial consequence is to a secondary school of excluding a pupil. [57499]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Pupil Retention Grant (PRG) is part of the Social Inclusion: Pupil Support (SIPS) grant which is available to tackle disaffection in schools and to provide education outside school. It is available only to secondary pupils.

PRG has given secondary schools significant additional resources to tackle poor behaviour, while at the same time ensuring that when pupils are excluded LEAs have the resources they need to provide alternative education. In 2001–02, we increased the PRG to £122 million from £100 million in 2000–01. LEAs must allocate the PRG direct to schools.

Where permanent exclusion has taken place, a child will still need to be educated. In these cases the exclusion will trigger the transfer of at least some of the PRG from the school to the LEA as a contribution to the education of that child. The LEA has flexibility about the amount it will seek to transfer back from the school that it negotiates with head teachers. On average, between £3,000—£6,000 will be deducted from the excluded school's budget allocation per excludee.

The LEA can then use the PRG to provide education outside of school and/or support a reintegration package at a new school, helping to ensure that full-time education really does become a reality for excluded children and young people. Schools accepting pupils previously excluded from other schools should therefore benefit from these additional funds. This procedure follows the principle introduced by the last Government of money following the excluded pupil.

Truancy

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many parents have been prosecuted in each of the last 10 years for failing to send their children to school; and what the average fine was for parents who have been successfully prosecuted and fined. [57505]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on 7 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 90W.

After School Clubs

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* after school and *(b)* holiday clubs have been (i) closed, (ii) established and (iii) supported by funding from her Department on the Isle of Wight in each year since 1997. [57538]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The information is not available in the form requested, statistics are gathered in the form of the number of places rather than the number of clubs (as the size of clubs varies considerably).

Since April 1999 local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs) have provided information on all the new child care places that have been established and all those that close within their local area. Between April 1999 and December 2001, Isle of Wight EYDCP has reported the creation of 515 out of school places and 202 holiday only places. During the same period the EYDCP reported the closure of 45 out of school places. The year on year breakdown is set out in the table.

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*April to December 2001*
New places			
Out of school[1]	270	138	107
Holiday only	42	44	116
Closed places			
Out of school[1]	0	0	45
Holiday only	0	0	0

[1] The data on out of school places includes before and after school places and all year round provision.

Detailed information prior to April 1999 is not available.

Funding for out of school and holiday clubs is provided by the New Opportunities Fund. Since April 1999 the New Opportunities Fund has made seven awards totalling £289,262 specifically to support out of school child care projects in the Isle of Wight.

In addition infrastructure support funding is provided by the Government through the child care grant made available to EYDCPs who are tasked with providing and supporting good quality, affordable child care in their respective areas. The annual child care grant allocations to Isle of Wight EYDCP since April 1999 are set out in the table.

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[1] Sickness absence on working days, whether paid absence or not, of teachers with permanent contracts or contracts of over one month, including teachers without QTS. The number of days taken as sick leave includes all periods of sick leave.

[2] The cost of a teacher's working day is calculated using estimates of teacher salaries and additional teacher costs in 2000.

	£
	Child care grant allocation
1999–2000	99,400
2000–01	124,740
2001–02	299,650

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* after school and *(b)* holiday clubs achieved financial sustainability within three years; and what steps she is taking to ensure that new clubs are not set up at the expense of those already in existence. [57539]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships have been given the target of ensuring that a minimum of 80 per cent. of all New Opportunities Fund sponsored out of school child care places remain viable and available five years after being established. The Fund has rigorous assessment procedures in place to ensure that funded projects have sound plans to ensure long term sustainability. The current position is that 90 per cent. of places opened are still in operation, irrespective of whether they are still receiving funding support, and we are well on track to achieve our sustainability target.

The available figures for sustainability do not separately identify after school and holiday clubs.

EYDCPs are responsible for planning and co-ordinating child care in their areas; ensuring that available funding is targeted in locations where there is a shortfall in provision to avoid conflicting with existing provision: and keep provision and demand under continuous review.

Nursery Provision (Lancashire)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many nursery places have been available in Lancashire in each year since 1997. [57282]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The available information is shown in the table.

Table 1: Number of places at day nurseries[1]
England and Lancashire local authority area 1997–2001

Position as at 31 March each year	*England*	*Lancashire local authority area*
1997	193,800	[2]9,900
1998	223,000	[3]—
1999	247,700	8,800
2000	264,200	9,600
2001	285,100	10,900

[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

[2] Includes Blackburn and Darwen and Blackpool.

[3] Not available.

The figures are as returned by local authorities. Figures for Lancashire local authority area for 1999–2001 are not directly comparable with 1997 because they do not include Blackburn and Darwen and Blackpool local authority areas.

The latest figures on day care facilities in England were published by my Department in Statistical Bulletin 08/01 "Children's Day Care facilities at 31 March 2001" in October 2001, a copy of which is available from the Library. An electronic copy of this publication is also available on my Department's web-site www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics.

The increase in the number of day nursery places ensures that a wide choice of child care provision is available to parents. We expect this trend to continue with the creation of 45,000 places in neighbourhood nurseries (equivalent to 900 new 50 place nurseries) in disadvantaged areas.

Faith-based Academies

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills where an academy is created involving *(a)* the Church Schools Company and *(b)* any other faith-based organisation, whether the school will be allowed to select and dismiss teachers in accordance with sections 58 to 60 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998. [58106]

Mr. Timms: Employment law allows any school with a religious character—whether maintained or independent—to take into account in appointing or promoting teaching staff, their ability to promote the religious character of the school. Where an academy has a religious character, we would consider proposals to include provisions in the funding agreement analogous to the provisions of sections 58 to 60 of the School Standards and Framework Act as these apply to aided schools with a religious character. This would include the parts of sections 58–60 which allow governing bodies of maintained schools to dismiss teachers appointed to give religious education in accordance with the character of the school, where they fail to do so efficiently and suitably.

Teaching Assistants

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to ensure that teaching assistants receive adequate ongoing training throughout their careers. [57290]

Mr. Timms: Induction training was introduced for newly-recruited teaching assistants in 2000, funded by the DfES. National Vocational Qualifications, based on the new National Occupational Standards for Teaching Assistants, are expected to be in place later this year. Training opportunities are being considered as part of wider work on the development of new roles and career structures for teaching assistants and other school support staff, which will be the subject of consultation later this year.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to introduce a career structure for teaching assistants. [57287]

Mr. Timms: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) on 29 April 2002, *Official Report,* columns 579–80W.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she has taken to encourage more people to enter into a career as a teaching assistant. [57288]

Mr. Timms: A working party involving representatives of teachers and support staff, the local government employers and other Government bodies, is currently considering the roles, responsibilities and career development of teaching assistants and other school support staff. Proposals for improving career structures for support staff will be published in a consultation paper later this year. Provisional figures for January 2002 show that the number of teaching assistants in maintained schools is 103,624, an increase of 61 per cent. since 1998, and that the Government's target for increasing the number of school support staff by 20,000 in this Parliament was exceeded by 6,000, four years early.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she expects the School Workforce Remodelling Working Party to report. [57289]

Mr. Timms: The School Workforce Remodelling Working Party was not set up to work towards a report. Rather, it was established last December so that key stakeholders could meet to consider issues raised by the Secretary of State in her Social Market Foundation pamphlet—"Professionalism and Trust".

The Working Party's debates have been wide-ranging, from the future deployment of teaching assistants through to reforms to teachers' contracts to deal with workload issues and the status of the teaching profession. The Working Party will shortly be debating the report on teacher workload from the School Teachers' Review Body which we published on 8 May.

SCOTLAND

National Insurance Contributions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the reasons were for the delay in answering the question from the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight on budget changes to employers' national insurance contributions tabled on 22 April, ref: 52079. [58333]

Mrs. Liddell: An oversight by my parliamentary branch.

TREASURY

EU Energy Tax

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 22 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 94W, on what dates since June 2001 *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* officials have met their EU counterparts to discuss the proposed EU energy tax. [53069]

Mr. Boateng: The proposed energy products directive has been discussed at meetings of the Council of Economic and Finance Ministers (ECOFIN) taking place on 5 June, 22 September and 13 December 2001 and associated preparatory meetings of permanent representatives (COREPER).

The Financial Questions Group, a working group of officials, has discussed proposals for the energy products directive. It has met on 17 July, 18 September, 23 October and 27 November 2001, and 14 February, 7 March and 17 April 2002.

Beer Duty

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on how many European Union states apply a reduced rate of duty on beer for small brewers; and on which states apply the reduced rate up to the maximum production level of 200,000 hectolitres allowable under EU law. [55600]

Mr. Boateng: Seven other member states apply reduced rates of duty based on brewers' production levels. Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg and Portugal offer a degree of relief up to the maximum production level allowable under EU law.

Oil and Gas Industry (Taxation)

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will begin consultation on his proposal to abolish royalty tax on the oil and gas industry; and how long the consultation period will last. [57441]

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the timetable is for reviewing the royalty tax on oil revenues. [57300]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government will publish a consultation paper shortly.

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what research he has commissioned on the effect of the supplementary charge and 100 per cent. first year capital allowances on expected monetary values of oil and gas assets and investments in the UK; [57442]

(2) what assumptions about future levels of investment in the UK by the oil and gas industry underlie his estimates of the additional revenue raised from the supplementary charge on corporation tax. [57436]

Dawn Primarolo: A full analysis was made of reform's effect on investment. The Government examined the impact on all investment, exploration and appraised development projects that had already commenced, probable and possible developments on new fields that had already been discovered, and incremental developments of fields already in production.

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the additional revenue that will be raised from the supplementary charge on the oil and gas industry between 2006 and 2010. [57437]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government do not publish such estimates. The overall impact of the Budget measures are taken into account in the forecasts of the economy and public finances as set out in the Financial Statement and Budget Report.

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish the analysis of the effect of changes in taxation of the oil and gas industry on *(a)* investment, *(b)* exploration and appraisal and *(c)* developments referred to in the oral statement by the Economic Secretary of 9 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 362. [58008]

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what study he has made of the effect on the *(a)* timing and *(b)* number of North sea oil and gas projects of tax changes introduced in the Budget. [58164]

Dawn Primarolo: A full analysis was made of reform's effect on investment. The Government examined the impact on all investment, exploration and appraisal development projects that had already commenced, probably and possible developments on new fields that had already been discovered, and incremental developments of fields already in production. Such information is commercially sensitive and it would be inappropriate to make it public, as provided for in exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations he has received from non-UK oil companies operating in the North sea on the effects of preventing companies from claiming funding costs against profits under the Budget tax changes on their overall liability for tax. [58165]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have received a number of representations from a variety of organisations regarding the Budget.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the effect of the decision not to allow financing costs against profits when assessing the 10 per cent. budget tax levy on North sea profits. [58166]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government keep all taxes under review.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Francois: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the effect which corporation tax changes announced in the Budget of 2002 will have on UK small businesses which are *(a)* incorporated and *(b)* unincorporated. [57969]

Dawn Primarolo: As set out in Budget 2002 cutting the corporation tax starting rate and the small companies rate will benefit around 485,000 smaller companies. An average small company will save around £700 a year.

Non-domiciled Tax Status

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the review of non-domiciled tax status; who is leading this review; and what its remit is. [56227]

Dawn Primarolo: The Chancellor announced a review of the residence and domicile rules as they affect the tax liabilities of individuals in his Budget statement. As paragraph 5.83 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report makes clear, we believe that modernisation of these rules needs to be based on clear principles: the rules should be fair, clear, easy to operate and support the competitiveness of the British economy.

National Insurance Contributions

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the increased employers' NI contribution on charities. [58175]

Dawn Primarolo: It is estimated that the changes to employer NICs announced in the Budget will add around 0.7 per cent. to pay costs on average next year. The changes will help to fund improvements to public services and a real terms increase in spending on health over the next five years of over 40 per cent.

VAT (Charities)

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received to waive value added tax payments for charities; and if he will make a statement. [58176]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have received a number of representations about VAT and charities. The Government regularly discuss taxation issues with the charitable sector.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Succession to Titles

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if the Lord Chancellor will take steps to amend the law relating to succession to titles to allow equality of rights to succeed between men and women. [57813]

Mr. Wills: There are no plans to legislate in this area.

Law Enforcement Agencies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what statutory law enforcement agencies and prosecuting authorities there are within the responsibility of his Department; and what complaints procedure is available for each. [57129]

Mr. Wills: The Information Commissioner exercises her statutory enforcement powers and brings prosecutions independently of the Government, but is sponsored by my Department. A new, two stage, complaints procedure, designed to ensure that all complaints are dealt with expeditiously by a senior member of staff, and the most serious ones by a Deputy Commissioner or the Commissioner herself, is about to be implemented.

While there are no enforcement agencies as such within the civil and family courts and Supreme Court, there are county court bailiffs employed by the Court Service as part of the civil service structure, and Sheriffs Officers who are not employed by the Court Service but are authorised to act for the Supreme Court. The complaints procedures for county court bailiffs and Sheriffs Officers are set out in a public leaflet available in all courts.

There are no prosecuting agencies within the civil and family courts system.

Libra Project

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, how much money additional to that already committed the Libra IT system will require before it is operational. [55282]

Mr. Wills: The Office Infrastructure has operated since October 2000 and is now in use in more than 70 per cent. of the magistrates court offices. The software application was not delivered on the planned date of July 2001. The contract is currently under renegotiation and it is not yet possible to indicate the outcome.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what contractual obligations there are in the Libra IT deal with Fujitsu that would require it to fund an overspend. [55284]

Mr. Wills: There is no obligation within the current contract with Fujitsu Services that would require the Department to fund an overspend.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if his Department recommended Fujitsu for the Libra IT deal. [55285]

Mr. Wills: Fujitsu (then ICL) were selected through a formal evaluation, which conformed to procurement laws and guidelines. The evaluation was carried out by staff from LCD and the magistrates court service supported by independent advisers.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he expects the Libra IT system to be up and running; and if he will make a statement. [55281]

Mr. Wills: The Libra IT system consists of two elements. The office infrastructure has been progressively installed and used across the country since late 2000 and is now more than 70 per cent. complete. The software application was due to begin rollout in July 2001 but was delayed. We are currently in negotiation with the suppliers, Fujitsu Services about this matter.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many computer companies bid for the Libra contract in 1997. [55283]

Mr. Wills: Two companies went forward to the final stage of the competition in 1997 for Libra but one withdrew at a late stage and only one formal bid was received.

Consultants

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the total cost to his Department was of the use of external consultants in each of the last four years. [35026]

Mr. Wills: The Department's net expenditure with external consultants over the past four years was:

£ million

	Expenditure
1998–99	1.2
1999–2000	1.9
2000–01	2.6
2001–03	6.5

The recent increase reflects a wide-ranging and fast paced programme to modernise the courts and the tribunal system to increase efficiency, provide better customer service, and value for money for the tax payer.

Delivering such a programme has necessitated the use of external expertise and skills to supplement the Department's own resources.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the mandate of the Committee on the Protection of Individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56745]

Mr. Wills: This is the committee of representatives of EU member states' Governments, which is established by Article 31 of the EC Data Protection directive (95/46/EC). Its mandate is to assist the European Commission in taking decisions relating to the adequacy of data protection in countries outside the European Union. Meetings of the committee are also used by the Commission to keep member states informed about other matters relating to the directive.

In the 12 months ending 30 April 2002, the committee met three times. The UK representation is provided by an official from my Department. The total cost to the Department of the meetings mentioned above is estimated at £1,100.

The committee currently has before it no draft Commission decisions, but the Commission is keeping the committee informed of matters that the Commission has under consideration. These include discussions with the United States authorities about the adequacy of US data protection laws for the financial sector; consideration of the adequacy of data protection in Argentina; and the Commission's future report on the implementation of directive 95/46/EC. The United Kingdom has also asked the Commission to consider an adequacy decision for the recently adopted Guernsey data protection law.

Together with the member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". There is an obligation under this decision for the Commission to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report (Com(2001)783 Final) was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002. As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the mandate of the group on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56746]

Mr. Wills: The group is the Working Party of EU member states' independent data protection supervisory authorities, which is set up under Article 29 of the EC Data Protection Directive (95/46/EC). Its mandate is to examine questions about the application of national measures adopted under the directive; to give the

European Commission opinions on the level of data protection in the European Community and in third countries; to advise the Commission on any proposed amendments of the directive, and on other data protection matters; and to give opinions on data protection codes of practice drawn up at Community level.

In the 12 months ending 30 April 2002, the Working Party met four times. In the same period there were also six meetings of sub-groups at which the UK was represented. The UK representation is provided by staff from the Office of the Information Commissioner. The total cost to the Commissioner's office of the meetings mentioned above is estimated at £6,800. The Working Party is currently considering a wide range of matters including the effect of certain provisions of the directive; the data protection implications of certain draft EU instruments; various draft codes of practices; and various requests which the European Commission have received for formal decisions relating to the adequacy of data protection in third countries.

A new regulation on public access to EU documents, fully supported by the UK, came into force in December 2001. It provides a clear and effective mechanism for any interested party to request access to documents of the European institutions, including the Commission. As the committee in question is an advisory body to the Commission, its conclusions are covered by that regulation.

Sick Leave

Mr. Heald: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many days of sick leave were taken in her Department last year; how many related to employees suffering *(a)* stress and *(b)* other mental health problems; and what the cost was to her Department. [56477]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The most recently published annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service" records the number of working days lost through sickness absence in the Lord Chancellor's Department as 10 working days per staff year for the calendar year 2000.

A recent analysis of sick absence by type indicates that around 23 per cent. of all sick absence in the Department is due to stress, depression or anxiety-related illnesses. We are unable accurately to cost this figure.

The Department is committed to managing sickness absence effectively. A great deal of work has been undertaken to raise awareness of our Service Delivery Agreement targets, of the need to manage attendance in accordance with best practice policies, and to reduce absence due to work related injuries and illness in line with the Government's Revitalising Health and Safety initiative.

Jury Central Summoning Bureau

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department for what reason the Jury Central Summoning Bureau in Pocock Street SE1 is using last year's electoral roll for Thurrock when selecting jurors; what year's electoral rolls are being used for these purposes in respect of other local authority areas; and if he will make a statement. [58336]

Mr. Wills: Last year's electoral rolls are being used for summoning jurors in all areas of England and Wales.

Current data from local authorities is still being received, checked and collated before entry on to the system. This will begin, for those areas where data sets are complete, in the near future although specific dates have yet to be arranged.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on the cause and extent of delay in the despatch of summons following their issue by the summoning officer at the Jury Central Summoning Bureau based at Pocock Street, London; and if he will make a statement. [58337]

Mr. Wills: Summonses are sent by electronic transfer from the Bureau to a print centre for despatch by second class post within 2 working days of generation.

Confusion has arisen because summonses were endorsed with the date on which they were generated rather than the date on which they were despatched. The anticipated date of despatch, 2 days after generation, has been endorsed on summonses since 7 May to overcome this.

Land Charges Registers

Mrs. May: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what duties are placed on local authorities with regard to maintaining their land charges register. [57701]

Mr. Wills: The duties of local authorities in relation to the maintenance of their local land charges register are set out in the Local Land Charges Act 1975 and the Local Land Charges Rules 1977 (SI 1977 No. 985).

Mrs. May: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidelines he has issued to local authorities with regard to levels of payment due for public access to local authority land charges registers. [57702]

Mr. Wills: No guidelines have been issued with regard to levels of payment due for public access to local land charges registers.

Mrs. May: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what statutory provision governs access to local authority land charges registers. [57700]

Mr. Wills: Access to the local land charges register is governed by the Local Land Charges Act 1975 and the Local Land Charges Rules 1977 (SI 1977 No. 985).

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what analysis he has made of local authorities' charges for access to their land records and their opening of their records for public inspection; and if he will make a statement. [58109]

Mr. Wills: None. Charges for access to the register of local land charges are prescribed by the Local Land Charges Rules 1977 (SI 1977 No. 985). These charges were last revised in 1998 (SI 1998 No. 1190). Records open to public inspection and held by local authorities may be inspected free of charge. These records include the planning register and the register of enforcement notices, stop notices and breach of condition notices

(Town and Country Planning Act 1990, ss 69 and 188). Other records open to public inspection relating to land include maps of public sewers, publicly adopted highways, and public rights of way (Water Industry Act 1991, ss 199 and 200; Highways Act 1980 s 36(7); and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, s 57(5) respectively). A local authority must behave reasonably in fulfilling its duty to allow access to public records. If reasonable access is denied the matter may be referred to the courts or the local government ombudsman. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 will improve the rights of individuals to have access to information, and provide a right to complain to the Information Commissioner if access is prevented. The Act is expected to come into force in relation to information held by local government on 1 January 2005.

Legal Searches

Mrs. May: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the statutory requirement is for provision of public access to local authority information as found on the forms *(a)* CON 29, Inquiries of Local Authorities and *(b)* LLC1, Requisition and Certificate of Search. [57706]

Mr. Wills: Some of the information contained in answers to questions in CON 29 is available from public records that are held by local authorities. Local authorities are under a statutory duty to allow public inspection, free of charge, to these records. In the case of the planning register, for example, sections 69, 188 and 214 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 require local authorities to make the register available for inspection by the public "at all reasonable hours". The statutory requirement for the provisions of public access to the register of local land charges is set out in the Local Land Charges Act 1975 and the Local Land Charges Rules 1977 (SI 1977 No. 985).

Mrs. May: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what guidelines he has issued to local authorities with regard to charging for searches based on the forms *(a)* CON 29, Inquiries of Local Authorities and *(b)* LLC1, Requisition and Certificate of Search. [57704]

Mr. Wills: The Local Authorities (Charges for Land Searches) Regulations 1994 (SI 1994 No. 1885) give local authorities the power to charge for CON 29 inquiries. The regulations provide that these charges are at the local authority's discretion "but should have regard to its costs in dealing with inquiries". Fees for searches of a local charges register are prescribed by the Local Land Charges Rules 1977 (SI 1977 No. 985).

Mrs. May: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to amend *(a)* the forms (i) CON 29, Inquiries of Local Authorities and (ii) LLC1, Requisition and Certificate of Search and *(b)* the regulations and guidelines associated with them; and if he will make a statement. [57707]

Mr. Wills: CON 29 is not a statutory form. The Local Government Association and The Law Society have recently revised CON 29. The new version will be brought into use on 1 July 2002. I have lodged a copy of the draft of the revised form in the Library of the House of Commons.

Form LLC 1 'Register of Local Land Charges Requisition for Search and Official Certificate of Search' is a prescribed form (see Local Land Charges Rules 1977 (SI 1977 No. 985)). The Government have no plans to amend it or the regulations relating to it.

Mrs. May: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the required contents are of forms *(a)* CON 29, Inquiries of Local Authorities and *(b)* LLC1, Requisition and Certificate of Search; and what their status is. [57703]

Mr. Wills: CON 29 is not a statutory form and is not subject to any statutory requirements as to content. The contents are agreed between local authorities and The Law Society. I have lodged a copy of the current form CON 29 in the Library of the House of Commons. The contents of form LLC1 (Register of Local Land Charges, Requisition for Search and Official Certificate of Search) are prescribed by the Local Land Charges Rules 1977 (SI 1977 No. 985).

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer of 26 March, *Official Report*, column 828W, what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of unpaid advisers who have assisted the work of his Department since June 1997 but are not included in the Cabinet Office's annual report "Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews 2000–01". [57039]

Mr. Leslie: As my answer to the right hon. Gentleman of 26 March made clear, Ministers in this Department have not appointed any unpaid advisers other than those accounted for in the list of task forces, reviews and other ad hoc advisory groups.

Review Bodies

Mr. Allen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he plans to improve the opportunities for *(a)* members of the House and *(b)* members of the public to become members of task forces and other ad hoc and review bodies; [58004]

(2) what the membership is of task forces and other ad hoc advisory and review bodies broken down into *(a)* public servants, *(b)* members of the House of Commons, *(c)* members of the Houses of Lords, *(d)* representatives of business, *(e)* representatives of trade unions, *(f)* representatives of consumers, *(g)* representatives of the voluntary sector, *(h)* representatives of local government and *(i)* volunteers for public appointments on the list maintained by the Cabinet Office; [58003]

(3) if he plans to *(a)* increase public knowledge of task forces and other ad hoc and review bodies, with particular reference to when they are first appointed, and *(b)* invite greater contributions from the general public to their work. [58005]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office's annual report on task forces, ad hoc advisory groups and reviews was produced in October 2001 and a copy is in the Library.

The report contains details of the date of establishment of each body, as well as the membership of each, broken down into Ministers, civil servants, wider public servants, volunteers or charity workers and others, including private sector members. Information on the numbers of members who are Lords, representatives of trade unions and representatives of consumers specifically is not recorded. There is no restriction on Members of Parliament or members of the public being appointed to a task force, ad hoc advisory body or review, subject to any actual or perceived conflict of interest.

Task forces, ad hoc advisory groups and reviews are, by their nature, created to provide advice on a particular subject or subject area. However, in order to carry out their functions, their memberships will consist of those best able because of their position, knowledge or experience, or best qualified to contribute. Individual Departments are responsible for announcing, setting up and organising the membership of these bodies as required.

The Government remain committed to increasing the involvement of people and groups in public consultations, which play an important part in improving the way new policies are developed and how new services are provided. The Code of Practice on written consultation published by Cabinet Office sets out new standards for consultation documents issued by the Government aimed at making it easier for people to put their views forward to ensure a wider range of views is heard in making decisions.

Better Regulation Task Force

Mr. Allen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister who the members of the Better Regulation Task Force are; what their other occupations are; and what the date of their appointment was. [58006]

Mr. Leslie: The Chairman of the Better Regulation Task Force (BRTF), David Arculus, was appointed on 1 April 2002. The other 15 members were appointed on 29 April 2002. A list of their names and principal organisation is as follows:

David Arculus, Chair—Chair, Severn Trent plc
Teresa Graham, Deputy Chair—Partner, Barker Tilly
Matti Alderson—Director, FireHorses Ltd.
Stephen Falder—Marketing Director, HMG Paints
Michael Gibbons—Formerly Director of UK Communications, Powergen plc
Kevin Hawking—Director of Communications, Safeway Stores plc
Deirdre Hutton—Chair, National Consumer Council
Simon Petch—General Secretary, CONNECT
Ian Peters—Director of External Affairs and Marketing, Engineering Employers Federation
Penelope Rowlatt—Independent economist
Janet Russell—Director of Environment and Transport, Kirklees Metropolitan borough council
Sukhvinder Stubbs—Director, Barrow Cadbury Trust
Tim Sweeney—Independent consultant: financial services
Barbara Thomas—Private Enquity Investor plc
Simon Ward—Independent consultant: hospitality industry.

A Register of members' interests is available on the Task Force website at http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/regulation/TaskForce/members.htm.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the mandate of the Committee on the Community Action Programme in the field of civil protection is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56807]

Mr. Leslie: The mandate of Committee for the Action Programme and for the Mechanism in the Field of Civil Protection, which is composed of representatives of all the member states and is chaired by a representative of the Commission, is to implement the Community Action Programme.

The UK currently has two projects under consideration for funding, one each from the Home Office and the Red Cross.

The committee has met five times in the past 12 months, and a member of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat of the Cabinet Office represents the UK.

The Committee comes under the remit of the Community Mechanism to facilitate reinforced co-operation in civil protection assistance interventions. This has been subject to scrutiny by Parliament. The Committee's work is made known to the Emergency Planning community throughout the European Union and reports are available on EU websites.

The costs to public fund are included in the total running costs of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat and could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

Charities and Voluntary Bodies (Funding)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has received from charities and voluntary bodies about the administrative burden applying to funding sources from national and local government and other bodies with different *(a)* timetables, *(b)* criteria and *(c)* monitoring systems; and what plans he has to ease this burden. [52230]

Mrs. Roche: There are several linked initiatives taking place across Government aimed at easing the administrative burdens that may face voluntary and community sector bodies when they apply for funding.

The Regional Co-ordination Unit (RCU) of the Cabinet Office has undertaken a study to explore how regeneration and community funding can be made more accessible.

In addition the Home Office's Active Community Unit (ACU) is developing a pilot website to provide information on grants available to voluntary and community sector organisations. This is part of a wider ACU exercise aimed at introducing a more integrated and accessible approach to the Government funding of community groups, particularly small grant schemes.

The Regional Co-ordination Unit has, since October 2001, been carrying out a series of reviews to better co-ordinate and rationalise central Government initiatives targeted on areas of deprivation, many of which involve voluntary agencies in delivering services or working in partnership with statutory agencies.

In each of these initiatives, representatives from the sector have been closely involved in shaping conclusions and recommendations.

WORK AND PENSIONS

PPP/PFI

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for the five largest PFI contracts let by his Department in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement; [45590]

(2) what the difference was between the price offered in reaching preferred bidder stage and the final contract price for PPP contracts let by his Department in each of the last four years; and if he will make a statement. [45605]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* A preferred bidder stage was used to cover seven of the nine PPP deals managed by this Department and let in the last four years. Of these seven PPP deals, five are also PFIs. Details of the use of the preferred bidder stage in letting these deals are provided below.

Five PPP deals for IS/IT support, of which three are also PFIs, have been let to date under the ACCORD Project. For evaluation purposes, ACCORD used the preferred bidder stage for the initial selection of partners against a set of typical service package scenarios. Ultimate business allocations, such as Child Support Reform support, which make up the five deals, were always likely to be packaged differently and this proved to be the case. There is therefore no simple correlation between prices offered at preferred bidder stage and final prices for individual business allocations. The ACCORD framework provides for internal competition to select suppliers for individual business allocations and secure value for money. Further to such internal competition ongoing value for money is established by means of independent benchmarking of suppliers prices.

The procurement leading to the PRIME PPP/PFI deal covering ex-DSS estate ownership and management and let in April 1998 selected Partnership Property Management (now Land Securities Trillium) as preferred bidder. At the selection of preferred bidder stage the price offered was £1.93 billion. In subsequent negotiation it was agreed to re-measure the estate and as a result the scope of the deal increased, other service improvements were also secured. These changes resulted in the price increasing by £78 million. The PRIME procurement was examined by the NAO in 1999 and the resulting deal was considered to represent value for money.

The Employment Service procurement leading to the PPP/PFI contract for human resources services, including payroll and personnel administration, selected the joint proposal from Rebus Resources Services and Norwich Systems Accounting as the preferred bid. Subsequent negotiations to final contract, awarded in February 1999, secured a reduction of £530,000 in price over the term of the contract.

Overseas Pensioners

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many British pensioners living overseas do not have their basic state pension uprated annually in line with inflation according to their country of residence; [46892]

(2) if he will make a statement on the age profile of British pensioners living overseas in countries with which the UK does not have a reciprocal agreement to uprate pensions annually in line with inflation; [46893]

(3) what recent assessment he has made of the costs involved in uprating the pensions of British pensioners overseas in line with inflation in those countries with which the UK does not have a reciprocal agreement; [46895]

(4) how many British pensioners living overseas are in receipt of the basic state pension; and what percentage of total spending on the basic state pension has payment to British pensioners overseas represented in each year since 1997. [46897]

Mr. McCartney: Such information as is available is as follows.

The UK state pension is paid to those who satisfy the qualifying conditions, which do not include nationality. The information requested on numbers of pensioners who do not receive annual uprating is contained in Table RP4 of the "Retirement Pension Summary of Statistics—September 2001", a copy of which is available in the Library. Costs involved in uprating the pensions of British pensioners overseas will depend on the outcome of the current Judicial Review.

A breakdown of pensioners in receipt of a British state pension in frozen rate countries by sex and age[1]

Thousand

Age	*All*	*Female*	*Male*
All	478.9	287.9	191.0
60	5.4	5.4	—
61	7.4	7.4	—
62	9.2	9.2	—
63	10.1	10.1	—
64	11.6	11.6	—
65	21.2	11.5	9.7
66	23.2	12.4	10.8
67	22.4	11.8	10.5
68	23.7	12.5	11.1
69	23.5	12.3	11.2
70	23.6	12.8	10.8
71	24.3	12.4	11.8
72	23.7	12.3	11.4
73	22.8	12.8	10.0
74	21.3	11.7	9.6
75	22.6	13.1	9.5
76	21.8	11.9	9.9
77	19.9	11.7	8.2
78	19.1	10.2	8.8
79	18.8	10.3	8.5
80	17.6	10.3	7.3
81	18.5	10.4	8.1
82	10.0	6.0	4.0
83	8.5	4.8	3.7
84	8.2	5.0	3.2
85	7.6	4.5	3.1

A breakdown of pensioners in receipt of a British state pension in frozen rate countries by sex and age[1]

Thousand

Age	*All*	*Female*	*Male*
86	7.2	4.8	2.5
87	5.1	3.3	1.8
88	4.7	3.2	1.5
89	3.7	2.5	1.2
90	3.0	2.2	0.8
91	2.3	1.7	0.6
92	1.8	1.4	[2]0.4
93	1.1	0.9	[2]0.2
94	1.3	1.0	[2]0.3
95	0.6	0.5	[2]0.1
96	[2]0.5	[2]0.4	[2]0.1
97	[2]0.5	[2]0.4	[2]0.1
98	[2]0.3	[2]0.3	—
99	[2]0.3	[2]0.2	—
100 and over	0.5	[2]0.5	[2]0.1

[1] Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred; totals may not sum due to rounding.

[2] Figures subject to high degree of sampling error and should only be used as a guide to the correct situation.

	Number of pensioners living overseas (thousand)	*Percentage of total BSP expenditure*
1997	740	3.6
1998	770	3.6
1999	790	3.7
2000	810	3.8
2001	840	3.9

Notes:

1. Figures rounded to nearest 10,000.
2. Taken from March administrative data.
3. Figures exclude those in receipt of additional pension/graduated retirement benefit only.
4. Figures exclude Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what progress has been made with his project on modernisation of disability living allowance. [54645]

Maria Eagle: We are delivering our commitment to modernise disability living allowance (DLA) by introducing a system of active case management which ensures that entitlements are right at the outset and remain right.

We are ensuring that the period for which disability living allowance is awarded more appropriately reflects the effects of the customer's disability. As a result the majority of DLA awards are now for a fixed period, and therefore subject to later renewal and review. In addition, in June 1999, we introduced a system of periodic inquiry to ensure that longer term awards remained correct. In April 2002 we introduced refinements to the periodic inquiry process to focus more effort on those cases with the greatest likelihood of incorrectness.

Extensive work has already been done to shorten and simplify the claiming process for disability living allowance. A shorter claim pack, reduced by 10 pages, was introduced in April 2001 and tests of a new attendance allowance claim pack for people aged 75 and over, which is currently taking place, shows that further significant shortening of the claim pack used for extra cost disability benefits is possible. From September 2002 it is planned to test a significantly shortened disability living allowance claim pack tailored to the needs of individual customers, as part of a new streamlined claim process.

New report forms to enable general practitioners and Examining Medical Officers to provide clinical rather than subjective medical information about customers are being introduced. These are currently being developed and tested and subject to the satisfactory evaluation of live testing will be rolled out nationally commencing with the general practitioner form in June 2002.

Staff involved in the DLA decision making process are receiving specialist training on disability awareness and the initial training programme is due to be completed by the end of December. Two additional modules to the programme are now being developed and delivery to staff is due to commence later this year.

We are continuing to examine the feasibility of making greater use of health care professionals in the decision making process.

Fraud and Improprieties

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff in his Department are involved in work to investigate suspicions of fraud from his Department's vote 1 budget. [54711]

Malcolm Wicks: The overall aim of the Department's anti-fraud strategy is to have a benefit system which is secure from first claim to final payment.

The implementation of this strategy means that an anti-fraud focus is integral to the work of all staff in the Department, as is dealing with the wider agenda of error and incorrectness in benefit payments.

The number of the Department's staff employed at 31 March 2002 specifically in work to investigate suspicions of fraud in the areas previously covered[1] by the Department's vote 1 budget was 5,469.

[1] As a result of the introduction of Resource Accounting and Budgeting the Department moved from three votes to one departmental vote on 1 April 2001. The last vote 1 and vote 2 accounts were for the 2000–01 financial year.

Source:

Professional Standards Unit. Figure includes investigators and dedicated administrative support staff.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff were employed undertaking specific work on counter fraud policy issues from his Department's vote 2 budget on 8 April. [54712]

Malcolm Wicks: The overall aim of the Department's anti-fraud strategy is to have a benefit system which is secure from first claim to final payment.

The implementation of this strategy means that an anti-fraud focus is integral to the work of all staff in the Department, as is dealing with the wider agenda of error and incorrectness in benefit payments.

As a result of the introduction of Resource Accounting and Budgeting the Department moved from three votes to one departmental vote on 1 April 2001. The last vote 1 and vote 2 accounts were for the 2000–01 financial year.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each of its agencies (i) were disciplined, (ii) resigned and (iii) were dismissed after suspicions of fraud or corruption arose in 2000–01. [54719]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department treats very seriously any suspicions of fraud or corruption by its officers and takes firm action in any cases that arise.

No instances of corruption were identified in 2000–01. Information on cases where misconduct as a consequence of fraud was identified in 2000–01 is in the table.

	Number of cases
Benefits Agency	65
Departmental directorates	10
War Pensions Agency	2
Child Support Agency	5
The Appeals Service	0
Employment Service	26
Total	108

Note:

DWP was only formed in 2001–02 and the Employment Service was formerly part of the Department for Education and Employment.

Information on the outcomes of cases in 2000–01 is in the following table.

	Disciplinary penalty	*Dismissed*	*Resigned*	*Other*[1]
Benefits Agency	31	14	9	11
Departmental directorates	9	0	0	1
War Pensions Agency	0	0	1	1
Child Support Agency	0	0	2	3
The Appeals Service	0	0	0	0
Employment Service	19	5	2	0
Total	59	19	14	16

[1] Including cases not proven, not culpable, not yet decided, those where no further action has been taken and those where an appeal is ongoing.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many staff in *(a)* his Department and *(b)* each of its agencies with access to national insurance records were (i) disciplined, (ii) resigned and (iii) dismissed as a result of improprieties concerning their use of this access in 2000–01. [54718]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department treats very seriously any suspicions of unauthorised access by its officers and takes firm action in any cases that arise.

Information on the number of cases in 2000–01 where misconduct was identified is in the table.

	Number of cases
Benefits Agency	50
Departmental directorates	1
War Pensions Agency	0
Child Support Agency	2
The Appeals Service	0
Employment Service	7
Total	60

Note:

DWP was only formed in 2001–02 and the Employment Service was formerly part of the Department for Education and Employment.

Information on the outcomes of cases in 2000–01 is in the following table.

	Disciplinary penalty	*Dismissed*	*Resigned*	*Other*
Benefits Agency	28	12	9	[1]1
Departmental directorates	1	0	0	0
War Pensions Agency	0	0	0	0
Child Support Agency	0	2	0	0
The Appeals Service	0	0	0	0
Employment Service	4	2	1	0
Total	33	16	10	1

[1] No formal action was taken.

Genetic Discrimination

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if the Government will introduce legislation to prevent genetic discrimination by employers, with specific reference to the refusal of employment on the grounds of adverse genetic test results. [55634]

Maria Eagle: We have no plans to introduce such legislation. The Human Genetics Commission is drawing up a report to Health and Science Ministers on the storage, protection and use of personal genetic information. This will include advice on the use of genetic testing in employment. We will carefully consider the commission's advice when it is received.

Benefit Rules

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what action he plans to take to simplify the benefit rules for people in residential care. [58527]

Maria Eagle: From 8 April 2002 all new customers (and all former preserved rights customers) in independent residential care, nursing homes and local authorities accommodation are entitled to the standard income support, personal allowance. Customers already in receipt of the residential allowance or part III accommodation rate on 8 April 2002 continue to receive it for as long as they satisfy the conditions for entitlement.

From October 2003 we intend to simplify the rules governing those customers in residential care by removing the residential allowance and part III accommodation rate for all customers. Introducing the same rules for people in care as for those supported in their own homes will simplify the system, making it more transparent and easier for customers to understand.

A consultation document setting out our proposals in detail is published today and a copy has been placed in the Library.

Press and Public Relations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people were employed in a press or public relations function in his Department on 1 January in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002. [39933]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 4 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 760W.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total cost of running the Department's press office was in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available. [46802]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in May 2001. This involved the amalgamation of parts of Department for Education and Employment (including the Employment Service) with the Department for Social Security.

The annual running cost for the press office from May 2001 to the end of April 2002 was £1.211 million. This figure includes both salaries and running costs for all press office activity.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list for each of the last five years the total amount of money spent by Ministers in his Department on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for official entertainment purposes. [47208]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department's accounting systems do not separately identify entertainment costs incurred by Ministers. The information could not be provided without incurring disproportionate costs.

Incapacity Benefits

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his written answers of 6 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 411W, and 2 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 983W, for what reason a revised version of the system used to allocate individuals to local areas was used; and what criteria he has used to calculate the number of claimants of incapacity benefits. [56201]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The number of people claiming incapacity benefit is taken from a quarterly 5 per cent. scan of the benefit computer system. The process of calculating the number of incapacity benefit claimants was not altered for August 2001.

Individuals are assigned to local authorities and other areas by matching postcodes against the relevant Office for National Statistics (ONS) postcode directory. The ONS postcode directory used in the original allocation of August 2001 incapacity benefit data was later revised by ONS using an improved methodology. Numbers of incapacity benefit recipients by local authority were consequently recalculated and revised.

Law Enforcement Agencies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what law enforcement agencies and prosecuting authorities designated with legislation there are within the responsibility of his Department; and what complaints procedure is available for each. [57100]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* There are no law enforcement agencies nor prosecuting authorities designated with legislation within the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions.

Winter Fuel Payments

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what time limit for claims for winter fuel payments will be imposed for winter 2002; and if it will be possible to accept claims now from pensioners who would have qualified for payments in winter 2000 and 2001 who did not submit claims in time. [57207]

Mr. McCartney: The majority of eligible people will again receive their winter fuel payments automatically for winter 2002–3. Those people who need to claim for winter 2002–03 will have until 30 March 2003 to do so. Claims from people who did not claim within the time limits for winters 2000–01 and 2001–02 cannot now be paid for those winters. However, failure to submit a claim for one winter does not preclude a person from claiming for the next winter, subject to the time limits. Claim forms for winter 2002–03 will be available later this year.

Pensions

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of pensions are underfunded on an MFR basis in the *(a)* public and *(b)* private sector; and if he will make a statement on trends in each sector. [57308]

Mr. McCartney: Private sector defined benefit pension schemes are generally subject to the Minimum Funding Requirement (MFR). Many public sector pension schemes are either unfunded (such as the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme) or covered by alternative legislation (such as the Local Government Pension Scheme) and are therefore not subject to the MFR. There are, however, a number of funded public sector schemes to which the MFR applies, such as those covering employees of some non-departmental public bodies.

Information on the MFR funding levels of private sector defined benefit schemes is available from the Employers' Pension Provision (EPP) Survey. Information is not available for public sector pension schemes which are subject to the MFR.

The latest EPP survey, carried out in 2000, indicated that around one in eight (13 per cent.) private sector defined benefit schemes were less than 100 per cent. funded on the MFR basis. Six per cent. of schemes were funded at less than 90 per cent. and 7 per cent. were funded at least at 90 per cent. but at less than 100 per cent. Almost all schemes surveyed that were underfunded had taken action to rectify this situation. These actions included increasing the employers' contributions (78 per cent.), increasing the members' contributions (29 per cent.) and making a cash injection to the fund (19 per cent).

It is not possible at present to identify funding trends from the data available, because only one full cycle of triennial scheme valuations has been carried out since the MFR was introduced in 1997. However, in February 2002, for the purposes of the regulatory impact assessment which accompanied the regulations recently introduced to make interim changes to the MFR, around one in six private sector defined benefit pension schemes were estimated to be underfunded on the MFR basis. This estimate was based on information collected by the actuarial profession from consulting actuaries and insurance companies between 1997 and 2000, and has been adjusted by the Government Actuary's Department broadly to take account of the likely effects on scheme funding levels of subsequent changes in conditions.

Foster Carers

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if home responsibilities protection will be given to foster carers; [56240]

(2) what pension arrangement foster carers are entitled to; and if he will make a statement on support for those who give up work to care for foster children. [56241]

Mr. McCartney: Home responsibilities protection in respect of carers of children is awarded through child benefit entitlement. Foster parents do not receive child benefit directly unless they have a child of their own aged under 16. We are currently reviewing these arrangements to ascertain if the position of foster carers can be improved.

Housing Benefit

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what assessment he has made of the impact of housing benefit regulation 5 on the receipt of housing benefit for a period of notice required by a landlord of a hospitalised claimant who is too unwell to return to their normal dwelling; and if he will make a statement; [57148]

(2) if housing benefit regulation 5 requires the benefits service of a local authority to treat a hospitalised claimant as no longer occupying their normal home and ineligible for benefit if the local social services believe that the claimant is not well enough to return to their normal dwelling. [57149]

Malcolm Wicks: The housing benefit scheme is designed to help people on low incomes meet the costs of the accommodation which they rent and occupy as their normal home. We recognise that there are circumstances in which people will reasonably be absent from their normal home for temporary periods and it is right that benefit should remain in payment in these cases.

People in hospital can continue to receive housing benefit in respect of their normal home for up to 52 weeks, or until the local authority decides that their absence is likely to be substantially more than 52 weeks or become permanent. At this point housing benefit is withdrawn. In reaching a decision on the likely length of a person's absence from their normal home, the local authority takes account of all available evidence including, where appropriate, the views of the local social services.

Child Support

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will initiate the new CSA maintenance formula; and whether sums being calculated during the interim period from April represent *(a)* definitive and *(b)* provisional obligations on absent parents being assessed. [57244]

Malcolm Wicks: Regarding the introduction of the new scheme, I refer the hon. Member to the statement my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made to this House on 20 March 2002, *Official Report,* columns 315–16. In all cases where a non-resident parent's liability begins before the new scheme is introduced, the assessment will be made using existing rules, until the case is converted to the new arrangements.

Public Sector Pension Schemes

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what information he collates as to the adequacy of *(a)* funded provision and *(b)* direct funding for public sector pension schemes to discharge their present and future obligations. [57245]

Mr. McCartney: The Department does not collate information on the adequacy of public sector pension schemes to discharge present and future liabilities.

In the case of funded public sector schemes, this would be taken into account in discussions with the sponsoring Department.

In the case of unfunded public sector schemes, projections of future expenditure are taken into account as part of the long-term fiscal projections of Her Majesty's Treasury. These are published as part of the Economic and Fiscal Strategy report at the time of the Budget. A copy of the 2002 report is in the Library and shows that the public finances are sustainable in the long term.

HEALTH

Vaccines

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on charging students for a hepatitis B vaccination when it is a condition of university entry. [44656]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 19 March 2002]:* Under the national health service general practitioners (GPs) are required to provide free of charge for their patients all necessary and appropriate medical services of the type usually provided by GPs. This may include immunisation against hepatitis B, if in the GP's clinical opinion, such a procedure is medically necessary. In determining medical necessity GPs may make reference to "Immunisation against Infectious Diseases"—the "Green Book". This lists one of the risk groups to whom hepatitis B should be offered as, "health care workers including students and trainees who have direct contact with patients' blood or blood stained body fluids or with patients' tissues".

If a GP thinks it is not medically necessary, then a charge can be made even if the vaccination is a requirement of employment or of university entry.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the level of BCG and Tuberculin PPD vaccination stocks was on 31 March in each of the past five years. [56998]

Yvette Cooper: The stock levels of licensed BCG vaccination and Tuberculin PPD on 31 March each year are shown in the table.

Year	*BCG vaccine (number of doses)*	*Tuberculin PPD (number of tests)*
2002	2,364,650	530,575
2001	2,217,200	711,875
2000	1,195,650	1,117,275
1999	110,100	131,575
1998	5,093,750	412,375

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on what dates *(a)* tenders were sought and *(b)* contracts were awarded for supply of (i) BCG vaccines, (ii) Tuberculin PPD solutions and (iii) influenza vaccine in the last 12 months. [56656]

Yvette Cooper: No tenders were sought and no contracts awarded in the last 12 months for BCG vaccine or Tuberculin PPD solutions.

For influenza vaccine, tenders were sought on 13 June 2001 and awards were made to four suppliers on 1 July 2001. The contract award notice appeared in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities (OJEC) on 7 August 2001.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the written questions asked of him between *(a)* 1 to 30 June 2001, *(b)* 1 to 31 July 2001, *(c)* 1 to 30 September 2001, *(d)* 1 to 31 October 2001, *(e)* 1 to 30 November 2001, *(f)* 1 to 31 December 2001, *(g)* 1 to 31 January 2002, *(h)* 1 to 28 February 2002, *(i)* 1 to 31 March 2002 and *(j)* 1 to 30 April 2002 that had not received a substantive answer by 30 April; and if he will state (i) the name of the hon. Member asking the question and (ii) the reasons the question had not received a substantive answer. [54084]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 2 May 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council (Mr. Cook) on 2 May 2002, *Official Report,* columns 949–50W.

The information is shown in the table.

	February	*March*	*April*
Number of written questions yet to receive a substantive answer by 30 April	5	70	391
of which:			
Number subsequently answered	4	46	329

The number of written questions tabled for the Department was 923 in February, 821 in March, and 1,139 in April. The size of the backlog is unfortunate, but nonetheless the key figure—the amount answered—demonstrates our commitment to responding as promptly and helpfully to Members' questions as we possibly can, regardless of the volume.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the question from the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton, ref. 51604, tabled on 17 April. [58178]

Yvette Cooper: I replied to the hon. Member on 20 May 2002.

Smoking

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent information he has collated on the extent to which smoking reduces life expectancy. [55404]

Yvette Cooper: The Health Education Authority publication titled "The UK Smoking Epidemic: Deaths in 1995" by Christine Callum sets out the impact of smoking on life expectancy, table F1 on page 65. A copy of the report is available in the Library.

The report shows, for example, that men of 35 who smoke will, on average, die seven years earlier than men who have never been smokers. Similarly, women of 35 who smoke will, on average, die six years earlier than women who have never been smokers.

Genetic Discrimination

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Government will introduce legislation to prevent genetic discrimination by insurers, with specific reference to the refusal of insurance on the grounds of adverse genetic test results. [55633]

Yvette Cooper: The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee report on genetics and insurance published in April 2001 recommended that the best way forward would be for Government and industry to agree a voluntary moratorium on the use of genetic tests by insurers. The moratorium came into effect on 1 November 2001 and will last for five years. Details of the moratorium are set out in the Government's response to the select Committee published in October 2001. However, if there is evidence of serious and persistent non-compliance with the terms of the moratorium, then the Government are prepared to introduce legislation if necessary.

London

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent assessment he has made of the number of people living in London who do not feature in the official statistics on which funding for the NHS in London is based; [56189]

(2) what recent assessment he has made of the impact of the change in the population in London over the last 10 years on demands for the NHS in London. [56188]

Mr. Hutton: The allocation of resources to health authorities and primary care trusts is informed by weighted capitation targets which take account of the health need of local populations.

The populations used to calculate weighted capitation targets are based on Office for National Statistics population projections. These are updated to take account of trends in births, deaths, internal migration and international migration. The population projections used are the latest available at the time of allocations.

The Department has not made any separate assessment of the number of people living in London who do not feature in these official statistics.

Homeless People

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is collected on the *(a)* number and *(b)* proportion of homeless people committing suicide who are *(a)* rough sleepers and *(b)* living in temporary accommodation; and if he will make a statement. [56157]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not routinely collected. However, the Department funds the National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Homicide by People with Mental Illness. In March 2001, the National Confidential Inquiry team published its five-year report, "Safety First", building on the earlier report "Safer Services". It was based on a detailed study of 5,582 suicides and 186 homicides by psychiatric patients in the United Kingdom between 1996 and 2000. It found that there were 131 suicides among homeless people, 3 per cent. of the inquiry sample.

The Department is in the process of developing, under the direction of the National Director for Mental Health, Professor Louis Appleby, a coherent national suicide prevention strategy to ensure that we are doing all we can to prevent suicides. This strategy was launched for public consultation on 26 April 2002. Copies of the strategy are available in the Library.

Asthma

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the Government's plans to develop a comprehensive service within the NHS to *(a)* research the causes and *(b)* treat the condition of asthma; [56444]

(2) what proposals his Department has for extending the provision of rehabilitation facilities in general hospitals and medical centres for asthma sufferers. [56445]

Jacqui Smith: Management of asthma mainly takes place in primary care. The chronic disease management programme (CDMP), introduced in July 1993, provides arrangements for health promotion under the GMS national contract for GPs. Participating GPs (93 per cent.) receive a fixed annual payment for running organised programmes of care for patients with asthma (and for those with diabetes).

People with asthma will benefit from the emerging Expert Patients Programme which will—via the national health service—provide training in self-management skills for people with long term chronic conditions. The first pilot phase has recently begun in selected primary care trust sites, with activity to take place both on a generic and a disease-specific basis.

The Medical Research Council always welcomes high quality applications from the scientific community for support into any aspect of biomedical research and these are judged in open competition with other demands on funding. The Department of Health spend on directly commissioned research projects on asthma since 1997 is an estimated £7.24 million.

Doctors

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average number of doctors is per 100 beds in NHS hospitals in *(a)* West Suffolk Hospitals NHS Trust, *(b)* Norfolk and Norwich Health Care NHS Trust, *(c)* James Paget Healthcare NHS Trust, *(d)* Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust and *(e)* Addenbrooke's NHS Trust. [56404]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is given in the following table.

Number of hospital medical staff within specified trusts (as at 30 September)

	2000[1]	*Staff per 100 beds*[2,3]
West Suffolk Hospitals NHS Trust	200	29.4
Norfolk and Norwich Health Care NHS Trust	440	48.4
James Paget Healthcare NHS Trust	200	38.0
Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust	290	37.3
Addenbrooke's NHS Trust	720	57.0

[1] Data are rounded to the nearest ten.

[2] Staff per 100 beds were calculated using unrounded figures.

[3] Staff per 100 beds were calculated using average total daily number of available beds which includes beds in the following wards, Acute, Geriatric, Mental Illness, Patients with Learning Disabilities, and Maternity. The returns are made on a financial year basis and the latest year for which data are available is 2000–01. Figures are taken from the annual Körner return KH03—"Bed availability and occupancy".

Source:

Department of Health 2000 medical and dental workforce census

Immunisation (Portsmouth)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on respiratory syncytial virus infection immunisation in the last three years in Portsmouth primary care trust; and if he will make a statement. [56149]

Yvette Cooper: There is no licensed immunisation available for respiratory syncytial virus. Palivizumab, a monoconal antibody, is prescribed through hospital consultants to assist with the condition. Information on the cost to Portsmouth primary care trust of this treatment is not collected centrally.

Hospital Discharges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the proposed charges will be to social services departments to cover the costs of beds needlessly blocked through delayed discharges, as set out in paragraph 8.10 of 'Delivering the NHS Plan'; [56620]

(2) what the proposed incentive charges will be to NHS trusts to cover the costs of emergency readmissions to ensure patients are not discharged prematurely as set out in paragraph 8.10 of 'Delivering the NHS Plan'; [56619]

(3) if he will place in the Library the evidence that he has collated that NHS hospitals are discharging patients prematurely as set out in paragraph 8.10 of 'Delivering the NHS Plan'. [56618]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) on 15 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 734–35W.

On the issue of premature discharge from hospital, information on emergency readmissions is available in 'NHS Performance Indicators: Acute NHS Hospital Trusts' (ref 26829) and 'NHS Performance Indicators: Health Authorities' (ref 26830) which are available in the Library.

Hospital Treatment

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many out-patient referrals from general practitioners were made within the Barking and Havering health authority area in *(a)* each year from 1994 to date and *(b)* each month of the last year. [56526]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Number of GP written referral requests for first out-patient appointments: Barking, Havering and Redbridge health authority

Year/quarter	*GP written referral requests*
1997–98	
2	15,628
3	16,283
4	15,140
1998–99	
1	16,847
2	17,217
3	17,290
4	17,430
1999–2000	
1	18,165
2	15,540
3	14,279
4	17,881
2000–01	
1	20,268
2	17,595
3	16,982
4	17,780
2001–02	
1	18,255
2	17,337
3	17,185

Source:

Department of Health form QM08R

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many elective patients received in-patient treatment within the Barking and Havering health authority area in *(a)* each year from 1994 to date and *(b)* each of the past 12 months. [56519]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Elective admissions by month—NHS hospitals in Barking, Havering and Redbridge health authority 1996–97 to 2000–01

Admission date	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
April	2,627	2,783	2,307	2,405	2,310
May	2,579	2,376	2,178	2,315	2,770
June	2,511	2,342	2,513	2,752	2,726
July	2,780	2,792	2,870	2,584	2,832
August	2,125	1,977	2,551	2,510	2,893
September	2,592	2,713	2,857	2,530	2,583
October	3,013	2,943	2,878	2,597	2,779
November	2,723	2,684	2,957	2,818	2,667
December	1,938	2,252	2,258	2,022	1,886
January	2,076	1,932	2,302	2,126	2,280
February	2,466	2,159	2,818	2,579	2,300
March	2,380	2,368	3,048	2,752	2,500
Total	29,810	29,321	31,537	29,990	30,526

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Dementia (Closure of Facilities)

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the closure of long-stay beds for dementia patients. [56582]

Jacqui Smith: The national service framework for older people, published in March 2001, sets out the Government's strategy to ensure fair, high quality integrated health and social care services for older people. This covers services for people with dementia. An adequate supply of long-term care beds needs to be available for those people with dementia for whom this is the appropriate form of care.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on *(a)* the NHS long-stay provision for severely demented patients in North Hertfordshire and *(b)* the closure of beds at Elizabeth Court and Victoria Court; [56580]

(2) what his assessment is of the effect on delayed discharges at the Lister Hospital Stevenage of the closure of NHS long-stay beds for patients with dementia at Elizabeth Court and Victoria Court. [56581]

Yvette Cooper: Hertfordshire County Council are in discussion with local primary care trusts and Bedfordshire and Luton Community National Health Service Trust on their proposals for the long term care of patients suffering with dementia.

Alzheimer's Disease (Memory Test)

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the effect on demand for NHS long-stay provision in respect of Alzheimer's disease if the Cantab Paired Associates memory test for Alzheimer's disease were more widely used; [56578]

(2) what assessment he has made of the Cantab Paired Associates memory test for Alzheimer's disease; and if he will make a statement as to what guidance his Department has issued as to the use of this test. [56575]

Yvette Cooper: The Department has not assessed the effectiveness or the implications on demand for NHS long-stay provision of the Cantab Paired Associates memory test.

Consideration is being given to the inclusion of a clinical guideline on the management of dementia within the National Institute for Clinical Excellence's programme of work. Such a guideline would cover diagnosis of dementia, including memory tests.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the timetable is for the appraisal by NICE of the Cantab Paired Associates memory test for Alzheimer's disease; and if he will make a statement. [56577]

Yvette Cooper: The Cantab Paired Associates memory test for Alzheimer's disease is not currently on the NICE work programme.

Consideration is being given to the inclusion of a clinical guideline on the management of dementia within the National Institute for Clinical Excellence's programme of work. Such a guideline would cover diagnosis of dementia, including memory tests.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the committee of senior officials on public health is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56753]

Yvette Cooper: The committee of senior officials on public health (CSOPH) was established in 1975 by European Council Decision 75/365/EEC, as a result of the adoption of the directives relating to medical training. Its mandate is set down in Article 2, which states that the task of the Committee shall be:

> to identify and analyse any difficulties which might arise from the implementation of Directives 75/362/EEC and 75/363/EEC (now Directive 93/16/EC);
>
> to collect all relevant information on the conditions under which general and specialist medical care is given by doctors in the Member States;
>
> to deliver opinions which could guide the Commission's work with a view to amendment of the above mentioned Directives.

CSOPH's remit was extended by later Decisions to take in the same tasks for:

Nurses responsible for general care;

Midwives; and

Dentists.

The Committee is made up of senior officials with responsibility for national health care systems. Each member state is entitled to nominate one representative and one alternate. The UK representative and his alternate represent the Department of Health.

CSOPH meets twice each year, in July and December. Meetings last one day. Costs to public funds are minimal. The Commission pays the travel costs of the nominated representative but member states meet the costs if it is necessary for the alternate to attend as well.

In carrying out its duties, CSOPH is advised by a group of training advisory committees (TACs) made up of representatives from the relevant professional bodies.

Items on CSOPH's agenda vary, but typically include:

Problems relating to particular groups or individuals affected by the directives;

Information on events of major importance that have occurred in each member state affecting the application of the directives;

Medical demography; and

Discussions about necessary updates to the directives (for instance CSOPH is empowered to make certain decisions relating to training for medical specialisms).

Member States are currently considering Commission proposals for streamlining the directives and processes relating to free movement of professionals. The issues arising from the Commission's proposals for the future of professional recognition were submitted to the Parliamentary Scrutiny Committees (Explanatory Memorandum No. 7239/92—COM(2002)119final) in April 2002.

CAT Scanners

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many CAT scanners there are in London. [56946]

Yvette Cooper: There are currently approximately 60 Computed Tomography (CT) scanners installed in the national health service in the London region.

Under a central modernisation programme, funding has been made available to ensure that no CT scanner used in the diagnosis of cancer will be more than 10 years old by 2004. This programme will allow the replacement of 19 CT scanners in London, of which 14 have already been delivered.

Nursing Homes and Care Homes

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to help residents of care and nursing homes who pay their own fees from civil service pensions cope with the increases to their fees above inflation. [57137]

Jacqui Smith: If self-funding residents of care homes have insufficient income to pay their own fees they may approach their local authority for advice and possible financial assistance. In considering whether or not to provide financial support, and the extent of that support, local authorities should refer to the National Assistance (Assessment of Resources) Regulations 1992.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effect of the changes of national insurance contribution on the care home sector; and what estimates he has made of the increased costs to care homes following the increase in national insurance contributions by *(a)* employers and *(b)* employees. [57181]

Jacqui Smith: It is estimated that the changes to employers and employees' national insurance contributions announced in the Budget will increase pay costs on average by 0.7 per cent. next year.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the success of the long-term relationship between social services and the independent care home sector following the launch of the *(a)* concordat, *(b)* building capacity, *(c)* joint funding and *(d)* change agent arrangement initiatives; and if he will make a statement. [57189]

Jacqui Smith: Our long-term care policy has led to more constructive partnerships between social services and the independent health and social care sectors. This is already bringing about better outcomes for patients and service users by delivering speedier and more flexible services to individuals, positively using the plurality of providers within our system. This is true for short-term services such as intermediate care as well as residential and nursing care. We are supporting these changes in many ways, including a substantial increase in the funding for personal social services and additional money and assistance through the change agents team-working with individual councils.

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* other care home owners imposing charges on residents for services which were intended to be free of charge under the Health and Social Care Act 2001. [58029]

Jacqui Smith: From 1 October 2001, the national health service has taken on responsibility for the funding of care from a registered nurse for all care home residents who, prior to that, paid for all or part of that care.

From 1 April 2003, the NHS, rather than local authorities, will become responsible for funding the care from a registered nurse for residents who are currently supported by local authorities.

Professions Allied to Medicine

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the health budget in each NHS trust area in England is spent on professions allied to medicine broken down by each discipline. [57298]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not available centrally.

Mid Essex Hospital Trust

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the Mid Essex hospital trust area were awaiting in-patient treatment in the last two available months; and how many were waiting *(a)* over 12 months and *(b)* over 15 months for treatment. [57242]

Yvette Cooper: At Mid Essex Hospital Services National Health Service Trust there were 9,732 patients waiting for elective admission at 31 March 2002, of these 320 were waiting more than 12 months and none were waiting more than 15 months. At the end of February there were 9,646 patients waiting for elective admission, of these 286 were waiting more than 12 months and five were waiting more than 15 months.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the Mid Essex hospital trust area are waiting for an out-patient appointment; how many have been waiting more than *(a)* 13 weeks and *(b)* 26 weeks in the latest available quarter. [57243]

Yvette Cooper: As at 31 March 2002 at Mid Essex Hospital Services National Health Service Trust 794 patients were waiting more than 13 weeks for first consultant out-patient appointment following a general practitioner written referral, and no patients were waiting more than 26 weeks.

Hepatitis C

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on *(a)* the steps which he is taking to ensure that hepatitis C is diagnosed and treated and *(b)* the budget for health awareness promotion concerning hepatitis C. [58300]

Yvette Cooper: We plan to publish a consultation document on a strategy for hepatitis C during the summer, which will propose how prevention, testing and treatment services might be strengthened.

In October 2000, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) issued guidance to the national health service on the use of Ribavirin and Interferon Alpha in the treatment of hepatitis C. Since then, we have placed health authorities and primary care trusts under a statutory obligation set out in directions, which came into force on 1 January 2002, to provide appropriate funding for treatments recommended by NICE.

Work on the strategy has identified the need to raise professional and public awareness of hepatitis C. The Department recently held four regional hepatitis C seminars for primary care professionals and sent a hepatitis C briefing pack to all general practitioners and practice nurses in England. The pack includes information leaflets for patients. We will be assessing the need for further health promotion activities to raise professional and public awareness.

Implementation of the strategy will form a key component of the hepatitis action plan proposed in the chief medical officer's infectious diseases strategy, "Getting Ahead of the Curve".

Child Mental Health Services

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the date was of the last meeting held between Ministers in his Department and Ministers in the Department for Education and Skills at which child mental health services were discussed. [58297]

Jacqui Smith: I met with my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department for Education and Skills (Baroness Ashton of Upholland) on 6 February 2002 to discuss a wide range of subjects, one of which was child and adolescent mental health.

Chiropody and Podiatry Services

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department has issued about the circumstances in which patients should receive NHS chiropody services. [58290]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has not issued any guidance on access specifically to national health service chiropody services. However, chiropody/podiatry services are essential parts of the national service frameworks for older people and diabetes.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the NHS to develop a partnership with private sector state registered chiropodists. [58285]

Jacqui Smith: We have no specific plans to develop a partnership with the private sector state registered chiropodists. However, the NHS Plan document "Delivering the NHS Plan" states that primary care trusts will be free to purchase care from public, private or voluntary providers as appropriate.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the initial contacts and *(b)* the first contacts in respect of chiropody by region in each year since 1997. [58289]

Jacqui Smith: Information about initial contacts and first contacts by region with the chiropody service are contained in the statistical report "Chiropody Services, Summary Information for 2000–01, England". A copy of the report is in the Library and it is also available on the Department's website www.doh.gov.uk/public/kt230001.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about *(a)* the reasons for substantial regional variations in the episodes of care in chiropody and *(b)* what steps he is taking in respect of such variations. [58286]

Jacqui Smith: We acknowledge that there are regional variations in national health service chiropody/podiatry services. These variations may result from NHS organisations prioritising the services they provide to meet local demand for chiropody/podiatry services. The criteria used to clinically prioritise will be determined locally.

We are committed to recruiting more allied health professionals (AHPs) which include chiropodists/podiatrists through the NHS Plan targets and will build on the over 6,500 extra AHPs as announced in the 2002 Budget.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the trend in foot health of persons aged over 75 years. [58287]

Jacqui Smith: The national service framework for older people sets a performance measure to collect numbers/rates of people aged 75+ who access chiropody/podiatry services. Information from that may be used to inform future planning of services.

Mental Health Services

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the use of *(a)* art and *(b)* counselling in the care and treatment of those with mental health problems. [58312]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has made no assessment of the use of art therapy and counselling either alone or in comparison with other treatments or services. However, creative arts therapy is increasingly recognised as a valuable treatment for people with a range of problems, including mental health problems. It offers an opportunity for expression and communication and can be particularly helpful to those individuals who find it hard to express their feelings verbally. The art therapist may work as part of a team in both primary and specialised health and social care settings. Equally, counselling, like psychotherapy, is offered within the national health service by a large number of both medical and non-medical staff in primary and specialised care settings and has been shown in a number of independent trials to make an important contribution to the treatment of common mental disorders.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the expenditure was in *(a)* Manchester, *(b)* Salford and *(c)* Trafford on mental health services in each of the past five years. [56934]

Jacqui Smith: The expenditure on mental health services in the Manchester, Salford and Trafford areas over the past five years is shown in the table.

£000

	Manchester health authority area	*Salford and Trafford health authority area*
1996–97	37,596	27,653
1997–98	36,853	26,570
1998–99	39,867	27,580
1999–2000	43,425	33,093
2000–01	44,949	35,623

Notes:

1. "Salford and Trafford" was formerly one health authority and data cannot be subdivided.

2. Data relates to expenditure in the two health authority areas (Manchester, Salford and Trafford) on the purchase of secondary health care—mental illness for the five years from 1996–97 to 2000–01, which is the latest year for which information is available.

3. The 2000–01 figures include expenditure by primary care trusts within the relevant health authority area, to enable comparison.

Sources:

Annual accounts of the Manchester, and Salford and Trafford, health authorities 1996–97 to 1998–99

Summarisation forms of the Manchester, and Salford and Trafford, health authorities 1999–2000 and 2000–01

Summarisation schedules of the primary care trusts within the Manchester, and Salford and Trafford, health authority areas 2000–01

Defibrillators

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new automated defibrillators will be installed in public places in the current financial year. [58301]

Yvette Cooper: By 31 March 2002 the "Defibrillators in Public Places Programme" had seen 487 Automated External Defibrillator devices installed at a total of 64 sites across England, including airports, mainline railway stations, bus and coach stations, and large shopping complexes.

The current financial year will see the installation of a further 205 units.

Family Centre Places

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many family centre places are provided by local authorities. [56957]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Richard House Children's Hospice

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much central Government funding is being given to the Richard House Children's Hospice. [56963]

Yvette Cooper: Information on levels of funding for individual hospices is not collected centrally. Funding for hospices is a matter for arrangement between the hospice concerned, primary care trusts and local authorities. Hospices may also apply to the new opportunities fund which has a specific initiative to support and develop palliative care services for children, for which £48 million has been made available.

Waiting Lists

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were waiting over six months on the in-patient waiting list in each month since January 2001. [56961]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the total number of patients who have been waiting over six months for elective admission.

Patients waiting for elective admission: Position at the end of the month: health authorities, England

Thousand

Month ending	*Patients waiting longer than six months*
2001	
January	262
February	251
March	243
April	256
May	268
June	264
July	265
August	271
September	274
October	259
November	244
December	256
2002	
January	256
February	243
March[1]	238

[1] On 3 May 2002 the Department of Health issued a press release about malpractice in the management of waiting lists at the Royal United Hospitals Bath (reference 2002–0211). This malpractice is now known to have affected the accuracy of the figures for long waiters reported by the trust for end March 2002.

We have sampled records for patients that could have been long waiters and have been able to confirm 25 over 15 month waiters. Based on this we estimate that there would be 180 such cases in total, but allowing for uncertainty the 95 per cent. confidence interval suggests this could be as high as 280.

Source:

Department of Health form QF01

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether waiting list data is collected centrally, in England and Wales, for the period between diagnosis and treatment for cancer. [57020]

Yvette Cooper: The NHS Cancer Plan sets out new goals to reduce waiting times for cancer patients including a target of a maximum one month wait from diagnosis to treatment for breast cancer by December 2001. Central monitoring of performance against this standard began on 1 January 2002 and figures will be published quarterly, with the first data due in June 2002. The Cancer Plan also sets the target that by 2005 no one should wait longer than one month from diagnosis to first treatment except for a good clinical reason or through patient choice. We are currently putting in place data collection mechanisms to show performance against this target.

Hypothermia

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of hypothermia there were in Tyne and Wear in each year since 1997. [56933]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is shown in the table.

Admissions to national health service hospitals in England for hypothermia patients resident in Newcastle and north Tyneside health authority, Gateshead and south Tyneside health authority and Sunderland health authority.

	Number of cases
1996–97	10
1997–98	16
1998–99	15
1999–2000	10
2000–01	19

Note:

Data in this table are adjusted for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data, except for 2000–02 which are not yet adjusted for shortfalls.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health.

Intermediate Care Beds

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the additional intermediate care beds are in *(a)* general and acute hospitals, *(b)* cottage hospitals, *(c)* patients' own homes, *(d)* care homes and *(e)* bed-and-breakfast accommodation. [56962]

Jacqui Smith: A breakdown of the number of additional intermediate care beds by setting is not available centrally. However, the Department is not aware of any intermediate care service being provided in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. Intermediate care services provided in patients' own homes do not count as "beds".

Vulnerable Adults

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 18 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 1179–80W, what complex issues in the health care aspects of the protection of vulnerable adults scheme have caused the delay in implementation. [57090]

Jacqui Smith: The Care Standards Act 2000, which sets out the legal basis for the protection of vulnerable adults scheme, defines 'vulnerable adult' in terms of the 'services' received. These services are to be prescribed in regulations and it has been important to ensure that as many vulnerable adults as possible are protected within the legal framework of the Care Standards Act.

Colposcopy

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* women and *(b)* women from the Asian community have used the community-based colposcopy service in Luton. [56938]

Yvette Cooper: Figures for uptake of the community-based colposcopy service in Luton are not collected by ethnic group.

Out-of-area Referrals

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many out-of-area referrals were made in the NHS in each of the last five years. [56949]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of referrals made under the out-of-area treatment arrangements is not available centrally.

Nurses

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria are used to decide which NHS nurses in Mid

Essex will receive the new living allowances; and whether auxiliary nurses without an NVQ qualification will receive the allowances. [56490]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 15 May 2002]:* From 1 April qualified nurses (grades C and above) in Essex are eligible for cost of living supplements of up to £600 per year.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultation he has had with nurse managers concerning the return of nurses to the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [56652]

Mr. Hutton: Ministers meet front line staff regularly, including nurse managers to discuss recruitment, retention and return.

In addition, on 5 February 2002 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State held a meeting on recruitment, retention and return attended by a number of nurse managers from the national health service.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many qualified health visitors are available to supervise the return of nurses to the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [56710]

Mr. Hutton: This information is not collected centrally.

Local work force development confederations organise return to practice programmes, in conjunction with higher education institutes and local national health service organisations. This includes the organisation of supervising work placements.

The Department is working closely with the Community Practitioner and Health Visitor Association to look at ways to extend efforts to bring health visitors back into the NHS.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent consultation he has had with health visitors as to the supervision of nurses returning to the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [56654]

Mr. Hutton: Ministers meet front line staff regularly, including health visitors to discuss recruitment, retention and return.

At the Community Practitioner and Health Visitor Association (CPHVA) conference in November 2001, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State emphasised the Government's commitment to bring health visitors back to the national health service. The Department is currently working with the CPHVA to take this work forward.

In addition, on 5 February 2002 my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State held a nursing summit on recruitment, retention and return attended by the director of CPHVA.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of those nurses who have indicated they wish to return to the NHS he calculates have home commitments that prevent them from attending the necessary out-of-area training sessions; where such courses are available; how long they are; what the cost of the courses was in the last 12 months and if he will make a statement. [56712]

Mr. Hutton: Information about the home commitments of potential returners is not collected centrally.

Work force development confederations organise and fund a range of part-time, full-time and distance learning return to practice courses which may vary in length, according to the needs of the returner and the vacancies available.

Return-to-practice courses are free to the returner, who is entitled to financial support of at least £1,000 while retraining. Further financial assistance is available to cover the costs of books and travel. The returners package also offers child care support where needed.

In 2001–02, the Department distributed a total of £11 million to work force development confederations to fund return-to-practice initiatives and refresher training. 4,385 health care professionals returned, of which 3,763 were nurses, midwives and health visitors. An additional 2,030 health care professionals are on their way back in.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses who wish to return to the NHS have so far been offered places; how long on average they have been out of practice; and if he will make a statement. [56709]

Mr. Hutton: This information is not collected centrally.

Since the first recruitment campaign in 1999, over 10,000 qualified nurses, midwives and health visitors have returned to the national health service.

71 per cent. of nurses who contacted the NHS in 2001–02 about returning practised more than five years ago. No further breakdown is collected.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were employed in the Social Care Council at 1 April; and what proportion of those staff have clinical contact with NHS patients. [56870]

Jacqui Smith: For the purpose of reply, it is assumed that the Social Care Council referred to is the General Social Care Council (GSCC), established under the Care Standards Act 2000 and with the objective to register, regulate and raise standards in the social care work force in England.

The GSCC employed 82 staff as of 1 April 2002.

No GSCC staff have any clinical contact with national health service patients as their task is to regulate the social care work force and not to provide frontline services.

Assisted Conception

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is *(a)* age range of patients accepted for treatment on the NHS, *(b)* age at which female NHS patients begin treatment and *(c)* waiting times for NHS patients on the lists at assisted conception units in England with NHS lists is the average; [57012]

(2) when the NICE report on access to fertility treatment will be published; [57021]

(3) if he will list the assisted conception units in England with NHS lists on which patients are prioritised by *(a)* age, *(b)* other factors and *(c)* date of referral. [57011]

Yvette Cooper: The statistical information requested is not available centrally. The Department undertook a baseline survey of infertility provision in the national health service in 1999. A report on this "Survey of NHS Infertility Services 1997–98" has been published and copies are available in the Library.

We understand that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence expects to deliver its clinical guidelines on infertility by October 2003.

Carers

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will amend the Assessment of Resources Regulations 1992 to include a mandatory disregard of property in situations where a carer who is aged under 60 or is not a relative of the person he is caring for remains in the property of that person when that person moves into a care home; [57018]

(2) if he will use the additional funds announced in the Budget for social care to make mandatory the discretionary disregard for carers who remain in the property of the person they are caring for when that person requires care in a care home. [57019]

Jacqui Smith: During the passage of the Health and Social Care Act 2001 through Parliament, Ministers gave a commitment to review the need for a mandatory property disregard in situations where former carers, not already covered under the current Assessment of Resources Regulations 1992, continue to live in properties of individuals permanently admitted to residential care. Ministers emphasised that progress could only be made should resources become available.

For the time being the Government are aware that many properties of care home residents are disregarded by statute from the financial assessment for residential accommodation because they continue to be the main home of spouses and other family members listed in the regulations. In many instances these individuals will have cared for the residents prior to admission. Additionally many councils use their discretion to disregard the value of residents' property from the financial assessment when it continues to be the home of carers not covered by the regulations.

Adoption

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children were adopted in each year since 1990. [57193]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Registrar General. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 21 May 2002:

As Registrar General for England and Wales, I have been asked to reply to your recent question on numbers of adoptions since 1990. (57193)

Figures are given in the table below.

Number of adoptions in England and Wales from 1990 until 2001

Year	*Number of adoptions*
1990	6,733
1991	6,912
1992	7,466
1993	6,799
1994	6,165
1995	5,840
1996	5,741
1997	5,212
1998	4,617
1999	4,988
2000	5,036
2001	5,131

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 22 May 2002

PRIME MINISTER

Electronic Databases

Mr. Beith: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the electronic databases created for No. 10 Downing Street since June 1997 for the purpose of storing parliamentary questions and answers, stating in each case *(a)* the office or unit concerned, *(b)* who has access to it, *(c)* the software employed and *(d)* the date and cost of its creation. [56250]

The Prime Minister: The No. 10 parliamentary section uses the same database software that was used under previous Administrations, and uses it according to the rules in the civil service code.

All my staff have access to a general information database which includes parliamentary questions for ease of reference and was established in 2000 at no additional cost to my office.

European-Latin American/Caribbean Summit

Mr. Spring: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Second European-Latin American and Caribbean Summit. [58364]

The Prime Minister: I attended the EU-Latin American and Caribbean Summit in Madrid on 17 May, with my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs.

The summit was a significant further step towards closer relations with Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean. We discussed important issues, notably terrorism and sustainable development, which affect us all and on which inter-regional co-operation is essential. The summit also made good progress on liberalising trade between Europe and Latin America, welcoming completion of negotiations on an EU/Chile Association Agreement, and agreeing to press forward with an EU/Mercosur Association Agreement. In addition, the summit decided to take concrete new steps in the development of EU/Andean and EU/central American relations.

I was also pleased to see Caribbean concerns recognised—the result of effective engagement in the summit and its preparations by many Caribbean countries. We have worked with the Caribbean to ensure that they are now playing a full part in the summit and that their voice is heard.

Establishment Responsibilities

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister which Departments have lead responsibility for (a)(i) Royal, (ii) Church and (iii) hereditary issues and (b) lords-lieutenant. [57970]

The Prime Minister: In England and Wales, the Lord Chancellor's Department has lead responsibility for these matters. Lords-lieutenant and certain Church and royal household posts are Crown appointments and are therefore made by Her Majesty the Queen on my advice.

Parliamentary Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Prime Minister what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of parliamentary advisers appointed to serve his Department. [56899]

The Prime Minister: I have made no such appointments.

Gibraltar

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Prime Minister when he last met the Spanish Prime Minister to discuss Gibraltar. [58552]

The Prime Minister: I met the Spanish Prime Minister on 20 May for discussions on a range of EU and foreign policy issues. We held talks on Gibraltar in a positive and constructive atmosphere.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Standing Committee on propagating material and ornamental plants is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [57489]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Standing Committee on propagating material of ornamental plants is to consider and adopt measures to facilitate implementation of Council Directive 98/56/EC on the marketing of propagating material of ornamental plants. The committee has met on three occasions over the last 12 months. The UK is normally represented by an official from my Department. The cost of the committee's work to public funds, including travel expenses which are met from Community funds, is estimated at around £1,500 annually.

Agendas and reports of meetings are available on the Commission website. Links to those reports are provided in the DEFRA website at http://defraweb/planth/oldnews.htm#links. The agenda of the last meeting included: discussions about the scope of the directive; whether further implementing measures were needed in relation to specific pests and diseases; the approach in relation to imports from third countries and future arrangements for Community trials which are used to take stock of the quality of materials being marketed within the Community. The committee also had an initial discussion to consider how to take forward work in relation to a recently adopted standard under the International Plant Protection Convention concerning Regulated Non-Quarantine Pests.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

> "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

The Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of the committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com(2001) 783 Final).

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for Community protection of plant variety rights is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [57486]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Committee for Community protection of plant variety rights is to assist the Commission in the administration and regulation of Community plant variety rights. The committee has met once over the past 12 months. The cost of representation by one official was de minimis as it was held on the same day as another meeting.

The item discussed was the preparation of a report in accordance with Article 116(4) of Council Regulation (EC) 2100/94 on an arrangement which permitted individual farmers who had farm saved seed of varieties established before the Community plant variety rights regime came into force to continue to do so free of charge for a transitional period.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission.

As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com(2001) 783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Standing Committee on plant health is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [57485]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Standing Committee on Plant Health (harmful organisms) is contained within Council Directive 2000/29 concerning protective measures against the introduction into and spread within the Community of organisms harmful to plants and plant products. The committee gives opinions on amendments to the lists of harmful organisms, on other amendments to the technical annexes to the directive, and on proposed emergency measures against new plant health risks. The committee has met eleven times in the last twelve months. The UK is usually represented by an official and a scientist from my Department assisted by a Forestry Commission official when necessary.

The direct cost of the committee's work to public funds, including travel expenses some of which are met from Community funds, is estimated at around £40,000 annually. UK risk assessments and survey results are presented to the committee but these are prepared partly to inform national policy and operational activities. The elements directly related to the work of the committee cannot be separately costed.

Agendas and reports of meetings are available on the Commission website. Links to those reports are provided in the DEFRA website at http://defraweb/planth/oldnews.htm#links. The agenda of the last meeting included: a discussion, at the UK's request, of the situation with *Phytophthora ramorum* (cause of Sudden Oak Death) in the Community; a report on progress with eradication of pinewood nematode in Portugal; discussion of measures to be taken against an outbreak of *Monilinia fructicola* (fruit brown rot) in France; consideration of a response to measures taken by China against wooden packing material with exports from the EC; and discussion of a risk assessment on *Aphelenchoides besseyi*, a nematode which affects rice seed and strawberry plants.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

> "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

The Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com(2001) 783 Final).

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Standing Committee on propagating material and plants of fruit genera and species is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [57488]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Standing Committee on propagating material and plants of fruit genera and species is to consider and adopt measures to facilitate implementation of Council Directive 92/34/EEC on the marketing of fruit propagating material and fruit plants intended for fruit production. The committee has met on three occasions over the last 12 months. The UK is normally represented by an official from my Department.

The cost of the committee's work to public funds, including travel expenses which are met from Community funds, is estimated at around £2,500 annually.

Agendas and reports of meetings are available on the Commission website. Links to those reports are provided in the DEFRA website at http://defraweb/planth/oldnews.htm#links. The agenda of the last meeting included: discussions about the effectiveness of current implementing measures; the scope of those measures and whether additional rules were needed; the approach in relation to imports from third countries and future arrangements for Community trials which are used to take stock of the quality of material being marketed within the Community. The committee also had an initial discussion to consider how to take forward work in relation to a recently adopted standard under the International Plant Protection Convention concerning Regulated Non-Quarantine Pests.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". The Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of the committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com(2001) 783 Final).

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the Fisheries and Aquaculture sector is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56743]

Mr. Morley: The Advisory Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture was set up to enable the Commission to consult representatives of the EU fishery products and aquaculture industry, and of related interests such as consumers and environmentalists, and to take their views on the drafting and implementation of relevant EU measures. It is not attended by officials of Her Majesty's Government. The questions raised would be for the European Commission, or for the European organisations who send representatives, to answer.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the adaptation to technical and scientific progress of the Directive on the quality of fresh waters needing protection or improvement in order to support fish life is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56798]

Mr. Morley: This committee has never met. Therefore the question of UK representation has not been addressed, no items are under consideration and it has not drawn on public funds. The role of the Committee, if it should meet, is set out in article 12 of the Directive. It is to deliver its opinion on amendments proposed by the Commission to the G values and to the methods of analysis set out in the Annexes to the Directive where amendments are necessary to adapt the Directive's provisions to technical or scientific progress. The Committee has equivalent functions in relation to Directive 79/923/EC on the quality required of Shellfish Waters.

Together with Member States, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". Consequent to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final.

As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on veterinary training is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56760]

Mr. Morley: The last meeting of the Advisory Committee on Veterinary Training (ACVT) was held on 16 June 2000 and it was abolished later that year.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Management Committee of the common organisations of agricultural markets for seeds is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55669]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Seeds Management Committee is to facilitate stability in the market for seeds and to ensure a fair income for producers through the payment of appropriate levels of production aid. The Committee has met four times over the past 12 months. UK representation at the Committee has been two officials for each meeting, and the cost of representation has been around £5,300.

The major item under discussion this year has been the introduction of a stabiliser mechanism to constrain EU expenditure on seed production aid.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission.

As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com(2001) 783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee on the supply of agricultural products to the population of the former Soviet Union is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55657]

Mr. Morley: The Department has no record of such a committee.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee on the conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of genetic resources in agriculture is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55659]

Mr. Morley: The purpose of the Committee on the conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of genetic resources in agriculture is to advise the Commission draft measures made under Council Regulation 1467–94 on:

(a) assisting the co-ordination, at Community level, of certain national measures for the conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of genetic resources in agriculture to permit the rational organisation of the means employed within the Community and the efficient utilisation of the results and to achieve an approach in line with the aims of the Common Agricultural Policy;

(b) the development and implementation of programmes of measures for the conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of genetic resources in agriculture at Community level to support or supplement action taken in the member states; and

(c) other relevant questions.

Regulation 1467–94 established a programme for the conservation, characterisation, collection and utilisation of genetic resources in agriculture for a period of five years. The Commission has made proposals for a successor regulation, which is currently under consideration.

The Committee met once in the last 12 months. It was attended by DEFRA officials from my Department. The cost of representation at that meeting and related work was about £2,000.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". The Commission published an annual report on the working of such committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Com (2001) 783 Final)). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Scientific and Technical Research Committee (CREST) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56731]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The Scientific and Technical Research Committee (CREST) is a standing advisory committee to the Council and Commission which was established pursuant to a Council Resolution of 14 January 1974 on the co-ordination of national policies and the definition of projects of interest to the Community in the field of science and technology.

A Council Resolution of 28 September 1995 defined the current role of CREST:

(i) to identify strategic priorities for Community policy, based on the criterion of added value while complying with the principle of subsidiarity, thereby helping the Commission to draw up Community research and technological development (RTD) programmes;

(ii) to promote co-ordination by the Community and the member states of their RTD activities in order to ensure mutual consistency between national policies and Community policy;

(iii) to review the independent assessment of the specific programmes and the framework programme, relying in particular on the programme committees, in order to learn useful lessons from them for Community RTD policy;

(iv) to contribute to the formulation of Community strategy for international co-operation in the sphere of research, including consultation within the Community in preparation for the proceedings of international bodies.

CREST also devotes itself to the following activities:

(v) dissemination and exploitation of the results of RTD and demonstration activities and of their impact on competitiveness and employment in the Community;

(vi) training activities through and for research and their response to innovation needs.

The CREST Committee discharges its functions either at the request of the Council or the Commission or on its own initiative. It comprises senior representatives responsible for RTD policies in the member states and of Commission representatives and is chaired by the Director General, Directorate General Research. The General Secretariat of the Council provides the secretariat for CREST. Since 2001 Candidate Countries to the European Union have been invited to attend as observers. CREST draws up it own rules of procedure and work programme. Records of meeting and opinions of CREST record the consensual opinion of its members, with reference to any minority views. They are forwarded to the Council and the Commission. CREST's work, reports and other documentation are publicly available. (http://register.consilium.eu.int)

CREST has met on eight occasions over the last 12 months:

275th CREST, 4 May 2001—Brussels

276th CREST, 31 May to 1 June 2001—Sweden

277th CREST, 5 July 2001—Brussels

278th CREST, 6 to 7 September 2001—Belgium

279th CREST, 18 to 19 October 2001—Brussels

280th CREST, 22 to 23 November 2001—Brussels

281st CREST, 8 February 2002—Brussels

282nd CREST, 26 to 27 March 2002—Spain.

Officials from the Office of Science and Technology, Department of Trade and Industry provide the UK representation. The UK usually sends two delegates to meetings of this committee, which are held either in Brussels or in the country holding the EU presidency. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

Items under current consideration for the next meeting include the Implementation of the Commission Action Plan on Science and Society, and the opening of national RTD programmes.

The agenda fro the next meeting of the committee includes the following issues:

Company Awards and List of Best Workplaces in Europe

Scheme to support transnational actions to combat discrimination

Presentations and discussions on data collection to measure the extent and impact of discrimination

Presentation of work programme of two groups of independent experts on racial discrimination, and on discrimination against people with disabilities

Presentation of work programme of four European-level umbrella NGO networks.

An evaluation of the programme will be reported to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. A copy of the evaluation report will be placed in the Libraries of the House once available.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees in line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

> "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission."

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of the House on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the approximation of the laws of the member states relating to noise emission in the environment by equipment for use outdoors is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56819]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The mandate of the Standing Committee is contained in Article 18 of the noise emission in the environment by equipment for use outdoors Directive, 2000/14/EC. In essence it is convened to consider matters of interpretation which are brought to its attention by member states. It has, however only met in its capacity as an advisory committee. Officials of the European Commission chair these meetings with a view to providing advice based on consensus in order to ensure that there is uniform interpretation of the directive throughout the European Union and also to ensure that any technical barriers to trade within the Single Market are removed. The committee, in particular, assists the Commission in the adaptation to technical progress of methods of measurement of airborne noise emitted by equipment for use outdoors by means of amendments to the technical annexes of the directive.

In the last 12 months this committee has met twice. Representation from the United Kingdom is led by officials from the Department of Trade and Industry. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

Items under consideration vary from meeting to meeting but usually include issues of standardisation and interpretation. Current issues include a possible amendment to the directive in respect of noise limits of lawn mowers.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Genetically Modified Foods

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its predecessors have undertaken in the last five years to assess and measure the commercial impact of genetically modified foodstuffs; and if she will place copies in the Library. [54589]

Mr. Morley: Neither DEFRA nor its predecessors have undertaken any research on the commercial impact of GM foods.

Consultation Documents

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many consultation documents and consultative drafts of legislation have been issued by her Department since January 2001; and what proportion of these have observed Criterion 5 of the Code of Practice on Written Consultation. [57006]

Mr. Morley: The following table shows up-to-date information regarding consultation documents issued by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs since 1 January 2001.

	Number of consultations issued	*% of consultations observing Criterion 5*
1 January to 31 December 2001	50	50
1 January 2002 to date	29	69
Total	79	57

Correspondence

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when he will respond to the letter from the hon. Member for Eastleigh dated 18 March, regarding the funding for supply chain companies constructing the A380. [57521]

Mr. Morley: I am sorry, but we are unable to trace the correspondence referred to by the hon. Member.

As the correspondence would appear to be on constructing the A380, a new wide body twin jet, perhaps this is a matter for the Department for Trade and Industry.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer on 19 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1192–93W, if she will investigate the whereabouts of the Bale Us Out correspondence. [56186]

Mr. Morley: As I have stated in my earlier reply to the hon. Member, we are unable to trace the correspondence referred to.

I am sorry, but diverting resources in our correspondence section to investigating the whereabouts of this correspondence would not be cost-effective, as we have no record of having received your correspondence. If you send us another copy of your correspondence we will reply.

Over-30-months Scheme

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of cattle presented to the over-30-months scheme were rejected for lack of proper document in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [57557]

Mr. Morley: 1 per cent. of all animals entering the scheme during the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 were rejected because of either documentation or animal ineligibility. Figures relating solely to the number of animals rejected because of documentation are not available.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much over-30-months scheme compensation has been paid in each year since its inception. [57531]

Mr. Morley: The information requested is as follows:

	£ million
1996–97	670
1997–98	288
1998–99	264
1999–2000	265
2000–01	240
2001–02	185

Colorado Beetle

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on steps being taken to prevent the spread of the Colorado beetle. [57558]

Mr. Morley: The United Kingdom has protected zone status for Colorado beetle, making it an offence for the beetle to be moved into the country. To support this the Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate in England and Wales and the similar inspectorates in Scotland and Northern Ireland inspect imports of plants and plant produce to ensure that the beetle, as well as many other pests and diseases, are not present. Added to this is the long-running campaign to promote and maintain a high level of public awareness of the beetle. This is instrumental in ensuring that members of the public, as well as importers and port operators, report findings of the beetle. These measures have all helped to prevent the Colorado beetle entering and establishing in the UK. Should an outbreak be detected, the Department has contingency plans to contain and eradicate the pest.

Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the estimated level of losses to fraud and corruption was in *(a)* her Department's vote 1 budget and *(b)* her Department's vote 2 budget for (i) 1999–2000 and (ii) 2000–01. [54701]

Mr. Morley: The estimated level of losses to fraud and corruption are:

		£
Departmental vote	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Former MAFF	27,409	18,616
Former IBEA	0	0

The machinery of Government changes in 2001–02 saw the creation of two votes, one for Rural Payments Agency and the other for the remainder of DEFRA. Prior to that period both former MAFF and IBEA had separate votes.

Agrimonetary Compensation

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to claim agrimonetary compensation in the next six months. [53451]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) on 2 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 935W.

Dairy Farmers

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will make a statement on the price of milk that dairy farmers receive in Lancashire; [57451]

(2) if she will make a statement on the change in milk prices in the last two months for dairy farmers in Lancashire; [57453]

(3) what support and assistance she will provide to dairy farmers in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* the UK, to assist them in relation to falling prices; [57452]

(4) what discussions her Department had on the application for agrimoney aid to support dairy farmers; what recent discussions her officials have had with supermarkets in order to ensure that farmers receive a fair price for milk produced; and what action she is taking to ensure that the price of milk in supermarkets reflects the price paid to dairy farmers. [57454]

Mr. Morley: In Lancashire, in common with the rest of the country, the farmgate price of milk has been falling for the last two months. The most recent official figures show that for milk delivered in March the average farmgate price of milk in the UK had fallen to 18.04 pence per litre. However, we expect the average milk price paid to farmers (in May) for milk delivered in April to fall substantially, reflecting the price cuts announced by many purchasers and reported widely in the trade press.

The reasons for this fall are complex, but it is principally due to unusually high production in the UK so far this year, which has lead to severe competition between milk purchasers to find customers, at a time of weak world and Community markets for dairy commodities. The Government cannot, of course, prevent such overproduction and negotiations between farmers and purchasers, purchasers and their customers, or indeed, processors and supermarkets, are a commercial matter in which the Government cannot get involved. The Government can, however, influence the environment in which price negotiations take place through the Milk and Milk Products Management Committee and we have supported measures taken in Brussels to support EU markets and encourage exports.

The Department received representations from the industry on the payment of agrimoney aid to the dairy sector. While we acknowledge the difficulties that the sector is facing and are working with them on the recommendations of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food, and the Milk Task Force, we decided not to make a claim for these funds given the many competing demands on the Exchequer at present.

London Markets

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Review of the London Markets. [56253]

Mr. Morley: Preparations are in hand for a review and I expect to make a further statement as soon as the necessary arrangements are in place.

Tidal Flows

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what planning legislation exists to protect tidal flows in rivers from the construction of barrages and weirs. [54033]

Mr. Morley: Tidal barrages and other structures to control river flows, as for other development projects, will generally require planning permission in addition to consent from the relevant flood defence operating authority.

Atrazine

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement about the safety of Atrazine. [56257]

Mr. Morley: All pesticides used in this country, including Atrazine, must be approved by Ministers. Approval is only granted following thorough scientific evaluation of the risk that the pesticide might pose to people, wildlife and to the wider environment. Only if this evaluation shows that there is no unacceptable risk will approval be granted.

Both the UK and the EU systems for regulating pesticides contain routine review programmes of older pesticides to ensure they meet current safety standards. Atrazine is currently being reviewed as part of the EU programme with the UK acting as Rapporteur Member State. The review covers both the possible effects of Atrazine on human health and the environment. The UK's report on Atrazine is currently being considered by the EU Standing Committee on Plant Health with particular attention being given to the levels of Atrazine found in ground water.

In the UK restrictions were placed on the agricultural uses of Atrazine in 1992 as there had been widespread breaches of the EU Drinking Water Directive's limit. However, the levels found did not endanger the health of consumers or damage the environment.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent estimate she has made of the extent of the use of Atrazine as a fertiliser. [56258]

Mr. Morley: I have no information on the use of Atrazine as a fertiliser. Atrazine is a herbicide and should not be used as a fertiliser.

Foodstuffs Reserves

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the level of strategic reserves of staple foodstuffs in the UK; and how many weeks supply of such foodstuffs are available. [55183]

Mr. Morley: The Government no longer holds strategic reserves of food. The availability of staple foodstuffs and plans to handle emergency situations are kept under review at regular meetings between officials and food industry representatives. The fuel crisis of 2000 was a good example of Government and industry working together to ensure the distribution of food in an emergency situation.

Pet Passports

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received from Eurostar on pet passports and guide dogs. [56906]

Mr. Morley: Eurostar has been in touch with the Department about the Pet Travel Scheme in the light of representations that it has received from, amongst others, the Royal National Institute for The Blind. Eurostar has made it clear that while it has not been its policy to date to permit the animals of any kind on its trains, it is keenly aware of the assistance that guide dogs bring to visually impaired passengers. The company has, for some time, been considering whether, and how, it might allow the carriage of assistance dogs on its trains. The Department is ready to advise it on how the company could meet the requirements of the Pet Travel Scheme.

State Veterinary Service (Scotland)

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many veterinarians are employed by the state veterinary service in Scotland; and where they are based. [56293]

Mr. Morley: A total of 61 veterinarians were employed by the state veterinary service in Scotland on 13 May 2002. Their disposition is illustrated by the following table:

SVS staff in Scotland on 13 May 2002

	Number
Scottish Veterinary Policy Unit	6
Scottish Field Service HQ	2
Divisions	
Ayr	11
Galashiels	14
Inverness	8
Inverurie	10
Perth	10
Total	61

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many laboratories are operated by the state veterinary service in Scotland; and where they are located. [56294]

Mr. Morley: The State Veterinary Service (SVS) does not directly operate laboratories.

Coley

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the amount of coley (saithe) that was discarded back in the sea by British registered vessels during 2001. [46394]

Mr. Morley: There is no reliable basis for estimating quantities of saithe discarded by all British registered vessels during 2001. On the basis of partial information, we believe that the amounts of saithe discarded or slipped by UK vessels landing into Great Britain during 2001 may be in excess of 12,000 tonnes.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Civil Defence and Emergency Planning

3. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what steps he is taking to improve co-ordination of Government policy in respect of civil emergencies. [55929]

Mr. Leslie: The Civil Contingencies Secretariat at the Cabinet Office was established last June to support the Civil Contingencies Cabinet Committee, and provide the central focus for the Government's commitment to deal effectively with disruptive challenges, crises and emergencies.

16. **Mr. Kevan Jones:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State if he will make a statement on Government support for local authority emergency planning. [55948]

Mr. Leslie: The Government provides financial support by the provision of civil defence grant, with £18.97 million being allocated to local authorities in England and Wales for 2002–03.

Support is also provided through the issue of guidance documents and training at the Cabinet Office emergency planning college.

Parliamentary Questions

11. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what role his Department has *(a)* in providing guidance to other Departments on the answering of parliamentary questions and *(b)* in providing them with briefings on parliamentary questions. [55939]

Mr. Leslie: In response to a Report of the Public Administration Select Committee on Ministerial Accountability and Parliamentary Questions, the Cabinet Office issued revised "Guidance to Officials on Drafting Answers to Parliamentary Questions". Departments can liaise with each other from time to time where parliamentary questions cut across departmental boundaries.

Government Regional Offices

12. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State if he will make a statement on the future role of Government offices for the regions. [55941]

Mrs. Roche: The Government Offices have an important role in strengthening the English regions as set out in our White Paper published on 9 May. They will bring together key Government bodies in their regions. They will also be given extra responsibilities to strengthen regional decision-making.

Ministerial Code of Conduct

13. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what recent representations he has received on declarations made under the ministerial code of conduct. [55942]

Mr. Leslie: Last year the Public Administration Select Committee published a report on the ministerial code and from time to time I receive the occasional representation from hon. Members.

Public Appointments

14. **Charlotte Atkins:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what proportion of public appointments were filled by women over the last five years. [55944]

Mr. Leslie: At 31 March 2001, as set out in "Public Bodies 2001", women held 34 per cent. of all of the appointments concerned, compared to 31 per cent. on 1 September 1996.

The Government remain committed to the principal that women and men should hold an equal proportion of all appointments. To this end, each Department has published plans for increasing diversity in public appointments by 2005 and, specifically, increasing the proportion held by women, people from ethnic minority backgrounds and disabled people. These plans are contained in "Public Bodies: Opening up Public Appointments 2002–2005", copies of which are in the Libraries of the House.

If the targets set out in these plans are met, this will mean that, by the end of 2005 and for the majority of Departments, women should hold 45–50 per cent. of the appointments to the bodies they sponsor.

In addition, the Women and Equality Unit is currently running a series of regional seminars, which aim to encourage women who currently hold a local or regional public appointment to apply for a national appointment. Additional seminars have been planned for ethnic minority women, business women, women in journalism and the trade unions.

Sustainable Development

15. **Lawrie Quinn:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what representations he has made on the marine environment for the consideration of the world summit on sustainable development. [55946]

Mrs. Roche: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State has made many representations on the UK priorities for the World summit. The conservation of the marine environment is one of those priorities, given the importance of marine resources for maintaining sustainable livelihoods across the world.

European Employment Directive

17. **Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what co-ordinating role his Department is taking in the implementation of the European employment directive in respect of age discrimination. [55949]

Mrs. Roche: I am co-ordinating the implementation of the European employment directive, which covers discrimination in employment and vocational training on three new equality strands, one of which is age.

We are working closely with key stakeholders both in and outside Whitehall, as we take forward the implementation of the employment directive.

Administrative Dispersal

18. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what his policy is for dispersing Government Departments to the regions. [55951]

Mrs. Roche: Individual Departments and agencies are free to make their own decisions about location and facilities on the basis of operational requirements and value for money.

However, the existing dispersal of many civil service functions across the UK has worked well, and the Government believe that the administration of public service benefits from this national and regional diversity. Following the publication on 9 May 2002 of the White Paper on regional governance, we will aim to:

increase the mobility of civil servants between headquarters offices and regional offices (in particular the Government Offices);

encourage interchange between the civil service and organisations in the regions;

encourage Whitehall Departments to consider the balance of their staff as between the centre and the regions in terms of effective policy design and implementation.

In particular, Departments will have to demonstrate the case for not locating new streams of work outside London and the south-east.

Civil Service Pensions

19. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State if he will make a statement on the percentage increase in civil service pensions in each of the past three years; and on which basis the increase was calculated. [55952]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the Hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 10 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 408W.

Ministerial Travel

20. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what plans he has for travelling abroad to represent the United Kingdom at conferences in his capacity as Deputy Prime Minister. [55953]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I have no immediate plans for travel.

Joined-up Government

21. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State what progress is being made with the implementation of the joined-up Government project. [55954]

Mr. Leslie: Joined-up working is key to meeting the Government's delivery agenda. We have introduced a number of initiatives. These include the dissemination of cross-Government policy tools; of good practice across the public sector; the co-ordination of area based initiatives in Government offices; and the creation of cross-cutting public service agreements.

Discrimination

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the action programme to tackle discrimination is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55239]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The Community Action Programme to Combat Discrimination (2001–06) supports the development of practical solutions to combat discrimination on grounds of racial and ethnic origin, disability, age, religion and belief and sexual orientation. The programme encourages the exchange of best practice on policies and practices which have been shown to work well in combating discrimination across Europe.

The Committee has met four times over the last 12 months.

The current UK representative is the responsible official from this Department's Diversity and Equality Branch.

It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the Committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

Parliamentary Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of parliamentary advisers appointed to serve his Department. [56987]

Mr. Leslie: Ministers in this Department have made no such appointments.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Regional Government

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what benefits he estimates regional government will bring to the regions of England. [55943]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government's policy on establishing elected assemblies in the English regions was set out in the White Paper "Your Region, Your Choice" (Cm 5511), which was published on 9 May. The benefits of such assemblies are summarised in chapter 3 of the White Paper and elaborated in the following chapters.

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which body is responsible for *(a)* the regulation and *(b)* the auditing of expenditure of the regional assemblies. [58071]

Dr. Whitehead: The arrangements for funding elected regional assemblies are described in chapter 5 of the White Paper, "Your Region, Your Choice", published on 9 May. Regional assemblies' financial responsibilities will be set out in the primary legislation which will be needed before assemblies can be established. Assemblies will be subject to appropriate audit arrangements. We are discussing with the National Audit Office and the Audit Commission what form these should take.

Local Councils (Auditing)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the arrangements for internal and external auditing of local councils. [57651]

Dr. Whitehead: I am aware of the need to ensure that external and internal audit arrangements for local councils are appropriate. For this reason, the Audit Commission has introduced a new "lighter touch" audit framework for local councils, with the aim of making the external audit process more proportionate to the size and circumstances of local councils. We plan to consult later this year on proposals to make explicit the need for authorities to follow existing relevant best practice when carrying out their internal audit role.

Mobile Telephones

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to review the operation of road traffic law in relation to the use of mobile telephones by drivers of road vehicles. [58741]

Mr. Jamieson: In accordance with our road safety strategy, we are keeping the need for new legislation on the use of mobile phones by drivers under review.

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent assessment he has made of the number of road accidents in which the use of mobile telephones by the driver has been a contributory factor. [58740]

Mr. Jamieson: Detailed investigation is needed to establish he cause of any accident. Two research projects currently under way will help to establish the likely numbers of road traffic accidents involving mobile phones. One project involves carrying out in-depth analysis of police fatal road accident reports that identify distraction as a possible contributory factor. The other involves on-the-spot studies of accidents in order to improve the understanding of the influences of human involvement, vehicle and highway design on accident causation and injury mechanisms. Nevertheless, international research has provided clear evidence of an increased risk of an accident when using a mobile phone while driving.

Population Growth

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what Her Majesty's Government's policy is for reducing population growth in the south east of England relative to other regions. [55930]

Ms Keeble: The Government's policy is to achieve high and stable levels of growth and employment throughout the UK, with all regions and communities having the opportunity to share in the nation's prosperity. Our target is to improve the economic performance of all regions, measured by the trend in growth of each region's GDP per capita. We believe this is best done by tackling the causes of regional under-performance in some regions rather than by restraining economic development in others.

Pneumoconiosis

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the medical assessment procedure set up under the compensation scheme for pneumoconiosis may be accessed by mesothelioma claimants, irrespective of whether they may be able to sue their former employer or not. [58260]

Dr. Whitehead: The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions administers a scheme under the Pneumoconiosis etc (Workers' Compensation) Act 1979. The Act provides compensation for sufferers (or their dependants) of certain dust-related diseases who are unable to claim damages from the responsible employers as they have gone out of business.

Mesothelioma is one of the diseases covered by the Act. The three conditions of eligibility for a payment of compensation are that:

(i) industrial injuries disablement benefit (IIDB) is, or in the case of dependants was, payable in respect of the disease;

(ii) every relevant employer has ceased to carry on business; and

(iii) the sufferer or dependants must not have brought any action or received an out-of-court settlement in respect of the disease.

Mesothelioma is a listed prescribed industrial disease for the purposes of IIDB. IIDB is awarded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). For such an award the claimant will have been referred for medical advice. There is no separate medical assessment process set up under the 1979 Act.

A claim for IIDB can be made irrespective of whether the claimant is pursuing a civil action against their employer. However, a payment under the 1979 Act cannot be made if there is a relevant employer still trading who may have caused or contributed to the claimants's condition.

Telecommunications Masts

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact on 3G cellular telephony roll-out of different models of planning controls with regard to masts. [55143]

Ms Keeble *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* Different approaches to telecommunications planning apply in England and the devolved Administrations. In England, the installation of any telecommunications mast in protected areas, such as national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty, sites of special scientific interest and conservation areas, and of masts above 15 metres in height elsewhere, is subject to an application for planning permission for determination by the local planning authority. The installation of masts up to 15 metres in height, elsewhere, would be subject to a prior approval procedure under Part 24 of Schedule 2 to the Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) Order 1995 (as amended). The planning arrangements do not distinguish between different generations of telecommunications equipment. The devolved Administrations have their own planning regulations.

On 22 August last year, following consultation, we introduced changes that significantly improved the planning procedures and guidance for telecommunications mast development in England. Our changes, which included amendments to the 1995 Order, were:

strengthened public consultation requirements on mast proposals of 15 metres and below so that they are the same as for planning applications;

increased the time for an authority to deal with prior approval applications to 56 days;

underlined that school governors must be consulted on all proposals for new masts on or near a school or college; and

increased fees to enable authorities to carry out full public consultation.

These arrangements give authorities more time to consider proposals but with consent deemed to be granted if no decision has been made after 56 days so that development is not delayed.

The new arrangements strike the right balance by improving consultation with local people while minimising delay for the rollout of telecommunications networks and giving the 45 million people who use mobile phones the service they want.

Modular Homes

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if new modular homes will be available to people on low wages in the private sector; [57274]

(2) how many new modular homes will be built; and what estimate he has made of their average price. [57273]

Ms Keeble: The Government recognise that there is an urgent and growing need to assist the number of key workers and others on intermediate incomes who cannot afford to rent or buy in high demand areas where house prices have risen sharply over the last few years. We are looking at a number of options for helping overcome this problem, including the potential to increase housing supply quickly by using the modular unit construction techniques as illustrated by the Peabody Trust scheme at Murray Grove, Hackney.

The Government do not hold costings on modular build.

Emergency Services (Communications)

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals there are to provide a link between the fire service national radio communications system and the police radio system (Airwave); how they will be reflected in the competitive tendering process; and what plans there are to use common approaches to masts and other equipment between the fire, ambulance and police forces. [58110]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* It is intended that the requirement to provide effective interoperability between the fire service and the other emergency services will be included as part of the specification for a replacement wide-area radio system for the fire service. The design of a system which meets the requirements of the specification will be a matter for tenderers.

Fire Service College

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in relation to the fire service college, Moreton-in-Marsh, how many orders of over £1 million have been *(a)* won and *(b)* lost in the last three months; and on what date his Department took over responsibility from the Home Department. [57222]

Dr. Whitehead: During the last three months the FSC has neither won nor lost any orders whose value exceeded £1 million. The last order that the FSC received whose value exceeded £1 million was in January 2002. The largest order that the FSC has received in the last three months is valued at £0.85 million.

The Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions assumed responsibility for fire matters, including the fire service college in June 2001.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the status is of the review of the framework document on the fire service college, Moreton-in-Marsh; in drawing up financial targets for 2002–03, by how much in *(a)* number and *(b)* income he expects (i) domestic and (ii) foreign courses to change compared with 2001–02; and when he expects the 2001–02 reports to be presented to Parliament. [57224]

Dr. Whitehead: The review of the framework document for the fire service college will be an important undertaking for the task group announced in my written answer of today's date to my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, South (Helen Southworth).

Information on number and income of domestic and foreign courses is not held at the fire service college in the form requested. Therefore, such information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The college expresses its targets in financial terms. The financial targets for 2002–03 as set out in the FSC business plan provide for a minimum increase in turnover over 2001–02 in the region of £1 million.

The FSC expects to present its 2001–02 annual report and accounts to Parliament in July 2002.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the studies and investigations, including audit investigations, instigated and commissioned by his Department on the fire service college, Moreton-in-Marsh; on what date they began; when each is due to report to his Department; if he will publish them; if he will make a statement on the areas in which he expects action to be taken as a result of these reports: and what plans there are to commission further reports. [57223]

Dr. Whitehead: DTLR have been conducting a review of financial regularity and propriety following the suspension of the Chief Executive on 31 January 2002. As there are a number of matters outstanding it would be inappropriate to comment further at this stage.

Following the suspension and subsequent resignation of the college's Facilities Manager, the Department commissioned a surveyors' review of value for money and probity in the procurement of estates works. The review started on 8 March 2002. A completion date has not been set. There are no plans for publication.

The only other study set up by the Department which directly concerns the fire service college is the establishment of a task group to review the future direction and funding of the college. The aim of the group is to ensure that the college is in a secure position to undertake its valuable work in the future and its terms of reference can be found in my written answer of today to my hon. Friend, the hon. Member for Warrington, South (Helen Southworth). The task group, which is to report to Ministers in September, has been drawn from bodies representing fire service stakeholders and customers.

The Department has no plans at present for any further studies or reports.

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to review the future direction and funding of the fire service college; and if he will make a statement. [59160]

Dr. Whitehead: I am today announcing the formation of a task group to report in September on short-term action to meet the current training requirements of the fire service and to make longer term recommendations.

The fire service college has a well deserved reputation as a centre of excellence in providing national training for Britain's firefighters. But we need to ensure that the college is in a secure position to undertake this role for the future. We are therefore asking the task group to:

(1) prepare a statement setting out the mission, functions, aims and objectives for the college as the primary training provider within a fire service development strategy.

(2) consider appropriate involvement of customer and stakeholder interests.

(3) recommend a preferred solution for future funding of the college; and

(4) In the light of (1), (2) and (3) review the framework of financial planning and control, the relationship with the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions and accountability to Ministers and to Parliament.

Membership of the task group has been drawn from bodies representing stakeholders and customers.

Government Communications

Mr. Clelland: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how he intends to ensure effective communication between regional assemblies, the devolved institutions of the United Kingdom and central Government. [55945]

Dr. Whitehead: The Government's proposals for ensuring effective working relationships between different tiers of government following the establishment of elected assemblies in the English regions are set out in chapter 8 of the White Paper "Your Region, Your Choice" (Cm 5511), which was published on 9 May.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the mandate of the EC-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Joint Transport Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [58414]

Mr. Jamieson: This committee is established under the provisions of Article 22 of the Agreement between the European Community and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in the field of transport which was published in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities on 18 December 1997. The remit of the committee is to ensure the proper implementation of the Agreement. The committee would be made up of representatives appointed by the Community and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. But I am not aware that it has met since the conclusion of the Agreement or that there are any plans for it to meet in the immediate future.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the mandate of the EC-Hungary Joint Transport Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [58412]

Mr. Jamieson: This committee is established under the provisions of the Agreement of 12 July 2000 between the European Community and the Republic of Hungary establishing certain conditions for the carriage of goods by road and the promotion of combined transport. The remit of the committee is to ensure the proper implementation of the Agreement. The committee would be made up of representatives appointed by the Community and Hungary. But I am not aware that it has met since the conclusion of the Agreement or that there are any plans for it to meet in the immediate future.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on restrictive practices and dominant positions in air transport is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [55221]

(2) what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on Restrictive Practices and Dominant Positions in the Shipping Industry is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [55220]

(3) what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on Restrictive Practices and Dominant Positions in the Transport Industry is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55219]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The Advisory Committee on Restrictive Practices and Dominant Positions is the body through which the European Commission carries out its duty to consult member states on decisions and amendments to EC competition law which it proposes to adopt. For the UK, DTI and Office of Fair Trading officials and, where transport issues are under discussion, DTLR officials attend meetings of the committee.

The committee meets only when there are decisions or legislative proposals to discuss. In the last 12 months, there have been four meetings on air transport matters and two on maritime transport. Issues currently on the agenda are a proposed extension of Air Transport Regulation 1617/93, the granting of clearance to a co-operation agreement between Lufthansa and Austrian Airlines and a review of Maritime Transport Regulation 4056/86.

The process is transparent. The Commission publishes in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities the draft of any proposed change to legislation in advance of the committee meeting at which it will be discussed. Adopted decisions, which are open to challenge at the European Court of Justice, are also published in the *Official Journal*.

It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the mandate of the EC-Slovenia Joint Transport Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [58415]

Mr. Jamieson: The committee is established under the provisions of the agreement between the European Economic Community and the Republic of Slovenia in the field of transport which was published in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* on 29 July 1993. The remit of the committee is to ensure the proper implementation of the agreement. The committee would be made up of representatives appointed by the Community and Slovenia. But I am not aware that it has met since the conclusion of the agreement or that there are any plans for it to meet in the immediate future.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the mandate of the Standing Committee on the Harmonisation of National Legislation on Cableway Installations Designed to Carry Passengers is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55372]

Mr. Jamieson: This committee is established under the provisions of Article 17 of Directive 2000/9/EC relating to cableway installations designed to carry persons. The remit of the committee is to assist the Commission in the implementation of the requirements of the directive and in coordination of all procedures. The committee would be composed of representatives of member states and chaired by the European Commission. But I am not aware that it has met since the adoption of the directive or that there are any plans for it to meet in the immediate future.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Com(2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Parliamentary Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of parliamentary advisers appointed to serve his Department. [56985]

Dr. Whitehead: Ministers in this Department have made no such appointments.

Sellafield

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the *(a)* safety precautions in force and *(b)* material used to transport MOX fuel from Japan to Sellafield. [58574]

Mr. Jamieson: *(a)* The regulations in force concerning safety are:

Sea—The Merchant Shipping (Dangerous Goods and Marine Pollutants) Regulations 1997 (SI 1997 No. 2367); Merchant Shipping Notice No. M 1755(M), "The Carriage of Dangerous Goods and Marine Pollutants in Packaged Form—Amendment 30–00 to the International Maritime Dangerous Goods (IMDG) Code". The Merchant Shipping (Carriage of Packaged Irradiated Nuclear Fuel etc.) (Code) Regulations 2000 (SI 2000 No. 3216).

Rail—The Packaging, Labelling and Carriage of Radioactive Material by Rail Regulations (RAMRail) 1996 (SI 1996 No. 2090): Approved Requirements for the packaging, labelling and carriage of radioactive material by rail 1996 edition. The Carriage of Dangerous Goods (Classification, Packaging and Labelling) and Use of Transportable Pressure Receptacles Regulations (CDGCPL) 1996 (SI 1996 No. 2092). The Carriage of Dangerous Goods (Amendment) Regulations 1999 (SI 1999 No. 303).

Road—The Radioactive Material (Road Transport) (Great Britain) Regulations 1996 (SI 1996 No. 1350).

(b) MOX fuel may be transported in packages on UK flagged ships, respectively approved and certified in accordance with the regulations cited above.

Health and Safety Executive

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the recommendations made by the Health and Safety Executive since 1997 which should have been implemented to date; what steps have been taken to ensure these recommendations will be implemented; when these recommendations are likely to be implemented; and if he will make a statement. [58193]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) do not make recommendations to Ministers on railway safety matters, this is the responsibility of the Health and Safety Commission. Recommendations made by the Commission since 1997 were that the Secretary of State make regulations on train protection and Mark 1 rolling stock (1998), regulations to extend the scope of train operators' safety cases and transfer responsibility for the acceptance of safety cases from Railtrack to the Health and Safety Executive (2000) and regulations to make clear that safety cases cover escape from trains as well as organised evacuation in an emergency (2001) implementing a recommendation from Lord Cullen's part 1 report into the Ladbroke Grove train accident. All of these regulations have been made.

HSE Railway Inspectors regularly make recommendations as part of their checks on dutyholders. Providing details of such recommendations would entail disproportionate cost.

Disabled Travellers

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what evidence he has collated on UK airports as to the levying of differential handling charges for disabled travellers; and if he will take steps to prevent this practice. [57823]

Mr. Jamieson: There is general agreement across airports and airlines that the additional costs incurred in providing assistance to disabled passengers should not be passed on to those passengers. That principle will be reflected in a UK Code of Practice on air travel for disabled people that the Department is planning to publish this summer. Compliance with that Code will be on a voluntary basis, but we have said that we will take powers to place the Code on a statutory basis should the voluntary approach prove ineffective.

Additionally, many UK airlines and airports have signed the European Air Passenger Rights Charter, which was launched on 14 February and which includes a similar commitment. The Charter covers a range of non-legally binding commitments to deliver defined standards of service to air travellers.

The Charter was developed by European airlines and airports following extensive discussion with representatives of air travellers; the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC), representing European Governments; and the European Commission. My Department is also involved in discussions through the European Civil Aviation Conference to look at the mechanisms which have been established at different airports across Europe to cover the costs of assisting disabled passengers and to develop guidance on workable models for providing assistance and covering the costs on an equitable basis.

The New Humber Pilotage Service

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if Humber Pilots Limited were consulted in the preparation of the document The New Humber Pilotage Service. [58349]

Mr. Jamieson: The paper was prepared following extensive representations from and on behalf of former Humber pilots, and several meetings with them and officers of Humber Pilots Ltd. The paper is an account of the Department's independent assessment of the new pilotage arrangements—it was not prepared to represent the views of the former pilots or other parties, although those that were expressed to the Department are fully reflected in the concerns that the paper discusses.

Freight Movement (Channel Tunnel)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what steps he is taking to secure the restitution of normal freight services using the Channel Tunnel; and if he will make a statement. [57602]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* The Government continues to press the French Government at the highest levels to provide adequate policing resources at Fréthun to support the anti-intrusion measures already being installed by SNCF in order to address the disruption to channel tunnel services caused by would-be illegal immigrants. We welcome the additional resources that have already been deployed. The Government also welcomes the recent announcement by the French Government of proposals to further strengthen the anti-intrusion measures at Fréthun, and the personal assurance from the new Interior Minister of his commitment to maintain policing resources.

Oil Tankers

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the effect of Regulation (EC) 417/2002 (OJ L64, 7/3/02), on the sales of oil tankers from the EU fleet to countries not covered by the regulation; and if he will make a statement. [57908]

Mr. Jamieson: The sale of oil tankers is a matter for the buyer and seller within the relevant regulatory framework.

Last year the International Maritime Organization (IMO) agreed to accelerate the phasing in of double hull tankers so that by 2017 single hull tankers will no longer be in service anywhere in the world. Under the IMO agreement states may bring this deadline forward slightly and EU member states have chosen this option. Regulation 417/2002 provides that the final deadline by which a vessel flying an EU flag or using an EU port must be fitted with a double hull is 2015 rather than 2017.

Transport Expenditure

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much *(a)* private capital and *(b)* public money was spent on transport during the first year of the 10-year plan. [58013]

Mr. Byers: During the first year of the 10-year plan for Transport (2001–02), provisional figures indicate that around £6,550 million of public money was spent on transport, almost £500 million more than was envisaged in the published plan.

My Department is currently collecting data on private sector spending on transport in 2001–02 and an estimate of this should be included in the first year report on the 10-year plan when it is published in July.

Aviation White Paper

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the proposed aviation White Paper will be published; and if he will make a statement. [57684]

Mr. Jamieson: As part of the process leading up to the proposed air transport White Paper we expect to publish a series of regional consultation documents on airports and air services in early summer. When the consultation has been completed we will analyse the responses before taking decisions on the policies for the new White Paper, which we aim to publish towards the end of the year.

London Underground

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the latest estimated date is for the handover of the operation of the London underground to the Mayor of London; and if he will make a statement. [55810]

Mr. Jamieson: The handover will happen as soon as possible after completion of the PPP contracts. The contracts will take effect provided the Health and Safety Executive approve London Underground's Railway Safety Case.

Railway Industry

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will publish the findings of the administrator as vendor on the condition of Railtrack assets. [58017]

Mr. Byers: This is a matter for the administrator.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what incentives he proposes for rail safety in the scheme for a company limited by guarantee to take over the railways. [58007]

Mr. Byers: Discussions are continuing on Network Rail's incentive proposals. Network Rail has made clear that if it succeeds in becoming network operator its work will be supported by an incentive scheme based on system-wide safety and performance measures.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to hold discussions with the Strategic Rail Authority concerning the re-routing of the main railway line between Paddington and Penzance away from the sea wall down the Exe Estuary and the coast at Dawlish and Teignmouth; and if he will make a statement. [55300]

Mr. Jamieson: Work has been carried out on flood defences and track re-laying to protect this section of the railway from wetting and erosion. However, there are no plans to re-route the main line.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) if he will list the consultants and external advisers used by the Government in the last year on railway matters; [58012]

(2) how much the Government have paid in fees in the last year for advice on railway and underground matters. [58011]

Mr. Byers: The consultants and external advisers, used by the Government in the last year on railway and underground matters, are as listed in the reply which I gave to the right hon. Member on 22 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 390W, except that: Finsbury Ltd., Herbert Smith, Linklaters and Alliance, Partnerships UK and Professor Andrew Evans should be added to that list; AEA Technology Rail, AON, Booz Allen and Hamilton, Deloitte and Touche and NERA should be deleted from it; and "Oscar Faber" should be altered to "Faber Maunsell".

In the last year, the Government have paid those consultants and external advisers about £19 million.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many animals have been *(a)* killed, *(b)* injured and *(c)* retrieved from railway lines in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [58199]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive's HM Railway Inspectorate only collect statistics on the number of trains which run into animals. Details are contained in the table. Further information may be found in HM Chief Inspector of Railways annual reports on railway safety, copies of which are in both House Libraries.

Trains running into animals 1996–97 to 2001–02

	Number of trains
1996–97	142
1997–98	124
1998–99	134
1999–2000	155
2000–01	129
2001–02[1]	75

[1] Provisional

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many incidents of motor vehicles colliding with trains on railway lines there were in each year since 1997; in which locations; and if he will make a statement. [58195]

Mr. Jamieson: Information held by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) on the number of incidents where trains have collided with motor vehicles on railway lines (not at level crossings) since 1977 is contained in the table. This information is based on notifications the HSE has received from railway operators under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations, 1995 (RIDDOR).

Information for the period 1 April 2001 to date is under analysis by HSE and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Date	*Location*
3 February 1997	Ascott under Wychwood
15 March 1997	Morton Garage
8 June 1997	Burbage
9 September 1998	Thornton
16 November 1998	Slateford
22 January 1999	Firbeck
29 July 1999	Holton-Le-Moor
17 November 1999	Northumberland Park
18 August 1999	Drax Branch Junction
14 September 1999	Aberdeen
26 February 2000	Kiveton Bridge
20 August 2000	Micklefield
28 February 2001	Great Heck

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the final report into the rail accident at Hatfield in October 2000 was originally planned to be published; when it will be published; and if he will make a statement. [58194]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive's final report will be published after the British Transport Police investigation and any possible criminal prosecutions arising from it have been completed. Safety critical information from the investigation has already been made available to the industry.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the extent is of the legal relationship between the Strategic Rail Authority and Network Rail; and if he will make a statement. [58155]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority is meeting the bid team's costs in order to ensure that there is at least one viable bidder for Railtrack plc. There is no other legal relationship between the SRA and Network Rail.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his oral answer of 13 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 508, on rail safety, if he will place in the Library a copy of the letter sent to the chairman of the Health and Safety Commission on 1 May asking him to report by the end of May on the progress made on Cullen's recommendations to which he refers in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [57724]

Mr. Byers *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* Normally the letter would be exempt from publication, however as I referred to it during my statement to the House on 13 May, I have placed a copy in the Libraries. I will also place a copy of the Health and Safety Commission's response when it is received.

Minibuses

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how often *(a)* non-PSV minibuses and *(b)* PSV minibuses will be subject to a seat belt installation check. [57597]

Mr. Jamieson: A seat belt installation check is carried out on all new PSVs at the registration stage as part of the Certificate of Initial Fitness (COIF) check.

If additional seat belts are added to a PSV or non-PSV, the installation is checked at the first annual test after fitting.

School Buses

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures he intends to take to encourage wider take-up of the yellow bus transport to school schemes. [58594]

Ms Keeble: We would like to see more children travelling to school by bus, especially where it is too far for them to walk or cycle or it is not safe for them to do so. There are currently two first yellow school bus pilots running in England with a further one due to start shortly in Wales. Once these pilot schemes have been running for about a year, they will be comprehensively evaluated by consultants working for my Department. Depending on the results of this evaluation, we will then consider whether we wish to encourage wider take-up of yellow school bus schemes, and if so how we will go about doing it.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

New Millennium Experience Company

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the grounds on which the identity of the individual acting as the Government's shareholder in the New Millennium Experience Company was decided. [54070]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 2 May 2002]:* The decision to appoint a Cabinet Office Minister as the first shareholder was made under the previous Government. The subsequent appointment of the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Peter Mandelson) as shareholder was consistent with this, as was the appointment of Lord Falconer who was also a Cabinet Office Minister. The former Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Chris Smith) held the position in a temporary capacity on two occasions.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 578W, what was the method by which the shares in the New Millennium Experience Company were transferred from one shareholder to another. [54109]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 2 May 2002]:* With reference to the shareholders listed in my Written Answer of 25 March, the shares in the New Millennium Experience Company were transferred from one shareholder to another using, in each case, a stock transfer form.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the mandate of the Contact Committee for Implementation of the Television without frontiers Directive is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56721]

Dr. Howells: The Contact Committee was established in Article 23a of the 1997 revision of the "Television Without Frontiers" Directive as an Advisory Committee to assist the European Commission in its supervision of the implementation of the Directive. In particular, it addresses problems arising from decisions on the licensing of broadcasters, and approves the listed events of major importance for society when submitted by a member state. It meets when required, and met once in the previous year, at a cost of approximately £600. Under its rules of procedure, some reports are available on the Commission's website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the training programme for professionals in the European audiovisual programme industry and of the programme to encourage the development, distribution and promotion of European audiovisual works (MEDIA III) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [57495]

Dr. Howells: The Media Plus programme 2001–05 is governed by two Decisions:

> Council Decision 2000/821/EC of 20 December 2000 on the implementation of a programme to encourage the development, distribution, and promotion of European audiovisual works (MEDIA Plus—Development, Distribution and Promotion) (2001–2005). The legal basis is Article 157 (3) (Title XVI—Industry) of the treaty establishing the European Community.
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> Decision No. 163/2001/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 19 January 2001 on the implementation of a training programme for professionals in the European audiovisual programme industry (MEDIA Training) (2001–05). The legal basis is Article 150 (4) (Chapter 3 of Title XI—Social Policy, Education, Vocational Training and Youth) of the treaty establishing the European Community.

In the last 12 months the Media Plus management committee has met five times. The UK is represented by officials from my Department and from the Film Council, the lead strategic body for film in the United Kingdom.

The annual cost borne by my Department in contributing to the work of the committee covers both the cost of officials' time in preparing for, and attending committee meetings as well as carrying out resultant action. The cost incurred by my Department in this work over the last 12 months is estimated to be £15,000. To disaggregate the costs of the committee from the UK's total contribution to the EU budget would involve disproportionate costs.

The management committee is currently considering a range of items. These include formulating new guidelines for appraisal of pilot and innovative projects, approving the results of calls for projects within a number of the programme's measures and keeping budgetary and procedural matters under review.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to the Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final. As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the

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Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the programme establishing a single financing and programming instrument for cultural co-operation (Culture 2000) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [57494]

Dr. Howells: The mandate of the Culture 2000 Management Committee is to assist the European Commission in the management of the Culture 2000 programme. It was established by a European Parliament and Council Decision (No 508/2000/EC, Article 5) on 14 February 2000.

The committee has met five times over the last 12 months and the UK has been represented on each occasion by officials from my Department. The costs incurred by my Department in attending these meetings are limited to travel and subsistence. To disaggregate the overall costs of the committee's work from the UK's total contribution to the EU budget would involve disproportionate cost.

The issues currently under consideration by the committee are the selection of cultural projects to be supported by the programme in 2002, and the publication of the call for applications for 2003.

Accountability and transparency to Parliament is ensured by the submission of Commission and Council documents to parliamentary scrutiny. Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, "to simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Commission Document 5685/02). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Playing Fields

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to create an accurate record of playing field losses and their cause over the last five years. [57631]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* Data on playing field losses are not available. My Department has established a Playing Fields Monitoring Group which will shortly be publishing combined figures for (a) applications from schools submitted to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for the disposal or change of use of school playing fields (which are already published monthly), and (b) figures from Sport England giving details of planning applications affecting playing fields which have been referred to them as statutory consultee (which are already published quarterly), along with (c) relevant data from the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the Playing Fields Monitoring Group first met; how often it has met; and when the details of playing field losses will be published. [57627]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The Playing Fields Monitoring Group first met on 10 July 2000 and has met on eight occasions. Data on playing fields losses are not available. The Playing Fields Monitoring Group which will shortly be publishing combined figures for (a) applications from schools submitted to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for the disposal or change of use of school playing fields (which are already published monthly), and (b) figures from Sport England giving details of planning applications affecting playing fields which have been referred to them as statutory consultee (which are already published quarterly), along with (c) relevant data from the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

Tourism (London)

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to promote tourism in *(a)* Greater London and *(b)* Enfield; and if she will make a statement. [57921]

Dr. Howells: Since 2001–02, the Greater London Authority (GLA) has been responsible for tourism in London. The Mayor has delegated responsibility to the London Development Agency (LDA), who have been working closely with the London Tourist Board (LTB). The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is granting the GLA £1.9 million for 2002–03. This is to be used predominantly on marketing London overseas, including £250,000 for marketing London as a gateway to the rest of the UK. Up to £100,000 may be used for domestic marketing and £400,000 for improving tourism infrastructure. The Mayor is currently producing a three-year strategic tourism plan for London, with DCMS encouragement, which is in the final stages of development.

The London borough of Enfield also carries out varied promotional work as part of over £90 million spent by local authorities around the country on developing and marketing tourism. They are conducting a full programme of promotional campaigns for 2002–03 in conjunction with Enfield Hoteliers and Hospitality Association and attraction providers.

Channel 5

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with the management of Channel 5 television as to the feasibility of extending the range of their analogue television service since the collapse of ITV Digital. [57940]

Dr. Howells: I had no specific discussions on this topic with the management of Channel 5 television. The priority for the use of scarce frequency channels is to develop digital terrestrial television across the UK, including digital Channel 5, rather than to extend analogue Channel 5 services. Therefore the multiplexes used by ITV Digital have been re-advertised by the ITC.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage of the *(a)* population and *(b)* land mass of (i) Scotland, (ii) Wales, (iii) Northern Ireland and (iv) England are able to receive Channel 5 television by means of the analogue signal. [57941]

Dr. Howells: The information is not available in the form requested. The Independent Television Commission advise that analogue Channel 5 services are transmitted from 50 transmitters across the UK of which: 11 are located in Scotland; three in Wales; two in Northern Ireland and 34 in England. These transmitters provide coverage to 80 per cent. of the UK population. Coverage details can be found on Channel 5's website at www.channel5.co.uk.

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the answer of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 306W, what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of unpaid advisers who have assisted the work of her Department since June 1997 but are not included in the Cabinet Office's annual report "Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews 2000–01". [57042]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* As my answer to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 306W made clear, Ministers in this Department have not appointed any unpaid advisers other than those accounted for in the list of task forces, reviews and other ad hoc advisory groups.

Equal Treatment

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the subject of each gender impact assessment drawn up by her Department since June 1997, indicating in each case whether the outcome has been *(a)* put out to consultation and *(b)* published. [58179]

Dr. Howells: The guidelines on gender impact assessments, issued by the Home Secretary, the Secretary of State for Education and Employment and the Minister for Women in November 1998, are incorporated into the Department's central guidance on policy formulation. However, the Department does not keep a central register of gender impact assessments, and the answer could be given only at disproportionate cost.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she has established a baseline for policy appraisal against which to measure progress on equal treatment; and what progress has been achieved. [58180]

Dr. Howells: The Department has responsibility for a very wide range of policies, and a single baseline for policy appraisal would not be universally appropriate.

We are currently appraising all of our policies in line with our new responsibilities under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 and have also been considering a number of relevant policies against the wider criteria of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The results of these assessments will be published on the Department's website. The Department also has targets for increasing the representation of women, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities on the boards of its public bodies.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the women's organisations which have been consulted over the proposed legislation by her Department during the 2000–01 and 2001–02 sessions; and if their responses have been published. [58181]

Dr. Howells: This information is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The Department actively follows the Cabinet Office's Code of Practice on Written Consultations, which is intended to make consultations more effective by opening up decision-making to as wide a range of people and organisations as possible. Individual responses to written consultations are made available to the public unless respondents have sought confidentiality.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport on how many occasions between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [58726]

Mr. Caborn: During the period 31 March 2001 to 31 March 2002, special advisers in this Department travelled overseas on official business on one occasion; to Athens, Greece. The cost of this visit was borne by the Greek Government.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

School Transport

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 2 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 905–06W, what the average *(a)* distance and *(b)* time travelled by schoolchildren was (i) on foot (ii) by bus (iii) by car and (iv) other to rural (A) primary and (B) secondary schools between 1992 and 2000. [57463]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

The average distance travelled and average time taken by schoolchildren travelling to primary and secondary schools for those living in rural areas in Great Britain, from the National Travel Survey over the period 1992–2000, was as follows:

miles

Distance travelled by	*(A) primary*	*(B) secondary*
(i) Foot	0.4	0.6
(ii) Bus	4.9	8.6
(iii) Car	3.1	5.8
(iv) Other	3.0	8.1

		minutes
Average time taken by	*(A) Primary*	*(B) Secondary*
(i) Foot	10	13
(ii) Bus	22	31
(iii) Car	10	17
(iv) Other	13	29

Note:

Primary pupils are defined as children aged 5–10 in the National Travel Survey, Secondary defined as children aged 11–16. Rural areas are those with a population of less than 3,000 as defined by the 1991 Census.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 2 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 905W, on school transport, how many children were included in the National Travel Survey in each year between 1992 and 2000. [57464]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

The number of children taking part in the National Travel Survey over the period 1992–2000 was as follows:

	Age range				
	0–4	*5–10*	*11–16*	*Total 16 and under*	*All ages*
1992	570	676	613	1,859	8,320
1993	566	691	649	1,906	8,161
1994	586	693	597	1,876	8,190
1995	615	693	598	1,906	8,029
1996	534	633	591	1,758	7,665
1997	514	654	581	1,749	7,473
1998	463	534	510	1,507	6,842
1999	452	562	533	1,547	6,970
2000	536	662	625	1,823	8,056
Grand total	4,841	5,811	5,314	15,966	69,851

Schools (Private Sponsors)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what approaches she has made to individuals, organisations and companies to sponsor academies and city academies; and what criteria are used to determine such approaches. [58076]

Mr. Timms: My Department has a dedicated Business Development Unit working with the corporate sector, to help build effective partnerships with companies. The Business Development Unit is supporting the Academies Unit to help identify potential sponsors for academies. My Department brings together these potential sponsors—many of them philanthropic individuals—and local education authorities (LEAs) who have expressed an interest in hosting an academy. It is for the sponsor and LEA to determine whether to establish an academy partnership.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what arrangements she has made to ensure that private sponsors of academies and city academies do not have a majority of places on the governing body of a school. [58075]

Mr. Timms: Governing bodies of academies will comprise sponsors, or their representatives, and other stakeholders, including staff, parents and an LEA representative. It would be possible for governors appointed by sponsors to be in the majority. As trustees all governors of academies will have a duty to act in the interests of the academy.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what powers and benefits can be received where an organisation or individual provides substantial sponsorship to an emerging school. [58074]

Mr. Timms: Sponsors of academies are expected to play a key role in the strategic leadership of the schools they support. Sponsors—whether individuals or organisations—can derive no financial or other material benefit from their involvement with the schools.

Church Schools Company

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when her Department invited the Church Schools Company to sponsor the proposed Moss Side City Academy; which other schools have been offered to the Church Schools Company; and what the criteria are for such approaches. [58077]

Mr. Timms: My Department brings together potential sponsors and local education authorities (LEAs) who have expressed an interest in hosting an Academy. It is for the sponsor and LEA to determine whether to establish an Academy partnership. Manchester LEA and the Church Schools Company have been working together since October 2001 to establish a partnership for an Academy to replace Ducie High School in Manchester. The Church Schools Company is also sponsoring a new City Academy in Lambeth. The company has expressed interest in sponsoring other Academies and is in discussion with a number of authorities.

Faith Schools

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills where an Academy is created involving the *(a)* Church Schools Company and *(b)* other faith-based organisations, what control they will be able to exercise over admissions. [58073]

Mr. Timms: The admission arrangements for each Academy will be agreed with the Secretary of State and form part of its legally binding funding agreement. Admission arrangements for all Academies must be consistent with admissions law and the statutory codes of practice, as these apply to maintained schools.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills where an existing school is taken over by *(a)* a faith-based organisation and *(b)* a group sponsored by a faith-based individual, what provision there will be for existing pupils and teachers to opt out of faith-based teaching and arrangements. [58078]

Mr. Timms: No state school can be taken over by an organisation or group. For an existing state school to become a faith school would require publication of two sets of statutory proposals—to close the school, and to open a new school with a religious character. The local School Organisation Committee, or Schools Adjudicator, would decide on the proposals following local consultation.

We would expect the School Organisation Committee or Adjudicator to seek assurances from the local education authority that existing pupils, including those who did not wish to transfer to the new faith school, would be provided for and their interests safeguarded.

Parents of children transferring to the new school could withdraw their children from RE teaching and collective worship if they wished to.

Teachers of the existing school who transferred to the new faith school would continue to enjoy the protections that applied to their employment at their former school. They would not have to participate in religious aspects of the new school. Those who did not wish to transfer would have to seek alternative employment if the local education authority did not offer another post.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if teachers who teach in accommodation centres for asylum seekers will be required to have completed initial teacher training. [57618]

Mr. Timms: No decision has yet been taken as to whether those who will teach in the accommodation centres for asylum seekers will be required to have completed initial teacher training.

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the vacancy rates for each of the last five years for *(a)* primary teachers and *(b)* secondary teachers in each of the eight local education authorities in which the Government are proposing to locate an accommodation centre for asylum seekers. [57619]

Mr. Timms: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department is currently proposing to locate an accommodation centre for asylum seekers in the following three English local education authorities: Worcestershire, Nottinghamshire, and Oxfordshire. A site in Lincolnshire is currently being evaluated.

The vacancy rates in maintained nursery/primary and secondary schools in these local education authorities[1] in the last five years for which we have data[2] are as follows:

Nursery/primary vacancy rates

LEA	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Former Hereford and Worcestershire	0.0	0.0	—	—	—
Herefordshire	—	—	0.3	1.4	1.2
Worcestershire	—	—	0.4	0.2	0.0
Total former Hereford and Worcester area	0.0	0.0	0.4	0.5	0.3
Former Nottinghamshire	0.0	0.0	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire	—	—	0.0	0.0	0.0
Nottingham	—	—	0.0	1.7	1.4
Total former Nottinghamshire area	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.5	0.4
Lincolnshire	0.9	1.7	0.5	0.5	0.3
Oxfordshire	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.2	0.5

Secondary vacancy rates

LEA	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Former Hereford and Worcestershire	0.1	0.2	—	—	—
Herefordshire	—	—	0.8	0.6	2.0
Worcestershire	—	—	0.2	0.1	0.3
Total former Hereford and Worcester area	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.2	0.6
Former Nottinghamshire	0.0	0.0	—	—	—
Nottinghamshire	—	—	0.0	0.0	0.0
Nottingham	—	—	0.0	0.8	2.7
Total former Nottinghamshire area	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.6
Lincolnshire	0.5	0.9	0.5	0.3	0.5
Oxfordshire	0.0	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3

Two sites are under consideration in Wales and Scotland, and two further sites in England have been found to be unsuitable and rejected.

Teacher Training Agency

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost was of producing the new logo of the Teacher Training Agency. [58040]

Mr. Timms: The cost of producing the new Teacher Training Agency logo, including contract management, design and development costs, came to £38,110, plus VAT.

Juvenile Sex Abusers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what provision is made within initial teacher training to provide trainee teachers with assistance in responding to children and young people who sexually abuse. [58038]

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[1] Local education authorities created by local government reorganisation in 1998 are shown under their parent authority. To allow comparisons between years, the vacancy data for new authorities have been aggregated to give total rates for the former authority areas.

[2] Data for January 2002 are not yet available at local education authority level. Information on vacancies in January 2002 by local education authority will be published in the Teachers in England statistical volume in December 2002.

Mr. Timms: The Government do not dictate the detailed curriculum for teacher training. However, we do expect teacher training providers to ensure trainee teachers are properly prepared to meet the standards required for Qualified Teacher Status. These standards include being aware of the statutory framework relating to teachers' responsibilities—which would include child protection legislation—and identifying and supporting pupils experiencing behavioural and emotional difficulties, with the help of an experienced teacher. Trainee teachers are also expected to understand the role of other professionals—including those responsible for child protection; to challenge harassment; and to work within schools' policies and procedures.

Teacher Vacancies

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will identify the local education authorities whose information on teacher vacancies had not been validated when the statistical first release was issued. [58041]

Mr. Timms: As in past years, the Government have no plans to publish the names of local education authorities whose information on teachers in service and teacher vacancies had not been validated when Statistical First Release 05/2002 was issued on 24 April. Statistical first releases are published on the basis that their contents should be considered to be provisional in their entirety.

Fully validated data will be published in the Teachers in England statistical volume in December 2002.

Parliamentary Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of parliamentary advisers appointed to serve her Department. [56989]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Ministers in this Department have made no such appointments.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Parliamentary Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of parliamentary advisers appointed to serve his Department. [56990]

Mr. Straw: Ministers in this Department have made no such appointments.

José Bustani

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the United States Government about their stance on the position of José Bustani in the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. [58047]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary spoke with the United States Secretary of State about the matter in a telephone conversation on 1 March 2002.

WALES

Parliamentary Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the *(a)* names and *(b)* the responsibilities are of parliamentary advisers appointed to serve his Department. [56897]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Ministers in this Department have made no such appointments.

DEFENCE

Overseas Military Personnel

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training courses run by his Department have been attended by overseas military personnel from *(a)* China and *(b)* Zimbabwe since May 1997. [57917]

Mr. Ingram: During the period 1 May 1997 to 20 May 2002, 63 Chinese and 25 Zimbabwean military personnel have attended training courses at United Kingdom military establishments. A full breakdown of the courses attended and numbers trained by country is as follows.

China and Zimbabwe military trained in UK between 1 May 1997 and 20 May 2002

Year (FY)[1]	*China*[2]	*Zimbabwe*[2]
1997–98	1	13
1998–99	1	7
1999–2000	4	4
2000–01	11	1
2001–02	27	0
2002	19	0
Total	63	25

[1] Financial year

[2] Military students

Note:

Numbers include Royal College of Defence Studies and Defence Diplomacy Scholarship Schemes.

Course title	*Number of students*	*Dates*
Courses attended by China[1]		
Royal College of Defence Studies	1	1997
Royal College of Defence Studies	1	1998
Royal College of Defence Studies	1	1999
International Intelligence Directors	1	1999–2000
Diploma in Defence Diplomacy	2	1999–2000
Royal College of Defence Studies	1	2000
Advanced Command and Staff Course	1	2000–01
Beaconsfield Military English Course	3	2000–01
English Language Training for China	3	2000–01
Defence Diplomacy Scholarship—MSc Global Security	1	2000–01
Diploma in Defence Diplomacy	2	2000–02
Royal College of Defence Studies	1	2001
Chinese English Language Training	6	2001–02
Advanced Command and Staff Course	1	2001–02
English Language Training for China	2	2001–02
Beaconsfield Military English Course	6	2001–02
Diploma in Defence Diplomacy	2	2001–02

Course title	*Number of students*	*Dates*
Defence Diplomacy Scholarship—MSc Global Security	1	2001–02
Master of Defence Administration	1	2001–02
Diploma in Defence Diplomacy	3	2001–02
International Peace Support Briefing Package	4	2001–02
Royal College of Defence Studies	1	2002
Chinese English Language Training	6	2002–03
English for Advanced Command and Staff Course	2	2002–03
Peacekeeping Basic Skills Course	10	2002–03
Total	63	—
Courses attended by Zimbabwe[1]		
Preparation for Commissioning Course	4	1997–98
Commissioning Course	3	1997–98
Advanced Command and Staff Course	1	1997–98
Military Vehicle Technology	1	1997–98
Artificer Weapons O/S	2	1997–98
REME Company Commanders Course	1	1997–98
Total Quality Leaders Course	1	1997–98
Royal College of Defence Studies	1	1998
Commissioning Course	3	1998–99
Preparation for Commissioning Course	1	1998–99
Artificer Weapons O/S	2	1998–99
Advanced Command and Staff Course	2	1999–2000
Commissioning Course	2	1999–2000
MSc in Designing Information Systems	1	2001–01
Total	25	—

[1] 1 May 1997 to 20 May 2002

Armed Forces (Women)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will publish the outcome of the study into the employment of women in the armed forces; and if he will make a statement. [59012]

Mr. Hoon: Women play a vital role in the armed forces. They have made, and continue to make, a valuable contribution to recent and current operations. The great majority of posts in the armed forces are already open to them. Only posts in the Royal Marines General Service, Household Cavalry, Royal Armoured Corps, the Infantry and Royal Air Force Regiment remain closed for reasons of combat effectiveness.

Following a detailed study into the performance and suitability of women in these close-combat roles, I have concluded that the case for lifting the current restrictions has not been made. I am today placing in the House of Commons Library the report of this study, entitled "Women in the Armed Forces", together with a short paper explaining the reasons for the decision.

Although women are, on average, less able to meet the physical demands of these roles, some women would certainly be able to do so and this was not, therefore, in itself, a reason to exclude them.

The key issue was whether the inclusion of women in close combat teams could adversely affect the combat effectiveness of those teams in a high-intensity direct fire battle. All the units in question operate primarily in small units as fire teams or tank crews.

The evidence available suggests that on operations other than close combat the presence of women in small units does not affect performance detrimentally. However, there is no evidence to show whether this remains the case under the extraordinary conditions of high intensity close combat.

Given the lack of relevant direct evidence, from either field studies or the experience of other countries, I have concluded that military judgment must form the basis of the decision. The military advice is that under the conditions of a high-intensity, close-quarter battle, group cohesion becomes of much greater significance to team performance and, in such an environment, the consequences of failure can have far-reaching and grave consequences. To admit women, therefore, would involve a risk without any offsetting gains in terms of combat effectiveness.

The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 allows the armed forces to exclude women from close combat posts. The judgment of the European Court of Justice in Sirdar *v.* the Army Board and the Secretary of State and relevant European Community equality law uphold that position, subject to a requirement periodically to assess the position.

The Ministry of Defence is committed to equality of opportunity consistent with the need to maintain combat effectiveness. It will continue to work with the Equal Opportunities Commission and discuss with it the results of further work to examine the wider issues raised by this study. Women must have the same opportunities as men to progress to the highest ranks.

Nuclear Weapons

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on the United Kingdom's *(a)* possession and *(b)* use of nuclear weapons and the basis for this policy. [57991]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to Chapter 4 and Supporting Essay Five of the Strategic Defence Review, and also to the answer I gave him on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 30W.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the contribution of nuclear weapons to the security of the United Kingdom. [57982]

Mr. Hoon: I refer my hon. Friend to Chapter 4 and Supporting Essay Five of the Strategic Defence Review.

RAF Bases (Scotland)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what investigation has been carried out into the security implications of the suggested commercial use of RAF bases in Scotland; what the outcome was of this investigation; and if he will make a statement; [58291]

(2) what representations have been made to his Department by private airline companies with regards to RAF bases in Scotland, including the dates of representations and the bases discussed; and if he will make a statement; [58169]

(3) what representations his Department made to commercial airline companies concerning the possibility of commercial use of RAF bases in Scotland; if he will list these representations by *(a)* date and *(b)* airline concerned; and if he will make a statement; [58167]

(4) what costings have been made with regard to the commercial use of *(a)* RAF Kinloss, *(b)* RAF Lossiemouth and *(c)* RAF Leuchars; if these costings were passed on to commercial airline companies; and if he will make a statement; [58168]

(5) what the conclusions of Strike Command's feasibility study were for each of the Scottish RAF bases; and if he will make a statement. [58292]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* As part of the Government's wider market initiative, RAF Strike Command is considering the feasibility for commercial exploitation of irreducible spare capacity at RAF Leuchars. No other airfields in Scotland have so far been considered. The RAF Leuchars study is at an early stage with the team currently examining whether commercial exploitation of irreducible spare capacity is feasible. As a part of this work, consultants have sought the views of the airline operator community; however, the detailed findings are commercially sensitive. The feasibility study has no remit to address the issue of what the costs might be for a commercial airline company to operate scheduled services from RAF Leuchars. Initial indications suggest that there might be some irreducible surplus airfield capacity at RAF Leuchars. However, until the Ministry of Defence formally seeks proposals from industry as part of an open and competitive process, my officials cannot fully evaluate the potential for the commercial exploitation at RAF Leuchars. A security assessment has not been undertaken at this stage of the feasibility study.

Some three weeks ago, Ryan Air expressed an interest in introducing new routes into Scotland, possibly using RAF airfields. Their formal proposals are awaited. No Ministry of Defence Minister or official has met representatives of commercial airline companies to discuss the commercial use of RAF stations in Scotland. Apart from occasional use by civil air operators permitted by existing MOD regulations, no formal proposals have been put forward by airline companies for the operation of scheduled services from any of the RAF stations located in Scotland.

Departmental Main Building (PFI Project)

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the total professional fees were for the redevelopment of his Department's main building, broken down by the *(a)* payer and *(b)* payee; [57810]

(2) what he estimates the total amount of cash paid by his Department to the Modus consortium will be over the lifetime of his Department's main building PFI project using his Department's inflation assumptions for the redevelopment of his Department's main building; [57828]

(3) what the total *(a)* refurbishment and *(b)* operating costs are in the PFI project for the redevelopment of his Department's main building, broken down by the principal cost headings used; [57826]

(4) what assumptions have been made about inflation in the PFI deal for the redevelopment of his Department's main building. [57827]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Exercises (Spending)

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total spend has been on exercises for each of the services in the past four years. [56194]

Mr. Ingram: Exercises are a fundamental activity for all military units not on operations at every level. To isolate, identify and cost the requested information, even if it were possible, could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Annington Homes

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the houses sold back to Annington Homes have been *(a)* grade 1, *(b)* grade II, *(c)* grade III and *(d)* grade IV since 1996; how much was spent on the repair and renovation of these houses in each year since 1996; and if he will make a statement. [57350]

Mr. Ingram: This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, it has generally been the practice to upgrade to Standard 1 for Condition those properties which are required as longer term core stock for service family occupation. Those which are not so required are disposed of, mainly by handing them back to Annington Homes Ltd., to whom the equity in the housing stock (in England and Wales) was sold in 1996.

Flying Hours

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the average number of flying hours in each of the last 12 months for pilots in *(a)* 9 Squadron, *(b)* 12 Squadron, *(c)* 14 Squadron, *(d)* 31 Squadron, *(e)* 617 Squadron, *(f)* 11 Squadron, *(g)* 25 Squadron, *(h)* 43 Squadron, *(i)* 111 Squadron, *(j)* 6 Squadron, *(k)* 41 Squadron, *(l)* 54 Squadron, *(m)* 1 Squadron, *(n)* 3 Squadron and *(o)* 4 Squadron was. [57803]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The following table details the average number of flying hours for each month from April 2001 to March 2002 for crews in the Squadrons listed:

Squadron no.	*April 2001*	*May 2001*	*June 2001*	*July 2001*	*August 2001*	*September 2001*	*October 2001*	*November 2001*	*December 2001*	*January 2002*	*February 2002*	*March 2002*
1	16.02	21.04	26.28	23.12	22.72	18.62	20.78	18.26	11.59	16.33	18.78	23.46
3	16.11	19.46	20.82	20.71	10.26	17.70	23.46	20.75	11.88	16.45	19.11	21.72
4	17.44	21.52	19.50	13.54	17.08	11.11	21.30	18.61	9.50	20.08	14.96	18.23
6	16.04	21.13	26.51	14.38	24.93	17.61	18.16	17.71	9.40	17.56	21.87	16.58
9	16.48	12.54	11.44	13.01	16.31	21.31	18.87	19.92	12.45	17.95	12.48	15.57
11	9.76	14.15	16.12	31.38	13.63	16.38	30.13	18.51	15.46	19.44	14.81	16.74
12	17.18	18.92	18.01	16.24	5.14	20.22	19.51	16.24	11.23	16.14	21.80	11.02
14	15.89	17.16	16.10	14.43	15.76	13.80	10.26	15.84	10.84	17.80	14.15	15.76
25	16.88	13.49	13.35	17.06	11.93	16.84	15.40	16.17	11.19	16.34	23.21	11.27
31	7.81	19.96	4.59	20.56	11.51	19.80	19.83	15.21	9.15	11.78	16.15	24.07

Squadron no.	*April 2001*	*May 2001*	*June 2001*	*July 2001*	*August 2001*	*September 2001*	*October 2001*	*November 2001*	*December 2001*	*January 2002*	*February 2002*	*March 2002*
41	16.40	19.61	21.01	23.38	18.85	17.92	20.14	16.59	13.67	15.61	16.97	18.21
43	14.55	10.59	17.97	9.26	12.59	10.66	18.46	23.45	7.54	13.73	18.90	14.25
54	15.47	18.23	21.93	15.74	13.91	16.46	24.40	19.04	11.24	17.90	12.63	15.58
111	17.64	15.51	16.96	18.59	17.83	28.14	17.03	14.65	9.39	15.71	12.87	16.91
617	13.14	9.88	21.62	15.55	9.73	19.59	25.99	13.33	9.02	14.08	14.85	14.99

Macedonia

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the European Union will be ready to take over in the autumn Operation Amber Fox in Macedonia. [57794]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* NATO has been invited by the Macedonian Government to extend the mandate of Operation Amber Fox for a further four months until 26 October 2002. The Netherlands will take over from Germany as lead-nation on 26 June 2002.

At Barcelona, the European Council expressed the European Union's availability to take responsibility for a follow-on to the NATO mission in Macedonia, Operation Amber Fox, following Macedonian elections set for 15 September 2002, and if the Macedonian Government so requested. The offer was conditional on the permanent arrangement on EU-NATO co-operation ("Berlin Plus") being in place by then.

At the present time no decision has been reached on the requirement for any follow-on mission.

Weapons of Mass Destruction

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what types of weapons of mass destruction are held by the United Kingdom. [58079]

Mr. Hoon: There is no universally accepted definition of the phrase "weapons of mass destruction", but it is generally held to refer to nuclear, chemical and biological weapons. The UK possesses no chemical or biological weapons. It holds nuclear weapons lawfully, and is one of the category of nuclear weapons states as defined in Article 9(3) of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Afghanistan

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of the United Kingdom armed forces from the *(a)* Royal Navy, *(b)* RAF and *(c)* Army are assigned to operations in and around Afghanistan; what percentage of coalition forces in Afghanistan this represents; and if he will make a statement. [57517]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* As at 20 May 2002 there are 3,100 Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel, 630 RAF personnel and 1,550 Army personnel operating in and around Afghanistan. Our forces in Afghanistan currently represent around 20 per cent. of the coalition forces operating there.

The United Kingdom attaches great importance to the task of helping to break the link between Afghanistan and terrorism for good, and we are making a substantial contribution to coalition operations in Afghanistan, both through warfighting and security assistance duties. Numbers in theatre vary according to the operational tempo, and so the figures here merely represent a snapshot in time.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Treasury Solicitor's Framework Document

Kali Mountford: To ask the Solicitor-General what changes the Attorney-General plans to make in the Treasury Solicitor's framework document. [58711]

The Solicitor-General: In his quinquennial review of the Treasury Solicitor's Department, Sir Quentin Thomas recommended that the framework document for the Treasury Solicitor's Department should be revised to provide the agency with the flexibilities it required to continue to meet the growing demand for efficient and high quality legal services from Government Departments and other publicly funded bodies in England and Wales. I am pleased to announce the publication of a revised framework document, a copy of which I have placed in the Library.

The framework document has also been published on the Treasury Solicitor's website (www.treasury-solicitor.gov.uk).

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Global Environmental Facility

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) how much assistance the Government have given to the global environmental facility since 1997; [58567]

(2) which countries have received assistance from the global environmental facility since 1997. [58568]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) on 16 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 748W.

Debt Relief

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact of vulture funds on debt relief for countries; what action she is taking on this issue; and if she will make a statement. [57850]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

Under the enhanced heavily indebted poor countries (HIPC) initiative eligible countries should receive debt relief from all creditors. However, a number of commercial creditors decline to provide debt relief and sue the HIPC for payment. Vulture funds specialise in purchasing debt at a discount in the secondary market and then suing for repayment in full. At their last meeting, HIPC Finance Ministers raised the issue of lawsuits against them from various creditors in their declaration. The UK Government has proposed that the international community should consider giving technical assistance to any HIPC being sued by a commercial creditor and provide expert financial advice on debt restructuring to prevent future claims.

TREASURY

Cocaine

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further steps are being taken to combat the smuggling of cocaine into the UK by air passengers from Jamaica. [59245]

Mr. Boateng: I have today signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of Jamaica to enable joint action to combat the use of air passengers to smuggle cocaine into the UK concealed in their bodies. The UK will be providing technical assistance and intelligence support to enable the Jamaican authorities to detect potential cocaine couriers before they board flights to the UK and take appropriate enforcement action.

Action in Jamaica will be supported by increased activity by Customs here in the UK. As part of the recent Budget package, the Chancellor of the Exchequer has increased the resources available to Customs for law enforcement action at the frontier. Customs will be deploying more than 30 additional specialist anti-smuggling staff to combat a range of smuggling threats. Their first priority will be to enhance controls on flights arriving from Jamaica, focusing on identifying any couriers who have escaped detection in Jamaica and on the smuggling of cocaine in passengers' baggage and air freight.

Customs will continue to work closely with a number of police forces, including the Metropolitan police's Operation Trident team, to maximise the impact of their efforts on cocaine smuggling and on associated, often violent, criminality across the UK.

Contracts

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make a statement on the continued use of retentions in relation to public procurement contracts; [58141]

(2) whether Government Departments will continue the practice of requiring retentions when negotiating contracts with outside contractors. [58139]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Salisbury (Mr. Key) on 29 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 168W.

National Insurance

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library the Treasury's calculations for establishing the total cost to the public sector of the 1 per cent. rise in employers' national insurance contributions from April 2003. [53626]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The estimate of just over £1 billion is based on a percentage of total employer national insurance contributions attributed to the public sector using assumptions supplied by the Revenue departments.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate his Department has made of the percentage of additional class 1 secondary national insurance contributions to come from *(a)* public sector employers and *(b)* private sector employers in 2003–04. [58042]

Dawn Primarolo: It is estimated that the changes to employer NICs announced in the Budget will add around 0.7 per cent. to pay costs on average next year. The cost to public services will be just over £1 billion which compares with a planned rise in spending on public services of nearly £20 billion. The changes will help to fund improvements to public services and a real terms increase in spending on health over the next five years of over 40 per cent.

Credits

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received since June 2001 on delays in crediting *(a)* contracting-out rebates and *(b)* employers' contributions to pension schemes; and if he will make a statement. [56589]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* The information on *(a)* is not available and could be supplied only at disproportionate cost.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has advised me that on *(b)* the Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (Opra) received reports about delays in employer payments to occupational pension schemes, stakeholder and personal pension schemes. Since June 2001, reports have been received by Opra as follows:

	Reports
Occupational pension schemes	10,257
Personal pensions	152,510
Stakeholder pensions	8,271

Of these, only a small proportion was serious enough to lead to a sanction.

Economic and Monetary Union

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on discussions which have taken place between officials in his Department and those from Sweden on the timing of referenda on EMU membership. [57882]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury has frequent discussions on a wide range of issues with its European counterparts.

Exotic Animals

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many consignments of exotic animals HM Customs and Excise have checked and inspected, broken down by month in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement; [57666]

(2) how many investigations HM Customs and Excise have undertaken into illegal imports of wild animals since 1997; what has been the outcome of prosecutions undertaken; and if he will make a statement; [57668]

(3) how many HM Customs officers are trained in CITES-related issues; and if he will make a statement. [57667]

Mr. Boateng: There are no central records which separately identify checks and inspections of exotic animals or investigations into illegal imports of wild animals. Details of prosecutions since 1997 involving imports of live animals are

2000—one person convicted

2002 (to date)—three persons convicted, one person acquitted.

Training in CITES related issues is part of the standard training of the approximately 3,800 Customs detection staff and other staff whose work involves CITES issues.

E-Procurement

Mr. Allan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for the development of e-procurement in Government purchasing. [55940]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The Office of Government Commerce is currently running pilot projects in e-procurement in seven Departments aimed at learning about the issues arising from the deployment of e-procurement systems. This information, together with the lessons learned from the recently concluded e-tendering pilot, will allow Government to make a full assessment of the options that will work best and ensure value for money. Plans for further development of e-procurement in Government purchasing will be announced later this year.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the mandate of the Contact Committee European economic interest grouping is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56767]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The mandate of the European Economic Interest Grouping Contact Committee is set out at article 42 of the Council Regulation of 25 July 1985 on the European Economic Interest Grouping (EEIG) (2137/85/EEC). Its functions are as follows:

(a) to facilitate, without prejudice to articles 169 and 170 of the treaty, application of the regulation through regular consultation dealing in particular with practical problems arising in connection with its application;

(b) to advise the Commission, if necessary, on additions or amendments to the regulation.

The committee has not met in the last 12 months and, consequently, there have been no costs incurred by the Department associated with the work of the committee and there are no on-going issues subject to its consideration. The UK would be represented in meetings of the committee by officials and lawyers of the Department.

Parliamentary Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of parliamentary advisers appointed to serve his Department. [56982]

Ruth Kelly: Treasury Ministers have made no such appointments.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue has been collected by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise from Customs (Import) duty and VAT charges paid by United Kingdom recipients of postal packages sent from countries outwith the EU in each year since 1995. [58060]

Mr. Boateng: It is not possible to provide the requested estimates due to lack of data on these specific transactions.

Private Members' Bills

Mr. McWalter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many written representations he has received from hon. Members in support of the *(a)* Industrial and Provident Societies Bill and *(b)* Employee Share Scheme Bill. [57549]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury received 177 written representations from hon. Members in support of the Industrial and Provident Societies Bill and six in support of the Employee Share Schemes Bill.

National Insurance (Scotland)

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the total cost to Scotland's *(a)* health trusts and *(b)* local authorities of the payment of the revenue in employees' national insurance in the year 2002–03. [57496]

Dawn Primarolo: The cost of national insurance contributions to these employers will remain similar between 2001–02 and 2002–03.

Oil and Gas Industry (Taxation)

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the value is of the threshold of profitability referred to in paragraph five of the paper he published as part of his letter to the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir Robert Smith) of 8 May. [57932]

Dawn Primarolo: The threshold of profitability referred to in the paper is not a cash figure. It is based on a measure of profitability expressed as the ratio of net present value to the pre-tax cost of the investment. The precise threshold of this ratio up to which net present value of projects is improved depends on various factors such as the discount rate used by the investor. But in general, projects below the threshold are likely to be the more marginal ones; those above threshold the more economically attractive ones.

Tax Credits

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families are expected to be eligible for the increased children's tax credit because they have a child born during 2001–02. [58762]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) on 15 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 244W.

Voluntary Sports Clubs

Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what sports are not eligible for the Inland Revenue tax exemptions and charitable status for voluntary sports clubs; and if he will make a statement. [58659]

Mr. Boateng: Clubs eligible for the Inland Revenue scheme will be determined by the national sports councils. Clubs eligible for charitable status will be those that meet the criteria of 'the promotion of community participation in healthy recreation by the provision of facilities for the playing of particular sports'.

Environmental Taxes

Mr. Key: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans the Government have to review UK environmental taxes and their impact both on *(a)* business and *(b)* the environment. [58538]

Mr. Boateng: The Government keeps all taxation policy under review and publishes updated estimates of the environmental impacts of taxation in the pre-Budget report and the Budget each year.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Non-governmental Organisations

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list non-governmental organisations operating in the south west region that receive public funds from his Department; and what amount of annual funding they received in the most recent year for which figures are available. [39193]

Mr. McCartney: There are no non-governmental organisations operating in the south west region that receive funds from the Department for Work and Pensions.

Correspondence

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects a reply to be sent to the letters to the Minister of State for Pensions dated 31 October 2001 and 2 July 2001 concerning Mrs. Anita Stamp of Mayland. [45492]

Mr. McCartney: The response was issued on 9 April 2002 with an apology for the delay which was due to an administrative error. The particular circumstances that gave rise to this delay have been fully reviewed and the related procedural arrangements have been strengthened to prevent a recurrence.

Medical Services Contract

Mr. Tom Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what further progress has been made on formalising the extension of the medical services contract with SchlumbergerSema. [59161]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department reviewed the performance of SchlumbergerSema against a series of performance targets and other contractual obligations to be met by 31 March 2002 and has confirmed the contract extension to August 2005.

The agreement with SchlumbergerSema contained a total of 45 key performance targets. These targets, in each of the three contract packages, covered the following areas:

IB examinations
DLA primary target for examinations
IISB primary and secondary examination targets
Customers turned away unseen
Customer waiting time
Customer satisfaction levels
Percentage of unacceptable (C grade medical reports)
Compliance with medical scrutiny guidelines
Complaint turnaround time and quality levels [5 targets]
Rework accuracy.

SchlumbergerSema met 43 out of the 45 targets set by 31 March and met the remaining 2 targets during April 2002.

In addition to the key performance targets, the contract contains a number of other performance measures, the vast majority of which are now being achieved. Performance is formally monitored on a monthly basis. If performance falls below agreed targets remedial action is taken, including the application of financial remedies where appropriate.

During 2000 (prior to the Department setting targets relating to contract extension) the Department set four challenging targets where tangible improvement in medical quality was required. These were:

Within six months to reduce by 10 per cent. the proportion of "C grade" medical reports which fail to meet the Department's standards; and within one year to reduce the proportion of "C grade" reports across all benefits to less than 5 per cent.

Within one year to demonstrate improvement in compliance with the agreed medical scrutiny guidelines for Incapacity Benefit claims so that the proportion of non-compliant reports is less than 5 per cent.

Within one year to deliver training to all doctors covering: the assessment of people with mental health problems; behaviours, attitudes and sensitivities for dealing with people with disabilities; and distress-avoiding techniques for the examination of people with musculo-skeletal conditions.

Within two years to improve customer satisfaction rates to at least 90 per cent.

These service targets have all been met. The agreement to extend the Contract contains a further set of quality improvement measures, including even more challenging measures relating to the quality of medical reports, together with new a doctor capability measure and a new complaints target.

Additionally, the agreement commits SchlumbergerSema to a programme of doctor recruitment and requires them to deliver a number of other important initiatives. These include:

National implementation of the "Did Not Attend" initiative which will reduce the number of claimants who are given an appointment but fail to attend. Results from the pilot undertaken show significant reductions and this new process will be rolled out across all Medical Service Centres by the end of June 2002.

National implementation of "Evidence Based Medicine" which aims to secure more consistency in conducting medical examinations and to improve the quality of medical reports by using fully researched medical protocols for examination supported by an IT application.

Piloting a new approach to evidence gathering where Doctors advising on Incapacity Benefit claims will have access to relevant medical information from the claimant's General Practitioner case notes.

Contractual milestones for the remaining life of the extended contract have been agreed for each of the key improvement projects underway, supported by financial remedies for failure to deliver against key milestones. The Department, through joint Project and Programme Boards, will continue to monitor closely the progress of each project.

The Department has also secured a range of other contractual improvements including greater cost transparency to underpin future commercial negotiations.

Rural Awareness

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) when his Department will establish rural targets and monitoring as part of overall rural proofing measures as set out in the Countryside Agency's report, "Rural Proofing in 2001–02"; [54413]

(2) when his Department will implement proofing and checklist measures as part of overall rural proofing measures set out in the Countryside Agency's report, "Rural Proofing in 2001–02"; [54425]

(3) when his Department will introduce measures to raise rural awareness through staff *(a)* training, *(b)* development and *(c)* secondments as part of overall rural proofing measures set out in the Countryside Agency's report, "Rural Proofing in 2001–02". [54437]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given by the Minister for Rural Affairs on 9 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 273–75W.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are in receipt of higher rate disability living allowance on the basis of autism-related disruption during the night. [57561]

Maria Eagle: Information is not available in the form requested. The most recent available information, which relates to 30 November 2001, is that there are about 39,300 recipients of the maximum rate of the disability living allowance care or mobility component, who have learning difficulties recorded as their principal disabling condition and whose needs include care during the night.

This information is based on 5 per cent. data and rounded to the nearest hundred.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are in receipt of disability living allowance in respect of autism. [57560]

Maria Eagle: Information is not available in the form requested. The most recent available information, which relates to 30 November 2001, is that there are about 226,700 disability living allowance recipients with learning difficulties as their principal disabling condition.

This figure is based on 5 per cent. data and rounded to the nearest hundred.

Property Protection

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what new measures his Department took in 2001–02 to protect its property from theft or damage. [47251]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department takes its responsibility for the security of its people, physical property, and information very seriously. We continually evaluate the trend in fraud and theft and introduce appropriate systems of security. However, in order to ensure the effectiveness of these measures, it is the Department's policy not to disclose the details of these actions (part 2, paragraph 4 Code of Practice on Access to Government Information).

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the names of the unpaid advisers appointed by him and his predecessor since June 1997, stating in each case *(a)* the date of their appointment, *(b)* the duration of their appointment and *(c)* the project or projects on which they have been engaged. [43381]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* Since June 1997, there have been no unpaid advisers appointed in line with the requirements of Paragraph 51 of the Ministerial Code.

For details of appointments made by this Department to task forces, review groups and other ad hoc advisory groups, I refer the hon. Member to the answer provided by the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie), on 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 958W.

Savings Credit

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether it is his intention that pensioners receiving the savings credit should receive the same amount of housing benefit and council tax benefit as they would if the savings credit were not introduced. [41196]

Mr. McCartney: The Government are investing £450 million a year in the housing benefit and council tax benefit schemes to ensure that people who gain from pension credit do not lose those gains because of knock-on effects. As a consequence, almost 1.9 million pensioner households will be entitled to more help, or entitled to help for the first time, with their rent or council tax from October 2003.

Parliamentary Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of parliamentary advisers appointed to serve his Department. [56900]

Mr. McCartney: Ministers in this Department have made no such appointments.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library a copy of the script used by staff at Pensions Service call centres to respond to new telephone claims for retirement pensions. [57512]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* There is no formal script used when making telephone application for retirement pension. Our agents have an "interactive" electronic claim form that prompts them to ask for the relevant information, but does not specify the words they use to do this.

As part of our commitment to provide a first class service to our customers, we will provide all of our customer agents with a two-week "customer experience" training programme. This will equip them with the tools they need to deal sensitively with our customers.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many prospective pensioners have received combined pensions forecasts to date; and what his target number is of recipients for each of the next three years. [54240]

Mr. McCartney: To date state pension information has been provided to pension scheme providers to enable the issue of 33,662 combined pension statements.

A further 15,000 records have recently been provided to enable the issue of combined pension statements by the scheme provider in the near future.

The on-going recruitment of providers will build to a service that enables the private sector to issue up to 15 million forecasts by 2005–06. Precise volumes are difficult to predict year-on-year as this is dependent on take-up levels within the industry.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will update his estimates based on the Family Resources Survey 1999–2000 of *(a)* median pensioner incomes, excluding means-tested benefits, by age, sex and marital status, on the basis of his answer of 16 November 2000, *Official Report*, column 790W, on pensions, and *(b)* the size of each group. [53009]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is in the table. It should be noted that the "median income" represents the income of the person or family exactly in the middle of the range of ranked incomes of the age group. For each age group there is a wide range of incomes.

Pensioner incomes

	Age 60–64	Age 65–69	Age 70–74	Age 75–79	Age 80+
Single males					
Median income (£)	n/a	136	138	126	118
Number	n/a	240,000	230,000	230,000	270,000
Single females					
Median income (£)	132	119	106	110	103
Number	380,000	540,000	610,000	700,000	900,000
Couples					
Median income (£)	n/a	281	233	216	178
Number	n/a	1,010,000	780,000	580,000	320,000

Notes:

1. The data are from the Family Resources Survey 1999–2000 and are rounded to the nearest £1 or 10,000.
2. Estimates are for pensioner units. Pensioner units are defined as single (non-cohabiting) people over state pension age (65 and over for men, 60 and over for women) and couples (married or cohabiting) where the man is over state pension age.
3. Pensioner units are allocated to age categories according to the age of the head. The head of a couple is defined as the man.
4. Estimates have not been split by gender for couples as the extent of income sharing within pensioner units is not known.
5. Means-tested benefits refer to minimum income guarantee, working families' tax credit, housing benefit, council tax benefit and social fund grants.
6. These results are based on survey respondents' identification of different elements of benefit income, and are therefore subject to misreporting.

Benefit Claimants

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many claimants of *(a)* disability living allowance and *(b)* incapacity benefit in (i) West Dunbartonshire and (ii) the UK have taken up work and remained in employment for longer than a year since the introduction of the linking rule. [51577]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Disability living allowance is payable regardless of whether or not the recipient is in work, providing that the qualifying criteria continue to be met. No linking rules therefore apply.

Information on the number of people who have stopped receiving incapacity benefit to take up work, and have remained in employment for longer than a year since the extension of the linking rule to 52 weeks is not available.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many claimants of *(a)* disability living allowance and *(b)* incapacity benefit in (i) West Dunbartonshire and (ii) the United Kingdom have taken up work and subsequently been able to reclaim and receive those benefits within a year owing to the linking rule. [51576]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Disability living allowance is payable regardless of whether or not the recipient is in work, providing that the qualifying criteria continue to be met. No linking rules therefore apply.

From 5 October 1998 we extended the linking rules for incapacity benefit to 52 weeks to allow disabled people to try out work safe in the knowledge that they can return to the same rate of benefit if the job does not work out.

The available information in respect of incapacity benefit is in the table.

	1 December 1998 to 30 November 2000
People in Great Britain	
Who stopped claiming incapacity benefit to start work[1]	48,400
Who returned to incapacity benefit from full-time work or employment training within 52 weeks	9,500
People in West Dunbartonshire	
Who stopped claiming incapacity benefit to start work	[2]2,003
Who returned to incapacity benefit from full-time work or employment training within 52 weeks	[3]—

[1] Figure refers only to people leaving incapacity benefit who declare that they are moving into work within seven days and protect their rate of benefit in payment for the following year. It does not represent all people who leave incapacity benefit.

[2] This figure is taken from a small number of sample cases and is subject to a high degree of sampling error. It should therefore only be used as an indication of the current situation.

[3] Denotes a negligible figure.

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Social Security matters in Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly.
3. The 52-week linking rule was introduced from 5 October 1998 for people who leave incapacity benefit to go into paid work or employment training. Information on the number benefiting from the change is available on the incapacity benefit computer system from 1 December 1998.

Source:

Figures are taken from 5 per cent. samples of the incapacity benefit computer system in Great Britain and exclude a small number of cases held clerically.

International Social Security Agreements

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when each international reciprocal social security agreement was entered into; and what the extent of the reciprocity is in each case. [55579]

Maria Eagle *[pursuant to her reply, 16 May 2002, c. 854W]:* The information on reciprocal social security agreements with other countries follows.

The main purpose of such reciprocal agreements is to protect the social security position of workers moving between the two countries during their working lives. They prevent employees, their employers and the self-employed from having to pay social security contributions to both the home state and the state of employment at the same time and ensure that such workers' rights to certain benefits are maintained. They vary to some extent from country to country depending on the nature and scope of the other country's social security scheme. Generally, they cover contributory benefits in respect of the following contingencies: sickness, invalidity, unemployment, retirement, bereavement and industrial injuries. Workers who have contributed to both countries' schemes during their working lives can usually receive an old age pension from each country which reflects the proportionate amount or their insurance in, or contributions to, each country's scheme.

Current reciprocal social security agreements and the year they came into force

Austria—1981 (replaced the 1971 agreement)
Barbados—1992
Belgium—1958
Bermuda—1969
Canada—1995 (replaced the 1959 agreement)
Cyprus—1983 (replaced the 1959 agreement)
Denmark—1960
Finland—1984 (replaced the 1959 agreement
France—1958
Germany—1961
Gibraltar—1974
Iceland—1985
Ireland—1960
Isle of Man—1977 (replaced the 1948 agreement)
Israel—1957
Italy—1953
Jamaica—1997 (replaced the 1972 agreement)
Jersey and Guernsey—1994 (replaced the 1978 agreement)
Luxembourg—1955
Malta—1996 (replaced the 1956 agreement)
Mauritius—1981
Netherlands—1955
New Zealand—1983 (replaced the 1969 agreement)
Norway—1991 (replaced the 1957 agreement)
Philippines—1989
Portugal—1979
Spain—1975
Sweden—1988 (replaced the 1956 agreement)
Switzerland—1969
Turkey—1961
USA—1984 (replaced the 1969 agreement
Yugoslavia—1958 (now applies to: the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia Serbia-Montenegro), Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia).

NORTHERN IRELAND

Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the estimated level of losses to fraud and corruption was in *(a)* his Department's Vote 1 budget and *(b)* his Department's Vote 2 budget for (i) 1999–2000 and (ii) 2000–01. [54697]

Jane Kennedy: The amount of loss to fraud and corruption in (a) Department's Vote 1 budget in (i) 1999–2000 and (ii) 2000–01 was:

£

	The Northern Ireland Office	*Its agencies*	*Non-departmental public bodies*
1999–2000	Nil	19,143.45	16,010.00
2000–01	Nil	5,243.11	135.00

Note:

The total cost to the Department was £40,531.56, ie £51,718.65 less amount recovered of £11,187.09.

The information requested in part (b) is not available. The Vote 2 budget is divided among the devolved Northern Ireland Departments. Any losses incurred through fraud are a matter for the individual Departments involved.

Prisons

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prisoners can be accommodated at each prison in Northern Ireland; and how many prisoners are in each prison. [56124]

Jane Kennedy: The maximum number of prisoner places available in Northern Ireland and the current number of prisoners is as follows:

Establishment	*Total available prisoner places*	*Total prisoners as at 13 May 2002*
HMP Maghaberry	594	565
HMP Magilligan	341	321
HM YOC	172	135

A rolling refurbishment programme means that a number of cells are presently out of commission, the numbers are as follows:

HMP Maghaberry 109 cells

HMP Magilligan 40 cells

HM YOC 130 cells.

Some cells are currently being used by two prisoners to facilitate the accommodation of prisoners from cells that are under renovation. This is in accordance with Health and Safety regulations.

Parliamentary Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of parliamentary advisers appointed to serve his Department. [56978]

Jane Kennedy: Ministers in this Department have made no such appointments.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the Implementation of the Multiannual Community Programme to stimulate the development and use of European digital content on the global networks and to promote linguistic diversity in the information society eContent is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56741]

Ms Hewitt: The Multiannual Community programme to stimulate the development and use of European digital content on the global networks and to promote the linguistic diversity in the information society (known as the eContent programme) was established under Council Decision 2001/48/EC. The Decision required the establishment of a committee, the mandate of which is to assist the Commission in running the programme. In particular the Committee will be informed of progress with the implementation of the programme as a whole on at least a half yearly basis. The Commission will also seek approval of the Committee for the funding of any projects with a Community contribution of over 700,000 euros. The Committee has met three times over the last 12 months. The UK representation is usually one official from the Department for Trade and Industry. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the Committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

Current issues before the Committee are drawing up a new work programme for the second half of the programme and overseeing a mid-term evaluation of the programme. It will also be involved in preparing a call for proposals towards the end of the year.

We submitted an explanatory memorandum on the proposal for a Council Decision to the House of Commons and House of Lords on 2 October 2002. The Commons European Scrutiny Committee considered it politically important and cleared, but asked that any significant changes should be reported before it was put to Council for Common position (there were in fact no significant changes and the Scrutiny Committee removed the item from the list of outstanding business).

Together with members states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees (like the eContent Programme Committee) into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (COM (2001)783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through the Commission's website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee on Projects of Common Interest in the field of trans-European telecommunications networks (TEN-telecom) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56740]

Ms Hewitt: The information requested is included in the reply to parliamentary question no. 55688 answered today.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for granting community financial aid in the field of trans-European telecommunications networks is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55688]

Ms Hewitt: The trans-European telecommunications networks (TEN-Telecom) programme is part of the trans-European networks (TENs) initiative established under Article 156 of the treaty and is governed by the general rules for the granting of community aid in the field of trans-European networks (regulation 2236/95, amended by regulation 1655/99). In addition, regulation 1336/97 established a series of guidelines for trans-European telecommunications networks. Both regulations require the establishment of a committee, the mandate of which is to assist the Commission in the implementation of the regulations. The TENs financial committee relating to telecommunications and the TEN-Telecom guidelines committee have the same membership and meet in joint sittings.

The committees have met three times over the last 12 months. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

Current issues before the committees are: drawing up a new work programme to implement the revision to the programme guidelines for the identification of projects of common interest which is currently being considered by the European Parliament; revising the evaluation process for project proposals; and preparing for calls for proposals in June and October 2002.

We have submitted explanatory memoranda to the House of Commons and House of Lords scrutiny committees on the TEN-Telecom programme, most recently: on the implementation of the programme guidelines and the development of the revised guidelines (Report 22, Item 23071, Session 2001/02); on the overall evaluation of the guidelines for the development of Euro-Integrated Services Digital Network as a trans-European network (Report 26, Item 21293, Session 99/00); and on the Court of Auditors report on the programme (Report 26, Item 21266, Session 99/00). The Commons European Scrutiny Committee considered these politically important and cleared.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees (such as the TEN-Telecom committees) into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through the Commission's website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee on security of information systems (SOS-GIS) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56738]

Ms Hewitt: The mandate establishing SOG-IS was set out in Article 1 Council Decision 92/242/EEC of 31 March 1992 OJ L123 dated 08.05.92 p.19. The Committee has not met for over three years and there are no issues under consideration at present.

Together with member states, the commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this decision the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of the committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of the House on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee on electronic signatures is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56734]

Ms Hewitt: The mandate establishing the Committee on electronic signatures was set out in Article 9(1) of the Directive 99/93/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 December 1999 on a Community framework for electronic signatures OJL13 dated 19 January 2001 page 12. The committee has not met for nearly two years and there are no issues under consideration at present.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

> "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of the House on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the Management of Generalised Preference is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55394]

Ms Hewitt: The functions of the Generalised Preference Committee are set out in the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) Regulation (Council Regulation (EC) No. 2501/2001 of 10 December 2001). Its function is to assist the Commission in the implementation of the GSP Regulation. According to the GSP Regulation (Article 37),

> "The Committee may examine any matter relating to the application of this regulation raised by the Commission or at the request of a Member State".

Thus, due to the nature of the committee, it does not meet regularly, but rather meets as and when necessary. It has met seven times since the beginning of May 2001. The DTI has lead policy responsibility for the GSP scheme as a whole, and therefore attends such meetings where possible. Such participation is an essential function of the Department's responsibilities. In addition, the UK Representation to the European Union normally attends where possible.

It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

The items currently under consideration include: application for additional preference under Article 8 (Special Incentive Arrangements); management of quotas under Article 9 (Special Arrangements for Least Developed Countries); Commission proposals under Article 12 (Graduation on and off the scheme).

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

> "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

The effects of this decision have already been incorporated into the GSP Regulation and the operation of the GSP Committee. As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of the House on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent action, to be accessible through the website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee on fees, implementation rules and the procedure of the boards of appeal of the Office for Harmonisation in the Internal Market (Trademarks and Designs) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56766]

Ms Hewitt: The committee's mandate is to assist the Commission in adopting fees and rules covering procedure before the Office for Harmonisation in the Internal Market (the Community trade mark and designs office) and its boards of appeal, as required by Council Regulation (EC) No. 40/94 of 20 December 1993 on the Community trade mark and Council Regulation (EC) No. 6/2002 of 12 December 2001 on Community designs.

The committee has met four times in the last 12 months. The UK representation comprises appropriate experts from the Patent Office, depending on the subject matter of the meeting. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost. The current programme of work consists of agreement rules and fees relating to the new Community registered design system, which is expected to commence next year.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

> "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what the mandate of the Textile Committee (Conventional Regime) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement; [55398]

(2) what the mandate of the Committee on Common Rules for Imports of Textile Products from Certain Third Countries (autonomous regime) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55397]

Ms Hewitt: These committees meet together as the "Textile Management Committee". Their mandate is to manage the EC's licensing control regimes for the import of textile products from WTO (conventional regime) and non-WTO countries (autonomous regime). The group has met eight times over the last year. A Department of Trade and Industry official represents the UK. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of its work without incurring disproportionate cost. This committee is currently considering the on-going management of the licensing regime for imports of certain textile products. Any EC legislation resulting from these committees is already subject to the parliamentary scrutiny procedures.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

> "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on state aid for the application of Articles 92 and 93 of the EC Treaty to certain categories of horizontal state aid (exemption) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to the public funding; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement; [55223]

(2) what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on state aid on the arrangements for applying Article 93 of the EC Treaty (Procedure) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55224]

Ms Hewitt: The Advisory Committee on state aid is established under Council Regulation 659/1999/EC. It has met once in the last 12 months and was attended by a departmental official and an officer from the UK Permanent Representation. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost. The committee is currently considering a draft regulation on matters concerning employment aid. Details of this proposal appeared for public consultation in the *Official Journal* 2002/C 88/02 on 12 April 2002.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on Protection against Subsidised Imports is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement; [55345]

(2) what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on Protection against Dumped Imports is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55344]

Ms Hewitt: The mandate of the Anti-dumping and Anti-subsidy Advisory Committee is to cover any European Commission anti-dumping and anti-subsidy proposals, and to discuss, as raised, third country actions against member states. The Committee generally meets on a monthly basis and written procedure is used to cover any outstanding issues as required. A Department of Trade and Industry official represents the UK. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost. The committee is currently considering various European Commission proposals on anti-dumping and anti-subsidy action. Any European Community legislation resulting from this committee is already subject to the parliamentary scrutiny procedures.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

> "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783 Final) (Commission Document 5685/02). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the co-ordinating Group for the Community Regime for the Control of Exports of Dual-use Goods is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55392]

Ms Hewitt: The mandate of the Co-ordination Group for the Community Regime for the Control of Exports of Dual-use Items and Technology is set out in Article 18 of Council Regulation (EC) No. 1334/2000 and published in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* of 30 June 2000, a copy of which is available in the Libraries of the House.

The items under discussion include the type and quality of information transmitted to the Commission for publication in the *Official Journal of the European Communities* and distributed to member states under various Articles contained within the regulation; areas of concern encountered by member states in implementing the regulation and addressing potential difficulties before they arise; and the exchange of views relating to a recent questionnaire distributed by the Commission to candidate countries concerning implementation of the regulation. The Co-ordination Group has met four times in the last 12 months and is attended by officials from the Department of Trade and Industry and other Government Departments as appropriate. Information on the annual cost to the UK Government is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The committee has no power to take decisions that have any legal effect. Where the need for change to the regulation is found it is for the Commission to bring forward proposals for legislative amendments and all such proposals are subject to scrutiny in accordance with the existing arrangements for parliamentary scrutiny of Community legislation.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the development of the internal market in postal services and the improvement of the quality of service is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56752]

Ms Hewitt: The legal base for the committee is Directive 97/67/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 15 December 1997, on common rules for the development of the internal market of Community postal services and the improvement of quality of service (the "Postal Directive"). It last met on 16 May 2001 and representatives from the Department of Trade and Industry and from the Postal Services Commission attended that meeting. Members of the UK's representation to the European Commission may also attend such meetings. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com(2001)783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on public contracts is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds;

if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56747]

Ms Hewitt: The EC Advisory Committee on Public Procurement discusses issues and exchanges views in the field of public procurement. Since January 2001 the advisory committee has met on six occasions. Officials from the Office of Government Commerce represent the UK Government. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

At the last meeting of the advisory committee the items discussed were: the Common Procurement Vocabulary Regulation; Commission Directive on standard forms; Government Procurement Agreement revision; establishment of statistical data; international aspects of statistical data; Internal Market indicators; technical issues on Article 19a (contracts awarded to entities owned by a contracting authority) of the draft public sector directive; draft new rules of procedure.

Together with EC member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com(2001)783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what the mandate of the Committee for granting community financial aid in the field of trans-European energy networks is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement; [55641]

(2) what the mandate of the committee for the implementation of the series of guidelines for trans-European energy networks is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55647]

Ms Hewitt: The mandate of the committee granting Community financial aid in the field of trans-European energy networks (energy TENS) is Council Regulation 2236/95 (TENS Financial Assistance). Its role is to select EU energy infrastructure projects to receive financial support under the Community's guidelines for trans-European energy networks. These guidelines are agreed by the Committee for the implementation of the guidelines established under Decision 1254/EC. Eligible projects are those needed for effective integration and operation of the EU's energy market and in order to enhance the EU's security of energy supply.

The (energy) TENS financial aid committee has met once over the last 12 months. UK representation is by an official from this Department. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost. The (energy) TENS guidelines committee usually meets annually but has not met in the last 12 months. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

The European Commission has made proposals for changes to the form of funding and the definition of priority axes or links. In terms of accountability and transparency to Parliament, this Department has submitted two Explanatory Memoranda to the Commons Scrutiny Committee:

> EM 7291/2 concerning the European Commission's amended proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Regulation (EC) No. 2236/95/EC laying down general rules for the granting of Community financial aid in the field of trans-European networks, at its meeting on 8 May 2002; and
>
> EM 6990/2 concerning the European Commission's Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Decision No. 1254/96/EC laying down a series of guidelines for trans-European energy networks.

These documents were considered at the Scrutiny Committee's meeting of 8 May 2002, and were considered to be politically important and cleared.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com(2001)783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on the implementation of open network provision (ONP) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56735]

Ms Hewitt: The committee was established under the open network provisions directive (Council Directive 90/387/EEC on the establishment of the internal market for telecommunications services through the implementation of open network provision) to give its opinion on measures proposed by the Commission in the field of open network provision for telecommunications, after consulting representatives of the organisation providing telecommunications services, the users, the consumers, the manufacturers and the service providers. The Commission has met four times over the past 12 months: in July and October 2001 and February and April 2002.

The UK representation normally consists of one official from DTI and two from Oftel, supplemented when required by specific agenda items by experts from either body. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate costs. Issues currently under consideration are: implementation of the new regulatory framework for electronic communications; sharing of information on local broadband access and leased lines; the adoption of the future internet protocol IPv6; mobile phone call termination cost structures; the introduction of the ".eu" domain name; universal service obligations; and the procedures for gathering information for the Commission's eighth report on the implementation of the current regulatory regime, due for publication at the end of this year.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC to

> "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee on economic outward-processing arrangements for textiles is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56787]

Ms Hewitt: The mandate of this committee is to manage the EC's economic outward-processing arrangements for textiles (OPT) regime (EC Regulation 3036/94). The administration of these arrangements is considered in the "Textile Management Committee". A Department of Trade and Industry official represents the UK. This committee last met in 1996. There are no proposals currently before this committee. Any EC legislation resulting from this committee is subject to parliamentary scrutiny procedures.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

> "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee on general authorisations and individual licences in the field of telecommunications services is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56736]

Ms Hewitt: The committee was established under the Licensing Directive (directive 97/13/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 10 April 1997 on a common framework for general authorisations and individual licences in the field of telecommunications services) to foster the exchange of information between the member states and between the member states and the Commission on the situation and the development of regulatory activities regarding the authorisation of telecommunications services; and to receive information from the Commission on the outcome of regular consultations with the representatives of telecommunications organisations, users, consumers, manufacturers, service providers and trade unions. The committee has met twice over the past 12 months: in October 2001 and January 2002.

The UK representation normally consists of one official each from Oftel and the Radiocommunications Agency. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost. Issues currently under consideration are: sharing of communications infrastructure, removing the need for individual licences for the use of radio spectrum, development of third general mobile systems within Europe and the deregulation of satellite dishes, frequencies and systems in order to facilitate multi-media applications.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the

Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of state for Trade and Industry (1) what the mandate of the Committee on the rational and efficient use of energy resources (SAVE) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement; [55650]

(2) what the mandate of the Committee for the promotion of renewable energy sources (ALTENER) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement; [55651]

(3) what the mandate of the Committee for the safety of nuclear installations in the countries participating in the TACIS programme (SURE) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement; [55652]

(4) what the mandate of the Committee for clean solid fuels technologies (CARNOT) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement; [55653]

(5) what the mandate of the Committee for the reinforcement of international energy co-operation (SYNERGY) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement; [55654]

(6) what the mandate of the Committee for the future development of energy policy (ETAP) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement; [55655]

(7) what the mandate of the Committee for implementation of the multiannual framework programme for actions in the energy sector (1999 to 2002) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55656]

Ms Hewitt: I am answering these questions together since the individual programmes mentioned are all activities which come under the EU's multiannual framework programme for actions in the energy sector (1998–2002). The mandate for these activities is set out in Council Decision 1999/21/EC of 14 December 1998. One committee meets in six different configurations. The aim of the framework programme is to contribute to the balanced pursuit of the energy policy objectives of security of supply, competitiveness and protection of the environment. A list of related Decisions follows.

The role of the committee in the respective configurations is as follows: under the ALTENER Decision, the committee promotes renewable energy sources; under the SURE Decision the committee promotes safety of nuclear installations in countries supported by the EU's TACIS (Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States) programme; under the CARNOT Decision the committee promotes the development and effective use of clean solid fuel technologies; under the SYNERGY Decision the committee reinforces international energy co-operation with reference to improving security of energy supply and improving countries' abilities to meet their environmental obligations under the Kyoto Convention; and under the ETAP Decision the Committee undertakes a programme of studies, analyses, forecasts and other related work concerning the future development of energy policy within the Community.

Generally, the committee meets once per year in respect of each Decision. With the exceptions of its responsibilities under the ETAP Decision (for which there was no meeting in the period in question) and under the ALTENER and SAVE Decisions (on which the committee met twice combining the two subjects), the committee met to discuss each individual Decision once in the past 12 months (April 2001 to end of March 2002). Each meeting lasted one day with the exception of the second meeting on ALTENER/SAVE which lasted two days. Attendance is by an official from this Department with the exception of SAVE which is attended by an official from the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The committee discussed issues relating to SURE in the same meeting as it discussed SYNERGY. These factors together make for a total of five meetings over the past year. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

There are two key items currently under the consideration of the Committee of the Energy Framework Programme. The first is the result of the mid-term evaluation of the programme (1998–2002) carried out by independent experts. The second key item under the committee's consideration is the Commission's proposal for a Multiannual Programme for Action in the Field of Energy: "Intelligent Energy for European" Programme (2003–06) (COM (2002) 162 FINAL. This is in large part a continuation of existing activities in the Energy Framework Programme (1998–2002) though it would introduce also a new programme on the energy aspects of transport. In respect of SYNERGY, the committee will be considering applications for project support under the next SYNERGY tender later this year. The next meeting (to be arranged) in respect of ALTENER/SAVE will be considering the evaluation of the final call for proposals which closed in April 2002. The next meeting in respect of CARNOT will be doing likewise—though the Commission may decide to deal with this by written procedure. It is likely that EU support under SURE and ETAP will be discontinued.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

> "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee on product safety emergencies is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [57491]

Ms Hewitt: The committee is mandated under the General Product Safety Directive (EC/92/59, recently revised as 2001–95) to assist the Commission in carrying out its responsibilities under that directive. In particular, the committee is required to give its opinion on drafts of measures to be taken by the Commission. The purpose of the directive is to ensure that consumer products placed on the market in the Community are safe.

The committee has met three times over the last 12 months. The UK is represented on the committee by the Department of Trade and Industry. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

The committee is currently considering a range of administrative issues arising from the revision of the directive. From time to time the committee also considers particular product safety issues when requested to do so by a member state.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC. As part of this review, the Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agenda and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what the mandate of the Customs Code Committee dealing with tariff quotas is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement; [56785]

(2) what the mandate of the Customs Code Committee dealing with favourable tariff treatment (nature of end-use of goods) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement; [56781]

(3) what the mandate of the Customs Code Committee dealing with the single administrative document is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement; [56778]

(4) what the mandate of the Customs Code Committee dealing with origin is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56782]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

The legal basis for all sections of the Customs Code Committee is set out in Article 247 of the Community Customs Code (Council Regulation EEC 2913/92). The mandate of the committee is to examine any questions relating to the implementation of this regulation.

The table shows the frequency of meetings for all sections of the Customs Code Committee.

Name of section[1]	*Meetings in last year*
End Use	5
Tariff Quotas	3
Origin	[1]10
SAD	3

[1] Occasionally meetings may be spread over two days.

The UK is normally represented by one official from HM Customs and Excise.

Travel expenses for one official are re-imbursed by the Commission. The usual cost of overnight accommodation and subsistence is per day per official is 217.95 euro (£134.70).

Items considered by the sections of the committee all relate to the implementation, interpretation and application of Community Customs Code.

Accountability and transparency to Parliament is ensured by the regular EU process. EU documents which fall within the Scrutiny Terms of Reference are deposited with Parliament along with an explanatory memorandum for examination by the Scrutiny Committees.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line

with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of the committees. The first report was deposited in the libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (COM (2001)783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agenda and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Arms Exports

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what export licences have been granted since 2 May 1997 for the export of the E100 series integrated grenade system manufactured by PW Defence. [57225]

Nigel Griffiths: Such information is not normally released because of commercial confidentiality. However, I have asked the company if they will waive this. I will write to my hon. Friend in the light of its response, and will place a copy of that letter in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what export licences have been granted since 2 May 1997 for the export of *(a)* the fragmentation grenade E105 and *(b)* the fragmentation grenade E105 incorporated into the trip wire mechanism manufactured by PW Defence. [57226]

Nigel Griffiths: Such information is not normally released because of commercial confidentiality. However, I have asked the company if they will waive this. I will write to my hon. Friend in the light of its response, and will place a copy of that letter in the Libraries of the House.

Solar Energy

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reasons solar energy schemes are precluded from the Major Photovoltaics Demonstration Programme's allocation of grants to support the take up of solar power; and what plans there are for their future inclusion. [57502]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The £20 million first phase of the Major Photovoltaics Demonstration Programme is designed specifically to support the installation of solar electricity systems. Our rationale for supporting photovoltaics is that it is a technology at a relatively early stage of development, but with significant potential for further cost reduction and for meeting our electricity needs in the future. There are no plans to include support for other forms of solar energy under this programme.

Consideration is being given to whether support for solar water heating systems, in addition to other small-scale renewables, could be included in the £10 million Community and Household Scheme, which is currently being designed.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what initiatives her Department has instigated to encourage the use of solar energy schemes in *(a)* domestic properties and *(b)* commercial properties since 1997. [57504]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* In addition to the £20 million first phase of the Major Photovoltaics Demonstration Programme mentioned in the hon. Member's question PQ No. 57502, the Department is supporting the installation of solar electricity systems in:

(a) the £5.4 million Domestic Field Trial will support the installation of PV systems in at least 500 homes over the next two years;

(b) the £4 million Large Scale Field Trial for Public Buildings will support the installation of integrated systems in 18 buildings over the next two years.

Export Credit

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what rules are applied by the ECGD to the offer of export credit support where the British contribution to an export is less than 100 per cent.; what thresholds are required of British content where British content is less than 100 per cent.; whether those thresholds vary for different products and projects; who monitors the share of United Kingdom content; and what measures are used. [58107]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* ECGD's main purpose is to facilitate the export of UK goods and services but few contracts involve 100 per cent. British content. ECGD determines the appropriate level of support for contracts of mixed national content on a case-by-case basis so it is difficult to generalise.

The factors to be taken into account include the precise breakdown of sourcing, and whether reinsurance arrangements or reciprocal agreements exist with other agencies. ECGD will stipulate the precise amount of foreign content to be supported for a particular transaction in its guarantee documentation. Compliance may be monitored by the bank financing the transaction or by ECGD's own auditors.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is towards export credit and the apportionment of liabilities, projects and equipment produced on a multi-national basis and which other European Union export credit agencies are involved. [57518]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* ECGD considers each case on its merits in order to determine the level of support that is appropriate.

ECGD and other European Union export credit agencies can collaborate to support multi-national transactions in a number of ways. Increasingly, use is made of re-insurance between the agencies which often allows a single export credit guarantee or insurance policy to be issued for such a transaction by one agency acting as lead insurer. Liability is then borne by each of the other export credit agencies according to its re-insured share of the transaction.

Sometimes each agency provides support for its own national content (possibly together with some non-national content) through the issues of separate guarantees or insurance.

European Union export credit agencies may also provide support for both their own national and each others national content under reciprocal arrangements.

Combinations of the above methods are also possible.

Correspondence

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will respond to correspondence arising from Mr. David Harrison of the Government office for the north-west in connection with Mr. Robin Mathais, Freshfield, Merseyside. [58043]

Alan Johnson: I replied on 8 May.

Construction Workers

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with the construction industry and UCATT about the abuse of C154 cards; what estimate she has made of the proportion of construction workers incorrectly categorised as self-employed; and what estimate she has made of the amount of tax lost by the incorrect categorising of self-employment in the construction industry. [57248]

Mr. Wilson: As Treasury have the lead on tax and NIC issues, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has had no direct discussion with the construction industry or UCATT regarding employment status and the CIS4 cards.

However, DTI Ministers have received written representations regarding self-employment in the construction industry, to which they have responded. DTI also welcomes the emphasis given to employment practices in the wider context of people issues in the Strategic Forum for Construction "Accelerating Change" consultation document.

Plutonium

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent communications her Department has had with NIREX in respect of options for the long-term management of plutonium. [57987]

Mr. Wilson: In connection with issues contained in DEFRA's consultation "Managing Radioactive Waste Safely", the Department has recently communicated with NIREX on research related to the options for the long-term management of UK civil plutonium.

Euratom

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what United Kingdom policy is in respect of proposals contained in the European Commission proposal document Com (2002) 99 for a Council Decision approving a Commission regulation on the application of Euratom safeguards; what cost compliance assessment has been made of the proposals; and what communications have been entered into with the Commission by United Kingdom Ministers in the drawing up of Commission proposals. [57986]

Mr. Wilson: An explanatory memorandum (7549–02) was submitted by the Department of Trade and Industry to the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee and the House of Lords European Union Committee on 2 May 2002. Prior to formal issue of COM (2002)99 Final on 22 March 2002 the Commission, in the form of the Euratom Safeguards Office, hosted two informal meetings with member state representatives. Officials from the DTI UK Safeguards Office took part in these meetings.

State Aid

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what reduction there has been in the level of state aid since the European Council's meeting in Lisbon in *(a)* the European Union and *(b)* the United Kingdom; and if she will make a statement. [57555]

Alan Johnson: Information on changes in the level of state aid in the European Union since the Lisbon Summit (March 2000) is not yet available. The Ninth Survey on State Aid in the European Union (COM 2001/403) was published in July 2001 and the latest EU State Aid Scoreboard (COM 2001/782) was published in December 2001. Both provide information on state aid in the period up to the end of 1999. Copies of these, and previous, reports have been placed in the Libraries of the House. The next State Aid Scoreboard is expected to be published shortly and to include information up to the end of 2000; a copy will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Business Promotion

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what visits to promote British business Ministers from her Department have made to the candidate countries of the European Union in the last six months; and what plans Ministers in her Department have to visit those countries in the next six months. [58119]

Ms Hewitt: In the last six months three visits were made by Ministers from my Department to the candidate countries of the European Union. Two more are planned in the coming six months.

Mauban Power Plant

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which United Kingdom companies the Export Credits Guarantee Department *(a)* is supporting and *(b)* has previously supported regarding the (i) Mauban power plant and (ii) transmission networks associated with the Mauban power plant in the Philippines. [58361]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD has not provided any support nor has it received any applications or inquiries from any UK company in respect of the Mauban power plant and/or the associated transmission networks.

Criminal Offences

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many criminal offences have been *(a)* created and *(b)* abolished by her Department since 1997. [55424]

Ms Hewitt: This information can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Parliamentary Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of parliamentary advisers appointed to serve her Department. [56988]

Ms Hewitt: Ministers in this Department have made no such appointments.

Land Mines

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what investigations she has made into the manufacture and foreign sale of fragmentation grenade land mines by P.W. Defence Ltd. [57983]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

Investigation of allegations relating to the international supply, or intended supply, of anti-personnel mines is a matter for HM Customs and Excise. Customs are fully aware of recent allegations. However, it is not Customs' general practice to comment publicly about the existence or nature of any investigations of individuals or companies not yet accused of criminal offences. To do so could risk prejudicing any on-going inquiries or future criminal proceedings.

Investigation of allegations relating to the manufacture, within the United Kingdom, of anti-personnel mines is a matter for the police.

Energy Products Tax Directive

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her policy towards Commission proposals for the adoption of an energy products tax directive. [57895]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

The Government support the principle of an energy products directive, recognising the benefits of co-ordination of environmental taxes at EU level. This is needed to solve cross-border environmental problems, such as global warming, where member states need to act together to prevent a lack of EU action undermining the achievement of environmental objectives through member states' own national tax policies.

But the Government attached great importance to addressing fuel poverty, and would not support any directive which would require the UK to introduce new taxes on domestic energy.

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General (1) what the cost was to her Department of answering written parliamentary questions in 2001; and how that cost was calculated; [49108]

(2) how many staff were involved in each of the last three years in preparing draft answers to written parliamentary questions. [49150]

The Advocate-General: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council on 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 929W.

SCOTLAND

Publicity

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the publicity and advertising campaigns run by her Department in each of the last four years, specifying the *(a)* purpose, *(b)* cost to public funds, *(c)* number of staff involved and *(d)* method of evaluation in each case. [39090]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer to the answer given to the hon. Member on 22 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 68W.

The information requested on the number of staff involved and the method of evaluation in each case is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what the cost was to her Department of answering written parliamentary questions in 2001; and how that cost was calculated; [49107]

(2) how many staff were involved in each of the last three years in preparing draft answers to written parliamentary questions. [49149]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council on 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 929W.

Sunset Clauses

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland which Bills introduced by her Department in the last five years have contained sunset clauses; and what plans she has for the future use of such clauses. [49625]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in [illegible] present form on 1 July 1999. Since then, no primary legislation has been introduced by my Department.

Road Fuels

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what studies she has carried out into availability of motor transport fuels in rural areas; and if she will make a statement; [53469]

(2) what discussions she has held with the Scottish Executive since January on the *(a)* provision of motor transport fuels and *(b)* pricing of fuels; and if she will make a statement. [53470]

Mr. Foulkes *[holding answer 1 May 2002]:* I have regular discussions with Scottish Executive Ministers on a wide range of issues.

I understand that Highlands and Islands Enterprise, in co-operation with Scottish Enterprise, is undertaking a study into the availability of LPG in Scotland. We expect this study to report its findings in July this year.

If the wholesale or retail price for vehicle fuel raises competition concerns it should be brought to the attention of the Director General of Fair Trading, who is responsible for investigating allegations of anti-competitive behaviour. The Director General has investigated allegations of differential pricing in Highlands and Islands by oil companies and has found that the competition legislation has not been breached.

The issue of the level of fuel taxation needs to be reviewed in the context of the overall cost of motoring taxes. Independent research commissioned by my Department has shown that the levels of taxation paid by private motorists in Scotland are lower than in other European countries such as Netherlands, Finland, Ireland and even Portugal.

The Scottish Executive assists rural petrol stations through the operation of the rural petrol station grant (RPSG) scheme. This scheme aims to help maintain a network of rural petrol stations by assisting rural petrol stations to meet the cost of tank and pump replacement and to deal with ground water problems. This was expanded to include the installation of LPG tanks and dispensers in 2000. To date, 41 rural petrol stations have been supported under the RPSG scheme. Total awards made since the scheme commenced in 1998 are now £856,765.

Criminal Cases Review Commission

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many applications have been received by the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission; how many have been processed; how many have been referred to the Court of Appeal; and with what result. [54175]

Mrs. Liddell: The functions of the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission are devolved. It is required to submit a report to the Scottish Ministers at the end of each financial year.

Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the estimated level of losses to fraud and corruption was in *(a)* her Department's Vote 1 budget and *(b)* her Department's Vote 2 budget for (i) 1999–2000 and (ii) 2000–01. [54696]

Mrs. Liddell: No fraud or corruption was recorded in my Department in 1999–2000 and 2000–01.

Disclosure of Interests

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what rules apply to the disclosure of interests on the part of those serving on public bodies which are responsible to her Department. [56465]

Mrs. Liddell: All advisory and executive non-departmental public bodies are required to adopt a board members' code, based on guidance produced by the Cabinet Office, and they should have registers of interests. The definition of interests is ultimately for individual Departments since they are best placed to decide what might be thought to influence members of their non-departmental public bodies.

The Scotland Office sponsors one NDPB, the Boundary Commission for Scotland. The relevant code of practice, "Boundary Commission for Scotland Code of Practice for Commissioners" is currently being produced and will be available shortly on the Commission's website at www.bcomm-scotland.gov.uk.

Oil and Gas Tax

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what meetings she has had since the Budget with representatives of the North sea oil industry in north-east Scotland to discuss the impact of the new oil and gas tax. [58123]

Mrs. Liddell: I have regular contact with businesses involved in the UK continental shelf oil and gas industry and have received views from a number of them on the tax measures announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his Budget statement.

Parliamentary Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of parliamentary advisers appointed to serve her Department. [56898]

Mrs. Liddell: Ministers in this Department have made no such appointments.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list the written questions asked of him between *(a)* 1 to 30 June 2001, *(b)* 1 to 31 July 2001, *(c)* 1 to 30 September 2001, *(d)* 1 to 31 October 2001, *(e)* 1 to 30 November 2001, *(f)* 1 to 31 December 2001, *(g)* 1 to 31 January 2002, *(h)* 1 to 28 February 2002, *(i)* 1 to 31 March 2002 and *(j)* 1 to 30 April 2002 that had not received a substantive answer by 30 April; and if he will state (i) the name of the hon. Member asking the question and (ii) the reasons the question had not received a substantive answer. [54088]

Mr. Wills *[holding answer 2 May 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the President of the Council on 2 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 949W. 1,236 questions were tabled to the Lord Chancellor's Department, between 1 June 2001 and 30 April 2002, of which 84.71 per cent. were substantively answered. A further 14.72 per cent. has been answered since 1 May 2002. Presently, the following seven questions (excluding this one) have not received a substantive answer:

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1 February to 28 February—two from my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth) and one from my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara).

1 March to 31 March—one from the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), one from the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) and one from the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow).

1 April to 30 April—one from the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames).

The remaining outstanding questions will be answered as soon as possible but have missed the deadline due in part to work pressures throughout the Department.

Stolen Equipment

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to the answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 805–07W, on stolen equipment, what criminal proceedings have been undertaken for cases of theft against her Department, stating in each case *(a)* whether the proceedings (i) led to a criminal conviction and (ii) were unsuccessful, *(b)* the cost incurred by her Department in pursuing a conviction and *(c)* the value of items recovered; and if she will make a statement. [41505]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The information is as follows:

(a) No criminal proceedings have been brought in relation to the cases of stolen equipment set out in the answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 805–07W. However, a wide range of security measures and systems of internal control, to deter and detect theft and fraud are in place and continue to be improved, as set out in the answer to the question from the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) of 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 907W. All incidents of suspected or detected theft and fraud are subject to investigation and appropriate action is taken including reporting incidents to the police, or disciplinary procedures taken against those found guilty of wrongdoing.

(b) The information requested is not collected centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

(c) Details of those items recovered (not pursuant to criminal proceedings), were included in the answer of 22 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 805–07W.

Taxi Fares

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what criteria have to be met in order for a taxi journey by the Lord Chancellor to be paid for from public funds. [53817]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In common with Ministers in other Departments, the Lord Chancellor normally uses a car provided through the Government Car Service and it would be exceptional for him to use a taxi for official business. A taxi might be used, and costs paid for from public funds, where a ministerial car was not available and considerations of urgency and security precluded the use of other means of transport.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much has been spent on taxi fares for the Lord Chancellor in the last year for which figures are available. [53783]

Ms Rosie Winterton: In common with Ministers in other Departments, the Lord Chancellor normally uses a car provided through the Government Car Service and he has scarcely ever used a taxi for official business. If a taxi was used, and costs paid for from public funds, it would be because a ministerial car was not available and considerations of urgency and security precluded the use of other means of transport. Separate records are not maintained of any taxi fares which, wholly exceptionally, might have been incurred by the Lord Chancellor.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if the expenditure by her Department on taxi fares in the last year has been audited; and if she will make a statement. [53782]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Expenditure on taxi fares is included in the expenditure figures published in the Department's accounts; these accounts are audited by the National Audit Office. In addition, the costs of staff travelling on duty are included in audit programmes conducted by the Department's internal auditors.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much has been spent by her Department on taxi fares in the last financial year. [53816]

Ms Rosie Winterton: £62,952.23.

Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the estimated level of losses to fraud and corruption was in *(a)* her Department's Vote 1 budget and *(b)* her Department's Vote 2 budget for (i) 1999–2000 and (ii) 2000–01. [54698]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The estimated losses to the Department's Vote, net of the recoveries to date, are as follows:

Financial year	*£*
(i) 1999–2000	11,847.49
(ii) 2000–01	2,232.65

The Department has a single Vote.

Correspondence

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Lord Chancellor will answer the letter from the hon. Member for Canterbury dated 21 December 2001, ref Womans Aid Federation. [57786]

Ms Rosie Winterton: A reply was sent on 13 March 2002.

Immigration Advice

Lynne Jones: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to her answer of 7 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 72W, on immigration advice, how many of the matter starts have been used in each area; and what the policy of the LSC is as to the balance between solicitors and not-for-profit agencies in the award of contracts. [57548]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The figures provided in the answer of 7 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 72W, were for the number of new matter starts or hours allocated for the financial year 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003. Solicitors' firms and not-for-profit organisations report their matter starts on a monthly basis, at the end of each month. It then takes up to one month for all the figures to be processed, so figures for April 2002 are not yet available. The figures for the whole of the financial year will not be known until after April 2003.

It is the Commission's policy to let contracts to solicitors' firms or not-for-profit organisations, or both, depending on the extent and location of the need for services, and to those best able to provide a comprehensive and accessible service. The Commission has no preference for not-for-profit organisations over solicitors' firms or vice versa.

The Commission is currently reviewing its bid rules, and expects to release a consultation paper early in June.

Open Government

Helen Jackson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will make a statement on promotion of open government. [55928]

Mr. Wills: With the Freedom of Information Act 2000 we have legislated to give to the people of this country, for the first time ever, a general statutory right to know. The timetable we have announced will ensure that full implementation of this new right is completed 11 months before the statutory deadline set out in the Act itself. The publication scheme provisions of the Act will be implemented first, on a rolling programme, starting with central Government in 2002. This roll out will be completed in June 2004 and the individual right of access to information held by all public authorities will be implemented in January 2005.

This approach will give public authorities the time they need to put into effect the change of culture necessary to ensure the legal rights are delivered in practice. It also aligns with the 2004 target for the completion of the Government's electronic records management. This initiative will enable the fast retrieval and accurate creation and storage of records that will be necessary to meet the demands of the Freedom of Information Act.

In his annual statutory report to Parliament in November 2001, the Lord Chancellor reported on the progress that had been made towards the implementation of the Act. In particular, he said that each Department had appointed a senior official to 'Champion' freedom of information within their Department and to lead culture change from the top of the organisation. Crucial developments are already taking place in the area of records management and Departments are preparing to meet the targets for the 2004 target for full electronic management of records. The Information Commissioner has already set up five pilot publication schemes with central Government organisation and I look forward to seeing similar pilots in local authorities and the police in the near future.

The report also announced the formation of the Lord Chancellor's Advisory Group on Implementation of the Act. The group includes members from representative organisations from across the public sector and independent representatives to advise the Lord Chancellor on what users will need in order to take advantage of their rights under the Freedom of Information Act. It has already met twice and the next meeting will take place in July.

A seminar for Ministers was held in March of this year, where Ministers were reminded of their key role in delivering compliance with the Act and a new culture of openness. In particular, we noted that there should be a Minister in each Department with responsibility for implementing freedom of information in that Department, its agencies and sponsored non-departmental public bodies; and those Ministers should take an active interest in the delivery of the Act within these Departments.

I have recently completed a series of road shows around the country to raise awareness of the Act at a senior level in public authorities. These events were attended by around 1,000 officials from across the public sector and officials in my Department intend to run a series of workshops in the autumn to follow-up these road shows.

This year's report, to be published in November, will contain further details of developments in all these areas. In the same month, publication schemes will come into force for central Government and other bodies already applying the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. These schemes will provide greater access to information for all members of the public.

Officials from the Freedom of Information and Data Protection Division in my Department have undertaken awareness-raising seminars and will continue to do so. These have been held in a wide range of Departments including: the Cabinet Office; the Home Office; the Department of Health; the Northern Ireland civil service as well as in my Department. Officials also speak at the civil service college course on freedom of information and have spoken on courses and conferences arranged by other organisations. In these sessions, officials are reminded of the requirement to comply with the existing Code of Practice on Access to Government Information when answering requests for information until the Freedom of Information Act comes fully into effect in January 2005.

More information about the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information and the Freedom of Information Act 2000 is available on the Department's website at www.lcd.gov.uk.

Court Buildings

Mr. Wray: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, how many court houses have closed since 1997; and how many have had improvements made to them. [54208]

Mr. Wills: There have been 77 magistrates' court houses closed since 1997 in England and Wales, as set out in the table. Of the 404 magistrates' courts in England and Wales currently in operation, almost all have had improvements made to them in one way or another, for example, improvements to environmental systems or enhancements to enable compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act or Health and Safety legislation, including security provisions.

The Department is currently funding an ongoing programme of building works on magistrates' courts throughout England and Wales. It received a £100 million capital grant allocation during the current Spending Review 2000 period for maintenance and other building enhancements. This is funding priority maintenance and improvement works such as facilities for victims and vulnerable witnesses, as well as Disability Discrimination Act and Security facilities. The grant provides 80 per cent. of the funding with a further 20 per cent. being provided by the local authority. There is also a public private partnership programme for the provision of new courts to meet the needs of a 21st century court system. £210 million national credit approval (NCA) has been allocated over the CSR 2000 period.

There have been 15 county court closures since 1997 in England and Wales, as set out in the table. There are two county court closure proposals (Gravesend and Gateshead) under consideration, both of which have gone out to public consultation.

There have been no Crown court closures in England and Wales since 1997. There is, however, currently public consultation on the proposal to close the Crown court at Knutsford. Consultation commenced on 10 April and will run until the end of May.

There are 78 Crown court centres and 218 county courts (permanent) in England and Wales; many have had various renovation works undertaken. The nature of works covered varies but they include items such as health and safety works, security work, Disability Discrimination Act compliance and environmental improvements. In most instances these works have been undertaken within the scope of major maintenance schemes.

MCC	*Magistrates' courthouse*	*Closure date*
Bedfordshire	Ampthill	1 January 2000
Bedfordshire	Biggleswade	1 January 2000
Bedfordshire	Dunstable	1 January 2000
Bedfordshire	Leighton Buzzard	1 January 2000
Cambridgeshire	March	31 December 1998
Cheshire	Warrington Patten Hall	1 April 2001
Cheshire	Macclesfield Park Green	1 April 2001
Cumbria	Keswick	30 April 2000
Cumbria	Appleby	31 May 2000
Cumbria	Windermere	31 May 2000
Cumbria	Wigton	31 May 2000
Derbyshire	Alfreton	1 January 2001
Derbyshire	Ashbourne	1 January 2001
Derbyshire	Bakewell	1 January 2001
Derbyshire	Matlock	1 January 2001
Devon and Cornwall	Bideford	30 April 2001
Devon and Cornwall	Exmouth	30 April 2001
Devon and Cornwall	Kingsbridge	30 April 2001
Devon and Cornwall	South Molton	30 April 2001
Devon and Cornwall	Teignmouth	30 April 2001
Devon and Cornwall	Tavistock	30 April 2001
Devon and Cornwall	Axminster	4 May 2001
Devon and Cornwall	Tiverton	4 May 2001
Devon and Cornwall	Newquay	30 June 2001
Dorset	Christchurch	31 March 1999
Dorset	Gillingham	30 September 2001
Durham	Barnard Castle	31 December 1998
Essex	Saffron Walden	31 December 1998
Gloucestershire	Stow on the Wold	30 June 1999
Greater London	Marlborough Street	31 March 98
Greater London	Clerkenwell	31 December 1998
Greater Manchester	Leigh	31 March 2001
Greater Manchester	Middleton	31 March 2001
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	Southampton (Commercial Road)	31 August 2001
Hertfordshire	Bishop's Stortford	31 March 1998
Hertfordshire	Hatfield	31 March 1998
Hertfordshire	Hitchin	31 March 1998
Humberside	Bridlington	9 November 2001
Humberside	Brough	9 November 2001
Humberside	Driffield	9 November 2001
Humberside	Hull (Guildhall)	9 November 2001
Humberside	Hull (Lowgate)	9 November 2001
Humberside	Pocklington	9 November 2001
Humberside	Withernsea	9 November 2001
Kent	Sheerness	31 December 1998
Kent	West Malling	31 December 1998
Kent	Gravesend	9 June 2000
Lancashire	Lytham	31 December 1998
Leicestershire	Lutterworth	31 July 1998
Lincolnshire	Market Rasen	31 March 1998
Norfolk	Diss	31 December 1998
North Wales	Corwen	31 December 1998
North Wales	Abergele	31 December 2000
North Yorkshire	Malton	6 February 1998
North Yorkshire	Ripon	1 August 1998
Staffordshire	Lichfield	31 March 2000
Staffordshire	Leek	31 March 2001
Staffordshire	Wombourne	1 September 2001
Suffolk	Felixstowe	31 December 1998
Suffolk	Haverhill	31 December 1998
Suffolk	Saxmundham	31 December 1998
Suffolk	Stowmarket	31 December 1998
Suffolk	Newmarket	31 December 1998
Surrey	Chertsey	31 March 1998
Surrey	Farnham	31 March 1998
Surrey	Oxted	31 March 1998
Sussex	Arundel	1 December 2001
Thames Valley	Abingdon	31 March 1999
Thames Valley	Henley on Thames	31 March 1999
Thames Valley	Windsor	31 March 1999
West Mercia	Worcester	31 March 2001
West Mercia	Bridgenorth	31 January 2002
West Mercia	Leominster	31 January 2002
West Yorkshire	Morley	31 March 1999
West Yorkshire	Pudsey	31 March 1999
West Yorkshire	Keighley	1 April 2000
Wiltshire	Wootton Bassett	2 October 2000

County court	*Closure date*
Rochdale	7 September 1998
Holywell	7 September 1998
Camborne and Redruth	24 December 1998
Hemel Hempstead	24 December 1998
West Bromwich	24 December 1998
Loughborough	31 December 1998
Corby	1 March 1999
Bridgwater	20 December 1999
Great Yarmouth	31 January 2000
Grays Thurrock	31 January 2000
Lichfield	3 July 2000
Caerphilly	30 November 2000
Workington	2 January 2001
Chepstow	1 April 2002
Monmouth	1 April 2002

Crown Courts

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the cost in 2000–01 was of *(a)* the maintenance of each of the Crown courts in England and *(b)* administering each of the Crown courts in England; and what the average cost per case heard was of each of the Crown courts in 2000–01. [50693]

Mr. Wills: *[pursuant to his reply, 29 April 2002]:* The table submitted with the answer was included in error.

I apologise for this error. The attached table correctly sets out the information requested.

Property number	*Property name*	*Total maintenance costs (£)*	*NIA (sq.m.)*	*Cost per sq.m. (£)*
233	Nottingham Combined Court	136,814.87	3,225.37	42.42
100	Chichester Combined Court	64,511.85	1,577.75	40.89
783	Newport (Isle of Wight) Combined Court	39,189.97	1,012.76	38.70
465	Portsmouth Combined Court	214,394.88	7,070.41	30.32
633	Taunton Combined Court	66,342.29	2,374.06	27.94
555	Plymouth Combined Court	79,320.47	2,902.23	27.33
611	Doncaster Crown Court	68,025.49	2,534.61	26.84
700	Warrington Combined Court	70,505.39	2,698.16	26.13
715	Hove Trial Centre	64,396.73	2,490.71	25.85
636	Manchester Crown Court	185,145.33	7,247.61	25.55
653	Bristol Crown Court	201,599.60	8,371.4	24.08
719	Preston Combined Court	216,269.95	9,193.9	23.52
243	Hereford Crown Court	11,680.74	513.05	22.77
232	Coventry Combined Court	91,018.66	4,152.07	21.92
556	Southampton Combined Court	108,348.83	5,080.92	21.32
551	Exeter Combined Court	55,543.17	2,630.51	21.11
710	Bournemouth Combined Court	119,860.20	5,691.58	21.06
666	Wood Green Crown Court	115,554.00	5,568.3	20.75
740	Woolwich Crown Court	160,975.00	7,950.79	20.25
690	Stafford Combined Court	92,346.95	4,568.98	20.21
129	Cambridge Crown Court	10,303.75	514.86	20.01
157	Warwick Combined Court Office	12,147.47	611.87	19.85
38	Snaresbrook Crown Court	253,546.00	13,004.51	19.50
43	Lewes Combined Court	87,337.98	4,523.97	19.31
560	Gloucester Crown Court	28,606.70	1,486.34	19.25
182	Lincoln Crown Court (Castle)	25,413.28	1,321.54	19.23
33	Middlesex Guildhall Crown Court	93,660.00	4,906.28	19.09
231	Birmingham Crown Court	122,406.88	6,488.59	18.86
709	Lincoln Combined Court	31,883.77	1,699.18	18.76
186	Oxford Combined Court Centre	93,152.63	4,966.46	18.76
168	Great Grimsby Combined Court	58,461.99	3,162.94	18.48
96	Kings Lynn Crown Court	9,704.49	527.8	18.39
162	Shrewsbury Crown Court	26,783.23	1,466.97	18.26
230	Worcester Crown Court	81,511.35	4,468.71	18.24
237	Derby Combined Court	80,341.16	4,475.67	17.95
229	Peterborough Combined Court	54,430.53	3,051.16	17.84
42	Maidstone Combined Court	143,435.91	8,119.31	17.67
34	Ipswich Crown Court	25,194.86	1,433.6	17.57
597	Weymouth and Dorchester Combined Court	8,771.74	500.52	17.53
16	Chelmsford Crown Court	106,293.07	6,125.62	17.35
21	Norwich Combined Court	88,302.86	5,228.97	16.89
688	Luton Crown Court	77,083.31	4,633.88	16.63
737	Blackfriars Crown Court	127,207.00	7,805.25	16.30
768	Kingston upon Thames Crown Court	153,011.00	9,395.03	16.29
187	Leicester Crown Court	94,066.71	5,792.98	16.24
676	Northampton Combined Court	84,883.44	5,269.62	16.11
373	York Crown Court	35,787.79	2,224	16.09
461	Chester Crown Court	61,469.38	3,833.35	16.04
619	Manchester Crown and County Courts	259,673.85	16,260.13	15.97
460	Knutsford Crown Court	17,444.33	1,100.48	15.85
31	Reading Crown Court	90,752.91	5,734.06	15.83
687	Harrow Crown Court	100,506.00	6,485.3	15.50
566	Truro Combined Court	55,645.92	3,592.2	15.49
659	Kingston upon Hull Combined Court	87,631.98	5,737.81	15.27
691	Stoke on Trent Combined Court	83,409.32	5,461.51	15.27
567	Swindon Combined Court	39,873.18	2,632.84	15.14
640	Newcastle upon Tyne Combined Court	174,699.74	11,657.19	14.99
806	Gloucester Combined Court	24,645.00	1,742.32	14.14
673	Basildon Combined Court	76,931.58	5,441.07	14.14
124	Guildford Crown Court	45,461.00	3,275.07	13.88
649	Wolverhampton Combined Court	86,925.15	6,396	13.59
293	Bolton Combined Court	55,192.01	4,190	13.17
136	Aylesbury Crown Court	10,144.61	775.42	13.08
716	Bradford Combined Court	129,061.56	9,983.17	12.93
329	Leeds Combined Court	172,813.17	13,371.19	12.92
294	Burnley Combined Court	31,732.93	2,457.06	12.92
349	Newcastle upon Tyne Combined Court Offices	21,404.75	1,673.18	12.79
332	Durham Crown Court	21,104.79	1,653.93	12.76
22	Croydon Combined Court	99,754.95	7,985.32	12.49
717	Carlisle Combined Court	49,576.03	3,985.8	12.44

Property number	*Property name*	*Total maintenance costs (£)*	*NIA (sq.m.)*	*Cost per sq.m. (£)*
4	Southwark Crown Court	137,407.00	11,103.31	12.38
299	Liverpool Combined Court	280,152.05	23,275.37	12.04
711	Sheffield Combined Court	125,096.88	10,884.96	11.49
105	Southend Crown Court	8,256.96	749.72	11.01
5	Isleworth Crown Court	50,101.00	5,023.36	9.97
553	Salisbury Combined Court	32,707.77	3,281.13	9.97
671	Canterbury Combined Court	59,737.73	6,157.68	9.70
634	Preston Crown Court	27,627.32	2,924.53	9.45
658	Teesside Combined Court	106,031.48	12,500.81	8.48
728	St. Albans Crown Court	33,402.41	4,305.56	7.76
562	Winchester Combined Court	38,488.31	7,028.89	5.48
503	Weymouth and Dorchester Combined Court Offices	4,191.77	936.41	4.48
185	Warwick Combined Court	5,631.51	1,315.08	4.28
269	Lancaster Crown Court	5,744.85	1,568.41	3.66
130	Bury St. Edmunds Crown Court	2,284.61	715.33	3.19
48	Central Criminal Court	39,320.90	17,174.41	2.29
	Total	6,927,609.96	434,430.16	15.95

Royal Family

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what her policy is on the release of papers from the Public Record Office relating to the royal family; how these rules differ according to whether the relevant member of the royal family is *(a)* alive and *(b)* dead; and what considerations as to the potential embarrassment caused by a release of papers apply in respect of (i) living and (ii) dead members of the royal family. [55741]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave to him on 14 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 593W. It is for the originating Government Department to determine the release of papers relating to the royal family, wherever they are held. The policy under which this is conducted derives from the Open Government Code, which applies in the same way to public records relating to the royal family as it does to other public records. One of the Open Government criteria under which records may remain closed beyond 30 years covers documents whose release would cause 'substantial distress' either to an individual or to descendants of the individual. The inclusion of "descendants" means that the criterion may apply whether the relevant individual is alive or dead. Under the Open Government Code, 'potential embarrassment' is not a factor in determining closure or release.

Euro Conversion Costs

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment she has made of the *(a)* cost *(b)* new equipment needed and *(c)* modifications needed to existing IT software to adapt to entry to the Euro for *(a)* the Court Service, *(b)* magistrates courts, *(c)* freedom of information, *(d)* data protection and identity services, *(e)* the Land Registry, *(f)* CAFCASS, *(g)* the Public Guardianship Office, *(h)* the Public Record Office, *(i)* the Northern Ireland Court Service, *(j)* the Statutory Compilations Office and *(k)* community legal services. [33631]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor's Department its NDPBs and sister Departments have carried out initial assessments of the business areas that would be affected on entry to the Euro, but are not in a position to provide the level of information requested, at this stage. Where appropriate, work is planned to assess the estimated time, cost and impact of conversion to Euro compliance for existing financial systems. However, where financial systems are being or will be upgraded or renewed in the near future, an assessment of Euro compliance is being made as part of the process.

Marriage and Relationship Support

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what support was given to this year's National Marriage Week by her Department. [47581]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I apologise for the delay in replying, which was due to an administrative oversight. National Marriage Week 2002 was supported through the grant of £31,500 paid to Oasis Media (the PR company employed by Futureway Trust) to launch National Marriage Week. Oasis Media and Futureway have also received advisory support and guidance from officials in the Lord Chancellor's Department.

Withheld Records

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many and what percentage of records eligible for release in 2001 under the 30-year rule were withheld; and for what reasons these were withheld, broken down by category of exemption. [57665]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The number of records accessioned by the PRO in 2001 but subject to extended closure is estimated at 2,300, about four per cent. of the total.

Of those records subject to extended closure, the percentages falling within the following broad categories of extended closure is as follows:

National security and defence—7 per cent.

Non-proliferation of nuclear weapons—13 per cent.

International relations—15 per cent.

Information given in confidence—8 per cent.

Substantial distress (including endangerment to individuals)—57 per cent.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the President of the Council what formula is used to determine the average cost of answering a parliamentary question. [58777]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

A costing survey conducted in 1991, involving six Government Departments answering a total of approximately 1,600 parliamentary questions, established the average full costs of answering both written and oral parliamentary questions, then £87 and £202 respectively.

Since 1991 the costs have been updated annually by indexation using two separate indices, the retail prices index and the civil service earnings index. The indices are applied 25 per cent. and 75 per cent. respectively to prior year average costs to determine the revised average costs for answering parliamentary questions.

The current average costs of answering parliamentary questions are £129 for a written parliamentary question and £299 for an oral parliamentary question, as announced on 11 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 582W.

HEALTH

Cancer Plan

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the opportunity costs of the Cancer Plan. [45774]

Yvette Cooper: Cancer is a central priority for the national health service and one in three people in England will develop cancer at some stage in their lives. The NHS Cancer Plan was published in September 2000 and is the first comprehensive national cancer programme.

Improvements to cancer services in line with the implementation of the Cancer Plan will benefit diagnostic, treatment and care services across the NHS and as such will benefit not only cancer patients but also a high proportion of other NHS patients as well.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the allocation in the NHS Cancer Plan for palliative care has been spent on hospices for *(a)* children and *(b)* adults in 2001–02; how much expenditure is planned for 2002–03, and if he will make a statement. [55402]

Yvette Cooper: In the NHS Cancer Plan, we pledged that the national health service contribution to the costs of specialist palliative care for adults (including hospices) would increase. By 2004 the NHS will invest an additional £50 million available for specialist palliative care. This investment is intended to help tackle inequalities in access to specialist palliative care and enable the NHS to increase their contribution to the cost hospices incur in providing agreed level of services. At a local level this investment must be based on the agreed strategic plans for palliative care provision within each cancer network's service delivery plan.

Funding to support this investment is included within the sums made available for cancer in NHS allocations each year.

Outturn information is not yet available for 2001–02. Palliative care will be included as actual expenditure on palliative care within plans for use of the £76 million of earmarked funding for cancer in 2002–03.

In addition to the extra investment identified in the Cancer Plan, the New Opportunities Fund has recently announced a further £70 million to support palliative care projects, £22 million for adults and £48 million for children.

General Practitioners

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GP practices do not have a connection with NHSnet. [46998]

Yvette Cooper: As at 22 April 2002 142 practices did not have an NHSnet connection. 75 of these are awaiting installation, the remainder (by agreement with the relevant health authorities) are where it would not be practical or cost-effective to install an NHSnet connection for a short period, for example, because the general practitioner is shortly to retire or working from temporary premises. 8,586 practices (95 per cent.) have an NHSnet line installed.

Vaccination Targets

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what incentive payments are available to general practitioners meeting vaccination targets. [52235]

Yvette Cooper: Under general medical services, the childhood immunisation programme target payment is £2,730 per annum if a general practitioner immunises 90 per cent. of children aged two on his partnership list or £910 per annum if 70 per cent. of children are immunised. The pre-school booster target payments are £810 per annum if 90 per cent. of children aged five on a GP's partnership list are immunised or £270 per annum for 70 per cent. Personal medical services incentive payments for vaccinations and immunisations are negotiated as part of the personal medical service agreement but are broadly similar to those payable to GPs working under general medical service arrangements.

Renal Transplant Services

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent estimate he has made of the costs of siting renal transplant services at *(a)* St. George's and *(b)* St. Helier hospitals. [54278]

Mr. Hutton: Renal transplantation services are currently provided from two sites in south-west London: Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust and St. George's Healthcare NHS Trust. It is proposed that renal services are maintained at both hospital sites and that the transplantation operation and immediate post-operative recovery period is centralised on one site at St. George's hospital. This proposal is currently the subject of a three-month public consultation which concludes on 25 June 2002.

Resource effectiveness and affordability was one of the 10 criteria as part of the relative benefits of centralising transplantation services at Epsom and St. Helier NHS Trust, St. George's Healthcare NHS Trust or Guy's and St. Thomas' NHS Trust. The estimated short-term costs for centralising transplantation at either the St. George's or St. Helier sites are outlined in the consultation document as approximately £320,000. The funding for a long-term purpose-built facility on either site would be subject to the development of an outline business case for consideration by the south-west London health authority. Any further development of a business case for an integrated facility at either site will be subject to the outcome of the public consultation on the future of renal transplantation services.

Diabetes

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what community provision is made for diabetes sufferers in Bradford. [56941]

Jacqui Smith: Bradford primary care trusts invest over £600,000 annually in the provision of community diabetes services. Provision includes:

A community based diabetes services for patients with diabetes needing insulin. The service is managed by diabetes specialist nurses, practice nurses, dieticians, podiatrists and general practitioners

A community based retinal screening service

Comprehensive audit and education for GPs specialising in diabetes

Primary care services for non-insulin dependent patients

Diabetic register

Nurse consultant in diabetes care

Diabetes co-ordinator

Diabetes lead teams in each primary care trust.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were employed in the National Care Standards Commission at 1 April; and what proportion of those staff have clinical contact with NHS patients. [56857]

Jacqui Smith: The National Care Standards Commission employed 1,866 staff at 1 April 2002.

The commission employs a range of staff including administrators and inspectors. While the commission's inspectors have qualifications relevant to the work they do in regulating services and establishments, including medical qualifications where appropriate, none of the commission's staff have clinical contact with national health service patients.

Juvenile Sex Abusers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what protocols are in place for child and adolescent mental health services in dealing with children who sexually abuse. [57186]

Jacqui Smith: No national protocols have been set for child and adolescent mental health services. However, paragraphs 6.31 to 6.37 of "Working Together to Safeguard Children" gives guidance for agencies working with children and young people who abuse others. This includes the principle that there should be a co-ordinated approach on the part of youth justice, child welfare, education (including educational psychology) and health (including child and adolescent mental health) agencies.

A number of adolescent sexual offenders will have co-existing serious mental health disorders or mental illness. In these circumstances, it is expected that child and adolescent mental health services would assess both the mental health needs of the young person and also the level of risk they pose and provide appropriate treatment for that disorder or illness.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to conduct further research into children and young people who sexually abuse. [57185]

Jacqui Smith: There are no current plans to conduct new research on child sexual abuse. It is often an issue that is picked up and explored as part of other studies about interventions with children in need. Relevant departmental funded studies on children or young people who sexually abuse are in the completed study, "Sexually Abused and Abusing Children in Substitute Care" by Elaine Farmer and the forthcoming study, "A Protective Study on the Onset of Sexually Abusive Behaviour in Boys who were Sexually Abused in Childhood" by Professor Skuse at the Institute of Child Health.

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made by his Department in implementing a multi-agency model to address *(a)* the risks posed by and *(b)* the needs of children and young people who abuse. [57320]

Jacqui Smith: "Working Together to Safeguard Children", a guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children published in December 1999, sets out how agencies should work together to assess the risks posed by and the needs of children and young people who abuse. It is the responsibility of area child protection committees and their relevant constituent agencies to determine ways of implementing this guidance at local level.

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding was available for programmes to address the needs of children and young people who sexually abuse in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001. [57322]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has funded two voluntary organisations under section 64 of the Health Services and Public Health Act (1968) to carry out work in relation to stopping child sexual abuse by using public health education approaches to increase public awareness of sexual abuse in a way that empowers people to act responsibly and without panic in the interests of effective child protection. The 'Stop It Now!' project is targeting specific groups of adults including adult abusers and the parents of young abusers. The Lucy Faithfull foundation and the national organisation for the treatment of abusers have been granted £55,000 and £37,000 a year for each year from 2001–02 to 2003–04, with additional funding from the Home Office of £50,000 a year for the same three-year period for the Lucy Faithfull foundation.

Public Inquiries (Child Abuse and Neglect)

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many public inquiries have been held into child *(a)* abuse and *(b)* neglect cases since 1990. [57192]

Jacqui Smith: There has been no statutory public inquiries into child abuse or neglect cases since 1990, apart from the Victoria Climbie inquiry that is currently carrying out its work. The Government guidance, "Working Together to Safeguard Children", issued by the Home Office, Department for Education and Skills and the Department of Health in December 1999, states that when a child dies and abuse or neglect are known or suspected to be a factor in the death, the area child protection committee (ACPC) should always conduct a review into the involvement with the child and family of agencies and professionals. In all cases, the ACPC overview report should contain an executive summary that will be made public.

Nurses

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole-time equivalent nurses are responsible for assessing patients for free nursing care. [57247]

Jacqui Smith: Across the country as a whole, in the period from October 2001 to March 2002, a total of approximately 800 nurses received training in carrying out the registered nursing care contribution in order to determine the needs of approximately 42,000 people. The number of whole-time equivalent nurses is not known.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people have been waiting *(a)* less than one month, *(b)* over one month and less than two months, *(c)* over two months and less than three months, *(d)* over three months and less than four months and *(e)* over four months for an assessment for free nursing care; [38354]

(2) how many people are awaiting an assessment for free nursing care; and what proportion that represents of people who have either been assessed for or are awaiting an assessment for free nursing care. [57246]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave him on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 462W.

Hospital Stays

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he has taken since 1997 to ensure that people *(a)* are not discharged from hospital too early and *(b)* do not stay in hospital longer than necessary. [57524]

Jacqui Smith: The number of people aged over 75 with a delayed discharge has fallen from 15.7 per cent. to 10.5 per cent. since 1997. In order that this trend should continue, we have already responded to the issue of delayed discharge with a special grant to councils of £300 million over two years, and the establishment of the 'change agents team' dedicated to supporting social services and the national health service to solve these problems locally. We are in the process of updating the hospital discharge workbook, which aims to help health, social services and other agencies improve discharge procedures.

Over the longer term, the Government intend to bring forward legislation to make councils responsible for meeting the costs to the NHS of delayed discharges. The new approach will be about putting in place the right incentives to ensure that people are able to leave hospital as soon as treatment is completed and it is safe for them to do so.

Mental Health

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many new mental health units have been built since June 2000. [58190]

Jacqui Smith: 22 major schemes, each exceeding £2 million have been completed throughout the country and funded from public capital, with a total value exceeding £50 million. Two large private finance initiative schemes have been developed at a value of £28 million.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are being taken to adapt older mental health units to match the criteria laid down for the building of new mental health units. [58191]

Jacqui Smith: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made available funding of £30 million over two years from 2001–02 specifically for improving the physical environment in in-patient psychiatric wards.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will carry out an audit of the opinions of mental health service users in hospitals regarding mixed and single-sex wards. [58188]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not intend to carry out a national audit of the opinions of mental health service users regarding mixed and single sex hospital accommodation. The Department has set clear objectives for the elimination of mixed sex accommodation in mental health settings. National health service trust boards are responsible for putting in place policies and procedures to address patient safety, privacy and dignity. The Department's guidance to trusts sets out that NHS trust chief executives should ensure that local patient surveys are considered as a means of assessing patients' and relatives' views about services and to ascertain their concerns.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what benefits exercise referral schemes offer in the field of mental health treatment. [58314]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* Regular physical activity reduces the risk of depression and has positive benefits for mental health including reduced anxiety, enhanced mood and self-esteem. Existing referral schemes involve primary care professionals referring patients to facilities such as leisure centres or gyms for supervised exercise programmes. Last year, the Department published a national quality assurance framework to improve the quality of existing referral schemes and help the development of new ones.

Children in Care

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of children who have been in care homes in the last five years have been convicted of an offence. [58118]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of children who have been in care homes who have been convicted of an offence is not collected centrally.

Of all children looked after in England for at least one year who were aged 10 years or older at 30 September 2000, 2,800 or 11 per cent. were cautioned or convicted during the year.

Hepatitis C

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the National Strategy report on hepatitis C will be published. [57604]

Yvette Cooper: We set up a steering group last year to assist in developing a strategic approach to hepatitis C by bringing together issues relating to prevention, control and treatment. We plan to consult on a strategy for hepatitis C in England during the summer, which will take account of advice from the steering group.

Nurse Prescribing Scheme

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what account he took of the need to tackle antibiotic resistance before deciding to extend the nurse prescribing scheme to include nine oral antibiotics. [42312]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 May 2002]:* We took the decision after detailed discussion between senior officials and representatives of the Specialist Advisory Committee on Antimicrobial Resistance.

Disability Equipment Services

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he is taking to implement the recommendations of the Audit Commission's "Fully Equipped" report on the provision of disability equipment services for older and disabled people. [57151]

Jacqui Smith: Since publication of the Audit Commission's report "Fully Equipped" in March 2000, the Department has extended the agenda set by the report, and gone beyond the four recommendations for the Department. In particular, it has done this by developing, with the active involvement of the Audit Commission, guidance on the modernisation of community equipment services and by funding the integration of local authority and health equipment services. The Department has also allocated £30 million to modernise hearing aids services, including the provision of digital hearing aids, and £4 million for the provision of life-like covering for artificial limbs. The Modernisation Agency will be identifying and spreading good practice within wheelchair services. The Department has continued to encourage health authorities, trusts and social services, and now, primary care trusts, to implement the further 13 recommendations that fell into their remit.

Intermediate Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 486W, on intermediate care, how many people in each quarter of 2001 who were *(a)* referred to/receiving intermediate care in a residential setting to prevent hospital admission and *(b)* referred to non-residential intermediate care teams to prevent hospital admission were subsequently admitted to hospital within (i) one month, (ii) two months, (iii) three months and (iv) four months. [57191]

Jacqui Smith: Information on the number of people admitted to hospital following an episode of intermediate care is not available.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 926W, on community hospitals, how many intermediate care beds there were in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02; and what proportion were located in rural areas, broken down by region. [57468]

Jacqui Smith: The results of a survey of NHS intermediate care [illegible] England carried out last summer, giving data by region and by health authority for the three years 1999–2000 to 2001–02, are in the Library. Information on the proportion of intermediate care beds in rural areas is not available.

Free Nursing Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* representations and *(b)* letters he has received from (i) hon. Members and (ii) members of the public regarding the failure of care homes to pass on the NHS free nursing care contribution to residents. [57182]

Jacqui Smith: I have received two representations on this subject, one from an hon. Member and one from an organisation representing the interests of older people.

I have received just over 200 letters from Members of Parliament and 150 letters direct from members of the public about national health service funded nursing care. A large proportion of these, though not all, were about the increases in care home fees following the introduction of NHS funded nursing care.

Care Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the impact on the care home sector of mergers and acquisitions of care homes in the last five years. [57187]

Jacqui Smith: The Government have made no such assessment.

Parliamentary Questions

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the information his Department collects centrally; and what steps the Department takes to obtain the desired information to answer hon. Members' written parliamentary questions. [42261]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 11 May 2002]:* The Department collects a wide range of information on health services and personal social services in England to enable it to meet its objectives and responsibilities. A consolidated list is being established of information collected centrally by the Department and can be found on the Department's Information Asset Register on the world-wide web (website address: http://tap.ccta.gov.uk/doh/iar.nsf/frames2?open). Details of information returns which it is planned routinely to collect from the national health service for 2002–03 is also available on the Department's website (www.doh.gov.uk/ipu/stbop/flowsa.htm).

The Department will always take reasonable steps to obtain the information needed to answer Members' written parliamentary questions provided that obtaining the information requested would not incur disproportionate cost.

MMR

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GP practices have failed to meet targets for MMR vaccination rates and missed out on target payments. [53294]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* 680 or 8 per cent. of general medical service general practitioner practices are not meeting the childhood immunisation targets. MMR is one of the immunisations in the childhood immunisation programme, the others are diphtheria, tetanus, poliomyelitis, pertussis and haemophilus influenza type B. No data are available for personal medical services (PMS) practices, as PMS works on the basis of local accountability these data are not held centrally.

Overseas Recruitment

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what targets have been set for the director of international recruitment for health services for the number of foreign recruited nurses working for the NHS. [58033]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* A combination of international recruitment, return to practice, improved retention and increased output from training has meant that the NHS Plan increase of 20,000 more nurses by 2004 has been achieved well in advance of the 2004 target.

A similar approach will be used to ensure achievement of the new targets for increases in the nursing work force.

Foot Infections

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the number of episodes of care in respect of tissue breakdown infection and/or ulceration of the foot by region in each year since 1997. [58288]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the tables.

Finished consultant episodes (FCEs) by main diagnosis in national health service hospitals, England 1996–97 to 1998–99

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
Northern and Yorkshire regional			
L97 Ulcer of lower limb, not elsewhere classified	2,540	1,067	1,083
A30.1 Tuberculoid leprosy	0	1	0
A52.1 Symptomatic neursyphilis	17	8	22
183.0 Varicose veins of lower extremities with ulcer	236	205	196
183.2 Varicose veins of lower extremities	83	50	81
Trent regional office			
L97 Ulcer of lower limb, not elsewhere classified	1,436	1,660	1,887
A52.1 Symptomatic neursyphilis	5	10	9
183.0 Varicose veins of lower extremities with ulcer	316	279	236
183.2 Varicose veins of lower extremities	121	110	69
Anglia and Oxford regional office			
L97 Ulcer of lower limb, not elsewhere classified	2,424	1,736	1,671
A52.1 Symptomatic neursyphilis	5	7	10
183.0 Varicose veins of lower extremities with ulcer	245	229	216
183.2 Varicose veins of lower extremities	100	102	80
North Thames regional office			
L97 Ulcer of lower limb, not elsewhere classified	1,620	1,506	1,754
A30.1 Tuberculoid leprosy	7	12	0
A52.1 Symptomatic neursyphilis	3	9	5
183.0 Varicose veins of lower extremities with ulcer	254	264	230
183.2 Varicose veins of lower extremities	107	87	117
South Thames regional office			
L97 Ulcer of lower limb, not elsewhere classified	1,790	1,697	1,719
A30.1 Tuberculoid leprosy	0	1	0
A52.1 Symptomatic neursyphilis	3	12	10
183.0 Varicose veins of lower extremities with ulcer	255	260	303
183.2 Varicose veins of lower extremities	132	88	100
South and West regional office			
L97 Ulcer of lower limb, not elsewhere classified	2,587	2,624	2,941
A52.1 Symptomatic neursyphilis	16	35	33
183.0 Varicose veins of lower extremities with ulcer	452	450	464
183.2 Varicose veins of lower extremities	130	149	157
West Midlands regional office			
L97 Ulcer of lower limb, not elsewhere classified	1,579	1,466	1,578
A30.1 Tuberculoid leprosy	1	2	0
A52.1 Symptomatic neursyphilis	2	9	2
183.0 Varicose veins of lower extremities with ulcer	213	204	234
183.2 Varicose veins of lower extremities	76	91	95

Finished consultant episodes (FCEs) by main diagnosis in national health service hospitals, England 1996–97 to 1998–99

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*
North West regional office			
L97 Ulcer of lower limb, not elsewhere classified	1,421	1,558	1,752
A52.1 Symptomatic neursyphilis	8	10	7
183.0 Varicose veins of lower extremities with ulcer	188	223	264
183.2 Varicose veins of lower extremities	141	145	156
Not known			
L97 Ulcer of lower limb, not elsewhere classified	0	22	0
A52.1 Symptomatic neursyphilis	0	0	0
183.0 Varicose veins of lower extremities with ulcer	0	3	0
183.2 Varicose veins of lower extremities	0	0	0

Finished consultant episodes (FCEs) by main diagnosis in national health service hospitals, England 1999–2000 to 2000–01

	1999–2000	*2000–01*
Northern and Yorkshire regional		
L97 Ulcer of lower limb, not elsewhere classified	1,251	1,292
A30.1 Tuberculoid leprosy	0	0
A52.1 Symptomatic neursyphilis	20	32
183.0 Varicose veins of lower extremities with ulcer	183	139
183.2 Varicose veins of lower extremities	61	54
Trent regional office		
L97 Ulcer of lower limb, not elsewhere classified	1,827	1,789
A30.1 Tuberculoid leprosy	0	0
A52.1 Symptomatic neursyphilis	2	9
183.0 Varicose veins of lower extremities with ulcer	208	214
183.2 Varicose veins of lower extremities	85	115
West Midlands regional office		
L97 Ulcer of lower limb, not elsewhere classified	1,625	1,717
A30.1 Tuberculoid leprosy	0	0
A52.1 Symptomatic neursyphilis	8	5
183.0 Varicose veins of lower extremities with ulcer	229	177
183.2 Varicose veins of lower extremities	65	103
North West regional office		
L97 Ulcer of lower limb, not elsewhere classified	1,737	1,918
A30.1 Tuberculoid leprosy	0	0
A52.1 Symptomatic neursyphilis	8	5
183.0 Varicose veins of lower extremities with ulcer	169	195
183.2 Varicose veins of lower extremities	163	113
Eastern regional office		
L97 Ulcer of lower limb, not elsewhere classified	1,597	1,572
A30.1 Tuberculoid leprosy	0	0
A52.1 Symptomatic neursyphilis	8	5
183.0 Varicose veins of lower extremities with ulcer	211	212
183.2 Varicose veins of lower extremities	106	85
London regional office		
L97 Ulcer of lower limb, not elsewhere classified	1,745	1,875
A30.1 Tuberculoid leprosy	1	2
A52.1 Symptomatic neursyphilis	15	9
183.0 Varicose veins of lower extremities with ulcer	262	331
183.2 Varicose veins of lower extremities	188	96
South East regional office		
L97 Ulcer of lower limb, not elsewhere classified	2,418	2,445
A30.1 Tuberculoid leprosy	0	0
A52.1 Symptomatic neursyphilis	4	8
183.0 Varicose veins of lower extremities with ulcer	345	272
183.2 Varicose veins of lower extremities	101	137
South West regional office		
L97 Ulcer of lower limb, not elsewhere classified	2,430	2,389
A30.1 Tuberculoid leprosy	0	0
A52.1 Symptomatic neursyphilis	7	17
183.0 Varicose veins of lower extremities with ulcer	358	354
183.2 Varicose veins of lower extremities	168	122

Expenditure

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, (1) pursuant to his answer of 14 May 2002, ref. 56283, on expenditure, what assessment he has made of the money necessary to meet *(a)* increases in pay, *(b)* increases in prices and *(c)* the other pressures faced by health authorities; and if he will make a statement on how the increased health authority allocations will meet each increase and pressure; [58335]

(2) if he will make a statement on how the increased allocations to health authorities for 2002–03 will be spent. [58302]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* Health authority allocations for 2002–03 increased by £3,704 million, or 9.9 per cent. This included sufficient funding to meet increases in pay, prices and other pressures faced by all health authorities. It is for health authorities in partnership with primary care trusts and other local stakeholders to determine how best to use their funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling inequalities and modernising services.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Units

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the Criminal Justice Joint Planning Unit was established; [48506]

(2) how many members of staff are employed by the Criminal Justice Joint Planning Unit; [48509]

(3) what the cost of the Criminal Justice Joint Planning Unit was in the last 12 months; [48507]

(4) what the remit is for the Criminal Justice Joint Planning Unit. [48508]

Mr. Blunkett: The Criminal Justice Joint Planning Unit was established in 1998. It is an interdepartmental unit, working in partnership with the criminal justice system departments, agencies, services and the 42 area criminal justice strategy committees to progress joint working and to take forward strategic planning, performance management and delivery across the whole of the criminal justice system. The Unit also works on improving the level of public confidence in the criminal justice system, including that of ethnic minority communities, and management of the criminal justice system reserve. The operating cost of the Criminal Justice Joint Planning Unit in 2001–02 is estimated at £0.8 million. There were 25 staff in post on 31 March 2002.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the remit is of the Corporate Management Unit; [48439]

(2) what the cost of the Corporate Management Unit was in the last 12 months; [48437]

(3) how many members of staff are employed by the Corporate Management Unit; [48438]

(4) when the Corporate Management Unit was established. [48436]

Mr. Blunkett: The Corporate Management Unit was established in 1996 under the previous Conservative Administration and has two main functions. The unit supports research, development and statistics directorate (RDS) units including: planning the RDS work programme; managing its budget; undertaking procurement; and dealing with staffing issues (including training and accommodation). Well over half the unit's staff are employed in data collection for RDS's key statistical collections. There are 62 staff, and the total operating costs for 2001–02 were £2.75 million.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the remit is of the Offenders and Corrections Unit; [48521]

(2) what the cost of the Offenders and Corrections Unit was in the last 12 months; [48519]

(3) when the Offenders and Corrections Unit was established; [48518]

(4) how many members of staff are employed by the Offenders and Corrections Unit; [48520]

Mr. Blunkett: The Offenders and Corrections Unit was established as a separate unit in 1996 under the previous Administration, to bring together responsibility for providing research, development and statistics for the prison and probation services and on offenders. The total operating costs for 2001–02 were £1.59 million. The number of staff employed in the unit is 66.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the Accounting and Finance Unit was established; [48460]

(2) what the remit is of the Accounting and Finance Unit; [48462]

(3) how many members of staff are employed by the Accounting and Finance Unit; [48463]

(4) what the cost of the Accounting and Finance Unit was in the last 12 months. [48461]

Mr. Blunkett: The Accounting and Finance Unit (AFU) was established in April 1998 as a result of a reorganisation which brought together the work of two related units. Its function is to deliver financial and accounting management, advice and systems in support of the Home Office's aims and objectives. At 31 March 2002 the unit comprised 129 established staff in London and Liverpool. The estimated outturn operating costs were £4.1 million. The size of the Home Office budget for which AFU is responsible is £10.7 billion.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many members of staff are employed by the Audit and Assurance Unit; [48467]

(2) what the cost of the Audit and Assurance Unit was in the last 12 months; [48465]

(3) when the Audit and Assurance Unit was established; [48464]

(4) what the remit is of the Audit and Assurance Unit. [48466]

Mr. Blunkett: The Audit and Assurance Unit (AAU) was formed in April 1998, replacing the former internal audit unit. It performs a statutory function to provide an independent and objective opinion to the Accounting Officer on risk management, control and governance.

AAU supports the Accounting Officer in meeting his responsibility for the propriety and regularity of the public finances and for the efficient and effective use of all the available resources including value for money.

AAU also provides these services to 1[illegible] executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies. In 2001–02 it has undertaken 180 separate audit reviews.

The outturn cost of AAU for the financial year 2001–02 is £1.4 million. As at 31 March 2002, AAU employed 27 staff.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the Immigration and Community Care Unit was established; [48514]

(2) how many members of staff are employed by the Immigration and Community Unit; [48516]

(3) what the cost of the Immigration and Community Unit was in the last 12 months; [48515]

(4) what the remit is of the Immigration and Community Unit. [48517]

Mr. Blunkett: The Immigration and Community Unit was established in 1996 under the previous Conservative Administration. The unit provides a research and statistics service for the Immigration and Nationality Directorate and the Community Policy Directorate. It publishes statistics about the control of immigration, asylum, citizenship, scientific procedures and research reports (to be found on the research development and statistics (RDS) website). There are 54 staff employed in the unit and the total operating costs for 2001–02 were £1.57 million.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what is the remit of the Correctional Policy Unit; [48497]

(2) when the Correctional Policy Unit was established; [48495]

(3) how many members of staff are employed by the Correctional Policy Unit; [48498]

(4) what the cost of the Correctional Policy Unit was in the last 12 months. [48496]

Mr. Blunkett: The Correctional Policy Unit was established in summer 1998, primarily to support the creation of the National Probation Service.

Its remit now is to monitor performance across the correctional services and identify ways to bridge gaps in provision for offenders as they move from prison to community supervision and in provision for women offenders. The Unit also sponsors and supports the inspectorates of prisons and probation and manages the contracts for the operators of electronic equipment used to monitor offenders in the community. In the financial year 2001–02 the Correctional Policy Unit's costs were £1.37 million. There were 39 members of staff in post on 31 March 2002.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the remit is of the Commercial and Procurement Unit; [48470]

(2) when the Commercial and Procurement Unit was established; [48468]

(3) what the cost of the Commercial and Procurement Group Resources Unit was in the last 12 months; [48477]

(4) what the cost of the Commercial and Procurement Unit was in the last 12 months; [48469]

(5) how many members of staff are employed by the Commercial and Procurement Unit. [48471]

Mr. Blunkett: The Commercial and Procurement Group Resources Unit does not exist.

The Commercial and Procurement Unit was formed in April 1998, from previously existing units following an internal reorganisation.

Its remit is to provide the Home Office, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies with central commercial expertise, and to ensure the consistent application of policy, procedures, legislation, and best practice.

The forecast cost of the Commercial and Procurement Unit for the 2001–02 financial year is £1.05 million. As at 31 March 2002 there were 26 staff in post.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many members of staff are employed by the Police Leadership and Powers Unit; [48422]

(2) how many members of staff are employed by the Police Resource Unit; [48426]

(3) how many members of staff are employed by the Science and Technology Unit; [48434]

(4) how many members of staff are employed by the Performance and Strategic Management Unit; [48418]

(5) how many members of staff are employed by the HM Inspectorate of Constabulary; [48414]

(6) how many members of staff are employed by the Action Against Crime and Disorder Unit; [48411]

(7) how many members of staff are employed by the Police Resource Unit. [48430]

Mr. Blunkett: The number of staff employed on 31 March 2002 in each of these units is shown in the table. These figures include staff employed on a temporary basis.

Unit	*Number of staff employed*[1]
Action Against Crime and Disorder Unit	80
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary	114
Performance and Strategic Management Unit[2]	218
Police Leadership and Powers Unit	45
Police Resources Unit	56
Science and Technology Unit	58

[1] As at 31 March 2002

[2] includes 10 regional Crime Reduction Teams

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the Animal Procedures and Coroners Unit was established; [48092]

(2) how many members of staff are employed by the Animal Procedures and Coroners Unit; [48094]

(3) what the cost of the Animal Procedures and Coroners Unit was in the last 12 months; [48093]

(4) what the remit is of the Animal Procedures and Coroners Unit. [48095]

Mr. Blunkett: The Animal Procedures and Coroners Unit was established in its present form after the machinery of Government changes following the general election in June 2001. The Unit was formerly called the Animals, Byelaws and Coroners Unit and had additional responsibilities that were transferred to other Government Departments.

The Unit is responsible for the operation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 (including the costs of the Animal Procedures Committee). It also carries out the Home Secretary's functions in relation to coroners, burial law and related matters.

The provisional outturn operating costs of the Animal Procedures and Coroners Unit for the financial year April 2001 to March 2002 were approximately £1.64 million. On 31 March 2002 there were 40 members of staff in post in the Unit.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many members of staff are employed by the Mental Health Unit; [48133]

(2) what the cost of the Mental Health Unit was in the last 12 months; [48131]

(3) what the remit is of the Mental Health Unit; [48132]

(4) when the Mental Health Unit was established. [48130]

Mr. Blunkett: The Home Office has exercised functions in respect of mentally disordered offenders since 1800, when the Criminal Lunatics Act was passed. The Mental Health Unit was established in its present form in 1996 under the previous Conservative Administration. It succeeded units which have existed since 1959 when the Mental Health Act created responsibilities for the Home Secretary in the management of restricted patients. This was also legislation passed by a Conservative Government.

The Mental Health Unit:

assists me in the discharge of my duties and powers under the Mental Health Act 1983 and the Criminal Procedure (Insanity and Unfitness to Plead) Acts 1964 and 1991; and

develops new services for those who are dangerous and severely personality disordered, and manages a research programme on their assessment and treatment.

In the year to 31 December 2000 (the latest year for which figures are available[1]) the Mental Health Unit:

transferred 271 restricted patients from a Prison Service establishment;

transferred 393 restricted patients from a Prison Service establishment to hospital while unsentenced or untried;

transferred 30 restricted patients to hospital under the Criminal Procedure (Insanity and Unfitness to Plead) Act;

conditionally discharged 23 restricted patients; and

recalled 60 patients to hospital after conditional discharge.

The estimated outturn operating costs of the unit are £2.06 million. On 31 March 2002 the Mental Health Unit employed the full time equivalent of 62 staff.

[1] Statistics of Mentally Disordered Offenders, Home Office statistical Bulletin 22/01

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the Criminal Justice Integration Programme was established; [48502]

(2) what the remit is of the Criminal Justice Integration Unit; [48501]

(3) how many members of staff are employed by the Criminal Justice Integration Programme; [48505]

(4) when the Criminal Justice Integration Unit was established; [48499]

(5) what the remit is of the Criminal Justice Integration Programme; [48504]

(6) what the cost of the Criminal Justice Integration Unit was in the last 12 months; [48500]

(7) what the cost of the Criminal Justice Integration Programme was in the last 12 months. [48503]

Mr. Blunkett: The Criminal Justice Integration Unit was established in August 2001 and the Criminal Justice Integration Programme was established in September 2001. They work closely together, sharing resources, to deliver the over-arching remit of Criminal Justice Information Technology (CJIT). That is, to ensure the delivery of timely and cost-effective information technology (IT) in support of a modern joined-up criminal justice system. CJIT will build on the existing criminal justice organisations' IT investments and link their case management systems, progressively, using Government-standard services and standards. At 31 March 2002, the number of staff in post in CJIT was 38. The cost of CJIT in the last financial year (2001–02) was £3.61 million.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the European and International Unit was established; [48440]

(2) how many members of staff are employed by the European and International Unit; [48443]

(3) what the cost of the European and International Unit was in the last 12 months; [48441]

(4) what the remit is of the European and International Unit. [48442]

Mr. Blunkett: A European Communities Unit was set up in May 1991 under the previous Conservative Administration. The present title (European and International Unit) was adopted in April 2000.

The unit:

provides a focus for the co-ordination of Home Office involvement in the European Union (EU), through development of the Home Office strategic approach to the EU and contributing to the development of policy and negotiating positions in a total, for the year ending 31 March 2002, of 56 Justice and Home Affairs Councils, meetings of the Article 36 Committee and meetings of the Enlargement Working Group;

advises other areas of the Home Office on EU policy and procedural issues in the field of justice and home affairs;

maintains and enhances the effectiveness of the mechanisms by which the Home Office ensures that parliamentary scrutiny obligations are fulfilled;

provides a focus for Home Office interests in the work of the G8 and other non-EU international organisations where a single policy focus does not exist; and

co-ordinates briefing and practical arrangements for international multiple-focus visits to/by Home Office Ministers and senior officials.

The unit cost £0.78 million in the 12 months ending 31 March 2002. It has 24 members of staff.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many members of staff are employed by the Corporate Support Services Unit; [48082]

(2) when the Corporate Support Services Unit was established; [48080]

(3) what the remit is of the Corporate Support Services Unit; [48083]

(4) what the cost of the Corporate Support Services Unit was in the last 12 months. [48081]

Mr. Blunkett: The Corporate Support Services Unit (CSSU) was established on 1 April 1996 under the previous Conservative Government and is responsible for the Mail and Messenger Service, the Text Processing Service, the Health and Safety Service and the Health and Welfare Service. The unit also has responsibility for the maintenance of appropriate security and business continuity arrangements within the Home Office. The estimated outturn for operating costs in the financial year 2001–02 was £6.18 million. As at 31 March 2002 there were 159 staff in post.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the remit is of the farm policy unit; [48084]

(2) when the farm policy unit was established; [48086]

(3) how many members of staff are employed by the farm policy unit; [48085]

(4) what the cost of the farm policy unit was in the last 12 months. [48087]

Mr. Blunkett: I presume the hon. Member is asking about the family policy unit. The family policy unit was established in February 1999 to co-ordinate family policy across Government, under the Cabinet Sub-Committee on Active Communities and Family Issues, and manage the family support grant to voluntary sector organisations working to improve support for parents.

In the 12 months to 31 March 2002, provisional outturn operating costs of the unit were some £0.48 million. 13 staff were in post as at 31 March 2002.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the Human Resources and Equality Unit was established; [48122]

(2) how many members of staff are employed by the Human Resources and Equality Unit; [48120]

(3) what the cost of the Home Office Sports and Social Association Organisation was in the last 12 months; [48492]

(4) how many members of staff are employed by the Home Office Sports and Social Association Organisation; [48494]

(5) what the remit is of the Home Office Sports and Social Association Organisation; [48493]

(6) what the cost of the Human Resources and Equality Unit was in the last 12 months; [48121]

(7) what the remit is of the Human Resources and Equality Unit. [48119]

Mr. Blunkett: The Human Resources and Equality Unit was created in its current form in May 1999, taking over functions from various other units at that time. It is responsible for pay and industrial relations for the Home Office, excluding the Prison Service and other agencies; human resource planning; diversity issues among Home Office staff; and for helping to modernise personnel systems in use across the Home Office.

On 31 March 2002 the number of staff employed in the Unit was 45. Another 16 posts are occupied by full-time trade union officials.

The Unit's forecast outturn operating costs, including the trade unions side, in the financial year 2001–02 were £2.08 million.

The Unit also has responsibility for the Home Office Sports and Social Association which was formed by staff in about 1924. The Association's remit is to encourage and co-ordinate sport and social activities among staff by means of associated clubs and societies. The Association is affiliated to the Civil Service Sports Council.

The Association does not employ any staff. However the Home Office, since at least 1970, has provided it with a secretary and one assistant. The cost to the Home Office of the Association in 2001–02 was £37,000, which covers the cost of the Secretariat. All money administered by the Association is received from staff through the Civil Service Sports Council and profits from a monthly work place lottery.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the remit is of the Science and Technology Unit; [48435]

(2) what the remit is of the Police Leadership and Powers Unit; [48423]

(3) what the remit is of HM Inspectorate of Constabulary; [48415]

(4) what the remit is of the Performance and Strategic Management Unit; [48419]

(5) what the remit is of the Action Against Crime and Disorder Unit; [48412]

(6) what the remit is of the Police Resource Unit; [48431]

(7) what the remit is of the Police Resource Unit. [48427]

Mr. Blunkett: As part of the Policing and Crime Reduction Group, all these units contribute to reducing crime and the fear of crime. Their main responsibilities are as follows:

Action Against Crime and Disorder Unit

This unit is responsible for:

Developing strategies against disorder and anti-social behaviour, violent crime, vehicle crime, burglary and other property crime, road crime, youth crime, rural crime and fear of crime;

Policy on the maintenance and disclosure of criminal records;

The promotion of information sharing in order to combat crime;

The administration of controls on firearms;

The payment of grants totalling £6.7 million in the year ending 31 March 2002 for a range of crime reduction initiatives and for the firearms compensation scheme.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary

HM Inspectorate of Constabulary is responsible for carrying out inspections of police forces under the Police Act 1964. It seeks to promote collaboration between forces and to encourage the application of up-to-date techniques and the results of central police research. The Inspectorate also provides advice to the Secretary of State and the Home Office on professional police matters.

Performance and Strategic Management Unit

This unit is responsible for:

Developing and maintaining the constitutional arrangements for policing and monitoring performance;

Supporting regional crime reduction teams and local partnerships;

Increasing the public availability of police officers and support staff;

Managing the Group's performance monitoring systems and budget;

The payment of grants totalling £162.4 million in the year ending 31 March 2002 for a range of crime reduction initiatives.

Police Leadership and Powers Unit

This unit is responsible for developing policy on:

Police leadership, police powers and procedures, and police relations with the public;

The training of police officers and support staff;

Police complaints and discipline and to combat police corruption;

Sponsoring the Police Complaints Authority and the Central Police Training and Development Authority.

Police Resources Unit

This unit is responsible for:

Developing the policy relating to police resource issues;

Allocating and monitoring the use of public money provided to the police, including the payment of grants totalling £4,290 million in the year ending 31 March 2002 to police forces and to police associations;

Developing the policy relating to police employment and conditions of service.

Science and Technology Unit

This unit is responsible for:

Advising on the exploitation of science and technology by the police and in crime prevention;

Managing the DNA Expansion Programme;

Acting as the sponsor unit for the Police Information Technology Organisation and the National Identification Service;

Supporting the Forensic Science Service;

Overseeing the provision of forensic pathology services in England and Wales;

Regulating the police radio frequency service;

Developing policy on the police use of aircraft;

Providing policy advice on the development of police equipment and software.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the cost of the Finance and Planning Unit was in the last 12 months; [48445]

(2) how many members of staff are employed by the Finance and Planning Unit; [48447]

(3) when the Finance and Planning Unit was established; [48444]

(4) what the remit is of the Finance and Planning Unit. [48446]

Mr. Blunkett: The Finance and Planning Unit was established in April 1996 under the previous Conservative Government, to provide advice on business planning in support of the aims and objectives of the newly created Organised and International Crime Directorate, and to manage the Directorate's budget. The provisional outturn operating costs of the unit in 2001–02 were £0.2 million. As at 31 March 2002 there were five staff in post.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the remit is of the Business Support Unit; [48103]

(2) what the cost is of the Business Support Unit; [48105]

(3) when the Business Support Unit was established; [48106]

(4) how many members of staff are employed by the Business Support Unit. [48104]

Mr. Blunkett: The Business Support Unit was established in November 1999 from two previous units to provide a central focus for all of Communication Directorate's administrative support and resource management/planning activities and manage the long-term strategic Customer Communications Foundation Project (CCFP) as well as a small number of related tactical/short-term projects designed to improve the Home Office's performance in dealing with Ministers' cases, public correspondence, and telephone inquiries. The Business Support Unit's provisional operating cost outturn for the financial year ending 31 March 2002 is £0.8 million. The number of staff on 31 March was 19.5.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the Sentencing and Offences Unit was established; [48138]

(2) what the remit is of the Sentencing and Offences Unit; [48140]

(3) what the cost of the Sentencing and Offences Unit was in the last 12 months; [48139]

(4) how many members of staff are employed by the Sentencing and Offences Unit. [48141]

Mr. Blunkett: The Sentencing and Offences Unit (SOU) was formed in 1996 under the previous Conservative Government when parts of the previous C1 division (dealing with sentencing policy) and C4 division (dealing with policy on criminal offences) were merged. The Sentencing and Offences Unit reviews sentencing policy and aspects of the criminal law, including ensuring that the criminal law is sufficient for the purposes of opposing criminal activities and that there are appropriate penalties available to the courts. It scrutinises all proposals for new offences and penalties to ensure their proper formulation.

Major areas of work in which the unit is at present engaged include the preparation of final proposals for the comprehensive reform of sex offences; proposals to strengthen the Sex Offenders Act 1997; a review of the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974; preparation of final proposals for reform of the Offences Against the Person Act and the law on involuntary manslaughter and on corruption; and the implementation of sections 1–11 of Part I of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 (on the spot penalties for disorderly behaviour).

The unit is responsible for a large amount of public and ministerial correspondence and parliamentary business on all aspects of sentencing and offences. During the period from 1 October 2001 to 31 March 2002 SOU replied to 766 items of public correspondence and 335 Ministers' cases.

The provisional outturn operating costs in the financial year 2001–02 are expected to be approximately £1.4 million. This includes the cost of the secretariat for the Sentencing Advisory Panel.

There are 36 members of staff employed in the Sentencing and Offences Unit.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the Criminal Justice Reform Unit was established; [48123]

(2) what the cost of the Criminal Justice Reform Unit was in the last 12 months; [48124]

(3) what the remit is of the Criminal Justice Reform Unit; [48125]

(4) how many members of staff are employed by the Criminal Justice Reform Unit. [48126]

Mr. Blunkett: The Criminal Justice Reform Unit was established in September 2001 to take forward the implementation of the Home Office aspects of Sir Robin Auld's Review of the Criminal Courts, which was published in October 2001.

The costs were not separated out until recently, and are around £35,000 a month.

On 31 March 2002 there were 14 members of staff in post.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the Group Resources Unit was established; [48476]

(2) what the remit is of the Group Resources Unit; [48478]

(3) how many members of staff are employed by the Group Resources Unit. [48479]

Mr. Blunkett: The Group Resources Unit was established in April 1998, following an internal reorganisation, to manage the budget of the Planning, Finance and Performance Group, and support the senior management of the Group in achieving the objectives set out in the Group's Business Plan and in taking forward the modernisation programme. As at 31 March 2002 there were four staff in post. The estimated outturn operating costs are £0.79 million.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the Police Resource Unit was established; [48424]

(2) when the Police Leadership and Powers Unit was established; [48420]

(3) when the Science and Technology Unit was established; [48432]

(4) when the Action Against Crime and Disorder Unit was established; [48409]

(5) when the Police Resource Unit was established; [48428]

(6) when the Performance and Strategic Management Unit was established. [48416]

Mr. Blunkett: These units were established in their current form in June 2000 as part of an internal re-organisation of the Policing and Crime Reduction Group.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the Crime and Criminal Justice Unit was established; [48510]

(2) what the cost of the Crime and Criminal Justice Unit was in the last 12 months; [48511]

(3) what the remit is of the Crime and Criminal Justice Unit; [48513]

(4) how many members of staff are employed by the Crime and Criminal Justice Unit. [48512]

Mr. Blunkett: The Crime and Criminal Justice Unit was established as a separate unit in 1996 under the previous Conservative Administration, to provide wide ranging research, development and statistics on patterns of crime, the prosecution process, court procedures, youth offending and sentencing to support policy development. The operating costs for 2001–02 were £1.70 million. The number of staff employed in the unit is 52.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the cost of the Business Support and Communication Unit was in the last 12 months; [48108]

(2) when the Business Support and Communication Unit was established; [48089]

(3) how many members of staff are employed by the Business Support and Communication Unit; [48091]

(4) what the remit is of the Business Support and Communication Unit; [48088]

(5) what the cost of the Business Support and Communication Unit was in the last 12 months; [48090]

(6) when the Business Support and Communication Unit was established; [48107]

(7) how many members of staff are employed by the Business Support and Communication Unit; [48109]

(8) what the remit is of the Business Support and Communication Unit. [48110]

Mr. Blunkett: A secretariat was established in 1996 under the previous Conservative Administration to support the newly created Corporate Resources Directorate. That is now the Corporate Development and Services Group (CDSG), and its support unit was renamed the Business Support and Communication Unit in February 2001. It provides budget management, business planning and other management support services to CDSG, and advice and support to CDSG managers and staff in communicating its policies to the wider Home Office and within CDSG itself. The cost of the Business Support and Communications Unit in the last 12 months was £0.24 million. There are seven staff in the unit.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the cost of the Buildings and Estate Management Unit was in the last 12 months; [48116]

(2) when the Buildings and Estate Management Unit was established; [48115]

(3) what the remit is of the Buildings and Estate Management Unit; [48118]

(4) how many members of staff are employed by the Buildings and Estate Management Unit. [48117]

Mr. Blunkett: The Building and Estate Management Unit was established in October 1995 under the previous Conservative Administration.

The Unit's remit is to provide best value accommodation and related services that enable and support the achievement of the Home Office aims. This includes developing and promoting the Department's (non prisons) property strategy; delivering specialist property and procurement services; developing and promoting the Department's sustainable development policies; and managing the central London headquarters estate and planned relocation to the new headquarters building at 2 Marsham Street.

As at 31 March 2002 it employed 44 staff. The projected operating costs for the financial year 2001–02 is £1.57 million.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the cost of the Sirius Programme Management Unit was in the last 12 months; [48113]

(2) when the Sirius Programme Management Unit was established; [48114]

(3) what the remit is of the Sirius Programme Management Unit; [48111]

(4) how many members of staff are employed by the Sirius Programme Management Unit. [48112]

Mr. Blunkett: The Sirius Programme Management Unit was established as a separate unit in February 2001 to manage the Sirius Programme, which provides information technology and telephones to the core Home

Office and business and consultancy services to the core Home Office. The Sirius programme comprises three initial business change projects, which cover financial and personnel administration and customer communications.

The provisional outturn operating costs of the Sirius Programme Management Unit for the financial year April 2001 to March 2002 were £3.3 million.

The number of staff employed in the Sirius Programme Management Unit was 27. In February 2002, the 11 staff responsible for the Home Office modernisation programme and the business and consultancy services transferred to another unit.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the cost of the Judicial Co-operation Unit was in the last 12 months; [48453]

(2) how many members of staff are employed by the Judicial Co-operation Unit; [48455]

(3) when the Judicial Co-operation Unit was established; [48452]

(4) what the remit is of the Judicial Co-operation Unit. [48454]

Mr. Blunkett: The Judicial Co-operation Unit (JCU), previously known as C2 Division, was formed in 1991 under the previous Conservative Administration following the implementation of the 1990 Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act and 1989 Extradition Act. Previously the functions, under earlier legislation, were undertaken by the Foreign Office.

JCU has three main functions:

The United Kingdom (UK) Central Authority for Mutual Legal Assistance (MLA) produced 2,900 incoming (from abroad) and 1,700 outgoing (from UK to foreign authorities) requests last year. It operates on behalf of the Secretary of State under the 1990 Criminal Justice (International Co-operation) Act.

The Extradition Section processed 125 incoming and 83 outgoing requests for extradition last year, under the terms of the 1989 Extradition Act. The section also deals with extradition policy.

The International Policy team negotiates, at official level, on proposals for improved judicial co-operation and criminal law co-operation between countries. Much of the work is in the European Union (EU), where it works to progress the relevant conclusions on the Tampere Council. It also works in United Nations, Council of Europe, Commonwealth and G8 fora, dealing with proposed international conventions, money-laundering and asset confiscation issues.

In addition, at present, it is running on behalf of the EU two projects for candidate countries on judicial co-operation and money laundering.

The cost of the Judicial Co-operation Unit for the year 2001–02 was £2.4 million. On 31 March 2002, there were 41 staff employed in JCU, plus four staff working on twinning projects for the candidate countries and paid for by European Union funds.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the cost of the Performance and Strategic Management Unit was in the last 12 months; [48417]

(2) what the cost of the Police Leadership and Powers Unit was in the last 12 months; [48421]

(3) what the cost of the Action Against Crime and Disorder Unit was in the last 12 months; [48410]

(4) what the cost of the Science and Technology Unit was in the last 12 months; [48433]

(5) what the cost of the HM Inspectorate of Constabulary was in the last 12 months; [48413]

(6) what the cost of the Police Resource Unit was in the last 12 months; [48429]

(7) what the cost of the Police Resource Unit was in the last 12 months. [48425]

Mr. Blunkett: Provisional information on operating costs for the year ending 31 March 2002 for each of these units is shown in the table.

£million

Unit	*Operating costs*[1]
Action Against Crime and Disorder Unit	1.66
Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary[2]	5.66
Performance and Strategic Management Unit (London and the Regions)	4.91
Police Leadership and Powers Unit	1.32
Police Resources Unit	1.45
Science and Technology Unit	2.20

[1] Year ending 31 March 2002.

[2] Including seconded police officers.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the cost of the Policing Organised Crime Unit was in the last 12 months; [48457]

(2) when the Policing Organised Crime Unit was established; [48456]

(3) what the remit is of the Policing Organised Crime Unit; [48458]

(4) how many members of staff are employed by the Policing Organised Crime Unit. [48459]

Mr. Blunkett: The Policing Organised Crime Unit (POCU) was established on 1 April 1996 under the previous Conservative Government. It is responsible for developing a strategic response to the various threats from serious and organised crime; in particular the reduction of serious and organised crime as measured by the disruption of organised criminal enterprises. POCU is the sponsor unit for the National Criminal Intelligence Service and the National Crime Squad. It is providing the United Kingdom link to the European Schengen Information System and co-ordinates Home Office interests in international police and drugs co-operation work (through work related to Europol, Interpol, G8, European Union, Council of Europe and the United Nations) and in both national and international aspects of police witness protection.

The provisional outturn operating costs of the Policing Organised Crime Unit for the financial year April 2001 to March 2002 were £1.12 million. In March 2002 there were 25 staff in post.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the Policing and Reducing Crime Unit was established; [48522]

(2) how many members of staff are employed by the Policing and Reducing Crime Unit; [48524]

(3) what the cost of the Policing and Reducing Crime Unit was in the last 12 months; [48523]

(4) what the remit is of the Policing and Reducing Crime Unit. [48525]

Mr. Blunkett: The Policing and Reducing Crime Unit was established as a separate unit in 1998. The unit conducts the Home Office's research on how to reduce crime and fear of crime, it improves policing, and it evaluates projects trying to reduce crime. There are 88 staff (including 27 in the offices of the regional Crime Reduction Teams). The provisional outturn operating costs for the financial year 2001–02 were £3.52 million.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many members of staff are employed by the national police training unit; [51171]

(2) what the remit is of the national police training unit; [51172]

(3) what the cost is of the national police training unit. [51173]

Mr. Blunkett: The Home Office national police training unit was responsible for providing police training and facilities for the provision of police training, promoting the value of the provision of police training, and giving advice and assistance on the provision of police training to others. It became a non-departmental public body—the Central Training and Development Authority (Centrex)—under the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001. Centrex was established on 1 April 2002.

The outturn revenue costs for 2001–02 are expected to be in the region of £73 million.

As at 31 March 2002, a total of 1,176 staff were in post, including 553 seconded police staff.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many members of staff are employed by the Active Community Unit; [48098]

(2) when the Active Community Unit was established; [48096]

(3) what the cost of the Active Community Unit was in the last 12 months; [48097]

(4) what the remit is of the Active Community Unit. [48099]

Mr. Blunkett: The Active Community Unit was established in 1999. It superseded the Voluntary and Community Unit which, with its predecessors, had been a unit in the Home Office since the early 1970s.

The Active Community Unit contributes to the delivery of Home Office aim 7: "To support strong and active communities in which people of all races and backgrounds are valued and participate on equal terms." It is also responsible for the achievement of the Government's target to make substantial progress by 2004 towards one million more people being actively involved in their communities.

It does this by working across Government to: take forward a range of initiatives designed to enable local people to make a positive contribution to their communities; develop productive partnerships between Government and the voluntary and community sector; develop a modern legal and regulatory framework for the voluntary and community sector.

Achievements in 2001 and 2002 include: establishing the Experience Corps initiative to encourage more people aged 50 and over to remain or become active in their communities; providing grants totalling £48.5 million to various voluntary and community organisations and ensuring that the resources are effectively utilised; launching Black and Minority Ethnic and Volunteering Codes of Good Practice supporting the 'Compact on Relations between Government and the Voluntary and Community Sector in England'; leading a cross-departmental initiative to develop an action plan to rationalise and simplify access by community groups to Government small grants programmes.

Operating cost expenditure for the Active Community Unit in 2001–02 was £2.1 million. On 31 March 2002, the Active Community Unit had 42 staff in post.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the Economics and Resource Analysis Unit was established; [48526]

(2) what the remit is of the Economics and Resource Analysis Unit; [48529]

(3) how many members of staff are employed by the Economics and Resource Analysis Unit; [48528]

(4) what the cost of the Economics and Resource Analysis Unit was in the last 12 months. [48527]

Mr. Blunkett: The Economics and Resource Analysis Unit was established in its present form in 1998. The unit is responsible for all economic advice and much of the quantitative modelling work that underpins Home Office policy. Major areas of work include:

policy modelling of the Criminal Justice system (including quantification of costs and benefits);

economic analysis of alternative policy options (including assessment of crime intervention strategies and programmes in terms of returns of tax payers' money);

economics of migration and asylum (including assessment of impact of migration and asylum policy on the economy);

efficiency and effectiveness of policing (including funding formula for allocating resources between forces).

The total operating costs for 2001–02 were £0.80 million. The number of staff employed in the unit is 22.

Prison and Probation Ombudsman

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the prison and probation ombudsman was established; [48134]

(2) what the remit is of the prison and probation ombudsman; [48136]

(3) how many members of staff are employed by the prison and probation ombudsman; [48137]

(4) what the cost of the prison and probation ombudsman was in the last 12 months. [48315]

Mr. Blunkett: The office of prisons ombudsman for England and Wales was established in 1994 under the previous Conservative Administration following the report by Lord Woolf and Sir Stephen Tumim on Prison Disturbances (Cm 1456) and the White Paper "Custody, Care and Justice" (Cm 1647). The remit was extended on 1 September 2001 to encompass complaints both from prisoners and those supervised by the National Probation Service (NPS). The office was re-titled prisons and probation ombudsman.

The prisons and probation ombudsman is independent of the Prison Service and National Probation Service. The ombudsman is appointed by the Home Secretary and reports to him. The ombudsman investigates complaints from prisoners, and those on license or otherwise under probation supervision, regarding aspects of their treatment. Complainants must first have sought redress through use of the internal Prison Service or NPS complaints systems. The number of complaints has increased rapidly over the last two years. In 2001–02, 1,100 complaints were investigated.

The ombudsman submits an annual report to the Home Secretary which the Home Secretary lays before Parliament.

Provisional outturn operating costs for the financial year April 2001 to March 2002 were £1.66 million. The unit employs 41 members of staff.

Strategic Policy Team

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many members of staff are employed by the Strategic Policy Team; [48532]

(2) when the Strategic Policy Team was established; [48530]

(3) what the cost of the Strategic Policy Team was in the last 12 months; [48531]

(4) what the remit is of the Strategic Policy Team. [48408]

Mr. Blunkett: The Strategic Policy Team was established in August 2000. Its role is to support Ministers and the Home Office Board by developing overall strategy, and individual policies and cross cutting work. Estimated outturn operating costs in 2001–02 were £0.9 million. The Strategic Policy Team is a mix of civil servants, secondees and a small number of people with specialist skills on short-term contracts. There are usually between 20 and 25 members in post.

Animals (Scientific Procedure) Inspectorate

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when the Animals (Scientific Procedure) Inspectorate was established; [48102]

(2) how many members of staff are employed by the Animals (Scientific Procedure) Inspectorate; [48100]

(3) what the cost of the Animals (Scientific Procedure) Inspectorate was in the last 12 months; [48101]

(4) what the remit is of the Animals (Scientific Procedure) Inspectorate. [48142]

Mr. Blunkett: The Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate was established on 1 January 1987 under the previous Conservative Administration.

The statutory functions of the Inspectorate are set out in section 18 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986.

"18 (2) It shall be the duty of an inspector:

(a) to advise the Secretary of State on applications for personal and project licences, on requests for their variation or revocation and on their periodical review;

(b) to advise him on applications for certificates under this Act and on requests for their variation or revocation;

(c) to visit places where regulated procedures are carried out for the purpose of determining whether those procedures are authorised by the requisite licences and whether the conditions of those licences are being complied with;

(d) to visit designated establishments for the purpose of determining whether the conditions of the certificates in respect of those establishments are being complied with;

(e) to report to the Secretary of State any case in which any provision of this Act or any condition of a licence or certificate under this Act has not been or is not being complied with and to advise him on the action to be taken in any such case.

18 (3) If an inspector considers that a protected animal is undergoing excessive suffering he may require it to be immediately killed by a method appropriate to the animal under Schedule 1 to this Act or by such other method as may be authorised by any personal licence held by the person to whom the requirement is addressed".

In addition, the Inspectorate is also involved in a number of initiatives to continuously raise awareness of opportunities to implement the three 'R's (of reduction, refinement and replacement) in animal experimentation, to promote a 'culture of care', and to identify and disseminate best practice.

For the year 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 the provisional outturn operating costs of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate were approximately £1.55 million.

A total of 25 staff are currently employed by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate.

National Technical Assistance Centre

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many members of staff are employed by the National Technical Assistance Centre; [48483]

(2) what the cost of the National Technical Assistance Centre was in the last 12 months; [48481]

(3) what the remit is of the National Technical Assistance Centre; [48482]

(4) when the National Technical Assistance Centre was established. [48480]

Mr. Blunkett: The head of the National Technical Assistance Centre (NTAC) was appointed in March 2001 in response to the 1999 Cabinet Office Performance and Innovation Unit report "Encryption and Law Enforcement".

NTAC will provide assistance to the investigations in the United Kingdom intelligence and law enforcement agencies; by providing techniques for lawful interception of modern multimedia communications, and by processing those lawfully intercepted communications to provide intelligible material to the intercepting agencies. NTAC also provides techniques to derive intelligible evidence from lawfully seized computer data.

Since the summer of 2001 NTAC has been operational in its role in respect of lawfully seized computer data. Operational work in respect of lawfully intercepted communications is planned to commence in late summer 2002.

The provisional outturn for 2001–02 was £1.9 million. NTAC currently employs 33 staff.

HM Inspectorate of Prisons

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many members of staff are employed by HM Inspectorate of Prisons; [48129]

(2) what the remit is of HM Inspectorate of Prisons; [48128]

(3) what the cost of HM Inspectorate of Prisons was in the last 12 months. [48127]

Mr. Blunkett: The Inspectorate of Prisons was set up as an independent body in 1981 under the previous Conservative administration. Its remit is to inspect and report the treatment and conditions of those in Prison Service custody, and Immigration Service detention. In the financial year 2001–02 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons costs were £1.89 million. There were 26 full-time members of staff and eight consultants in post on 31 March 2002.

Financial Crime Team

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the cost of the Financial Crime Team was in the last 12 months; [48449]

(2) what the remit is of the Financial Crime Team; [48450]

(3) when the Financial Crime Team was established; [48448]

(4) how many members of staff are employed by the Financial Crime Team. [48451]

Mr. Blunkett: The Financial Crime Team was set up in April 2000 to secure delivery of the Government's policy on the recovery of criminal assets which is a priority for this Government. In particular, the Financial Crime Team is responsible for:

the management and, if approved, implementation of the Proceeds of Crime Bill;

the establishment of the proposed Assets Recovery Agency and Financial Investigation of Excellence;

monitoring and development of the Asset Recovery Strategy; and

the administration of the Recovered Assets fund and of a separate grant scheme for police financial investigators.

The estimated operating costs of the team for the financial year 2001–02 were £0.41 million. 18 members of staff were in post on 31 March 2002.

Legal Adviser's Branch

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the remit is of the Legal Adviser's Branch; [48489]

(2) how many members of staff are employed by the Legal Adviser's Branch; [48488]

(3) what the cost of the Legal Adviser's Branch was in the last 12 months; [48490]

(4) when the Legal Adviser's Branch was established. [48491]

Mr. Blunkett: The first permanent Home Office Counsel was appointed in 1835 but the current Legal Adviser's Branch (LAB) can be said to date from the appointment, in 1869, of the first Assistant Under-Secretary (Legal). LAB provides specific legal services to other parts of the Home Office, and a similar service to the Northern Ireland Office. The cost of LAB in the last 12 months was £2.76 million. As at 31 March 2002 there were 57 members of staff employed.

National Probation Service

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the cost of the National Probation Service was in the last 12 months; [48486]

(2) when the National Probation Service was established; [48487]

(3) what the remit is of the National Probation Service; [48485]

(4) how many members of staff are employed by the National Probation Service. [48484]

Mr. Blunkett: The National Probation Service came into being in April 2001 when the existing 54 local services were disbanded and 42 boards created as part of a new national service to raise standards and improve performance. For example, at least one accredited behaviour programme is now available in all areas and during 2001–02 17,177 offenders were placed on these programmes by the courts.

The National Probation Service is a unified national service for England and Wales, and was established by the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000. It is responsible for giving courts assistance in determining the appropriate sentence, and in making other decisions, for people charged with or convicted of offences. It is further responsible for the supervision and rehabilitation of such people, including giving effect to community orders, supervising people released from prison on licence, and providing accommodation in approved premises.

In doing all this the National Probation Service has the aims of protecting the public, reducing re-offending, ensuring the proper punishment of offenders in the community, ensuring offenders' awareness of the effects of crime on the victims of crime and the public, and rehabilitating offenders.

The latest forecast expenditure for the financial year 2001–02 is £642 million. The accounts for the year ended 31 March 2002 will not be completed until October 2002.

As of June 2001, the latest date for which figures are available, there were 15,401 members of staff (full-time equivalents) employed by the National Probation Service in probation areas.

The National Probation Directorate employed 205 members of staff (full-time equivalents) at the end of January 2002, when the latest figures were collected.

Departmental Directorates

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which directorates and units of his Department cited on his Department's website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/direct.htm were created after May 1997. [51442]

Mr. Blunkett: I keep the organisations of all parts of the Home Office under close review to ensure that we are able to secure the ambitious agenda set for the Department in our delivery contracts and public service agreements.

The following directorates and units were created after May 1997: Criminal Justice Integration Unit and Programme Office, Criminal Justice Joint Planning Unit, Strategic Policy Team, Police Reform and Bill Unit, Police Standards Unit, Financial Crime Team, Sirius Programme Management Unit.

The following units were created but subsumed functions and staff previously located elsewhere in the Department: Family Policy Unit, Correctional Policy Unit, Criminal Justice Reform Unit, Action Against Crime and Disorder Unit, Crime Reduction Programme, Police Leadership and Powers Unit, National Technical Assistance Centre, Better Letters Team, Information Management and Technology Unit.

The following directorates and units acquired new or altered names in internal reorganisation which has been undertaken since May 1997: Business Support Unit, Marketing Communications Unit, Internal Communications Unit, Information Services Unit, Community Policy Directorate (formerly Constitutional and Community Policy Directorate prior to machinery of Government changes), Prisons and Probation Ombudsman (formerly Prisons Ombudsman), Organised Crime, Drugs and International Group (formerly Organised and International Crime Directorate), European and International Unit, Policing Organised Crime Unit, Accounting and Finance Unit, Audit and Assurance Unit, Commercial and Procurement Unit, Group Resources Unit, Performance Delivery and Strategy Unit, Business Support and Communication Unit, Merseyside Personnel Management Unit, Human Resources and Equality Unit, Research Development and Statistics Directorate (RDS) Corporate Management Unit, RDS Crime and Criminal Justice Unit, RDS Immigration and Community Unit, RDS Offenders and Corrections Unit, RDS Policing and Reducing Crime Unit (incorporating the former Police Research Group), RDS Communications Development Unit, RDS Economics and Resource Analysis Unit.

The website also refers to units in the Fire and Emergency Planning Directorate which have been transferred to the Cabinet Office and the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions. These units were located in the Home Office before the machinery of Government changes of 8 June 2001. Questions concerning these units should now be addressed to the Secretaries of State for the Departments concerned.

Drug Treatment and Testing Orders

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drug treatment and testing orders have been made since they were introduced; and what appraisal has been made of their effectiveness. [56543]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Between 1 October 2000, when the Drug Treatment and Testing Orders (DTTO) were rolled out to courts in England and Wales, and 31 March 2002, which is the latest month for which complete figures are available, 6,085 orders were made.

Results of a one-year reconviction study following the pilot programme which ran between 1 October 1998 and 31 March 2000 will be available within the next few weeks and this will be followed by a further study at the two years' stage in spring 2003. Data from the Probation Criminality Survey, which will include information about offenders subject to DTTOs will be available later in the autumn.

Drug-related Crime

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the change in the amount of drug-related crime since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [56220]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* Levels of drug-related crime cannot be directly measured as no routine statistical data are collected on whether an offence may have been committed as a result of drug taking. However, the Home Office compiles research findings and statistics that provide indirect measures of drug-related crime.

The NEW-ADAM research programme of interviewing and drug testing those arrested by the police in 16 areas sheds some light on the links between drugs and crime, but cannot provide national trend data from 1997. Fieldwork was completed this year in eight areas originally visited in 1999. Results from this project, showing the change in drug use and crime among arrestees in these eight areas will be published later this year.

We are currently reviewing the drugs strategy targets and progress against them, including those concerning drugs and crime, to ensure we still have the right balance and focus. As part of this review, we are undertaking work to improve our ability to track changes over time in drug-related crime. The outcome of the review will be announced before the summer recess.

Information is collected on the number of drug offenders. The most recent figures were published on 17 May, in Home Office Statistical Bulletin Number 4/02 "Drug Seizure and Offender Statistics, United Kingdom, 2000", copies of which will be placed in the Library. These show that from 1997 to 2000 the number of drug offenders dealt with has fallen from 114,629 to 104,390.

Illegal Drugs

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimates have been made by his Department of the street prices of illegal drugs in each year since 1990–91. [56219]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* The average prices for the main illegal drugs during the period 1990–2001 are given in the table.

UK average drug prices 1990–2001

£

	Amphetamine[1]	*Herbal cannabis*[2]	*Cannabis resin*[2]	*Cocaine*[1]	*Crack*[3]	*Heroin*[1]	*Ecstasy*[4]	*LSD*[4]
November 1990	13.8	59.3	91.8	87.0	25.4	90.0	18.8	4.2
August 1991	12.8	67.8	84.8	84.6	22.4	89.8	19.6	4.3
December 1992	12.9	63.6	91.8	86.0	26.0	91.0	20.5	4.1
October 1993	12.0	96.5	96.5	80.0	23.0	90.0	17.5	4.0
December 1994	12.0	95.0	100.0	65.0	20.0	75.0	13.0	3.8
July 1995	11.0	95.0	100.0	80.0	20.0	88.0	15.0	4.2
September 1996	10.5	91.0	114.0	69.0	20.0	72.0	12.0	3.0
December 1997	10.0	95.0	97.0	71.0	20.0	74.0	11.0	3.5
December 1998	10.0	91.0	93.0	77.0	20.0	74.0	11.0	3.5
December 1999	10.0	89.0	100.0	63.0	20.0	65.0	11.0	3.9
December 2000	9.0	82.0	85.0	65.0	23.0	70.0	9.0	3.3
December 2001	9.0	80.0	77.0	60.0	21.0	63.0	7.0	3.4

[1] Per gram

[2] Per ounce

[3] Per 'rock', equivalent to 0.2 gram

[4] Per dose

Note:

1. These prices are based on average purity levels and do not reflect the fluctuations in price which may occur within an area as the result of law enforcement action, other interruption of supply, or even over-supply. Prices may be inflated by 'cutting' drugs, and by selling under measures. Prices increase when smaller amounts such as £10 or £20 deals are sold.
2. Data for the first half of the period are based on fewer observations and may be subject to greater uncertainty.

Sources:

National Co-ordination Unit, Her Majesty's Customs (data from 1990 to 1994), National Criminal Intelligence Service (data from 1995 to 2001).

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the street price of crack cocaine in the United Kingdom in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [56533]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* The National Criminal Intelligence Service collates information on street level prices of drugs. The average prices for 'crack' cocaine during the period 1996–2001 are given in the following table.

I view the availability of crack cocaine with concern. I have established an expert group on the treatment of crack cocaine addiction and I am organising a conference to develop more effective solutions to the problems caused by crack cocaine.

We are also working to ensure that routes into Britain for crack cocaine are shut down as effectively as possible. The total amount of cocaine (including crack) seized in 2000 rose to an all-time record of 3,970 kilograms, an increase of about one metric tonne on the previous year.

United Kingdom average crack cocaine prices 1996–2001

£

	Price[1]
September 1996	20
December 1997	20
December 1998	20
December 1999	20
December 2000	23
December 2001	21

[1] Per rock, equivalent to 0.2 gram

Note:

These prices are based on average purity levels and do not reflect the fluctuations in price that may occur within an area as the result of law enforcement action, other interruption of supply, or even over-supply. In addition to this, prices can be inflated by 'cutting' drugs, and by selling under measures.

Source:

National Criminal Intelligence Service

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 23 May 2002

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Asthma

10. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will require local education authorities to implement an asthma policy; and if she will remind them of her Department's 1996 guidelines for supporting children with medical needs in schools. [56353]

Mr. Timms: We encourage all local education authorities and schools in England to have policies for supporting pupils' medical conditions, including asthma. We reminded them in the spring of the importance of following our guidelines.

Standard Spending Assessment

11. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how standard spending assessments for education take into account the impact of large movements of pupils with differing needs across local authority boundaries. [56355]

Mr. Timms: The current system allocates extra funding for additional needs on the basis of where pupils are educated, rather than where they live. We are currently working on a new funding system for introduction in 2003–04. Our aim is for the new system to be fairer and clearer, and justified by the educational needs of children. We want it to be child and school based, taking into account cross-LEA boundary migration.

National Insurance

13. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what impact the increased national insurance contributions announced in the Budget will have on special needs schools. [56358]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The cost to all special schools in England will be around £6 million a year from 2003–04. This cost will be considered along side other priorities and pressures in the 2002 spending review.

9. **Mr. Peter Duncan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) of 29 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 571W, how much the increases in national insurance announced in the Budget will cost the average *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary school, expressed on a cost per pupil basis. [56352]

Mr. Timms: On average, the changes will cost about £15 per primary school pupil and about £20 per secondary school pupil in England from 2003–04. These costs will be considered as part of this year's Spending Review alongside other priorities and pressures.

Youth Service

14. **Phil Hope:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she is taking to improve the quality of and resources for the Youth Service. [56359]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Under the Government's "Transforming Youth Work" agenda we will publish later this year our view of an adequate and sufficient' Youth Service. In the longer term this will be supported by the introduction of National Quality Standards, National Performance Measures, a Common Planning Framework, a new National Management Training Programme, and a Workforce Development Strategy. In addition we have provided £49 million to Youth Services over the next two years to support this agenda.

Medical Students

15. **Dr. Evan Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans the Government have to provide more financial support for medical students in higher education, with particular regard to graduate entrants. [56360]

Margaret Hodge: There are special arrangements for both undergraduate and graduate medical students. Students on undergraduate courses pay no tuition fees in year five and later years and become eligible for means-tested NHS bursaries and reduced-rate income contingent student loans made on generous terms. Students undertaking the four year graduate entry programme have the same enhanced support in years two to four. In the other years medical students are eligible for DfES student support on the same basis as other students.

School Discipline

16. **Ms Oona King:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what policies are in place to tackle poor behaviour and promote discipline in schools. [56361]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We have provided extensive support to schools including funding for over 1,050 Learning Support Units for disruptive pupils, guidance on discipline and exclusion policies, and guidance on developing effective anti-bullying strategies.

In addition, the £66 million made available through this year's Budget will fund a programme of focused support for schools in the 34 LEAs facing the toughest challenges of behaviour and criminality.

Student Funding

17. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proposals she has to increase student funding. [56362]

Margaret Hodge: Our review of student finance is still under way. We shall make an announcement on the outcome of the review when it is complete.

School Funding

18. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of money provided to schools by her Department is allocated to specific purposes and activities. [56363]

Mr. Timms: Recurrent funding for schools is channelled through local education authorities and is made up of Education Standard Spending, the Standards Fund, the Schools Standards Grant and other special grants.

Education Standard Spending is the amount the Government consider appropriate for local authorities to spend on education from their total budgets and is not ring-fenced for specific purposes or activities. In addition, the School Standards Grant is paid to schools to be used by them as they wish to raise standards.

LEAs and schools receive Standards Fund Grant for particular specific purposes and activities such as the literacy and numeracy strategies. Other special grants are paid to schools to support payments to teachers passing the threshold and performance pay for teachers. Schools also receive funding via education action zones for particular purposes. Taken together these account for 11.7 per cent. of recurrent education funding for LEAs and schools. Of this, around half is devolved to schools from the Standards Fund for them to spend on their own priorities within the broad objectives of the Standards Fund programme.

Capital funding for schools is provided through a combination of credit approvals, Government grant, and through the Private Finance Initiative. Around 45 per cent. of capital funding is allocated for specific purposes or activities.

31. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what extra funding she has made available to schools with classes of 8, 9 and 10-year-olds containing more than 30 children in the last 12 months. [56376]

Mr. Timms: In 2001–02 we made up to £73 million available to local education authorities to make progress on class sizes at Key Stage 2. We estimate that this has paid for around 500 additional teachers and 500 new classrooms.

Mathematics

19. **Mrs. Curtis-Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the measures that she has taken to increase the number of young people taking AS and A-level mathematics. [56364]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Because post-16 education is not compulsory, the Government is not able to promote an individual subject at the expense of others. But we are keen to see that students take on a broader range of subjects, mixing science and art subjects, including mathematics. To encourage this, we have made available additional funding to schools and colleges.

Centres of Vocational Excellence

20. **Barbara Follett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the new centres of vocational excellence. [56365]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: On 29 April we announced new money to fund an extra 100 centres of vocational excellence. Centres of vocational excellence will develop new, and enhance existing, excellent vocational provision which is focused on meeting the skills needs of employers, nationally, regionally and locally.

An additional £57 million is being invested into extending the centres of vocational excellence programme beyond our existing commitment to create centres of vocational excellence in half of all general further education colleges by 2004. The money, £40 million of which is new resource from the Capital Modernisation Fund announced in the Budget, will fund an extra 50 centres in colleges and an additional 50 centres of vocational excellence based in organisations beyond the further education sector, such as private or voluntary training providers.

For the first time, we are inviting training providers outside the further education sector to become involved in the programme. These new centres will help us harness the valuable experience that many in the private and voluntary training sectors possess and is a direct response to the positive feedback we received for this proposal in our consultation.

We have made excellent progress to date. The first 16 centres are up and running and beginning to deliver excellent results across a range of industries. A further 70 have just been established and the first non-college centres of vocational excellence come on stream later this month. By March 2004 there will be 250 centres of vocational excellence making a vital contribution to increasing the nation's vocational skills and productivity.

Further Education

21. **Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the results from the inspections of further education colleges in the last 12 months. [56366]

Margaret Hodge: Of the 93 college inspections carried out to date under the new regime, results have been published for 44 colleges. There have been some good results, but there is still some way to go to achieve consistent quality.

30. **Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent representations she has received about funding and other support for further education colleges. [56375]

John Healey: Ministers have received extensive recent representations about funding and other support for further education. In particular, the Association of Colleges, NATFHE, the NUS and others organised a lobby of Parliament on 23 April on the issues of further education funding, pay and support. We are listening carefully to the views of those in the further education sector and will take these into account in determining how best to use the 2002 spending review settlement.

12. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on funding for further education. [56356]

John Healey: The Government are steadily increasing investment in further education. By next year funding for further education will have risen by 26 per cent. in real terms since 1997. The Learning and Skills Council's funding rates for programmes delivered by further education colleges are increasing by 2.5 per cent. above current rate of inflation for the 2002–03 academic year.

Beyond this we are looking to the current spending review to deliver the resources needed to meet the Government's ambitions for further education.

Sector Skills Councils

22. **Judy Mallaber:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on progress in the establishment of sector skills councils. [56367]

John Healey: Five Trailblazer sector skills councils were announced in December 2001 covering audio visual industries, land-based industries, apparel, footwear and textiles, oil and gas extraction, chemicals manufacturing and petroleum industries and the retail sector. Four Trailblazer sector skills councils have received two-year licences, the fifth should follow shortly. The Sector Skills Development Agency is expected to call for formal expressions of interest to establish new sector skills councils in the next few weeks.

University Entrants

23. **Ross Cranston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to encourage university applications from pupils from lower socio-economic groups. [56368]

Margaret Hodge: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright).

24. **Mr. Hopkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the number of university applications for the coming year. [56369]

29. **Mr. Grogan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the number of university applications for the next academic year. [56374]

Margaret Hodge: The latest data published by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service show that the number of applications is 1.5 per cent. higher than last year. This is very welcome and indicates the strength of demand for British higher education. The 4.6 per cent. rise in applications from mature entrants is particularly welcome since we have introduced generous additional support for student parents, including a child care grant and a travel and equipment grant.

Reception Classes

25. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidelines she issues on ensuring that parents do not come under inappropriate pressure to enrol their children in reception classes before they are ready. [56370]

Mr. Timms: The code of practice on school admissions says that admission authorities can offer places in reception classes to parents before their children are of compulsory school age (e.g. five), but also that parents accepting the offer can ask to defer their child's entry until he or she is of compulsory school age, provided the place is taken up within the same academic year.

Teachers

26. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the reasons teachers leave the profession. [56371]

Mr. Timms: The Department has commissioned Professor Alan Smithers and Dr. Pamela Robinson, from the university of Liverpool, Centre for Education and Employment Research to undertake research into this issue. The study is gathering information from a nationally representative survey of teachers leaving the profession about the factors affecting their decisions to leave teaching. The research commenced in December 2001 and we expect the report to be published in March 2003.

Higher Education Funding Review

27. **Norman Lamb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she expects to announce the findings of the Government's review of higher education funding. [56372]

Margaret Hodge: The Government's plans for higher education funding in England will be announced later in the year, when the present spending review is concluded.

Special Educational Needs

28. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what support her Department gives to local education authorities seeking to raise standards in meeting special educational needs. [56373]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Officials in the Department's Special Educational Needs Division support local education authorities in raising standards in meeting special educational needs through offering guidance, drawing on expertise provided by educational advisers, building consultants, members of the Office for Standards in Education, officials in other Government Departments and voluntary organisations. Education standard spending assessment support for local education authorities for 2002–03 totalled £23.68 billion, an increase of nearly £1.2 billion compared with 2001–02. By 2003–04 average recurrent funding per pupil will have increased by over £760 in real terms since 1997–98. In addition £91 million was available from the Department's Standards Fund for special educational needs for 2002–03. This represents more than a fivefold increase compared with the £17 million available in 1997–98.

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children per 1,000 are issued with a statement of special needs in *(a)* Boston and Skegness, *(b)* Lincolnshire and *(c)* England. [56146]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested is shown in the table:

Pupils with statements of special educational needs[1]
January 2001

	Total pupils	*Pupils with statements of SEN*[2]	*Number of pupils per 1,000 with a statement of SEN*
Boston and Skegness parliamentary constituency[3]	13,005	296	22.8
Lincolnshire local education authority[3]	100,666	3,218	32.0
England	7,733,640	249,300	32.2

[1] Includes maintained primary and secondary schools and maintained and non-maintained special schools.

[2] Estimates have been made at national level for January 2001 because the data for SEN are known to be incomplete. Figures given for Boston and skegness parliamentary constituency and Lincolnshire LEA are as reported by schools in the Boston and Skegness parliamentary constituency and Lincolnshire LEA areas.

[3] Pupils attending schools within Boston and Skegness parliamentary constituency and Lincolnshire local education authority.

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what provision for special educational needs statementing will be in place for children in accommodation centres *(a)* on arrival at the accommodation centre and *(b)* before entering mainstream schools. [57623]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We expect the needs of most children with special educational needs to be met by the provision in the accommodation centres in the same way as in schools. Where asked by an accommodation centre to carry out a statutory assessment of a child's needs, the local education authority will consider the request in the same way as for other children and, where appropriate, will draw up a statement of special educational needs.

Sixth Form Colleges

32. **Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she expects that the funding for students at sixth form colleges will be raised to the same level as for students in school sixth forms. [56377]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government have set no timetable for achieving equivalent funding between further education and sixth form colleges and school sixth forms. We have made it clear that bringing the level of funding for colleges towards that of school sixth forms can be done only as resources allow and it would be unwise to commit ourselves beyond the resources we secure. We are looking to the current spending review to provide the resources needed to deliver the Government's ambitious agenda for further education.

Tuition Fees

Mr. Steinberg: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total income was from student tuition fees in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* each of the subsequent five financial years. [50981]

Margaret Hodge: The available information is shown in the following table. Data for 2001–02 will be available in April 2003.

Total income from student tuition fees[1]: UK higher education institutions

£ million

Financial Year	*Tuition Fee Income*
1996–97	2,347
1997–98	2,469
1998–99	2,675
1999–2000	2,814
2000–01	2,997

[1] Covers tuition fee income from all students (home, EU and other overseas) on full-time and part-time undergraduate and postgraduate courses, and students on non-credit-bearing courses.

Individual Learning Accounts

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of claims made by learning providers, following the closure of the Individual Learning Account scheme, have been paid; when the rest will be paid; and what factors underlie the delay in completing payments. [55981]

John Healey: At the end of April, 93 per cent. of claims made by registered learning providers following the closure of the Individual Learning Account programme on 23 November 2001 had been paid.

Payments are only withheld pending follow up and investigation where serious complaints from trainees have been received by the Department or where there are serious concerns about the provider's operation of the programme.

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether she has been notified of closures of small firms providing learning or training following the closure of the Individual Learning Account Scheme; and if she will make a statement. [55982]

John Healey: The Department has been notified of the closure of four small firms providing learning or training following the closure of the Individual Learning Account (ILA) programme. We have no information to suggest that these were directly related to the closure of the Individual Learning Account (ILA) programme.

Sick Leave

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many days of sick leave were taken in her Department last year; how many related to employees suffering *(a)* stress and *(b)* other mental health problems; and what the cost was to her Department. [56485]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* An average of 7.7 days sick leave were taken by employees in the former Department for Education and Employment in 2000, the latest year for which this information is available. Information is not held for the other questions and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, no compensation has been paid to employees specifically for work related stress.

My Department is committed to meeting targets for reducing the number of working days lost due to sickness absence generally and due to work related injuries and illness arising from the Government's revitalising health and safety initiative.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the mandate of the Socrates Committee (and Erasmus and Comenius Subcommittees) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56717]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The purpose of the Socrates Committee is set out in the Council Decision 253/2000/EC of 24 January 2000, which established the second phase of the Socrates programme. The Socrates Committee has met formally three times over the last 12 months, with an additional informal meeting in May 2002. The sub-committees for schools and higher education have met twice each. Two officials from the UK attend the Socrates Committee meetings, and one official usually attends the sub-committee meetings. Travel expenses were met from Commission resources. The subsistence and travelling costs incurred by this Department was about £8,485.00, for the committee and sub-committee meetings over the past twelve months, of which about £4,860 was reimbursed by the Commission.

The next Socrates Committee meeting will consider approval of the selection of projects for 2002–03, a discussion of the programme budget, the monitoring and evaluation of the programme, and EC and general educational initiatives impacting on the programme. The Schools sub-committee will consider the allocation of funds to the Comenius action for schools. The next meeting of the higher education sub-committee is expected to be in the autumn. An agenda will not be available until nearer the time, but it is likely to cover various aspects of Erasmus, the higher education part of the Socrates programme, and EC and general initiatives impacting on higher education.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Applied Science and Technology

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the percentage increase in funding per year per student studying applied science and technology subjects was, using 1997 as a base of 100, in each year since 1997, awarded to *(a)* further education colleges, *(b)* sixth form colleges and *(c)* schools with a sixth form in each year since 1997. [56168]

John Healey *[holding answer 15 May 2002]:* The specific information requested is not available. The table shows the overall unit of funding each year in general further education colleges and sixth form colleges as a percentage of the 1997–98 overall funding rate for general further education colleges. The year on year changes are the same for all subject areas. Information on a similar basis is not available for schools.

	General further education colleges	*Sixth form colleges*
1997–98	100	108.2
1998–99	101.8	104.9
1999–2000	104.3	105.4
2000–01	105.0	105.4
2001–02	106.4	106.4
2002–03	109.0	109.0

Law Enforcement Agencies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what law enforcement agencies and prosecuting authorities designated with legislation there are within the responsibility of her Department; and what complaints procedure is available for each. [57127]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* None.

Juvenile Sex Abusers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures her Department takes to address the needs of children and young people who sexually abuse; and if she will make a statement. [57195]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Dealing with children and young people who sexually abuse requires contributions from different agencies—covering youth justice, child welfare, education and health, including child and adolescent mental health services. The response to these children and young people should take place within the framework of guidance set out in "Working Together to Safeguard Children", issued in December 1999 by the Department of Health, the Home Office and the Department for Education and Employment.

The Department for Education and Skills has made available to schools on request a guidance pack entitled "Bullying: don't suffer in silence" which is intended to help Headteachers in fulfilling their duty to draw up measures to prevent all forms of bullying among pupils. The pack refers to bullying which is sexual in nature and it sets out some suggested strategies to deal with such behaviour. It also mentions that a proven sexual assault is likely to lead to the exclusion from the school of the perpetrator. However, we recognise that excluded pupils often need further help in managing their behaviour from personnel such as Education Welfare Officers or Educational Psychologists.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what mechanisms are in place for information-sharing between social services and schools regarding children and young people who sexually abuse. [58039]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* The guidance "Working Together to Safeguard Children", issued jointly by the Home Office, the Department for Education and Skills and the Department of Health in December 1999, sets out the role of statutory agencies in responding to young abusers.

In addition to collaborative working at the individual case level, there is also ongoing contact between schools, social services and criminal justice agencies at the strategic level, through local Area Child Protection Committees.

All schools should be aware of local child protection policies, (as required by DfEE Circular 10–95) and should designate a member of staff to be responsible for child protection issues—including children who sexually abuse other young people. In cases of suspected abuse, the designated staff member should inform social services.

To ensure that all information sharing arrangements between schools and social services complies with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998, the Circular includes a checklist provided by the then Data Protection Registrar (now the Information Commissioner).

Deaf Young People (Education)

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of young people who are profoundly deaf went into further and higher education in each of the last three years. [56491]

John Healey *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* Figures for people entering further or higher education who are profoundly deaf are not available, although we can provide those recorded as having a hearing impairment.

The number of people in England registered as deaf or hard of hearing with their local authority, at 31 March 2001, is 194,840. However the true number of people in England with mild, moderate, severe or profound deafness is likely to be much more and was estimated by the Royal National Institute for Deaf People in 1996 to be 7,243,000.

The number of people in Further Education recorded as having a hearing impairment is not available before 2000–01. Figures for 2000–01 are as follows:

	Numbers in Further Education (FE) in England	*Numbers in FE in England recorded as having a hearing impairment as their main disability*[1]
All ages	3,537,620	9,291
Aged 16–18 inclusive[2]	621,542	1,217

[1] Based upon the students' own self-assessments

[2] Age as at 31 August

Source:

Individualised Student Records collected by the Learning and Skills Council on 31 July 2001

The numbers of people in English domiciles, at UK Higher Education Institutions, recorded as deaf/having a hearing impairment are as follows:

	Number starting Higher Education (HE)[1]	*Number starting HE recorded as "deaf/have a hearing impairment"*[2]
1998–99		
All ages	555,300	1,320
Aged 16–18 inclusive[3]	120,200	190
1999–2000		
All ages	554,400	1,340
Aged 16–18 inclusive[3]	118,200	220
2000–01		
All ages	567,300	1,530
Aged 16–18 inclusive[3]	117,300	250

[1] A census count of England domiciled students on the first year of higher education courses in UK HE institutions, as at 1 December, rounded to nearest 100.

[2] Based upon the students' own self-assessments, rounded to nearest 10.

[3] Age as at 31 August.

Source:

July Student Records collected by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA)

Work-related Illness

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many days of sick leave were taken by employees in her Department in the last year for which records are available; what proportion of those were due to work-related illness or injury; and what the cost to the Department was. [56056]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* An average of 7.7 days sick leave were taken by employees in the former Department for Education and Employment in 2000, the latest year for which this information is available. Information is not held for sick absences due to work-related illness or injury and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

During the period April 2001 to March 2002 three cases for work related illness reached final settlement at a cost of £20,318 including solicitors' fees. During the same period the Department received £3,280 back from a previous case where a claimant lost an appeal.

My Department is committed to meeting targets for reducing the number of working days lost due to sickness absence as published in our Service Delivery Agreement.

Truancy

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many recorded truants have missed more than 33 per cent. school days in the past year, broken down by local education authority. [57953]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This level of detail is not available. Information on the number of pupils missing due to unauthorised absence is collected at school level. The number of days missed by individual pupils cannot be identified from this data.

Dyslexia

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans the Government have to make use of courses run by the dyslexia treatment centres; and what assessment she has made of the research carried out by DDAT on inner ear balance disorder and its relationship with dyslexia. [57564]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The dyslexia, dyspraxia and attention deficit (DDAT) treatment is one of a number of commercially available programmes of help designed to support children with specific learning difficulties. It is for parents, individual schools and local education authorities to decide whether a given technique has something to offer an individual child in the light of his or her particular needs. The Department has no plans to commission research into this particular technique but it is one of number of approaches assessed by Dr. Angela Fawcett of Sheffield university in her third review of dyslexia research. This may be consulted on the Department's special educational needs website.

School Exclusions

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many school exclusions of one term or more there have been in the past year, broken down by local education authority. [57954]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The available information covering permanent exclusions is shown in the table.

Information on the duration of fixed period (temporary) exclusions is not collected centrally.

Number of permanent exclusions[1] 1999–2000 by local education authority area, by Government Office region in England

	Number of permanent exclusions	*Percentage of the school population[2]*
England	8,323	0.11
North-east	482	0.11
Darlington	27	0.17
Durham	114	0.14
Gateshead	14	0.05
Hartlepool	15	0.09
Middlesbrough	3	0.01
Newcastle upon Tyne	73	0.19
North Tyneside	50	0.16
Northumberland	42	0.08
Redcar and Cleveland	37	0.14
South Tyneside	36	0.14
Stockton-on-Tees	27	0.08
Sunderland	44	0.09
North-west	1,314	0.12
Blackburn with Darwen	40	0.16
Blackpool	21	0.10
Bolton	50	0.11
Bury	39	0.13
Cheshire	119	0.11
Cumbria	39	0.05
Halton	35	0.16
Knowsley	6	0.02
Lancashire	167	0.09
Liverpool	175	0.22
Manchester	114	0.17
Oldham	51	0.12
Rochdale	43	0.12
Salford	77	0.22
Sefton	56	0.12
St. Helens	28	0.09
Stockport	51	0.12
Tameside	41	0.11
Trafford	30	0.08
Warrington	32	0.10
Wigan	53	0.10
Wirral	47	0.08
Yorkshire and the Humber	819	0.10
Barnsley	43	0.12
Bradford	116	0.13
Calderdale	11	0.03
Doncaster	121	0.23
East Riding of Yorkshire	20	0.04
Kingston Upon Hull, City of	30	0.07
Kirklees	72	0.11
Leeds	71	0.06
North-east Lincolnshire	38	0.13
North Lincolnshire	39	0.15
North Yorkshire	40	0.05
Rotherham	32	0.07
Sheffield	111	0.15
Wakefield	59	0.11
York	16	0.06
East Midlands	696	0.10
Derby	47	0.12
Derbyshire	91	0.08
Leicester	107	0.22
Leicestershire	80	0.08
Lincolnshire	107	0.11
Northamptonshire	105	0.10
Nottingham	55	0.13
Nottinghamshire	102	0.08
Rutland	2	0.04
West Midlands	1,104	0.12
Birmingham	274	0.15
Coventry	95	0.19
Dudley	39	0.08
Herefordshire	27	0.11
Sandwell	132	0.25
Shropshire	23	0.06
Solihull	37	0.10
Staffordshire	99	0.07
Stoke-on-Trent	60	0.16
Telford and Wrekin	50	0.19
Walsall	51	0.10
Warwickshire	82	0.11
Wolverhampton	26	0.06
Worcestershire	109	0.13
East of England	735	0.09
Bedfordshire	56	0.09
Cambridgeshire	20	0.03
Essex	182	0.09
Hertfordshire	175	0.10
Luton	15	0.05
Norfolk	84	0.07
Peterborough	38	0.13
Southend-on-Sea	29	0.11
Suffolk	100	0.10
Thurrock	36	0.16
London	1,289	0.12
Inner London	516	0.14
Camden	22	0.10
City of London	1	0.45
Hackney	31	0.12
Hammersmith and Fulham	21	0.12
Haringey	25	0.07
Islington	20	0.08
Kensington and Chelsea	24	0.23
Lambeth	31	0.11
Lewisham	75	0.21
Newham	33	0.07
Southwark	69	0.20
Tower Hamlets	31	0.09
Wandsworth	94	0.33
Westminster	39	0.22
Outer London	773	0.11
Barking and Dagenham	31	0.11
Barnet	57	0.12
Bexley	33	0.08
Brent	57	0.15
Bromley	28	0.06
Croydon	87	0.18
Ealing	27	0.06
Enfield	73	0.15
Greenwich	43	0.12
Harrow	39	0.13
Havering	34	0.09
Hillingdon	47	0.12
Hounslow	52	0.14
Kingston upon Thames	16	0.08
Merton	23	0.10
Redbridge	29	0.07
Richmond upon Thames	25	0.13
Sutton	19	0.07
Waltham Forest	53	0.15

Number of permanent exclusions[1] *1999–2000 by local education authority area, by Government Office region in England*

	Number of permanent exclusions	*Percentage of the school population*[2]
South-east	1,251	0.11
Bracknell Forest	29	0.19
Brighton and Hove	45	0.15
Buckinghamshire	63	0.08
East Sussex	72	0.11
Hampshire	181	0.10
Isle of Wight	11	0.06
Kent	253	0.12
Medway	75	0.17
Milton Keynes	35	0.10
Oxfordshire	76	0.09
Portsmouth	27	0.10
Reading	35	0.20
Slough	10	0.05
Southampton	15	0.05
Surrey	133	0.10
West Berkshire	16	0.07
West Sussex	131	0.12
Windsor and Maidenhead	25	0.13
Wokingham	19	0.08
South-west	633	0.09
Bath and North-east Somerset	26	0.10
Bournemouth	7	0.03
Bristol, City of	104	0.21
Cornwall	58	0.08
Devon	79	0.08
Dorset	35	0.06
Gloucestershire	91	0.11
Isles of Scilly	0	0.00
North Somerset	41	0.15
Plymouth	23	0.06
Poole	5	0.03
Somerset	62	0.09
South Gloucestershire	23	0.06
Swindon	20	0.07
Torbay	18	0.09
Wiltshire	41	0.06

[1] Maintained primary and secondary schools and maintained and non-maintained special schools.

[2] The number of permanent exclusions expressed as a percentage of the number (head count) of pupils in primary, secondary and special schools, excluding dually registered pupils in special schools in January 2000.

Source:

Annual schools' census.

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the numbers of pupils excluded from schools. [56347]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Only statistics on permanent exclusions from school are collected centrally. The statistical first release on exclusions published this morning shows that there were 9,210 permanent exclusions from school in England in the 2000–01 school year. Our priority now is to provide suitable full time education for permanently excluded pupils and we have a public service agreement target to ensure that all local education authorities offer this by September 2002.

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will discuss with software companies whether they would be prepared to waive rights and let licences be passed from one user to another when personal computers are reconditioned or similarly second-hand and the recipients are schools and educational facilities. [57691]

John Healey: My Department has regular meetings with major software suppliers and these discussions include issues related to the particular rights on licences. Our aim is to ensure that education institutions obtain best value for money, and usually the cost of licences for education is considerably lower than other market areas. It is important that schools are properly licensed, and most suppliers will offer substantial discounts to schools. This applies both to new, second hand or reconditioned computers.

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 129W, what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of unpaid advisers who have assisted the work of her Department since June 1997 but are not included in the Cabinet Office's annual report "Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews 2000–01". [57033]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* The Secretary of State has appointed Sir Cyril Taylor as her unpaid adviser for the specialist schools programme, and on sponsorship for education action zones.

I apologise to the right hon. Member. Sir Cyril Taylor's name should have been included in my reply to him of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 129W, but was omitted in error.

Breakfast Clubs

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what evaluation she has made of the value of breakfast clubs in enhancing the attendance and achievement of school pupils. [56354]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Evidence shows that out-of-school-hours study support, including breakfast clubs, can make a real difference to children's attitudes to school, attendance and attainment. Specific evaluation of breakfast clubs also points to benefits such as improved punctuality, concentration, social skills, and relationships with staff.

Sixth Forms

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the impact of the establishment of the Learning and Skills Council on the funding arrangements for school sixth forms. [56357]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Learning and Skills Council began funding LEAs for their school sixth form provision in April. Funding allocations were notified to LEAs and schools in early March. All LEAs have received their first tranche payments from the LSC.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

36. **Caroline Flint:** To ask the Solicitor-General if she will examine ways of achieving more effective representation by the CPS in handling breaches of antisocial behaviour orders. [56381]

The Solicitor-General: A breach of an antisocial behaviour order is a criminal offence and the CPS will prosecute when the police send them a file.

Last year there were 85 prosecutions for breaches of ASBOs of which 69 resulted in a conviction.

Crown Prosecution Service

37. **Mr. Mike O'Brien:** To ask the Solicitor-General what action she has taken to introduce anti-discrimination policies within the Crown Prosecution Service. [56382]

The Solicitor-General: Anti-discrimination measures already implemented include:

(1) training over 6,000 members of staff in equality and diversity, all staff have diversity objectives measured through the performance appraisal system,

(2) the appointment of 11 regional officers,

(3) campaigns on "dignity at work"

(4) a raft of community engagement initiatives across the country,

(5) all personnel procedures have been reviewed to ensure they are not discriminatory,

(6) a new complaints procedure has been written, and there is a review of 15,000 cases to see whether there are indicators of discrimination in any part of the prosecution process.

All these measures are already paying dividends: the CPS now has a representative workforce—11.6 per cent. of staff are from minority ethnic groups, this is higher than the percentage in the population. In London the figure is 30 per cent. This compares very well with other Government Departments.

39. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Solicitor-General what arrangements she has made for the Crown Prosecution Service to support the Government's aim of reducing street crime. [56384]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service is committed fully to playing its part in the street crime initiative. With police it developed the Premium Service. This is designed to deliver a premium service of best practice in investigation and prosecution.

The premium service targets particular crime areas and will ensure that offenders are investigated and prosecuted with skill and determination. Experienced lawyers and detectives will handle cases and they will work closely together. An extra £6 million is being allocated to the CPS to free up experienced lawyers to concentrate on this work.

Key features of the Premium Service include:

early CPS advice to get the charge right first time;

working closely with the police throughout the preparation of the case and the court hearing;

speeding up the criminal justice process by using measures such as Narey courts, telephone advice, urgent conferences and simple, unbureaucratic procedures;

more careful consideration given to discontinuing prosecutions;

extra care for victims and witnesses;

use of videos in court to show the court the full picture of a robbery;

opposing bail when appropriate and being robust about appealing against decisions to grant bail;

presenting full evidence of previous convictions.

In addition, Premium Service arrangements have been made in relation to the care of victims and witnesses.

The Crown Prosecution Service has also been at the forefront in developing area protocols in partnership with criminal justice agencies at a local level. These protocols are designed to ensure that there is engagement all the way through the criminal justice system and with the local community.

The CPS has engaged fully with its criminal justice partners, meeting regularly at local levels and nationally at strategic levels. It has taken national areas of concern, such as those surrounding bail, and worked towards solutions that benefit the whole of the criminal justice system.

Both the Attorney-General and I are being briefed regularly by the CPS about progress on this initiative. The Attorney-General attends the ministerial meetings, which the Prime Minister chairs, together with the DPP and the chief executive.

Witness Intimidation

38. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Solicitor-General what steps the Crown Prosecution Service is taking to identify cases of witness intimidation. [56383]

The Solicitor-General: The police have the primary responsibility to identify that a case involves an intimidated witness.

The Crown Prosecution Service will, as part of its case review, be alert to the possibility that the case may involve an intimidated or vulnerable witness and will take the appropriate action to protect witnesses, which could include an application for the remand of the defendant in custody or for special measures to protect an intimidated witness such as the video evidence screens or clearing the public gallery.

Death in Custody

40. **Hugh Bayley:** To ask the Solicitor-General what plans she has to seek the involvement of the CPS in giving advice immediately following a death in custody. [56385]

The Solicitor-General: In many cases the police already seek early legal advice from the Crown Prosecution Service during the investigation of a death in custody. The practice of the CPS giving early advice in these cases is one of the issues raised for consultation by the Attorney General in his review of the role and practices of the Crown Prosecution Service in cases arising from deaths in custody.

Crime Statistics (North Yorkshire)

41. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Solicitor-General if she will make a statement on levels of *(a)* reported crimes and *(b)* successful prosecutions brought in North Yorkshire since 1996–97. [56387]

The Solicitor-General: The level of reported crime in North Yorkshire stood at 50,924 cases for the year 1996–97.

The figures for 2001–02, show 59,149 cases being reported in that year.

Over the last two years there has been a drop in the number of convictions with 10,801 in 2001–02.

PRIME MINISTER

Euro

Mr. Laws: To ask the Prime Minister what opinion polling has been carried out into the public's attitude to the euro since June 2001; what the cost has been of such polling; if he will publish the results; and if he will make a statement. [58611]

The Prime Minister: The FCO announced on 5 December 2001 the results of its opinion poll on attitudes towards the European Union and put the results in the Library of the House. The poll, carried out by ICM on behalf of the FCO, cost £28,317.50.

Constituency Data

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the Members who have requested statistical data, since 1 May 1997, on the effects of the Government's policies pertaining to their own constituency; what has been the average length of response to such parliamentary questions; what his policy is on length of response to parliamentary questions in general; what measures are taken to ensure political impartiality in such responses; and if he will make a statement. [58776]

The Prime Minister: The Government have consistently made it clear, in response to reports of the Public Administration Select Committee, and previous questions from Members of the House, that they are committed to providing prompt and accurate answers to PQs. This remains the position.

Details of Members who have requested information on the effect of Government policy on their respective constituencies can be obtained from the Library of the House.

Information on the response time to this sort of question is not kept centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

With regard to maintaining political impartiality in answers to PQs, the general principles which civil servants must follow are set out in the Civil Service Code, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Weston Park Agreement

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which Northern Ireland political parties endorsed the Weston Park Agreement. [45969]

Mr. Browne: The Weston Park discussions did not result in immediate agreement between the Northern Ireland parties. Following intensive discussions there, the British and Irish Governments put a package of measures, covering all outstanding issues, to the parties on 1 August.

Organised Crime Task Force

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the work of the Organised Crime Task Force during the last 12 months. [59800]

Jane Kennedy: The creation of the Northern Ireland Organised Crime Task Force is the manifestation of the Government's commitment to help make Northern Ireland a stable and peaceful society. A year on from the publication of the task force's first Threat Assessment and Strategy, we have seen some truly remarkable successes against organised criminals in Northern Ireland. Concerted law enforcement activity has clearly played a vital role in disrupting and fragmenting the illegal acts of the criminals.

I have today arranged for copies of the publication to be placed in the Library of both Houses.

Kinetic Energy Projectiles

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what research has been undertaken on *(a)* the energy attenuation features for future kinetic energy projectiles in order to reduce the severity of head injuries, *(b)* post-ricochet injuries and energy of baton rounds and steps that could be taken to reduce risk to non-targeted personnel from ricochets and *(c)* the features of a kinetic energy based system that are intrinsic to its use as a deterrent, in order to provide the analysis tools for maintaining the required performance but at a reduced risk of life-threatening injury. [17761]

Mr. Ingram: I have been asked to reply as these issues relate to recommendations following an independent medical assessment of the safety of the L21A1 baton round undertaken by the Defence Scientific Advisory Council (DSAC) to my request.

The assessment was completed prior to work on alternatives to the L21A1 being undertaken under the leadership of the Northern Ireland Office. This work seeks to address recommendations 69 and 70 of the Patten report. Phases 1 and 11 have been completed and publicly reported. This programme is currently assessing systems that offer potentially energy attenuating features and that will have different ricochet characteristics to L21A1. In support of this assessment the Government are undertaking a programme of trials and model development as well as recording information from L21A1 in service. These programmes therefore address energy attenuation features for kinetic energy projectiles and systems that will reduce risk from ricochet.

In addition the Ministry of Defence has conducted a separate research programme into the characteristics of kinetic energy projectiles intrinsic to their use as a deterrent.

Provisional IRA Ceasefire

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the present status of the provisional IRA ceasefire in relation to the theft of intelligence information from PSNI Special Branch at Castlereagh police station. [48766]

Dr. John Reid: In relation to the break in at Castlereagh, the criminal investigation is continuing and the Acting Chief Constable has advised me that the PSNI are actively pursuing lines of inquiry. It would be wrong for me to make any comment which anticipated the outcome of the investigation.

In relation to the status of the IRA's ceasefire, I do not believe that it is under threat.

DEFENCE

Armed Forces Personnel (Deaths on Military Premises)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members or employees of Her Majesty's armed forces have died by self-inflicted injuries in and around military premises in each of the past eight years, indicating *(a)* the date of death of each person, *(b)* their gender, age and ethnic origin, *(c)* the military premises on which the fatal incident occurred and *(d)* the location, date and verdict of the inquest. [56697]

Mr. Ingram: Between 1 January 1993 and 14 May 2002 there have been 156 suicides among serving members of the regular armed forces. To ensure that service personnel confidentiality is not compromised, it has been necessary to group the data by year, location and age group in the following tables. Of the 156 suicides only three were female. In respect of breakdown by ethnic origin, information is only available from May 1996—64 suicides were recorded as "White" and 10 were recorded as "Unspecified".

It is not possible to provide information on self inflicted deaths as the definitions used for these deaths are currently under review. They are being checked for consistency against those used in the Office of National Statistics (ONS).

Information on suicides can however be provided for this period, as these are well defined.

Suicides in serving regular armed forces personnel by geographic location: 1 January 1993 to 14 May 2002

	Location				
Year of death	*Great Britain (4)*	*Northern Ireland*	*Germany (BAOR)*	*Other*	*Grand Total*
1 January					
1993	20	2	5	1	28
1994	19	3	6	2	30
1995	9	7	4	0	20
1996	16	3	2	3	24
1997	19	0	2	0	21
1998	9	0	2	0	11
1999	9	0	0	0	9
2000	8	0	1	1	10
2001	2	0	1	0	3
Grand total	111	15	23	7	156

Suicides in serving regular armed forces personnel by age group: 1 January 1993 to 14 May 2002

	Age group			
Year of death	*Under 30*	*30–39*	*40 and over*	*Grand total*
1 January				
1993	18	8	2	28
1994	24	5	1	30
1995	13	6	1	20
1996	15	8	1	24
1997	11	8	2	21
1998	6	3	2	11
1999	4	4	1	9
2000	4	5	1	10
2001	2	1	0	3
Grand total	97	48	11	156

Notes:

1. There were no reported suicides for 2002 as at the 14 May 2002.
2. Figures for suicides are subject to revision as further coroner's verdicts are reported to DASA.
3. Census Survey categories, based on the 1991 Census Survey categories. Records of ethnic category for service personnel was not recorded prior to May 1996.
4. Great Britain included UK Waters and North Atlantic.

Armed Forces

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many violent incidents involving *(a)* injury and *(b)* death of Her Majesty's forces personnel stationed or present at the Deepcut barracks have been (i) reported in the past eight years to the army medical services and (ii) sent on for treatment at a local hospital; and if he will make a statement. [56698]

Mr. Ingram: There have been four deaths at Deepcut resulting from gunshot wounds over the last eight years. It is not possible to provide details of the number of injuries as, due to differing reporting criteria for sickness and injuries in the past, these data are unreliable. This shortcoming is being addressed.

Since 1 January 1995, 28 personnel from 25 Training Support Regiment, Royal Logistics Corps, Deepcut, have appeared before court-martial as a result of violent incidents. In addition, a further 41 soldiers have been dealt with summarily as a result of their involvement in such incidents since October 2000, the date from which central recording of summary dealing statistics began. It is not readily possible, however, to determine whether these incidents resulted in injury and/or death and, consequently, whether the Army medical services or local hospitals were involved in providing any treatment.

QinetiQ

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on his plans for the privatisation of QinetiQ. [57336]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 314W, about the route and timing for the sale of QinetiQ. The selection process for a strategic partner for QinetiQ is now well under way with initial bids from interested parties due by 20 May. The timetable is on track to identify the preferred bidder by summer 2002 and complete the process later this year.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the information memorandum sent to potential bidders for QinetiQ; and if he will make a statement. [57796]

Mr. Ingram: The QinetiQ information memorandum contains details about QinetiQ's business, including future commercial plans, and is therefore commercial-in-confidence. It was prepared solely for the use of bidders to aid them in the preparation of their indicative bids for a share of the business. In accordance with normal practice, these parties were required to sign confidentiality agreements before the information memorandum was sent to them. Publishing the document more widely would not be in the interests of a successful QinetiQ transaction and would risk damaging value for the taxpayer. I am, therefore, withholding the information requested under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

RAF Bases

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will announce the outcome of the study into the future of RAF Lyneham, Brize Norton and St. Mawgan. [57241]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The exact timing of the announcement of the outcome of the Strategic Review of RAF Lyneham, RAF Brize Norton and RAF St. Mawgan is not yet known but expected to be later this year.

Service Personnel

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people there were in the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Navy and *(c)* Air Force in (i) 1980, (ii) 1985, (iii) 1990, (iv) 1995 and (v) 2000. [58572]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the UK Defence Statistics 2001, table 2.8, which lists these figures. A copy of this annual publication is held in the Library of the House.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made regarding the ratification of the optional protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; and what plans the Government have for the deployment of under-18s after its ratification. [58022]

Mr. Ingram: Officials in both the Ministry of Defence and Foreign and Commonwealth Office are working actively towards ratification of the optional protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict, and we expect to be in a position to ratify soon. This work includes finalising guidelines for the armed forces which are designed to ensure adherence to the protocol's requirement that all feasible measures be taken to avoid direct involvement in hostilities by those under 18 years of age while reflecting the practical position set out in the United Kingdom's declaration on signing, thus maintaining operational effectiveness. As part of the ratification process, an Explanatory Memorandum will be laid before Parliament to explain the significance of the optional protocol and will cover the steps being taken to enable ratification.

Air Services (RAF)

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make it his policy to consult local interests before agreeing to the operation of scheduled services by commercial airlines from RAF Leuchars; [57729]

(2) what proposals have been made and by which airline companies for the operation of scheduled service from RAF Leuchars; [57728]

(3) what his policy is towards the use of front line RAF stations by commercial airlines operating scheduled services; and if he will make a statement; [57727]

(4) on how many occasions Ministers or members of his Department have met representatives of commercial airline companies to discuss the operation of scheduled services from RAF Leuchars; [57726]

(5) if he will make it his policy to take amenity considerations into account when responding to proposals for the operation of scheduled air services from RAF stations. [57725]

Mr. Ingram: As part of the Government's Wider Markets Initiative, RAF Strike Command is considering the feasibility for the exploitation of irreducible spare capacity on its airfields, which may include use by scheduled service operators. The primacy of military operations will not be diluted as a result of commercial activity. No formal proposals have been put forward by airline companies for the operation of scheduled services from RAF Leuchars. No Ministry of Defence Minister or official has met representatives of commercial airline companies to discuss the operation of scheduled services from RAF Leuchars, however, consultants advising the RAF have sought the views of the airline operator community. It is Ministry of Defence policy to consult fully and openly with representatives from relevant local and regional councils when examining the feasibility of any regular commercial airline activity at RAF bases.

Meteorological Office

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Meteorological Office for financial year 2002–03. [59660]

Mr. Ingram: The chief executive of the Met Office is responsible for providing meteorological and related environmental services, including climate change prediction, to a wide range of customers, including the armed forces, Government, civil aviation, shipping, emergency services, media, commerce, industry and general public. The Met Office also undertakes research to meteorology and climate. This year, the Met Office will be set the following challenging targets.

Key Target 1

To achieve a value for the Numerical Weather Prediction Index of at least 109.5 on 31 March 2003, from a baseline of 100.0 on 31 March 2000.

Key Target 2

To achieve a value for the Service Quality Index of at least 115.4 on 31 March 2003, from a baseline of 100.0 on 31 March 1997, in line with customer requirements.

Key Target 3

A three-year target to achieve a value for the Efficiency Index of at least 111.6 by 31 March 2003 was announced last year, but has been passed ahead of schedule. A revised target is therefore set which is: To achieve a value for the Efficiency Index of at least 120.5 on 31 March 2003, from a baseline of 100.0 on 31 March 2000.

Key Target 4

To ensure a positive Return On Capital Employed in 2002–03, while returning an operating profit of at least £13.3 million before strategic investments.

Key Target 5

To achieve strategic investment in 2002–03 or £19.4 million ± £1.5 million.

Key Target 6

To achieve a total contribution from commercial activities in 2002–03 of at least £3.8 million.

Key Target 7

To achieve a value for the Staff Skills Index of at least 107.5 by 31 March 2004, from a baseline of 100.0 as at 31 March 2001.

Eurofighter

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date Eurofighter is expected to enter service with the Royal Air Force; and if he will make a statement. [59801]

Dr. Moonie: As I made clear on 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1139W, to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) the June 2002 In-Service-Date for Eurofighter was becoming increasingly challenging to achieve. Although good progress has been made by industry, with the first three instrumented production aircraft achieving successful first flights in early April, delays in bringing the detailed design to full maturity in some areas prevented the flight test programme from starting on time. Following a thorough review of the programme involving the partner nations, the NATO agency responsible for undertaking the procurement, and industry, we have jointly concluded that acceptance of the first aircraft into service should be delayed, to take place by the end of this year, and we shall plan on that basis. We shall now be working hard with industry to recover lost time and achieve the planned Operational Employment Date in the second half of the decade, thus avoiding any gap in front-line capability or extra costs to the Ministry of Defence. The delays are disappointing but reflect the complexity of the project and the major advance in technology it represents. Initial flights of the instrumented production aircraft have been impressive and the Government remain fully committed to this contribution to the United Kingdom's military capability.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what have been the legal costs to his Department of opposing claims by ex-service men for pensions claimed as a result of ill health stemming from their service on Christmas Island or other nuclear test sites in each of the last five years. [57214]

Mr. Ingram: The Veterans Agency does not employ legal services in the consideration of claims for war disablement pension, or in the appeals process.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what has been the cost to his Department of claims by ex-service men for pensions claimed as a result of ill health stemming from their service on Christmas Island and other nuclear test sites in each of the last five years. [57212]

Mr. Ingram: The exact information requested is not available. The estimated annual cost to the Veterans Agency of pensions awarded to ex-service men who served in the south Pacific and at other nuclear test sites amounts to £300,000.

Parliamentary Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of parliamentary advisers appointed to serve his Department. [56984]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* Ministers in this Department have made no such appointments.

European Security and Defence Policy

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the dispute between Greece and Turkey concerning the relations between ESDP and NATO has been resolved; and if he will make a statement. [57635]

Mr. Straw: I have been asked to reply.

Contacts continue between the EU and NATO, and between their members, to finalise the arrangements linking the two organisations.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the application of the regulation authorising voluntary participation by undertakings in the industrial sector in eco-Community the co-management and audit scheme (EMAS) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56725]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

Regulation (EEC) No. 1836/93, allowing voluntary participation by companies in the industrial sector in a Community eco-management and audit scheme (EMAS), was revised by Regulation (EC) No. 761/2001, with the effect that participation in EMAS is now open to organisations in all economic sectors. The aim of the scheme is to promote the continual improvement of environmental performance in organisations through them establishing an environmental management system and publishing an environmental report, both of which have to be independently verified. Registered organisations are entitled to use the EMAS logo to advertise their participation in the scheme. A committee composed of representatives of member states and chaired by the commission has been established to assist the commission in the implementation and operation of the scheme.

The Committee has met three times in the last 12 months. The UK is formally represented by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The cost of attending the committee over the last 12 months was approximately £4,000. The main issues currently under consideration by the committee are the relationship of EMAS with the implementation and enforcement of environmental legislation; the development of marketing and promotional initiatives to increase participation in the scheme; the use of EMAS in other Community policies and instruments; and the potential for wider use of the EMAS logo in applications like product information.

Correspondence

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will answer the letters dated 14 November 2001 from the hon. Member for Canterbury regarding Pipeflex Limited-funding. [57784]

Mr. Wilson: I wrote to the hon. Member on 23 May 2002.

Export Credits

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what her policy is towards the offer of export credits for the support of offset in defence deals arrangements; [57519]

(2) what her policy is towards the offer of credits and the apportionment of liabilities to support projects and exports which form part of multi-national defence export offset deals in which other European Union export credit agencies are involved. [57520]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answers 21 May 2002]:* Offset related to UK defence exports would normally take the form of investments in, or arranging exports from, the buyer's country.

ECGD support would need to be considered on a case-by-case basis, and is most likely to take the form of political risk insurance to UK companies seeking to make overseas investments in connection with offset arrangements. Limited support might also be available for goods exported from a buyer's country, but the rules are complex and it is not possible to generalise.

Post Offices

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to improve the management of the post office network. [59804]

Ms Hewitt: A new chairman will be recruited to lead the board of Post Office Ltd. (the Consignia subsidiary which operates the network) and to work with the recently appointed chief executive, David Mills, in the development and implementation of a new vision and strategy for the business.

Maternity, Paternity and Adoption Rights

Mrs. Humble: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to consult on draft regulations in respect of new maternity, paternity and adoption rights. [59803]

Alan Johnson: My Department is today publishing a consultation document on these new rights, highlighting a limited number of outstanding issues on which we are seeking comments. We are also making draft regulations available on the internet. The consultation document and regulations are available at www.dti.gov.uk/er/review/htm, and comments are sought by 19 July 2002. Copies have also been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Regional Development Agencies

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of regional development agency boards are made up by *(a)* business representatives, *(b)* councillors, *(c)* trade union members, *(d)* voluntary organisation representatives and *(e)* others. [58387]

Alan Johnson: The regional development agency (RDA) boards currently have the following backgrounds: *(a)* business 49 per cent., *(b)* local authority 26 per cent., *(c)* trade unions 7 per cent., *(d)* voluntary/community sectors 6 per cent. and *(e)* others 12 per cent. There are two vacant posts. These figures have been derived based on the primary experience of each board member. Many board members have expertise in more than one area of relevance to the work of the RDAs. These figures do not include London Development Agency (LDA) board members, as the LDA is the responsibility of the Greater London Authority.

Redundant Oil Installations

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements are in place to ensure that redundant oil installations from the North sea are properly disposed of onshore. [58346]

Mr. Wilson: The Oslo and Paris convention of 1992 (OSPAR) provides for the protection of the marine environment of the north-east Atlantic. Under the convention the UK has adopted OSPAR Decision 98/3 which provides a regime for the decommissioning of oil and gas installations and effectively prohibits sea disposal. There is a presumption that installations on the UK continental shelf will be brought back to shore for reuse, recycling or final disposal on land. However, the OSPAR Decision recognises that there may be difficulty in removing the "footings" of large steel jackets weighing more than 10,000 tonnes and in removing concrete installations. As a result derogations may be granted in these cases if the internationally agreed assessment and consultation process shows that leaving such installations wholly or partly in place is justifiable. If a derogation is granted, the permit will specify who will be liable for the remains and require suitable monitoring and management measures to prevent or mitigate any adverse consequences to both the environment and other users of the sea.

In the UK, to ensure the orderly decommissioning of all installations, including those subject to derogation from the OSPAR decision, the decommissioning of each installation is addressed within a decommissioning programme. The programme assesses the potential decommissioning solutions and determines the most appropriate disposal option by balancing safety, the environment, impact on other users of the sea, technical feasibility and economics. The programme must be approved by the Secretary of State under the Petroleum Act 1998.

Coal Industry Pensions

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost is of the Government's guarantees associated with the report of the asset liability study carried out by the Mineworkers Pension Scheme and the British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme as a percentage of the surpluses over the next 30 years for each scheme. [57824]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* The findings of the asset liability studies commissioned by the trustees of the two former British Coal pension schemes remain confidential to the trustees and the Government.

On 17 January the Government and the schemes' trustees made a joint statement agreeing a review of the arrangements for the Government's guarantee of basic retirement benefits for the members of the schemes. It was agreed that the review should explore how changes in circumstances since 1994, when British Coal was privatised, might best be reflected in revisions to the guarantee arrangements which would benefit members. In doing so, the trustees and the Government recognised that any revisions will need to be based on an equitable sharing of risk and reward between the schemes and the Exchequer, and will need to be sufficiently robust to operate satisfactorily in a wide range of conditions.

BCCI SA

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total retained interest earned on the moneys held by the ISA since 5 July 2001 is. [55009]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Figures for part months could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what the total fees levied by the ISA were in the English liquidation of BCCI SA from 5 July 1991 to date; [55007]

(2) what moneys are held on deposit with the ISA in relation to BCCI SA; [55011]

(3) what *(a)* the total amount of interest paid to the liquidation estate by the ISA on moneys held and *(b)* the various rates of interest paid during the liquidation of BCCI SA were. [55008]

Miss Melanie Johnson: These are matters for the liquidators.

Telecommunications Report

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she has yet received a report by the Director General of Telecommunications for 2000, as required under section 55 of the Telecommunications Act 1984. [59805]

Ms Hewitt: Yes. The eighteenth report by the Director General of Telecommunications is being published today. It covers the period 1 January to 31 December 2001. This includes initiatives to develop the structures for the new communications regulator Ofcom and other initiatives to promote the interests of consumers and a competitive telecoms market. Copies of the report have been laid before the House of Parliament.

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many press releases were issued by her Department in each month between May and December 1997. [59492]

Ms Hewitt: The number of DTI press releases issued each month were:

DTI press releases May to December 1997

Month	*Number*
May	35
June	63
July	75
August	38
September	53
October	66
November	78
December	72

These monthly statistics include number of statutory announcements (merger clearances, power station consents and company winding up petitions) that the Department is required to issue when individual decisions are made.

Cefn Croes Windfarm

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will take her decision on the application to build a windfarm at Cefn Croes, Ceredigion. [59159]

Mr. Wilson: I have today decided to grant consent under section 36 and section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 to Renewable Development Company's applications to build a 58.5 MW windfarm and associated overhead electric line at Cefn Croes, Ceredigion.

My decisions were only taken after extensive and thorough consideration of the representations received both for and against consent being granted.

The Secretary of State has not used her discretionary power to call a public inquiry because all parties have already taken the opportunity to inform her of their concerns. I am confident that Ministers have all the necessary information on which to take the decisions on the applications.

The decisions also took into account the fact that the local planning authority, Ceredigion county council did not object to the applications subject to conditions being attached to the planning permissions and the company entering into an obligation to pay the costs of a land management scheme and decommissioning.

Copies of the press notice and decision letters are being placed in the Library of the House.

Edmonton Power Station

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will announce her decision on London Waste Ltd.'s application to extend the Edmonton energy-from-waste power station. [59158]

Mr. Wilson: I have today decided that consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 to London Waste Ltd.'s application cannot be given. The extension would have an annual throughput of waste of around 285,000 tonnes over and above the existing station's capacity of 550,000 tonnes per annum.

In deciding not to grant consent I have taken into account the hierarchy for the treatment of waste set out in the Government's Waste Strategy 2000. Our policy is that waste should be minimised and recycling and composting undertaken before energy from waste is considered. I have considered all the information placed before me, both for and against the extension, and have concluded that the existing station is large enough to deal with the North London Waste Authority's (NLWA) residual waste after recycling. To grant consent for the extension would result in a station with an overall capacity capable of handling all of NLWA's municipal waste and could mean that the NLWA had little incentive to do more recycling over and above the minimum required by statute. Also should the NLWA meet or better its recycling targets then this would lead to a shortfall in the waste stream for the extended station and could lead to waste being imported from other areas which would be contrary to the Proximity Principal whereby waste should be treated as near to its origin as possible.

I have also considered the measures the applicant has undertaken to incorporate at the Edmonton site to encourage recycling, composting and using heat for local district heating schemes. While these measures are to be welcomed I am aware that previous ones of a similar type in the site have been closed or not utilised. I am of the opinion they are not sufficient to justify granting consent to the extension. Indeed should such measures prove successful then there would appear to me to be less justification for the need for the extension.

In refusing consent I should make it clear that the Government are not against energy-from-waste stations where they are clearly required and properly sized. The requirement of our policy is that statutory recycling targets must be met and that no incineration proposal shall be permitted which will pre-empt recycling or reduce the option for recycling for the future.

Copies of the Press Notice and decision letters are being placed in the Library of the House.

Carlton House Terrace

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what organisations are located in Carlton House Terrace and have the rent paid by the Government. [55987]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have been asked to reply.

There are no organisations in Carlton House Terrace that have rent paid by the Government.

Websites

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what the budget is for the website www.ukonline.gov.uk in respect of *(a)* site development and maintenance, *(b)* marketing, *(c)* other and *(d)* in total for the financial year (i) 2002–03 and (ii) 2003–04; [51518]

(2) how much has been spent on the website www.ukonline.gov.uk for *(a)* design and build prior to launch, *(b)* development and maintenance since launch, *(c)* marketing, *(d)* other and *(e)* the project in total in each of the financial years and accumulatively to date since the inception of the project. [51515]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

ukonline.gov.uk supports the Government's aim to enable the citizen to interact electronically with government by 2005. ukonline.gov.uk will be a key driver in transforming the way in which public services are organised and delivered, and in leading the way to better integration of government services and in putting all relevant government information and services online.

The system was originally launched as a pilot in February 2001 and re-launched in January 2002. The redesign followed extensive research and reflected best practice both within government and the private sector. The views of users were also an important consideration within the development process.

The figures below reflect the amount spent in the financial year ending 31 March 1902. Since ukonline.gov.uk relaunched in January 2002, these figures are representative of both pre and post launch.

(a) and (b) (combined for reasons above) £3,195,619

(c) £633,711 has been spent on marketing since the launch of ukonline in February 2001

(d) Usability/accessibility audit £2,320

(e) Year ending 31 March 2001—£8,055,781

Year ending 31 March 2002—£8,894,981

The budget for site development and maintenance for 2002–3 is £8,358,000. the figure for 2003–04 is not available as Cabinet Office is still finalising its budget.

In the period since the site was re-launched usage has increased by 200 per cent. The site has also been subjected to external benchmarking and was recently assessed by the Bertelsmann Foundation as the best government website in Europe.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Rio Earth Summit (Implementation)

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps have been taken by the Government since the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 to *(a)* set goals on environmental protection and *(b)* improve eco-efficiency and resource productivity relating to energy issues; and what these (i) goals and (ii) improvements have been. [44341]

Mr. Meacher: The UK is one of the few OECD countries to have met, and gone beyond, the target agreed at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 to return its emissions of greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2000. It is estimated that UK emissions were more than 13 per cent. below 1990 levels in 2000.

The UK published its climate change programme in November 2000. This sets out how the UK will deliver its Kyoto target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 12.5 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2008–12, and move towards its domestic goal to cut CO_2 emissions by 20 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010.

The programme contains a substantial, integrated package of policies and measures. It will improve business use of energy, stimulate new, more efficient sources of power generation, including renewables, cut emissions from the transport sector, promote better energy efficiency in the residential sector, and ensure that the public sector takes a leading role.

Following publication of the PIU Energy Review 14 February 2002, the Government plan to publish a White Paper later this year which, with full consultation, will consider the future of Government policy on sustainable energy.

The Government have introduced a wide range of measures, including market incentives, financial assistance, legal obligations, and guidance and information, to promote energy efficiency in all sectors of the economy. These include:

the energy efficiency commitment (EEC) on domestic energy supplies, from 2002 to 2005;

the climate change levy and climate change agreements;

the UK emissions trading scheme;

revised building regulations which require high energy efficiency standards;

the market transformation programme;

a wide range of measures to support combined heat and power (CHP);

substantial Government funding of the Energy Saving Trust and the Carbon Trust to promote and support energy efficiency in the domestic, public, industry and business sectors.

Kyoto Clean Development Mechanism

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many projects British oil and gas companies have initiated under the Kyoto Clean Development Mechanism; what the location and nature of each project is; and what involvement the Government have had in this process. [51956]

Mr. Meacher: At present there are no CDM projects as the detailed procedures to validate and register CDM projects are still under discussion by the CDM executive board, the body established at international level to operationalise the CDM.

In the interim, the Government have established the Climate Change Projects Office (CCPO) to advise UK business of the opportunities arising from CDM and joint implementation (JI) projects. I understand from that office that many companies, including oil and gas companies, are currently exploring the possibility of undertaking pilot projects worldwide in anticipation of finalised rules and procedures.

Country Land and Business Association

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she *(a)* last met and *(b)* will next meet representatives of the Country Land and Business Association to discuss issues relating to the future viability of agriculture and the rural economy. [54494]

Alun Michael: Representatives of the Countryside Landowners and Business Association are included in a variety of meetings to help DEFRA promote the future of agriculture and the rural economy. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, last met representatives of the CLA formally when she attended a reception which they hosted for Young Farmers at the Royal Cornwall Show on 15 September last year. She also attended a summer reception hosted by Anthony Bosanquet, President of the CLA on 3 July.

All DEFRA Ministers meet CLA representatives in a variety of settings, I do on both a formal and informal basis, often several times in a week. For instance the President of the CLA is a member of the Rural Affairs Forum which meets regularly, and which I chair. He and his predecessor were members of the Rural Task Force and he has taken a leading role in the "Your Countryside, You're Welcome" campaign to boost tourism in the rural economy. On 15 May I spoke at a reception hosted jointly by the CLA, the Thoroughbred Breeders Association and the East of England Development Agency. I am meeting the President for a wide ranging discussion today (21 May).

My officials are also in frequent contact with the CLA to discuss matters relating to agriculture and the rural economy.

Waste Composting

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what estimate she has made of the proportion of household waste which *(a)* could potentially be composted and *(b)* is composted; and if she will make a statement; [54601]

(2) what percentage of municipal waste was composted in the years *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001; and if he will make a statement; [54583]

(3) what assessment her Department has made of the scope for increasing composting capacity in the UK as a means of meeting EU Landfill Directive targets; and if she will make a statement. [54600]

Mr. Meacher: The Landfill Directive, requires significant reductions in the amount of biodegradable municipal waste landfilled to 75 per cent. of that produced in 1995 by 2006, 50 per cent. by 2009 and 35 per cent. by 2016 (although countries such as the UK may use, if they wish, a derogation of up to four years for meeting each of these targets). To help achieve this, "Waste Strategy 2000" set targets for recycling and composting of household waste. In 2001 the Government set statutory performance standards for each local authority in England, which require them to double the overall recycling and composting rate by 2003–04 and treble it by 2005–06 over 1998–99 levels.

The Government strongly support composting as a way of disposing of biodegradable waste, and believes it has an important role to play. We are actively encouraging the composting of green waste at home, at municipal civic amenity sites and when separately collected by local authorities.

Potentially, all biodegradable waste can be composted, although some may be unsuitable for animal health reasons or because non-compostable wastes are present in the mix. Also, some wastes suitable for the composting process are better reused, recycled or recovered in other ways. "Waste Strategy 2000" (Part 2) indicates that 21 per cent. of household waste may be putrescible, while some 62 per cent. in total may be biodegradable. These proportions may vary seasonally (depending on green waste for example) and according to the amount of waste separated for recycling and home composting.

Figures from the DEFRA Municipal Waste Management Survey show there have been substantial increases in the amount of household waste collected for composting by local authorities in England and Wales—from 461,000 tonnes in 1998–99 to 670,000 tonnes in 1999–2000.

Data on the percentage of waste composted are available for household waste only. Household waste amounts to approximately 90 per cent. of all municipal waste. The latest results taken from the Department's Municipal Waste Management Survey are as follows:

Household waste composted[1] in England and Wales

	Percentage
1996–97	1.2
1997–98	1.6
1998–99	1.9
1999–2000	2.6

[1] Includes organic materials (kitchen and garden waste) collected for centralised composting schemes from households via kerbside schemes or taken by householders to civic amenity sites. Home composting is not included.

Note:

The equivalent figures for 2000–01 are not yet available.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what steps her Department is taking to introduce best practice guidelines and safety regulations for the composting of household waste; [54550]

(2) what assessment her Department has made of the scope for encouraging composting initiatives within the retail sector; [54586]

(3) what steps her Department is taking to encourage home composting of domestic waste; [54584]

(4) what steps her Department is taking to promote community waste composting initiatives; and if she will make a statement; [54587]

(5) what steps her Department is taking to promote composting as a central part of the UK's waste management strategy; and if she will make a statement. [54551]

Mr. Meacher: The Government strongly support composting as a way of treating biodegradable waste, improving soil quality and replacing non-renewable products such as peat. We are actively encouraging the composting of green waste—at home, at municipal civic amenity and community composting sites and when separately collected by local authorities. Guidance on composting, including on safety issues, is produced by the Environment Agency.

To support composting activity, the 2000 spending review allocated £220 million Private Finance Initiative funding for waste management that can be used to deliver increased recycling/composting rates. It also established a new £140 million household waste and recycling fund to help local authorities meet their statutory performance standards for recycling and composting.

Although animal health legislation currently prohibits the land spreading of composted kitchen/catering waste which might contain meat, we have commissioned a risk assessment to assess the risks to public, animal and plant health from such compost. In the light of that assessment, we will review the legislation.

The Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) are currently working with the Composting Association to develop the existing industry standard for compost, to achieve British Standards Institute (BSI) accreditation. The delivery of these accredited industry standards for compost will help to create markets for organic waste derived products. The creation of these new markets will be relevant to the retail sector when considering whether composting has a part to play in its waste management strategy (bearing in mind the present legal requirements).

"Waste Strategy 2000" places composting high in the hierarchy of preferred waste management options, and set targets for England and Wales to recycle or compost at least 25 per cent. of household waste by 2005. This national target is backed up by statutory targets for each local authority in England for 2003–04 and 2005–06, and the 2000 spending review identified substantial additional resources to help deliver the statutory performance standards on recycling and composting.

Illegal Timber Imports

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what actions her Department is taking to ensure that no illegally logged timber enters the United Kingdom. [55294]

Mr. Meacher: The actions that the Department and the Department for International Development are taking to combat illegal logging are:

(a) ensuring that the import of endangered timber species is in compliance with CITES, the convention on trade in endangered species;

(b) implementing the government timber procurement policy that seeks to procure forest products only from legal and sustainable sources;

(c) working with a number of timber exporting countries to help them improve governance and strengthen forest law enforcement;

(d) working to develop capacity for the implementation of timber certification schemes in some producing countries;

(e) promoting bilateral arrangements between the UK and timber producing countries whereby countries work together to tackle illegal logging and associated trade;

(f) showing leadership within the European Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) process that will see the European Commission draft a FLEGT action plan by the end of 2002. The EU FLEGT action plan will include consideration of new EU legislative requirements to enforce the control of access to the EU market of illegally logged timber and timber products

(g) sponsoring, among other, research that shows the negative economic impact of illegal logging for the development of certain producing countries with a view to help them manage their natural resources in a more sustainable manner.

With regard to (e) the Governments of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Indonesia signed on 18 April 2002 a Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation to improve Forest Law Enforcement and Governance and to combat illegal logging and the international trade in illegally logged timber and timber products. Copies of the Memorandum have been placed in the Library of both Houses. We are discussing the content of the memorandum with a number of both timber producing and timber consuming countries, including United States, Japan, Canada, New Zealand and Malaysia as a possible model for taking forward actions on combating illegal logging on a bilateral, regional and multilateral basis.

With regard to (a), (c), (d) and (g), it is important to remember that combating illegal logging and associated trade requires effort from both timber producing and consuming countries. Timber producing countries are responsible for defining and enforcing the national legislative and regulatory frameworks that define legality. We are helping them to do so effectively.

Marine Environment

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what extra resources her Department will provide to meet the objectives of the Government's Marine Stewardship report. [55767]

Mr. Meacher: The Marine Stewardship report contains a range of initiatives for the conservation and sustainable development of the marine environment. Sustainable development is an overarching theme for the 2002 Spending Review. The review is due to conclude in the summer.

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether spatial planning of the marine environment will take account of the review of regulations affecting development in coastal waters. [56046]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 15 May 2002]:* We will certainly want to take account of the findings of the review in developing the role of spatial planning for the marine environment.

Hinkley Point A

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what level of nuclear waste will be created as a result of Hinkley Point A power station in Somerset; and what plans she has to dispose of this waste. [56028]

Mr. Meacher: While it was operational the station gave rise to intermediate and low-level wastes and spent fuel which was sent to Sellafield for reprocessing. The station is in the defuelling stage which will give rise to further spent fuel and intermediate-level wastes. In due course the station will be decommissioned and this will give rise to further intermediate and low-level waste. Intermediate-level waste is stored on the Hinkley Point A site. Low-level waste is disposed of at the Drigg facility in Cumbria.

The Department and the devolved Administrations issued a consultation paper in September 2001 on "Managing Radioactive Waste Safely" as part of a process for developing policy on the future long-term management of radioactive waste. The responses to that consultation exercise are currently being considered.

Pollution

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department plans to take to tackle diffuse pollution from *(a)* agricultural sources and *(b)* other sources. [56551]

Mr. Meacher: DEFRA is currently considering how best to tackle diffuse pollution of water, caused by agriculture, transport and urban development. We are carrying out a cross-cutting review of agricultural diffuse pollution, and expect an interim outcome from this process to inform our forthcoming sustainable agriculture strategy. The review is taking an evidence-based approach to the problem assessing the nature of the problem, including the impact of major pollutants such as phosphates, nitrates and microbial contamination, learning from wider international experience. We are also considering what additional measures, such as regulation, economic instruments, voluntary measures and awareness-raising, may be required in the future to tackle both agricultural and urban diffuse pollution, in order to implement the water framework directive.

Landfill Sites

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) when her Department will publish interim and final results from studies on possible health effects associated with landfill sites; [56850]

(2) what assessment her Department has made of the implications for landfill sites in UK of the Eurohazcon study on landfill sites throughout Europe; [56851]

(3) what studies her Department is sponsoring to investigate possible health effects associated with landfill sites. [56849]

Mr. Meacher: Following a European study (the first Eurohazcon study) published in 1998 that reported a 33 per cent. higher rate of non-chromosomal anomalies among people living near hazardous waste sites, the Government commissioned a programme of work on health effects of landfill sites including a much more extensive national study by the Small Area Health Statistics Unit (SAHSU); this was published in the summer 2001.

The SAHSU study found that 80 per cent. of the population lives within 2 kilometres of a landfill site (operational or closed). The SAHSU study looked at the rates of all birth defects (chromosomal and non-chromosomal) and found only a slightly higher rate (1 per cent.) in populations living near landfill sites and a 7 per cent. higher rate near hazardous waste sites. The Government's expert advisory committee, the Committee on Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment, noted that this excess risk was small and could be accounted for by factors other than the landfill sites. The study has not shown, nor indeed could it show, a causal link between landfill sites and birth defects.

Earlier this year a second Eurohazcon study was published. The study investigated the rates of certain birth defects (chromosomal anomalies) around 23 European hazardous waste landfill sites, including 12 sites in Great Britain. It found a 41 per cent. higher rate of chromosomal anomalies close to sites (0 to 3km) compared to further away (3 to 7km).

The major difference between the two studies is the scale. The Eurohazcon study looked at populations around 23 landfills spread right across Europe, whereas the SAHSU study looked at populations within 2km of 9,565 sites (80 per cent. of the British population) of which 774 were known to take hazardous waste. The SAHSU study was therefore much more comprehensive. As such the results are less likely to be skewed by the pattern of birth defects surrounding any individual landfill site.

Both the SAHSU and Eurohazcon reports have recommended further work and DEFRA, the Department of Health and the Environment Agency have a considerable amount of work planned or under way. A great deal is already known about the general make-up of gases that are emitted from landfill sites. However, better information is needed on the substances present in very low concentrations in landfill emissions and the levels of exposure experienced by people living near to landfills. To obtain this information, research is currently under way to analyse over 12 months the emissions from municipal landfills. This monitoring study will provide information on which to make a more informed assessment of the likelihood of landfill sites posing a risk to health. The work will be completed next summer and published as soon as possible thereafter.

This Department hosted a seminar on 15 May 2002 to consider where there are gaps in the research on health impacts of all waste management options and to help prioritise future research. There are no risk-free options but conducting such research will allow local authorities and others to make more informed choices about the range, type and location of facility they wish to operate.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (habitat) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56804]

Mr. Meacher: The Habitats Committee is established by Article 20 of the EC Habitats Directive (92/43/EC) to assist the European Commission in measures to implement the directive.

Two meetings of the Habitats Committee have taken place in the last twelve months. UK representation usually consists of an official from my Department and a scientific adviser from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. Officials from the devolved Administrations have also occasionally attended in the past.

The items currently under consideration by the committee are:

adoption and protection of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs);

selection of projects to be funded under LIFE (Nature), Council Regulation 1655/2000;

needs and opportunities for co-funding of site management measures (article 8);

species protection measures (article 12);

monitoring of conservation status;

raising awareness of the Natura 2000 network;

application of the directive in the marine zone, including the directive's extension by member states beyond their territorial waters;

forestry;

implications of enlargement, including discussions with candidate countries on proposed modification of the annexes of the directive in light of future enlargement of EU, and the participation of accession countries in the Committee.

The European Commission meets the travel and subsistence costs of one UK representative at each Habitats Committee meeting. However, it would be of disproportionate cost to identify the cost to public funds of the Habitats Committee's work, as in addition to travel costs of any further UK representatives, this includes the cost of policy, scientific and practical conservation work undertaken by my Department, the devolved Administrations and the statutory conservation agencies, contributing to the UK's implementation of the EC habitats directive.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the adaptation to technical and scientific progress of the Directive on conservation of wild birds (ORNIS) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56803]

Mr. Meacher: The ORNIS Committee assists the European Commission in an advisory capacity on a wide range of issues concerning implementation of the EC Wild Birds Directive and has a regulatory role under article 16 of the Directive considering adaptations of the Annexes to the Directive.

One meeting of the ORNIS Committee has taken place in the last twelve months, on 15 June 2001. UK representation usually consists of an official from my Department and a scientific adviser from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. Officials from the devolved administrations have also occasionally attended in the past.

The European Commission meets the travel and subsistence costs of one UK representative at each ORNIS Committee meeting but, in addition to travel costs of any further UK representatives, the cost to public funds of the Committee's work includes policy, scientific and practical conservation work undertaken by my Department, the devolved administrations and the statutory conservation agencies, contributing to the UK's implementation of the EC Wild Birds Directive. It would therefore be of disproportionate cost to try to separately identify the cost to public funds of the ORNIS Committee's work.

Recent issues which have been considered by the Committee include:

definition and overview of pre-nuptial and reproduction periods of huntable species

progress and perspective for classification of Special Protection Areas

progress in discussions with candidate countries on proposed modification of the Annexes of the Directive in light of future enlargement of EU

sustainable hunting initiative

action plans for endangered species listed in Annex I of the Directive

list of bird species covered by Article 1 of the directive

use of lead shot.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee on implementation of the Directive establishing a Community policy regarding water is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56840]

Mr. Meacher: This committee, established by article 21 of the Directive, has never met. Therefore the question of UK representation has not been addressed, no items are under consideration and it has not drawn on public funds. The role of the Committee, when it meets, will be to assist the Commission, mainly with technical matters relating to the Directive.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the Directive on the incineration of hazardous waste is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56726]

Mr. Meacher: Article 15 of Directive 94/67/EC on the incineration of hazardous waste provides for a committee to assist the European Commission with the adaptation to technical progress of the provisions of Article 10 to 12 and Annexes I to III of that Directive. There have been no meetings of this committee in the last 12 months and there are no items currently under its consideration.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the Directive concerning integrated pollution prevention and control is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56727]

Mr. Meacher: Article 19 of Directive 96/61/EC concerning integrated pollution prevention and control ("IPPC") provides for a committee to assist with the establishment and maintenance by the European Commission of an inventory of the principal emissions and sources responsible from among the member states' industrial installations covered by that Directive.

The Committee is currently considering the technical requirements for the establishment of the inventory, which will be known as the European Pollutant Emissions Register ("EPER"). It has met once in the last 12 months. The UK is represented by one official from my Department, assisted by another from the Environment Agency. Travel costs for the official are met by the European Commission. Subsistence costs amount to about £100 per meeting. Work in preparation for the meetings forms part of the general work of the Department on IPPC and cannot readily be separated and costed.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of the Directive on procedures for the surveillance and monitoring of environments concerned by waste from the titanium dioxide industry is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56825]

Mr. Meacher: The role of the Committee is to decide on amendments to parameters listed in the annexes to the Directive. There have been no meetings of the Committee over the last 12 months. The UK would usually be represented by an official from my Department. The annual cost of the work includes the time taken to prepare for and attend meetings and the travel and subsistence costs incurred. Specific information is not available without incurring disproportionate cost. There are no matters currently under consideration.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the adaptation to technical progress and the implementation of the Directive on the control of volatile organic compound (VOC) emissions resulting from the storage of petrol and its distribution from terminals to service stations is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration;

if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56815]

Mr. Meacher: The role of the Committee is to decide on amendments to technical measures described in the annexes to the Directive. There have been no meetings of the Committee over the last 12 months. The UK would usually be represented by an official from my Department. The annual cost of the work includes the time taken to prepare for and attend meetings and the travel and subsistence costs incurred. Specific information is not available without incurring disproportionate cost. There are no matters currently under consideration.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the adaptation to technical and scientific progress and implementation of the directive on urban waste-water treatment is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56800]

Mr. Meacher: The mandate of the EC Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive Regulatory Committee is to assist the European Commission's work relating to implementation of the directive and to its adaptation to technical progress.

The Committee has generally met once a year with the last meeting held on 20 February 2001.

Four representatives are permitted from each member state. DEFRA is the lead Department for the United Kingdom with devolved authority representatives involved as appropriate. DEFRA will field two officials and the Scottish Executive one official for the next meeting. The Commission pays for one representative to attend from each member state. Additional experts from the UK cost between £300 and £400 per representative per meeting.

Items for discussion at the next meeting, to be held on 3 June next month, will include: progress with the provision of information for the third Commission report on member state progress with implementation of the directive; discussion of the second such report published in November 2001; discussion of provision of required treatment standards for small to medium-sized sewage works by the directive deadline of 2005; discussion of infringement procedures being taken against member states and guidelines for extensive treatment systems.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the adaptation to technical and scientific progress of the directive on methods of measurement of sampling and analysis of surface water intended for the abstraction of drinking water in the member states is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56796]

Mr. Meacher: This Committee has not met over the last 12 months. The question of current UK representation has not been addressed, no items are under consideration and it has not drawn on public funds. The role of the Committee, if it should meet, is set out in Article 9 of the directive. Its purpose is to take account in particular of alterations in the levels of the parameters specified in the directive.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of the decision establishing a common procedure for the exchange of information on the quality of surface fresh water in the Community is; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56799]

Mr. Meacher: This Committee has not met for more than five years. Therefore the question of current UK representation has not been addressed, no items are under consideration and it has not drawn on public funds in the last five years. The role of the Committee, if it should meet, is set out in Article 8 of the decision (Council decision 77/795/EEC, OJ L334, 24.12.1977, p29). It is to give its opinion on any measures proposed by the Commission which are necessary to adapt the decision's provisions to technical progress.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Management Committee on application of the directive on the standardisation and rationalisation of reports on the implementation of certain directives relating to the environment is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56802]

Mr. Meacher: This Committee has not met for more than five years. Therefore the question of current UK representation has not been addressed, no items are under consideration and it has not drawn on public funds in the last five years. The role of the Committee, if it should meet, is set out in Article 6 of the Council directive 91/692/EEC (OJ L 377, 31.12.1991, p 48). It is to give its opinion on any measures proposed by the Commission which are necessary to adapt the directive's provisions to technical or scientific progress.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Advisory Committee for the implementation of the directive on the limitation of volatile organic compounds due to the use of organic solvents in certain activities and installations is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56817]

Mr. Meacher: The role of the Advisory Committee is to assist the Commission with matters on which it is required to take a decision under the provisions of the directive such as reviewing the progress of member states and on the format of reports. There was one meeting of the committee over the last 12 months at which the UK was represented by an official from my Department. That meeting considered the format of reports required under the directive; there are no matters currently under consideration. The annual cost of the work includes the time taken to prepare for and attend meetings and the travel and subsistence costs incurred. Specific information is not available without incurring disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Management Committee for the control and production of substances that deplete the ozone layer (SAO) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56730]

Mr. Meacher: The Management Committee was established under Article 18 of EC Regulation 2037/2000 on substances that deplete the ozone layer. The regulation that enforces the European Union's obligations under the Montreal Protocol. The committee's mandate is to assist the European Commission with implementation of the various controls in the regulation. It was established by Council Decision 1999/468/EC.

The committee has met twice in the last 12 months. The UK is usually represented by two officials from my Department and one from the Department of Trade and Industry, although officials from other Government Departments and agencies, including the Ministry of Defence and the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, have also attended meetings when items pertinent to their responsibilities were under discussion. The costs incurred by my Department in contributing to the committee's work are largely travel and subsistence costs of about £930 per meeting, incurred in attending the two-day meetings in Brussels, and staff costs of about £480 per meeting. In addition to the time spent at the meetings themselves, officials spend a similar amount of time preparing for and reporting back on the meetings.

Items due to be considered by the committee at its next meeting include proposed changes to the critical uses of halon listed in annexe VII of the regulation, a mechanism for setting import quotas of HCFCs from 1 January 2003, and information on critical use procedures for methyl bromide.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the protection of species of wild fauna and flora by regulating trade is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56805]

Mr. Meacher: The Scientific Review Group was set up under the terms of Article 17 of Council Regulation (EC) No. 338/97 to examine scientific questions relating to the application of these regulations. These questions may be raised by the chairman, either on his own initiative or at the request of the members of the group, or by members of the Committee on Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora. It is composed of representatives from each member state and the UK is represented on the committee by scientific advisers from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (fauna) and the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew (flora).

The group has met three times over the last 12 months. The annual cost of its work is relatively small, although detailed figures cannot be provided without incurring disproportionate costs. The items currently under consideration by the committee include:

Application of Articles 4.1(a)(i) and 4.2(a) of the Regulation—opinions of the SRG on:

  procedure for making and transmitting SRG opinions

  imports form Madagascar

  "Psittacus erithacus"/Nigeria

  replies to consultations with third countries on "Phelsuma comorensis"

  review of annexe B animals subject to import restrictions

  "Amazona aestiva"/Argentina

  "Geochelone carbonaria"/Suriname

Export quotas 2002

Private husbandry or reptiles

Coral mariculture and fossil corals

18th meeting of the CITES Animals Committee

12th meeting of the CITES Plants Committee

Preparations for the 12th Conference of CITES Parties

Mortality in transport

Negative effects of captive breeding/artificial propagation operations.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Scientific review group for the protection of species of wild fauna and flora by regulating trade is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56806]

Mr. Meacher: The Committee on Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora was set up under the terms of Article 18 of Council Regulation (EC) No. 338–97 to assist the Commission in carrying out the functions set out at Article 19 of the Regulation, relating to the implementation within the Community of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES). It is composed of representatives from each member state and the UK is represented on the Committee by DEFRA officials.

The Committee has met three times over the last 12 months. The annual cost of its work is relatively small, although detailed figures cannot be provided without incurring disproportionate costs. The items currently under consideration by the Committee include:

Preparations for the 12th Conference of CITES Parties

Imports of mahogany from Brazil

Treatment of vagrant species listed in the European Birds directive

Regulation of trade in primates, rhinos, tigers and bears and parts or derivatives thereof

Status and transmission of SRG opinions

Treatment of ecological threat species

Marking of specimens in trade

Use of transponders

Import of hunting trophies

Annual and biennial reports

Outcome of CITES Committee meetings

Imports of reptiles from Madagascar.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Group of experts appointed by the Euratom Scientific and Technical Committee to address basic standards (Article 31) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56826]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

This expert Group is mandated directly by article 31 of the Euratom treaty. Three experts in radiation protection matters attend from the UK. The Group has met twice in the last 12 months. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

The task of the Group is to advise the Commission on the basic safety standards for the protection of the health of workers and the general public against the dangers arising from ionising radiations. Experts are appointed in a personal capacity and therefore do not serve a representative function.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Euratom Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (CST) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56732]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The Euratom Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee is mandated directly by article 134 of the Euratom Treaty. Five scientific experts attend from the UK. Meetings are held two or three times a year. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the Committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

The main task of the Committee is to advise the Commission on the nuclear component of the Community's work, in particular the fission and fusion content of its ongoing research programmes. Experts on the Committee are appointed in a personal capacity and therefore do not serve a representative function. The Treaty specifically states that they are not to be bound by mandatory instructions.

Farm Films Recovery Scheme

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assistance her Department gives to support recycling of used silage films; [57254]

(2) if she will make a statement on the Farm Films Recovery Scheme. [57253]

Mr. Meacher: The Farm Film Producers Group operated on a voluntary basis between 1994 and 1997 to collect farm plastics for recycling. A small number of voluntary local collection schemes still exist.

We will be addressing the question of how to deal with waste non-packaging farm plastics in the forthcoming consultation document on the application of the Waste Framework Directive to agricultural waste. We will consider whether a statutory scheme should be introduced in the light of responses to this consultation exercise.

Village Pub Diversification

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many requests have been made for information on village pub diversification, broken down by region. [57457]

Alun Michael: The "Pub is the Hub" good practice guide is issued by Business in the Community, the British Beer and Pub Association and the Countryside Agency. There are no central records held on requests for information on village pub diversification.

The Countryside Agency has funded eight projects located in public houses in the past year through their Community Services Grant. These are broken down by region as follows:

Region	
North East	0
North West	0
Yorkshire & Humber	1
East Midlands	1
West Midlands	0
Eastern	2
South East	4
South West	0

Rural Funding

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was spent on *(a)* parish plans, *(b)* community service grants and *(c)* parish transport grants, broken down by initiative, in 2001–02. [57461]

Alun Michael: The total outturn for expenditure on the Countryside Agency's Vital Villages Grant schemes until 31 March 2002 is: *(a)* Parish Plans Fund £399,000; *(b)* Community Services Grant £1.7 million; and *(c)* Parish Transport Fund £354,000.

Endangered Species

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the review of the Control of Trade in Endangered Species (Enforcement) Regulations 1997 will be completed. [57650]

Mr. Meacher: The review will be conducted in accordance with standard Cabinet Office guidelines for such reviews. This will involve discussions within Government (which are already under way), a pre-consultation process with the main stakeholder organisations, and a full formal public consultation exercise (which normally takes three months, to allow sufficient time for a considered response). How long the review will take will depend on the outcome of those consultations.

Bali Pre-conference

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* first class, *(b)* club class and *(c)* economy tickets have been booked for (i) Ministers, (ii) officials and (iii) special advisers attending the WSD conference in Bali. [57835]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* One Minister, two officials and one special adviser have booked first class tickets. Thirty officials have booked club class tickets.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her Department's budget is for the Bali pre-conference. [57839]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The Department's budget for the Bali preparatory meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development is approximately £86,000.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total budget is for the UK delegation to the Bali pre-conference. [57842]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The total budget for the UK Delegation for the fourth preparatory meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Bali will be approximately £180,000. This comprises air fares, hotel rooms, subsistence and office accommodation.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people will accompany her at public expense on her forthcoming trip to Bali; and what the total cost of the visit will be. [57654]

Mr. Meacher: There will be 28 people accompanying the Secretary of State during her forthcoming trip to Bali for the fourth preparatory meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. This will include representatives from DEFRA, DFID, DTI, FCO and the Cabinet Office; the total cost of the visit will be approximately £180,000. This comprises air fares, hotel rooms, subsistence and office accommodation.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Bailey: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Government will publish their response to the Environmental Audit Committee's First report of Session 2001–02, Departmental Responsibilities for Sustainable Development. [59802]

Margaret Beckett: I am pleased to announce that I have today, laid copies of the Government's response to the Environment Audit Committee's first report of the 2001–02 session, Departmental Responsibilities for Sustainable Development, in the Library of the House.

The Government's response sets out progress on sustainable development following the general election in 2001. We strongly believe that the creation of DEFRA has produced a department which is better equipped to champion sustainable development and ensure that sustainable development continues to be a priority for the Government.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Maladministration

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many findings there have been of maladministration by ombudsmen with responsibility for agencies under the remit of his Department since 1997. [56307]

Dr. Whitehead: Information on the handling of complaints is set out in tabular form by the Parliamentary Ombudsman each year as an attachment to his Annual Report. For those complaints where there was evidence of maladministration which warranted a full investigation, the table sets out how many complaints were upheld as being fully or partially justified. Copies of the Parliamentary Ombudsman's Annual Reports for the period 1997–98 to 2000–01 inclusive can be viewed in the House Library, or on the Parliamentary Ombudsman's website at "www.ombudsman.org.uk/publications"

Parish Councillors (Data Protection)

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether the Register of Parish Councillors' interests are covered by the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. [56617]

Dr. Whitehead: The provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 apply to the maintenance of the register of parish councillors' interests, subject to the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, including the requirement that the register should be made available for inspection by members of the public.

Statutory Law Enforcement Agencies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what statutory law enforcement agencies and prosecuting authorities there are within the responsibility of his Department; and what complaints procedure is available for each. [57101]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* The following divisions of the Department, its agencies, or bodies for which the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions is accountable to Parliament, may act as prosecuting authorities in relation to the matters for which they have responsibility:

British Transport Police
Civil Aviation Authority
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency
Health and Safety Executive
Maritime and Coastguard Agency
Radioactive Materials Transport Division
Transport Security Division
Vehicle Certification Agency
Vehicle Inspectorate.

All of the authorities listed have procedures in place for the handling of complaints. Complaints about any of these authorities may, in the first instance, be directed to the authority in question.

Additionally, all of the authorities listed are within the jurisdiction of the Parliamentary Ombudsman, with the exception of the British Transport Police. Complaints against the British Transport Police may be referred to the Police Complaints Authority.

Local authorities are also within the responsibility of the Department and operate their own complaints procedures. Complaints against local authorities can also be made in appropriate circumstances to the Local Government Ombudsman; in addition complaints against Councillors can be made to the Standards Board for England.

Train Protection and Warning System

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the estimated cost is of the implementation of the new train protection warning system on Scotland's rail network; and what percentage this cost represents of the total costs of the implementation of the Strategic Rail Authority's plan in Scotland. [58093]

Mr. Jamieson: Information provided by Railtrack indicates the estimated cost of installing the train protection and warning system on Scotland's rail network is in the region of £50 million. The Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan does not allocate costs by region.

Housing Repairs

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the backlog of disrepair of *(a)* local authority, *(b)* RSL, *(c)* private rented and *(d)* owner occupied housing in (i) Greater London and (ii) Enfield. [57922]

Ms Keeble: Through the 2001 Housing Strategy Statistical Appendix, London authorities have reported the following numbers of unfit dwellings on 1 April 2001:

All London	*Total stock*	*Unfit dwellings*
Local authority	526,739	29,490
RSL	284,240	9,038
Other public sector	13,917	870
Owner occupied	1,741,428	95,602
Other private sector	560,034	84,769

Enfield have not given a full breakdown of their unfit stock, but the figures available are as follows:

Enfield	*Total stock*	*Unfit dwellings*
Local authority	13,183	166
RSL	5,778	–
Other public sector	521	–
Total private sector	94,619	4,506

We do not have up to date information on expenditure required across tenures in London and Enfield. All London local authorities say they need to spend £5,380 million on capital investment at 1 April 2001 on their own stock. Enfield estimates that its current backlog of repairs on its own stock is about £50 million, of which about £8 million is required to bring its housing up to the Decent Homes standard. (All figures are from the 2001 Business Plan Statistical Appendix).

All local authorities are working towards providing numbers of non-decent homes within their own stock in July in their 2002 Housing Revenue Account Business Plans.

Commercial Aircraft

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the criteria are for determining the lowest permissible altitude of commercial aircraft operations around international airports; and which authority is responsible for them. [57543]

Mr. Jamieson: Provisions relating to the lowest height at which aircraft may fly are contained in the Rules of the Air Regulations 1996 (Statutory Instrument 1996 No. 1393). These are made under the Air Navigation Order and reflect internationally agreed safety standards and recommended practices. The Rules apply to all flights.

Rule 5 of the Rules of the Air Regulations is the low flying rule, and aircraft flying under Instrument Flight Rules must also comply with Rule 29 (minimum height).

The responsible authority for the rules of the air is the Civil Aviation Authority, the Government's safety regulator.

In addition some airports apply their own local restrictions within the immediate vicinity of the airport (normally within the local traffic circuit) for noise abatement purposes. These restrictions require aircraft to fly at heights greater than those specified in the low flying rules.

Unpaid Advis[illegible]

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 85W, what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of unpaid advisers who have assisted the work of his Department since June 1997 but are not included in the Cabinet Office's annual report "Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews 2000–01". [57034]

Dr. Whitehead *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* As my answer of 10 April made clear, Ministers in this Department have not appointed any unpaid advisers other than those accounted for in the list of Task Forces, Reviews and other ad hoc Advisory Groups.

"The New Humber Pilotage Service"

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions from which sources his Department derived its information in preparing the document "The New Humber Pilotage Service". [58350]

Mr. Jamieson: The sources are given in the document.

Potters Bar Derailment

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to publish the report from the formal investigation into the Potters Bar rail derailment by the Health and Safety Executive. [58655]

Dr. Whitehead: The Health and Safety Commission (HSC) will publish their formal report once the British Transport Police (BTP) and Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have completed their investigations.

Safety lessons learnt from the BTP/HSE investigations will be transmitted without delay to industry dutyholders.

Fire Service

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the major orders *(a)* won and *(b)* lost this year by the Fire Service College, Moreton-in-Marsh; what arrangements he is making for consultation on proposed changes to the Framework Document; and what the timescale is. [58735]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave him on 22 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 341W.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent research the Government have commissioned under the Pathfinder studies into fire brigades; what the conclusions were; and what action the Government proposes to take to meet the recommendations. [58713]

Dr. Whitehead: Some 50 separate studies have been commissioned the Fire Cover Task Group of the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council (CFBAC). The scope of the studies is too wide to summarise here. However, copies of the reports of all (48) currently completed studies can be found on my Department's website at "http://www.safety.dtlr.gov.uk/fire/fepd/fcr/fcrhome.htm".

It is the responsibility of the Task Group to make recommendations to the CFBAC on the research they have commissioned and the overall outcome of the Pathfinder trials. Their report is expected in the late summer.

When this is available it will be considered initially by the Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council, following which I expect to consult widely, since I expect the review to provide the fundamental basis of planning delivery of service by fire brigades in the future.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what investigations he has commissioned in the current year into aspects of the *(a)* financial and *(b)* other forms of management of the Fire Service College, Moreton-in-Marsh; and what consequent reports he has received. [58733]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 22 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 341-42W.

Regional Airports

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to support and facilitate the expansion of regional airports. [58581]

Mr. Jamieson: A New Deal for Transport (1998) said that the Government would

> "encourage the growth of regional airports to meet local demand for air travel where consistent with sustainable development principles"

in order to

> "maximise the contribution they make to national and regional economies; relieve pressure on congested airports in the south east of England; and reduce the need for long surface journeys (particularly by road) to south east airports."

Before the summer recess, we aim to publish a series of regional consultation documents on airports and air services that will set out alternative options for how these aims might be achieved. Responses to the consultation will be used to inform the publication of an air transport White Paper, planned for late this year.

Tourism

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what importance he attaches to the needs of tourism in his plans to improve England's road network. [58579]

Mr. Jamieson: Individual road improvement schemes are subject to the New Approach to Appraisal (NATA), introduced in 1998. NATA takes account of the expected impact of a proposed scheme on the environment, safety, the economy, accessibility and integration. The assessment includes an appraisal of the extent to which a proposed scheme may help the regeneration of an area. The time savings and reductions in vehicle operating costs for tourists (including coaches) are included in the overall appraisal of the benefits of a proposed road scheme.

Rural Population

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 16 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 798W, on the rural population, if he will estimate *(a)* the number of population increase and *(b)* the number of households projected in (i) deep rural and (ii) mixed rural areas by 2016. [58779]

Ms Keeble: The latest sub-national population projections for England to 2016 are the 1996-based projections prepared by the Office for National Statistics. Between 1996 and 2016 the population in those local authorities categorised by my Department as "deep rural" is projected to rise by 0.26 million and the number of households by 0.21 million. Over the same period, the population in those local authorities categorised by my Department as "mixed rural" is projected to rise by 0.77 million and the number of households by 0.67 million.

Starter Home Initiative

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 16 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 799W, on the starter home initiative, how many key workers will receive financial support in small rural settlements with a population of *(a)* 3000 or less, *(b)* 3001–5000 and *(c)* 5001–10,000. [58778]

Ms Keeble: Information is not available in the form requested.

Starter home initiative funding has been allocated to schemes which propose to help around 360 key workers in rural settlements with a population of 10,000 or less. This is a correction to the answers I gave on 9 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 278W and 16 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 799W.

PFI Housing Schemes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what advice he provides to local authorities on developing their outline business case for submission in bidding rounds for PFI housing schemes. [57928]

Ms Keeble: The Department offers advice to local authorities at each stage of the housing private finance initiative (PFI) process. At the bidding stage the Department sends a letter to all authorities inviting them to submit expressions of interest. That letter is accompanied by guidance on issues to cover in submissions. The guidance is available on the Department's housing website.

Following the expression of interest stage, the Department assesses the bids. The successful authorities are invited to develop their outline business case (OBC), and my officials offer advice to authorities on an individual basis during this stage. In addition, guidance is available from the Public Private Partnerships Programme (the 4Ps), with whom the Department is working closely in developing PFI for social housing. The OBC has to be endorsed by the inter-departmental Project Review Group (PRG) which is chaired by the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) who also provide general guidance on PFI procurement.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what criteria are used by the inter-departmental Project Review Group in assessing bids from local authorities for PFI housing schemes. [57927]

Ms Keeble: The assessment of bids for private finance initiative (PFI) housing schemes is carried out by my Department, with the help of the Government Offices for the Regions. In our recent bidding round schemes were assessed on the following criteria:

value for money and whether an options appraisal had been carried out;

evidence of housing demand and fitting in with the council's wider strategy;

risk transfer;

stakeholder and council consultation;

meeting the general PFI criteria (e.g. innovation, sustainability and design quality);

management and timetable.

In order for a scheme to proceed, it also has to be endorsed at a later stage by the Project Review Group (PRG), who ensure that the projects which local authorities take into procurement are deliverable. PRG's assessment of all PFI schemes is based on the following criteria:

affordability;

output specification;

bankability of the scheme;

key terms and conditions;

use of appropriate comparators;

suitability of proposed advisers;

indicative timetable;

project team;

commitment of the sponsors;

statutory process.

Construction Industry

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what further self-certification schemes are being planned for the construction industry; and whether they will be subject to public consultation. [59188]

Dr. Whitehead: A number of organisations have contacted my Department with proposals for self-certification schemes. Each of these schemes will be reviewed on their merits. As there have been two public consultations on self-certification, we do not intend to issue a further public consultation before recognising schemes for work already controlled by the Building Regulations. Individual trade and professional bodies may undertake some consultation, depending on the nature of the schemes they are developing.

The hon. Member may wish to note that my Department issued a consultation document on 20 May entitled "Proposals for new safety requirements for electrical installation work in dwellings", which makes reference to self-certification by competent persons as a means of alleviating some of the financial and administrative burdens the proposed extension of the Building Regulations might create.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost of maintaining the Millennium Dome, including security costs, has been *(a)* since its closure and *(b)* in each of the last three months for which figures are available. [58605]

Ms Keeble: Since 31 December 2000, when the Millennium Experience ended, the cost of management, maintenance and security of the Dome has been £3.9 million, of which £1.9 million was incurred by the New Millennium Experience Company (NMEC) and £2 million by English Partnerships (EP). This includes the final figures for expenditure in December 2001, January and February 2002, which are £266,000, £251,000 and £287,000 respectively. However, the January and February figures exclude telecommunications costs, which await final confirmation due to on-going delays by the service provider particularly in transferring accounts formerly held by NMEC to EP.

Costs incurred by NMEC have been paid from the grant already approved by the Millennium Commission. EP costs are from their normal budget and will be recovered from eventual sale proceeds.

English Regions

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if it is his policy that regional tourist boards should remain independent of regional assemblies created under proposals outlined in the White Paper, Your Region, Your Choice: Revitalising the English Regions. [58602]

Mr. Raynsford: Regional tourist boards will remain separate bodies from elected regional assemblies, but the assemblies will allocate funding from their block grants for the regional tourist boards and will provide direction on how this should be used.

Groundwork

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on progress in establishing a Lancashire-wide groundwork. [57607]

Ms Keeble: The Department is currently considering the proposal from Groundwork for a Lancashire-wide trust. A final decision is yet to be taken.

Mobile Phones

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to commission research into the dangers posed by the use of hands-free mobile phones while driving. [58202]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to my answer of 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 362W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Janet Anderson).

In-flight Air Quality

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to meet the airlines to discuss the quality of cabin air in domestic and international flights. [58206]

Mr. Jamieson: The issue of cabin air quality was comprehensively addressed by the House of Lords inquiry into air travel and health. Since publication of the House of Lords findings, discussions between Government and the airline industry have been pursued through meetings of the Aviation Health Working Group. The Aviation Health Working Group was established to advise Ministers on all issues relating to aviation health.

Permanent members of the group are the Department for Transport Local Government and the Regions (chair), the Department of Health, the Civil Aviation Authority and the Health and Safety Executive. Representatives from the airlines, as well as consumer groups and other interested parties such as medical specialists, are regularly invited to participate in selected meetings. At present we have no plans to meet airlines to discuss the quality of cabin air in domestic and international flights, but European Union funded research into cabin air quality is currently under way and my Department will continue to monitor this work closely.

Road Safety

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 14 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 520W, on road works injuries, what safety guidelines are issued to contractors working on the road; and what plans the Government have to introduce further safety measures for contractors working on the roads. [57930]

Dr. Whitehead: Following is a list of documents which provide safety guidelines for contractors working on the road:

The Traffic Signs Manual, chapter 8 on Traffic Safety Measures and Signs for Road Works and Temporary Situations 1991 (Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions)

Planning for Safety—Guidance notes for the health and safety of workers at in-service motorway roadwork sites (Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions)

The Mobile Lane Closure Technique—TD49/97 (Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions)

Notes for Guidance on Safety at Roadwork—County Surveyors Society and Department Transport (Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions)

Safety at Street Works and Road Works: A Code of Practice (Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions)

Crossing high-speed roads on foot during temporary traffic-management works—CIS 53 (Health and safety Executive).

The Highways Agency established a steering group last year, consisting of representatives from public bodies and from across industry to look at safe practice in temporary traffic management operations on high speed roads. It has prepared an action plan consisting of short, medium and long term aims and is reviewing current guidance and practice.

Rail Safety

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what research his Department has commissioned into the prevention of rail failures and accidents. [58207]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive and the Office of the Rail Regulator jointly funded research into the causation and treatment of gauge corner cracking by Arup and Partners International Ltd., and the Transportation Technology Centre Incorporated. Additional research is currently planned into track integrity and the effect on rolling stock.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what alterations were made to Railtrack plc's safety case following the appointment of an administrator. [58019]

Mr. Byers: On 8 October 2001, following Railtrack plc's entry into railway administration and consequent changes to the organisation, the HSE directed Railtrack plc to prepare and submit a revision to its safety case. Railtrack plc complied with the direction and HSE accepted this revised safety case, covering minor administrative and organisational changes, on 14 November 2001.

In compliance with the requirements of the Railways (Safety Case) Regulations 2000, Railtrack plc submitted a new thoroughly revised safety case to the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) on 28 June 2001. The HSE process of assessment was completed and the safety case was accepted on 1 May 2002.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what representations he has received over the past six months about the condition of the railway track between Colchester and London Liverpool Street from *(a)* Railtrack, *(b)* train operating companies, *(c)* rail unions and *(d)* others; and if he will make a statement. [58615]

Mr. Jamieson: None.

Terrorist Activity (Railways)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many incidents of *(a)* terrorist activity and *(b)* suspected terrorist activity have been recorded by (i) the British Transport Police and (ii) other organisations relating to the railways in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [58192]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* After consultation with the British Transport Police, I can confirm that since 1997 the following numbers of incidents have been recorded in relation to security of the UK's rail network:

1997: 562 threats, three viable devices or explosions, 33 hoax bomb items

1998: 280 threats, 0 viable devices or explosions, 30 hoax bomb items

1999: 323 threats, 0 viable devices or explosions, 20 hoax bomb items

2000: 253 threats, two viable devices or explosions, 10 hoax bomb items

2001: 347 threats, three viable devices or explosions, 18 hoax bomb items (plus 94 hoax biological items, eg white powder)

2002: 58 threats, 0 viable devices or explosions, 9 hoax bomb items.

In this instance "threat" means the number of times that railway infrastructure has specifically been indicated as a possible target in each given year, and "hoax bomb items" constitutes the number of items that have deliberately been assembled to resemble an explosive device.

Railway Vandalism

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals he has to combat acts of vandalism on railway lines; and if he will make a statement on the implementation of anti-vandalism programmes on the railways. [58200]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* The problem of vandalism on the railways is taken very seriously by the Government, the Health and Safety Executive, Railtrack, the British Transport police and the railway industry.

Current initiatives to reduce vandalism on the rail network include:

"Leave Sites Safe and Secure"—a Railtrack campaign to clear lineside debris which could be used in acts of vandalism. The overall aim of the campaign is to remove or safely secure all lineside materials by October 2002. The railway industry is working closely with HM Railway Inspectorate (HMRI) to achieve this objective;

"National Route Crime Week" 17–25 June sponsored by the National Co-ordinating Group for Trespass and Vandalism (an SRA/Railway Safety body). There will be a number of activities including an open debate at the Health and Safety Commission's (HSC) Rail Industry Advisory Committee meeting on 25 June;

Industry programmes for reducing vandalism, including a range of targeted engineering measures such as improved railway fencing and caging bridges at vulnerable locations. HMRI monitor these programmes and take action if necessary.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* incidents of and *(b)* prosecutions there were for (i) vandalism, (ii) informed vandalism and (iii) trespass on rail lines in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [58196]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* Information held by the British Transport police on reported vandalism offences (there is no defined difference between informed and non-informed vandalism) in each of the last five years is contained in the following table:

	Number of offences
1997–98	13,751
1998–99	12,855
1999–2000	13,743
2000–01	13,349
2001–02	15,075

Information held by the British Transport police on adults/juveniles charged or summonsed to court for vandalism from 1998–99 onwards is contained in the following table (due to archiving issues the BTP are unable to supply data prior to this data):

	Number
1998–99	2,262
1999–2000	1,928
2000–01	1,963
2001–02	2,200

Note:

Those persons charged or summonsed to court may or may not have been convicted and the data do not include cautions.

Information held by the British Transport police on reported trespass offences in each of the last five years is contained in the following table:

	Number of reported trespass offences
1997–98	17,451
1998–99	16,535
1999–2000	13,896
2000–01	14,964
2001–02	15,395

Information held by the British Transport police on adults/juveniles charged or summonsed to court for trespassing from 1998–99 onwards is contained in the following table (due to archiving issues the BTP are unable to supply data prior to this data):

	Number
1998–99	1,170
1999–2000	973
2000–01	1,215
2001–02	903

Note:

Those persons charged or summonsed to court may or may not have been convicted and the data do not include cautions.

Mass Decontamination

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list those groups and individuals from which he has taken advice in preparing the UK's strategy for mass decontamination in the event of *(a)* chemical and *(b)* biological attack. [50857]

Mr. Hutton: In preparing the United Kingdom's response, advice has been taken from the following sources:

Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (DTLR)

Ambulance Services Association

Defence Science and Technology Laboratory

The nuclear industry, including Nuclear Emergency Planning Liaison Group, National Radiological Protection Board, and Atomic Weapons Establishment

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Environment Agency

Civil Contingency Secretariat

Health and Safety Executive

Defence and Nuclear, Biological, Chemical Centre

London Resilience Committee

Association of Chief Police Officers

Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers' Association

Local Government Association.

The Department of Health and DTLR continue to research the approaches of other countries, including Japan and the United States of America.

WALES

Data Protection Act

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will place in the Library copies of each version of the internal guidance which have been drawn up by his Department since 1 January 1999 to assist staff in his Department to answer subject access requests under the Data Protection Act 1998. [53374]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Mr. Wills), gave to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) on 25 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 446W.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales on how many occasions between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [58724]

Mr. Paul Murphy: Between 1 April 2001 and 31 March 2002, a departmental special adviser accompanied me to Brussels on one occasion. It is not practicable separately to identify the cost of this visit, but the journey was judged to comply with the Civil Service Code.

Sick Leave

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many days of sick leave were taken in his Department last year; how many related to employees suffering *(a)* stress and *(b)* other mental health problems; and what the cost was to his Department. [56488]

Mr. Paul Murphy *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* The number of days of sick leave taken in my Department last year was 232 days. This averages to 6.1 days per staff year. Sickness records are not broken down by *(a)* stress (other than work-related) or *(b)* other mental health.

The civil service is committed to reducing sickness absence by 20 per cent. by 2010 (to 8.3 days per staff year). Wales Office average of sick leave for last year is already below this target.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Visitor Tours

Mrs. Roe: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what further consideration the Commission has given to visitor tours. [59659]

Mr. Kirkwood: Hon. Members were informed on 19 March of the Commission's wish to improve the arrangements to provide high quality tours for constituents and other visitors to the Palace, and its view that there should be a single official tours organisation supporting both the permanent Summer Opening and tours at other times. The Commission felt that this was an important part of its strategic aim to increase public understanding and knowledge of the House and its work.

At its meeting on 20 May the Commission considered the advice of the Administration Committee and the Board of Management on the way forward. We also took into account the views of a number of right hon. and hon. Members, their staff and staff of the House who have helpfully contributed to the process.

The House of Lords has an equal interest in visitor tours. We have sought the views of the authorities of that House on the improvements we would like to see, and will be working closely with them on the details.

We think it is important that Members should have the same freedom and flexibility to arrange tours for their constituents as is now the case, but we believe that there is scope for improvement. We decided that:

> for the convenience of Members and their staff, the tours office should be a "one-stop shop", making bookings, issuing permits and allocating guides, and that funds should be provided for this in the current financial year. We thought that the separate, well-understood system for allocating Gallery tickets should remain unchanged, and that the separately organised Summer Opening primarily for tourists should not be affected;
>
> informal visits of six people or fewer accompanied by Members, Peers, or Officers of either House, or four people accompanied by other permanent passholders, should continue as at present. The ability of Members, their staff, and staff of the House to guide their own larger parties should they wish would be unaffected;
>
> in the interests of fairness, unguided and unaccompanied visits should be discontinued;
>
> guides should be drawn primarily from staff of the House, who have given excellent service over a number of years; and that staff from all House Departments should be given the opportunity to contribute. We supported the idea of a guiding qualification that would help maintain high standards and encourage House staff to take part;
>
> tours should emphasise the role and work of the House just as much as the history and the heritage of the building.

We thought that the new arrangements should begin to operate from the beginning of the next Session of Parliament, although some aspects (for example the guiding qualification) will need to be phased in over a longer period of time. We were also conscious of the restrictions that possible changes in sitting times of this House might impose on access. In order not to reduce the total number of visitors who are able to come to the House, Saturday opening may be an option.

We had well in mind the need to ensure that the costs to visitors are kept as low as possible, especially in the interests of groups such as school parties and old age pensioners. We have asked the Finance and Services Committee to look at possible cost structures and to report to us for our next meeting. We have also asked the Board of Management now to develop a detailed implementation plan.

The views of Members, their staff and staff of the House will be a welcome contribution to the development of the new arrangements. They should be sent to the Serjeant at Arms as the member of the Board of Management responsible for this project.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

BBC Wales

Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the basis was for the reference in her advertisement for the post of National Governor (Wales) of the BBC to a substantial proportion of the output of BBC Wales being in Welsh. [57208]

Dr. Howells: BBC Wales provides S4C with 10 hours per week of Welsh language programming, as part of its commitment under the 1996 Broadcasting Act. It also produces 18 hours a day of radio in Welsh on Radio Cymru and provides an extensive Welsh language online service, Cymru'r Byd.

Listed Buildings (London)

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many *(a)* Grade I and *(b)* Grade II listed buildings there are in (i) Greater London and (ii) the London Borough of Enfield; what public funds including Lottery funds have been spent on them in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement. [57920]

Dr. Howells: The numbers of list entries as at 17 May, 2002 for listed buildings in Greater London are 576 at Grade I, 1,243 at Grade II* and 16,157 at Grade II; in Enfield as at the same date there are three list entries for buildings graded at Grade I, 13 at Grade II* and 256 at Grade II.

English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund are the main distributors of public funds for listed buildings. The public funds spent on listed buildings by English Heritage in each of the last five years are as follows:

Public funds for listed buildings—1997 to 2002

£

Year 1 April to 31 March	*Enfield*	*Greater London*[1]
1997–98	2,285	2,599,000
1998–99	74,754	2,196,000
1999–2000	24,023	2,672,000
2000–01	Nil	2,083,000
2001–02	1,618	2,187,000

[1] Rounded figures

It is not possible to ascertain the public funds spent through the Heritage lottery fund, but only the amounts awarded for funding listed buildings each year; these are therefore estimated and projected figures as follows:

	Enfield (£)	*Greater London (£)*	*Number of buildings funded*
1997	365,048	19,272,448	38
1998	264,236	15,098,893	51
1999	Nil	5,273,321	24
2000	Nil	13,230,900	42
2001	Nil	29,912,614	37

Gaelic Programmes

Mr. MacDonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many hours of Gaelic programmes per year are required of *(a)* the BBC, *(b)* Grampian Television and *(c)* Scottish Television under the Multiplex Licence (Broadcasting of Programmes in Gaelic) Order 1996; and how many hours have been provided by each of the above broadcasters in (i) 1997, (ii) 1998, (iii) 1999, (iv) 2000, (v) 2001 and (vi) 2002. [57891]

Dr. Howells: The Multiplex Licence (Broadcasting of Programmes in Gaelic) Order 1996 requires the holder of the multiplex licence under which Channel 5 and S4C Digital are broadcast (SDN) to broadcast at least 30 minutes of Gaelic programming every day in Scotland during peak evening viewing time. In complying with this requirement SDN must broadcast at least 30 hours of Gaelic programmes per year supplied by each of the BBC, Scottish Television and Grampian Television. Under section 32(3) of the Broadcasting Act 1996, the BBC, Scottish Television and Grampian Television are required to provide SDN, free of charge, with such programmes in Gaelic as have been broadcast by the supplier as the holder may request.

In practice, programmes from the BBC, Scottish Television and Grampian Television are provided to SDN indirectly via the Gaelic Broadcasting Committee (CCG). I understand that, of the programmes supplied to SDN by the CCG, the following hours had previously been broadcast on the BBC, Scottish Television and Grampian Television (the Gaelic service (TeleG) on SDN did not begin broadcasting until 31 October 1999):

			Hours
	BBC	*STV*	*GTV*
1999	14.5	19.5	6.0
2000	38	120.5	56
2001	31.5	161	41.5
2002[1]	13.5	37.5	20.5

[1] To 30 April 2002.

Communication Policy

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which Ministers have met representatives of *(a)* the BBC, *(b)* ITV, *(c)* Channel 4 and *(d)* Channel 5 to discuss Government communication policy since October 2001. [57847]

Dr. Howells: Since October 2001 my ministerial colleagues and I have met representatives from all four broadcasters, both informally and in the course of our ministerial duties, on a wide range of issues including the development of communication policy. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists.

National Lottery

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the advice that her Department gives people in receipt of Lottery funds on conflicts of interest. [58108]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* The financial directions issued to Lottery distributing bodies require them to devise and abide by a procedure for handling potential conflicts of interest which may arise in the evaluation of applications by the body or individual members of that body. The directions also deal with the avoidance of actual or perceived conflicts when bodies solicit Lottery applications; and with conflicts which might arise in connection with applications from companies or persons which the distributing body owns, controls or is able materially to influence.

In preparing their annual accounts, Lottery distributing bodies are required to comply with UK Accounting Standard FRS8 Related Party Transactions. The objective is to ensure that financial statements contain the disclosures necessary to draw attention to the possibility that the reported financial position and results may have been affected by the existence of related parties and transactions between them.

Equal Treatment

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what new data series separated by gender, race, disability and age have been commissioned by her Department since August 1997. [58201]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* No new data series separated by gender, race, disability and age have been commissioned since August 1997. However, the following data have been commissioned which can potentially be separated by gender, ethnicity and age. Data on disability are not available from these sources.

Museums and Galleries

Aspects of age and ethnicity are available from a series, commissioned by DCMS in February 2000, to be collected annually from its sponsored museums and galleries.

Digital television

Data on age, gender, and ethnicity are available from DCMS commissioned MORI research into consumer attitudes to digital television. This research was published in June 2001 and has been re-commissioned for publication in June 2002.

DCMS sectors

Data on ethnicity, gender and age is available from two surveys co-funded by DCMS and managed by the Office For National Statistics. Funding to the General Household Survey has been on-going since its reinstatement in 2000–01, and has also been provided for the first run of the Time Use Survey, published in 2002.

Wage Costs

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 2 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 919W, what her latest assessment is of the wage costs of museums, galleries and arts organisations. [58660]

Dr. Howells: The latest estimate of the total wage costs of museums, galleries and arts organisations sponsored by DCMS is £175 million. This covers the national museums and galleries and The Arts Council of England.

The total is drawn from information supplied by the sponsored bodies on their pay bill during the 2001–02 financial year.

Television Licence Fee

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will abolish the television licence fee; and if she will make a statement. [58551]

Dr. Howells: No. The Government believe that, at present, the television licence fee retains distinct advantages over the possible alternative methods for funding the BBC. We have therefore made clear that the licence fee will remain the main source of BBC funding at least until the expiry of the BBC's current royal charter at the end of 2006. Future funding arrangements will need to be considered as part of the charter review process, which will commence in 2004.

Sports Facilities

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many publicly owned playing fields have been sold in each of the last 15 years. [58780]

Mr. Caborn: Data on the number of playing fields sold is not collected. Sport England do however, monitor the number of planning applications concerning playing fields in their role as statutory consultee. The Government will shortly be publishing combined figures for *(a)* applications from schools submitted to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for the disposal or change of use of school playing fields (which are already published monthly), and *(b)* figures from Sport England giving details of planning applications affecting playing fields which have been referred to them as statutory consultee (which are already published quarterly), along with *(c)* relevant data from the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much was spent by local authorities on sport facilities in each of the last 15 years. [58667]

Mr. Caborn: Details of the expenditure by local authorities on the construction, conversion and renovation of sports facilities are shown in the following table. Figures for 2000–01 and 2001–02 are not available. (For the purposes of this question the figures relate to built facilities and do not include running costs (eg staffing costs, other overheads)):

£ million

Year	*Indoor sports and Leisure centres*	*Swimming pools*
1987–88	71.6	45.5
1988–89	88.6	49.6
1989–90	173.4	80.6
1990–91	145.3	69.0
1991–92	107.8	50.6
1992–93	52.7	35.1
1993–94	56.9	27.4
1994–95	73.4	30.3
1995–96	74.3	35.9
1996–97	78.9	35.8

£ million

Year	*Sports facilities*
1997–98	167.6
1998–99	191.0
1999–2000	190.7

Tourism

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will publish her response to the recent report of the Tourism Alliance commissioned by her. [58661]

Dr. Howells: The Government have not responded point by point to the Tourism Alliance document "Tourism Spending Priorities", which was published in April. However, the document's recommendations will be taken on board in developing the modernisation programme for the tourism and hospitality industry, including marketing, quality, skills, modernised communication and structural reform. The document identifies a number of key strategic spending issues which we will be considering in the coming months.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what funding will be allocated to the regional development agencies in support of the tourism industry in the year 2002–03 by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* other Government agencies; [58603]

(2) what plans she has to ensure the continuing independence of the regional tourist boards; [58599]

(3) what offers of financial support she has received for the proposed public-private coalition for the marketing of English tourism; [58600]

(4) when she expects a campaign to market English tourism to be launched; [58598]

(5) what funding her Department intends to allocate to the proposed public-private coalition responsible for the marketing of English tourism. [58601]

Dr. Howells: The announcement on 13 May about the structural reform of English tourism represents a radical change and yesterday I held the first meeting of the Steering Group to start considering the detail of how to take our proposals forward. We aim to report the Group's findings this summer.

No decision on the level of funding for marketing has yet been taken—an announcement about resources for tourism will be made at the appropriate time but not in advance of the spending round decisions. We have not sought, nor yet received offers of financial support, but I am sure that the industry will respond well, as it did for the Million Visitor campaign earlier in the year.

Depending on the details of transition to the new structures, we hope to be in a position to start marketing domestically in 2003–04. The precise decisions on dates will of course be for the public-private coalition to decide upon.

Regional development agencies will in future play a stronger part in the strategic leadership of tourism. However, no decisions on funding have yet been taken and the level of that funding will depend on the precise allocation of new responsibilities. We will continue to encourage RDAs to take account of the huge importance of tourism to their regions, both its direct and indirect impacts, when they take decisions about allocating their single pot.

Regional tourist boards are private companies limited by guarantee (one is a trust) and so are independent by nature. They are the natural partners for RDAs, with much tourism expertise, and we hope they will all forge effective working relationships with the RDAs.

Prize Competitions

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action the Government are taking in respect of its commitment in paragraph 4.53 of "A Safe Bet for Success" to carry out a separate review of prize competitions and similar quasi-gambling products. [59721]

Mr. Caborn: We are issuing a consultation paper today, which is also available on our website www.culture.gov.uk. The Government does not want to affect companies' ability to run genuine and harmless sales promotions. But it is important that operators should not be able to circumvent the principle that lotteries should not be run for commercial gain.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the Community action programme concerning co-operation policy in the youth field, including European voluntary service and youth exchanges within the Community and with third countries (YOUTH) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [57493]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I have been asked to reply.

The purpose of the Youth Programme Committee is set out in the Council Decision 1031/2000/EC of 13 April 2000, which established the "Youth" Community action programme. The Youth Programme Committee has met twice over the last 12 months. One official and one expert attend the Committee meetings. Travel expenses are met from Commission resources. The travel and subsistence costs to public funds amount to approximately £1,100 over the last 12 months, of which approximately £800 was reimbursed by the Commission.

The date of the next meeting has yet to be announced by the Commission and an agenda has not been published. However, the previous meeting in December 2001 considered the Commission's White Paper on Youth, adopted the 2002 Youth Programme Work Plan and approved the 2002 Budget.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Middle East

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to his answer of 11 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 616W, on Israel, what the final cost of the damage to projects in the area administered by the Palestinian Authority that have been funded by the UK on a bilateral basis is; and what plans he has to call for financial compensation. [58520]

Clare Short: The final cost of damage to UK-funded projects has still to be confirmed. We have also recently learned of damage to fourteen vehicles the UK provided to the Palestinian police force in 1995. The replacement cost would be about £280,000. In common with European Union partners we reserve the right to seek compensation from the Israeli authorities.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to his answer of 11 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 616W, on Israel, what the outcome was of the meeting between the Task Force and Minister Eliezer. [58519]

Clare Short: No formal response was given by Minister Ben Eliezer. Subsequent discussions with the Israeli authorities reveal plans for a tightening of travel restrictions affecting the movement of people and goods. This has serious implications for the Palestinian economy, Palestinian society and the viability of the future Palestinian state. In common with the European Union, and other partners, we are considering how we should address this unwelcome development.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with other countries about co-operating in paying for the damage caused to Palestinian areas during the recent Israeli incursions with special reference to Jenin. [58020]

Clare Short: A World bank led team has recently completed a damage assessment. We have been fully involved in that process, including discussions about potential funding opportunities. Initial indications are that at least $150 million—out of an estimated total cost of $360 million—will be readily available for urgent priority repairs. We are currently discussing with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian refugees the provision of long term technical assistance to support the rebuilding of the Jenin refugee camp.

Sustainable Development

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made towards the implementation of national strategies for sustainable development for developing countries; and what involvement she has had with the development of the United Nations policy guidance. [58570]

Clare Short: My Department has been working within the OECD's Development Assistance Committee and the United Nations to reach international agreement on the characteristics of national strategies for sustainable development. In April 2001 the high level meeting of the Development Assistance Committee agreed guidelines on principles of planning for sustainable development. These principles were discussed at an international forum on national sustainable development strategies, held in Ghana in November 2001. This forum was organised by the United Nations Department for Economic and Social Affairs with support from my Department.

An important outcome of this work has been the conclusion that good poverty reduction strategies contain the elements necessary for strategic planning for sustainable development and fulfil the role of national strategies for sustainable development. My Department is providing support in over 30 of the 41 countries which have produced interim or full PRSPs.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Côte d'Ivoire) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [58507]

Clare Short: My officials are unaware of any meetings of a Joint Committee (EEC-Côte d'Ivoire). In response to our inquiries, the European Commission was also unable to recall such a committee ever having met or what its mandate might have been.

Parliamentary Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of parliamentary advisers appointed to serve her Department. [56979]

Clare Short: Ministers in this Department have made no such appointments.

HIV

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether there will be an open call from the European Commission for non-Governmental organisations to present proposals targeting HIV prevention in youth under budget line B7–6211. [58136]

Clare Short: The Commission will prioritise interventions targeting HIV prevention in youth under budget line B7–6211. An open call for proposals will be made in July 2002.

Reproductive Health

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when the European Commission is planning to issue calls for projects in 2002 for budget line B7–6312 Aid for Population and Reproduction Health in Developing Countries funding. [58135]

Clare Short: The European Commission plans to issue calls for proposals to budget line B7–6312 in July 2002.

Somalian Refugees

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many Somalian refugees are believed to be camped in *(a)* Kenya and *(b)* Ethiopia. [58100]

Clare Short: The latest figures from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees indicate there are *(a)* 129,800 Somalian refugees in Kenya and *(b)* 50,906 Somalian refugees in Ethiopia. The Kenya figure does not include approximately 10,000 people who have crossed the border into Kenya at Mandera this month.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action the Government are taking to assist the Government of Kenya to deal with Somalian refugees from the town of Bula Hawa. [58101]

Clare Short: None. The Government of Kenya have not asked us for any assistance, and we understand that many of the refugees have already returned to Bula Hawa. Several UN agencies and NGOs are working with the Kenyan authorities and the refugees who have not yet returned, to ensure the latter receive the assistance they need, though we understand that food distribution is proving difficult as a result of the security situation. British officials in Nairobi continue to monitor the situation closely.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations the Government have made to the Government of Kenya for Somalian refugees from the town of Bula Hawa to be allowed to remain around Mandera until the fighting in their home areas subsides. [58099]

Clare Short: None. UNHCR is discussing with the Government of Kenya how best to look after the interests of the refugees in around Mandera. We understand that some have agreed to go to the established refugee camp in Dadaab rather than stay near to Mandera. British officials in Nairobi are in close touch with UNCHR and other concerned agencies, and are monitoring the situation as it evolves.

Peru

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance the Government will be offering Peru following the announcement by President Alejandro Toledo diverting military spending to basic social services for children. [57678]

Clare Short: We are pleased that President Toledo has reaffirmed the commitment that he made on assuming government in Peru last year to reduce military expenditures and to divert the funds to social expenditures. In support of this and other pro-poor policies, we have provided additional support to Peru in the last year, and we will continue to work closely with the Government and civil society in Peru to support improved access to basic services, for the poorest and most excluded people, including children.

Anglo-Italian Meetings

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development on how many occasions in the last six months members of her Department have met their Italian counterparts; and what subjects were discussed. [56885]

Clare Short: Members of my Department meet their counterparts from other countries on a regular basis. It is not possible without disproportionate effort to provide details of all meetings that have taken place between staff of my Department and their Italian counterparts.

Burma

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People regarding the provision of humanitarian aid to internally displaced people in Burma. [57660]

Clare Short: The UK contributes to the costs of providing safe refuge and assistance for both Karen refugees in Thailand and internally displaced people in Burma. This includes funding through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Burmese Border Consortium and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Officials from my Department have met the Committee for Internally Displaced Karen People, and we are aware of its work through our more regular contacts with the Burmese Border Consortium.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action the Government are taking to get *(a)* food and *(b)* medical supplies to internally displaced Karen, Kaenni and Shan people in Burma. [57661]

Clare Short: The situation for internally displaced people in Burma remains extremely vulnerable. Many of these people have taken refuge in remote, inaccessible and politically sensitive areas, making it difficult to conduct any detailed humanitarian assessment of their situation. In 2001–02 we provided humanitarian assistance amounting to over £2 million for both refugees and internally displaced people within Burma. This included funding through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Burmese Border Consortium and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on progress towards creating a Government of National Unity in the Democratic Republic of Congo. [58096]

Clare Short: The Inter-Congolese Dialogue reached agreement on a wide range of issues and passed 37 resolutions. But it did not reach agreement on the crucial issue of a transitional leadership. An agreement was signed outside the ICD between President Kabila and the Chairman of the MLC, Jean-Pierre Bemba, which a number of political parties and members of civil society also signed. The RCD-Goma and some political parties including UPDS of Tshishekedi did not. Intensive efforts continue to find an inclusive agreement acceptable to all Congolese elements of the ICD as envisaged by the Lusaka Agreement.

UN Aid Pledge

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent steps her Department has taken to meet the UN pledge of wealthy countries to spend 0.7 per cent. of national income on international aid. [58213]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have made clear their commitment to the United Nations' 0.7 per cent. oda/GNI target and to reversing the decline in UK development assistance. In 1997 the UK's oda/GNI ratio was 0.26 per cent. By 2003–04 it will have risen to 0.33 per cent. This represents an increase in the UK's development assistance budget of 45 per cent. in real terms.

The Chancellor confirmed in his November 2001 pre-Budget report that in the next Spending Review, for the years 2003–04 to 2005–06, the Government will not only raise significantly the amounts of our own overseas development aid but also raise its share in national income. Further details of the review will be published later this year.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Mongolia

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to promote trade with, and United Kingdom investment in, Mongolia; and if he will make a statement. [39948]

Mr. MacShane: Mongolia is a specialised market and British exporters often need help in establishing themselves. Trade Partners UK maintains a market information service on Mongolia for potential exporters. Trade Promotion is also a high priority of the British embassy in Ulaanbaatar. Her Majesty's ambassador and his team are fully equipped to help British exporters pursue business in the country.

Grenade Licence Application

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what *(a)* legal and *(b)* human rights factors were taken into account before 1998 when his Department considered export licence applications for the (i) E100 series integrated grenade system and (ii) fragmentation grenade E105 incorporated into the trip wire mechanism manufactured by PW Defence. [57169]

Mr. Bradshaw: Such items would have been considered under the criteria applicable to all items on the Military List. From July 1997 onwards those were the UK's national export licensing criteria set out in the answer given by my right hon. Friend the former Foreign Secretary to my hon. Friend the Member for East Ham (Mr. Timms) on 28 July 1997, *Official Report*, HC26–29. Under those criteria we were obliged to comply with the UK's commitment not to export all forms of anti-personnel land mines and their component parts. The criteria also made clear that we would not issue licences where there is a clearly identifiable risk that the proposed export might be used for internal repression, aggressively against another country, or to assert by force a territorial claim.

The legal basis for controls of integrated grenade systems and fragmentation grenades is entry ML4 in Part III of Schedule 1 of the Export of Control (Goods) Order 1994 as amended.

Foreign and Defence Council

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what was discussed at European Union Foreign and Defence Ministers' meeting at Brussels on 13 and 14 May; what conclusions were reached; what was agreed for the agenda for European Council's meeting at Seville; and if he will make a statement. [57259]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I represented the UK at the General Affairs Council (GAC) in Brussels on 13 May. Conclusions were agreed by consensus and no formal votes were taken. Preparation for the Seville European Council was not included in the final agenda.

Preparation of the Johannesburg Summit on sustainable development

The Council noted progress made in preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), which will take place in Johannesburg on 26 August to 4 September 2002. The Council instructed relevant Council bodies to prepare a substantive contribution on the EU's role in the WSSD process, to be approved at the GAC on 17 June and endorsed at the Seville European Council.

Annual Policy Strategy 2003

The Council endorsed the Commission's three main priorities for 2003: achieving enlargement successfully, continuing to ensure security for EU citizens, and developing a sustainable and inclusive economy. The Council agreed that the Commission's suggested budgetary allocations would be studied in the framework of the Preliminary Draft Budget examination for 2003. The Council recommended that future versions of the Annual Policy Strategy should be presented as early in the year as possible to improve the coherence of the budgetary process.

Effectiveness of the Union's external action

The Council noted work in hand and heard presentations on improving cross-pillar co-operation, strengthening the EU's role in international organisations, budgetary issues, development aid and the EU decision-making process. Commissioner Patten briefed Ministers on pilot studies aimed at improving the impact of EU external assistance and on the process of evolution of responsibilities to Commission delegations.

Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with ACP countries

The Council welcomed the Commission's proposal for a mandate to negotiate EPAs with the ACP countries, recalling that the ultimate purpose of the negotiations was poverty eradication and integration of ACPs into the world economy. It also addressed questions of ACP market access and WTO compatibility. The discussion will continue in the Permanent Representatives' Committee, with a view to adopting the mandate at the June GAC.

Renewal of mandates and financing of EU Special Representatives (EUSRs)

Recalling the essential role played by EUSRs, the Council agreed to extend the functions and funding for FYROM and Afghanistan EUSRs and asked the relevant bodies to study financial formulae to make this possible.

Middle East

The Council discussed the possibility of convening an international conference and welcomed the end of the Church of the Nativity crisis in Bethlehem. It thanked the Cypriot Government for their assistance and thanked member states for provisionally offering the 13 Palestinians involved temporary residence on humanitarian grounds.

European Security and Defence Policy

The Council welcomed the participation of Defence Ministers, meeting as the GAC for the first time, and noted progress towards establishing the Capability Development Mechanism (CDM). It also acknowledged recent advances made in European military capabilities and discussed possible means of resolving current shortfalls with a view to meeting the Headline Goal.

Western Balkans

The Council conducted its annual review of the Stabilisation and Association Process for South Eastern Europe (SAP), which provides a route map to EU membership, tied to each country's progress on reform. The Council called on the SAP countries to devote adequate attention and resources to implementation of EU recommendations, with particular reference to strengthening the rule of law and judicial systems and visa and entry policies. The Council invited the Commission to assess progress made at its next annual review in March 2003. The Council also proposed to establish a new ministerial-level political forum, linking the EU with the SAP countries. It also highlighted the need for a greater EU public information effort to foster greater understanding of the SAP. Crisis management in the Balkans, including the future EU Police Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina and a possible mission in Macedonia, was also discussed.

Iran

The Council noted that broad agreement had been reached on substance and objectives for developing EU relations with Iran. In addition to commercial matters, it was felt important that this include dialogue on terrorism, proliferation and regional stability. It instructed officials to pursue discussion with a view to a decision at the next GAC on a negotiating mandate for a Trade and Co-operation Agreement with Iran.

Angola

The Council welcomed recent encouraging developments in Angola, including the signing of an MOU by the Angolan Armed and Unita forces culminating in a ceasefire. The Council, while expressing support for positive initiatives undertaken by the Angolan Government, called on the authorities to allocate the necessary resources to: reintegrating Unita and Angolan armed soldiers into the armed forces police and civil society; demining; and reconstruction of social and civil infrastructure. It also requested that the Angolan Government do their utmost to assist humanitarian needs.

Bali Pre-conference

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people from his Department will travel to Bali to participate in the mini-summit for discussion of environmental issues. [57656]

Mr. MacShane: There will be six officials travelling to Bali from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, who will be participating at the fourth preparatory committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

World Cup

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with *(a)* the Football Association and *(b)* the England Supporters Club on the advice to be given to England football supporters travelling to Japan and South Korea for the World Cup finals. [58089]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have been working closely with the Football Association and "Englandfans" (the official England supporters club) to provide useful, relevant and up-to-date information for travelling supporters to the World Cup in Japan and Korea. As well as the travellers tips available on our website, an FCO pocket information guide and FCO/DCMS/Home Office leaflet are being distributed with World Cup match tickets by the FA and FIFA, and will also be available at UK airports and upon arrival in Japan and Korea.

Mr. Martyn Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Japanese Government on British prisoner transfer arrangements during the course of and following the World Cup finals. [58090]

Mr. Bradshaw: The UK does not have a bilateral prisoner transfer agreement with Japan. We have been encouraging Japan to accede to the Council of Europe Convention on the Transfer of Sentenced Persons (CECTSP), but Japan must first enact the necessary domestic legislation. During discussions in April 2002, Japanese officials said that they hoped to have the necessary legislation in place by summer 2002, which will then enable Japan to apply for accession to the CECTSP. As applications to the Council of Europe Secretariat take some time, Japan will not have acceded to the Convention in time for the World Cup 2002. British consular staff will, however, continue to do everything possible to help British nationals who are arrested or detained in Japan.

Single Currency

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on discussions which have taken place between officials in his Department and those from Sweden on the timing of referenda on EMU membership. [57881]

Peter Hain: Officials in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office conduct discussions on all aspects of EU policy, including economic issues, with all our European counterparts on a regular basis.

Information Campaigns

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy towards projecting plurality of opinion on the future direction of the EU in his Department's information campaigns; what input he receives from representatives of external organisations in developing his material; and if he will make it his policy to expand contact lists to represent organisations critical of the EU. [57877]

Peter Hain: We are committed to consulting the public over the convention on the future of Europe, including by getting young people from all walks of life and political persuasion involved in the Youth convention. The Foreign Office, in conjunction with *The Independent*, is running a nationwide competition to select three young people to join the UK delegation.

In developing EU public diplomacy material, we have received input from the Plain Language Commission.

The FCO is open to the views of all organisations but is tasked with presenting the Government's policy on the EU.

Nagorno-Karabakh

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on forced movement of ethnic Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh by the Azerbaijan authorities. [58048]

Mr. Bradshaw: Approximately 60,000 Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians were displaced by the Azeris during the heaviest part of the fighting in 1991–92. 35,000 have since returned. The displaced Armenian population was largely from the Shahumian and Madakaert regions. During the same period, a large number (approximately 800,000) of Azeris were also displaced from Nagorno-Karabakh. We are not aware of any forced movement of population on either side of the line of control since the ceasefire in 1994.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the waiting time is for the spouse of a British national applying for a settlement visa in the UK from Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. [57974]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have a Public Service Agreement with the Treasury that we conduct 90 per cent. of settlement interviews within a target time of 12 weeks. However, in practice applicants who apply to our visa section in Kinshasa on a Monday morning are usually interviewed on Tuesday and Wednesday; those who apply on a Wednesday morning, when the visa section opens again, are interviewed on Thursday, or the following Monday. The section would therefore expect to interview the spouse of a British national applying for settlement within three working days. Normally, a decision on the application would immediately follow this interview.

Hague Tribunal

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Chief Prosecutor at the Hague Tribunal over funding of the Prosecutor's Office. [58052]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met with the Prosecutor, Mrs. Del Ponte, in London on 14 March 2002. They discussed the resource requirements of the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia, including the Office of the Prosecutor. Mrs. Del Ponte received assurances of our continued support.

Iraq

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent research his Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated on the (i) level of risk posed by and (ii) stage of development reached by Iraq in the development of chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. [58210]

Mr. Bradshaw: We have not specifically commissioned any such research.

We do, however, have regular access, including from intelligence sources, to information regarding the development of such weapons by Iraq.

This information, coupled with the details of weapons and materials for which UN weapons inspectors were unable to account between 1991 and 1998 enables us to make periodic assessments of the risk posed by Iraq and of on-going development work.

Since the withdrawal of UNSCOM and IAEA inspection teams in December 1998, we have had no independently-verifiable information of the stage of development reached in the Iraqi WMD programme.

Libya

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Libyan authorities about the crash report on flight LAA1103. [57017]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our embassy in Tripoli have made regular requests to the Libyan authorities for a copy of the crash report. They will continue to do so. As a British citizen was killed in the crash, we believe that we have a right to this information. However, it is far from certain whether a crash report has or will be written, or, if one does exist, whether the Libyan authorities will hand a copy over to us.

Burma

Mr. Luke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with foreign Ministers in other countries about future strategies to be adopted in partnership aimed at encouraging peaceful democratic change in Burma. [58024]

Mr. Bradshaw: Burma is a frequent topic of multilateral and bilateral discussion at ministerial and official level within the EU as well as key members of the international community. I took the opportunity to discuss Burma with ministerial colleagues in Singapore and Brunei during my visit to south east Asia. I impressed on them the importance of maintaining pressure on the Burmese regime to take meaningful progress on democratic reform.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he plans to impose sanctions against Burma as a result of military action on behalf of the Burmese Army against Karen, Kaenni and Shan people. [57662]

Mr. Bradshaw: In response to the overall political and human rights situation in Burma, the EU Common Position contains an arms embargo, a ban on high level visits, a ban on the export of items that may be used for torture, a ban on non-humanitarian assistance and an asset freeze and visa ban on senior members of the regime. The European Commission suspended Burma's trading privileges in 1997 in response to concerns over forced labour. In addition HMG discourages trade, investment and tourism with Burma.

The EU Common Position was extended for a further period of six months in April 2002. It will only be relaxed when there is substantive progress towards national reconciliation in Burma.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the Government are taking to help bring democracy to Burma. [57659]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Government have played a leading role in the EU and the UN in pressing for substantive political change in Burma. In April, the EU Common Position was renewed unchanged for a further period of six months and an EU-sponsored resolution on the human rights situation in Burma was adopted by consensus at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

The release from house arrest of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is a welcome step forward. But it is only one of many needed. We will continue to press for national reconciliation, respect for human rights and democracy in Burma.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his latest estimate is of the number of Karen, Kaenni and Shan people *(a)* internally displaced and *(b)* killed as a result of military action against them by the Burmese Army in the last 12 months. [57663]

Mr. Bradshaw: Exact figures are not available as international access to many of the conflict areas is restricted or prevented by the military authorities. Recent UN estimates have indicated that up to 600,000 Burmese may be internally displaced.

It is even more difficult to gauge the number of people who have been killed as a result of fighting with the military authorities. That human rights abuses continue in Burma is not in doubt. The United Nations Commission on Human Rights adopted a consensus resolution on Burma in April sponsored by the EU, which detailed the scale of the problem and expressed its continuing grave concern.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the level of military action taken by the Burmese Army against the Karen, Kaenni and Shan people following the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. [57658]

Mr. Bradshaw: The ethnic minorities in Burma suffer disproportionately due to the misrule of the Burmese authorities. The violence inflicted on the Karen, the Karenni and the Shan is on-going. The intensity of the fighting fluctuates, in part due to the climate of Burma, particularly the monsoon. We have consistently pressed the regime to move ahead on national reconciliation and urged all sides to resolve their differences through peaceful dialogue.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last made representations to *(a)* the Burmese Government and *(b)* other interested parties about the treatment of the Karen people by the Burmese army. [35792]

Mr. Bradshaw: We take every opportunity to impress upon the Burmese regime our deep concern about their treatment of the Karen and other ethnic minorities in Burma, including through our ambassador in Rangoon and visiting officials. The UK co-sponsored a United Nations Commission on Human Rights resolution on Burma in April 2002 and, as part of the EU, we shall co-sponsor a similar resolution at the United Nations General Assembly in November. We have also drawn our concerns to the attention of the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma and the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Burma.

Gibraltar

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the planned prime ministerial and ministerial meetings with the Spanish Prime Minister and Spanish Ministers in which it is expected that the future of Gibraltar will be discussed under the Brussels Process in the next month. [57551]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister met the Spanish Prime Minister on 20 May for discussions on a range of EU and foreign policy issues. They held talks on Gibraltar in a positive and constructive atmosphere. When my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary met his Spanish counterpart on 15 May they agreed to convene a further formal Brussels Process meeting in late June or early July.

Pakistan

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 1 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 830W, on appeals on what date *(a)* the appeal papers were despatched from Islamabad, *(b)* they were received by London and *(c)* they were sent to the IAA. [56128]

Angela Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

As my hon. Friend has referred this case to the parliamentary ombudsman it would not be appropriate for me to comment in detail on the issues he has raised at this stage of proceedings. My officials from Immigration and Nationality Directorate will shortly be responding to the matters raised by the ombudsman who will send you a reply in due course.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) if he will call upon the Australian Government to ban President Mugabe and his Ministers from attending the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Brisbane; [38417]

(2) if he will urge the Australian Government to ban President Mugabe and his Ministers from attending the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Brisbane and from entering Australia until 10 March; [39800]

(3) what discussions he has had with his Australian counterpart on whether Australia should ban President Mugabe and his Ministers from travelling to or entering Australia ahead of the presidential election in Zimbabwe on 10 March during the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group meeting on 1 March; [39788]

(4) what discussions *(a)* he has had and *(b)* plans to have with Commonwealth partners on whether President Mugabe should attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting during the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group meeting on 1 March. [39791]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* President Mugabe did not, in the event, attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Brisbane. Attendance at the meeting was a matter for the Australian Government.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he will recommend his Commonwealth colleagues take regarding the present situation in Zimbabwe during the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group meeting on 1 March. [39787]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 4 March 2002]:* At the CMAG meeting on 1 March we urged our Commonwealth partners to suspend Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth. Zimbabwe was duly suspended from the Council of the Commonwealth on 19 March.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the European Union observers who have recently returned from Zimbabwe will publish a report on their findings. [38416]

Mr. Straw: The European Union observer team was withdrawn from Zimbabwe before the elections took place, as the Government of Zimbabwe prevented it from carrying out its mandate. The team did not publish a report.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy not to engage in dialogue or attend meetings with President Mugabe during the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Brisbane. [38415]

Mr. Straw: I was unable to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in Brisbane, at which President Mugabe was also not present. My noble Friend Baroness Amos attended plenary meetings at which Zimbabwe was represented, but did not engage in dialogue with representatives of the Zimbabwe Government.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the implications of Council Common Position 2002/203/CFSP of 11 March, repealing 2001/83/CFSP, for the Zimbabwean military; and what steps he will take to ensure that EU aid is properly accounted for. [57876]

Mr. MacShane: The Council Common Position referred to supports the implementation of the Lusaka ceasefire agreement and relevant United Nations Security Council Resolutions within the framework of the peace process in the Democratic Republic of Congo. A key element of the Lusaka agreement is the full withdrawal of all foreign troops, including Zimbabweans. This is also in accordance with the Security Council Resolutions.

The European Commission now focuses its aid for Zimbabwe on humanitarian assistance and support for the health sector to combat HIV/AIDS. It has systems in place to closely monitor its assistance, and ensure that it is properly accounted for.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reason the European Community has banned exports of electronic jamming equipment designed to prevent the detonation by remote of improvised bombs to Zimbabwe under EC 310/2002 Annex II. [57869]

Mr. MacShane: EC Regulation 310/2002 of 18 February 2002 places inter alia an embargo on sale or supply to Zimbabwe of equipment which might be used for internal repression. Annex II of that Regulation contains an agreed EC list of equipment subject to the embargo. This list was originally established in the context of EC Regulation 926/98 of 27 April 1998 which placed inter alia an embargo on the sale or supply to the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia of equipment which might be used for internal repression or terrorism. "Electronic jamming equipment especially designed to prevent the detonation by radio remote control of improvised devices and specially designed components therefor" was included in the list annexed to Regulation 926/98 because of the potential for such equipment being used in countering anti-terrorism measures.

This embargo is in addition to the full scope arms embargo imposed by the Council Common Position (2002/145/CFSP).

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Profession

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when he will publish his consultative paper on the OFT report on the legal profession; and if he will make a statement. [57696]

Ms Rosie Winterton: As announced in the Budget statement in April, Government plans to issue a consultation paper on matters falling to it before the summer recess. The issues concern the extension of legal professional privilege and rights to do conveyancing and probate work; moves towards enabling the Law Society effectively to regulate the provision of legal services through alternative business structures; and the QC system.

Immigration Appeals

Mr. Cox: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the estimated waiting time is for an immigration appeal to be heard. [50591]

Ms Rosie Winterton [pursuant to her reply, 29 April 2002]: The average time to hearing for immigration cases received by the IAA between 1 May 2001 and 31 October 2001 was 5.2 weeks to first hearing and 14.1 weeks to substantive hearing at the adjudicator stage.

SCOTLAND

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to her answer of 7 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 512W, on statutory instruments, what assessment she has made of the cost effectiveness of each of the statutory instruments listed. [50400]

Mrs. Liddell: Costs associated with regulatory proposals are considered at the policy development stage. A Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) is completed for regulatory proposals unless there are no or negligible costs, and sets out the impact, in terms of costs, benefits and risks of the proposed regulation which could affect businesses, charities or the voluntary sector. RIAs are available from the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland (1) what assessment she has made of the cost effectiveness of the Scottish Parliament (Elections etc.) (Amendment) Order 2001; and if he will make a statement; [51105]

(2) what assessment she has made of the cost effectiveness of the Representation of the People (Scotland) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [51106]

(3) what assessment she has made of the cost effectiveness of the Representation of the People (Form of Canvass) (Scotland) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement; [51129]

(4) what assessment she has made of the cost effectiveness of the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 (Conditions Attached to PSV Operators' Licence and Competition Tests for Exercise of Bus Functions) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement; [51103]

(5) what assessment she has made of the cost effectiveness of the Scotland Act 1998 (Consequential Modifications) Order 2001; and if she will make a statement. [51104]

Mrs. Liddell: Costs associated with regulatory proposals are considered at the policy development stage. A Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) is completed for regulatory proposals unless there are no or negligible costs, and sets out the impact, in terms of costs, benefits and risks of the proposed regulation which could affect businesses, charities or the voluntary sector. RIAs are available from the Libraries of the House.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she will answer the questions from the hon. Member for Isle of Wight of 1 March, Ref 39912 and 40038. [55434]

Mrs. Liddell: With apologies for the delay, I replied to the hon. Member's questions on 20 May.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefits Agency

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the staff turnover in *(a)* administrative officer and *(b)* administrative assistant grades in the Benefits Agency was in each year since 1997; and if he will break down the turnover by region. [51051]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is not available for the period before April 2000. Such information as is available is in the following tables.

Period April 2000 to March 2001

	Joiners		*Leavers*	
Region	*Administrative Assistants*	*Administrative Officers*	*Administrative Assistants*	*Administrative Officers*
London East	360	580	187	233
London North	390	477	253	172
London Central and South	408	580	237	285
South-west	332	213	226	91
East Midlands	254	174	155	157
West Midlands	264	174	122	65
Wales	272	195	189	77
Merseyside	258	81	167	42
Greater Manchester	185	136	102	70
Yorkshire	217	79	134	46
North-east	258	119	155	57
West of Scotland	322	217	196	147
East of Scotland	305	153	194	103
Agency Central Services	207	123	151	119

Period April 2001 to March 2002

	Joiners		*Leavers*	
Region	*Administrative Assistants*	*Administrative Officers*	*Administrative Assistants*	*Administrative Officers*
London East	511	640	257	159
London North	530	620	304	179
London Central and South	667	840	372	379
South-west	453	403	292	149
East Midlands	397	398	221	91
West Midlands	414	488	167	92

Period April 2001 to March 2002

Region	Joiners: Administrative Assistants	Joiners: Administrative Officers	Leavers: Administrative Assistants	Leavers: Administrative Officers
Wales	467	392	245	180
Merseyside	506	245	260	87
Greater Manchester	259	234	124	56
Yorkshire	507	376	266	68
North-east	298	156	148	45
West of Scotland	334	284	160	52
East of Scotland	384	194	211	58

Note:

Agency Central Services became part of DSS Corporate Services Directorate on 1 April 2001.

Head Injury Rehabilitation

Mr. Berry: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans he has to assess the availability of vocational rehabilitation services for people who sustain head injury; [56435]

(2) what recent meetings have taken place within his Department on the provision of brain injury rehabilitation; and if he will make a statement. [56436]

Maria Eagle: Regular assessments are carried out of the availability of vocational rehabilitation services, including those for people who sustain head injuries. The services which are now in place, and delivered under contract through the Department's Work Preparation Programme, meet current and expected demand within the catchment area of individual providers.

Ministers and officials have regular meetings with colleagues across Government to discuss rehabilitation, including services for people with acquired brain injury. A meeting was held with Ministerial colleagues from the Department of Health on 15 April to discuss a range of issues concerning health and rehabilitation. The Department is working jointly with a number of other Departments, including the Department of Health, to ensure that what is in place fully contributes towards our objective of helping as many as possible of those not working following injury or ill-health to make a prompt return to work.

Departmental Report

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the Departmental report will be published. [58526]

Mr. Darling: The Work and Pensions Departmental Report, which sets out the Department's expenditure plans for 2002–03 to 2003–04, has been published today. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Correspondence

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reasons the letter from the hon. Member for Ilford, North on behalf of Mrs. C. A. Beadle of Tomswood Hill, Ilford dated 2 July 2001 took nine months to answer. [49020]

Malcolm Wicks: The delay in replying to my hon. Friend's letter is regretted. This was due to administrative error.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will amend the housing benefit regulations to take into account those individuals whose financial circumstances have changed between selling the property they continue to reside in, and making a claim for housing benefit; [52955]

(2) what reason the amendment of regulation 7 of the Housing Benefit regulations, effective in January 1999, excluded from entitlement to benefit those who previously owned the home they now rent. [52956]

Malcolm Wicks: The intention of Housing Benefit regulation 7(1)(h) is to halt the abuse of the scheme where an owner-occupier transfers ownership of his or her home without money changing hands, or sells it for less than the market price, and then rents it back.

Housing Benefit is still available to anyone who can demonstrate that he or she was forced to transfer or sell, for example because of impending repossession for mortgage arrears. A further amendment, from May 2001, allows a former owner to claim Housing Benefit provided five years have elapsed since he or she ceased to own the property.

We keep all our policies under review but have no plans to make further amendments to this provision.

Data Protection

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library copies of each version of the internal guidance which have been drawn up by her Department since 1 January 1999 to assist staff in her Department to answer subject access requests under the Data Protection Act 1998. [53373]

Malcolm Wicks: Since 1 January 1999 the Department has only had one version of internal guidance to assist staff to answer subject access requests under the Data Protection Act 1998. The guidance is contained in the Data Protection Manual, which is available in the Library.

Medical Services

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will make a statement on his plans to extend SchlumbergerSema's contract for the supply of medical services; and if he will list the service improvements that SchlumbergerSema will be expected to deliver as a result of a contract extension; [54037]

(2) when he plans to publish the Department's report on Medical Services' performance against quality targets; [54038]

(3) if he will list each performance target that his Department has set for SchlumbergerSema to deliver medical services and the levels of performance against those targets that have been achieved; [54039]

(4) what measures he has taken to ensure that SchlumbergerSema has made improvements to its level of performance in delivering medical services. [54040]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke), 22 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 374–75W.

Fraud

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many of the staff employed undertaking specific work on counter fraud policy issues on 1 April had less than *(a)* six months, *(b)* 12 months, *(c)* two years, *(d)* three years, *(e)* four years and *(f)* more than four years experience of working in this specific area. [54717]

Malcolm Wicks: The overall aim of the Department's anti-fraud strategy is to have a benefit system which is secure from first claim to final payment.

The implementation of this strategy means that an anti-fraud focus is integral to the work of all staff in the Department, as is dealing with the wider agenda of error and incorrectness in benefit payments.

The Fraud Strategy Unit (FSU) manages the setting and dissemination of fraud policy for the Department's Agencies and has a central role in undertaking specific work on counter-fraud policy issues. The information requested, in respect of FSU staff, is in the table.

FSU staff's length of experience of working on counter-fraud policy issues as at 1 April 2002

Less than 6 months	*6 to 12 months*	*1 to 2 years*	*2 to 3 years*	*3 to 4 years*	*More than 4 years*
19	19	12	18	8	8

The staff in Fraud Strategy Unit bring with them a wide range of skills and experience, notably in counter-fraud operational work, social security administration, legislation and programme/budget management. Many staff in the unit have had several years' experience in social security administration and dealing with customers, where countering fraud is the concern of all staff.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many prosecutions for fraud involving housing or council tax benefit were undertaken by local authorities in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* between 1 January and 31 December 2001. [54725]

Malcolm Wicks: The latest information available on the number of prosecutions for fraud undertaken by local authorities is in the table.

Local authority investigations

	Prosecutions	*Cautions and penalties as an alternative to prosecution*	*Total*
1997–98	700	—	700
1998–99	800	—	800
1999–2000	860	390	1,250
2000–01	1,100	550	1,650

Notes:

1. Figures are taken from local authority management information returns. It is possible that there could be some double counting with Benefits Agency data if there were cases which involved a joint prosecution.

2. Information is not available for all 408 local authorities. The total for Great Britain includes estimates for local authorities that have not responded. These estimates are based on historical and regional data. This type of estimate is standard practice in reporting totals where there have been non-respondents. The figures for financial years 1997–98 to 2000–01 have been rounded to two significant figures.

3. Administrative penalties, as an alternative to prosecution, were introduced by the Social Security Administration (Fraud) Act (1997) with effect from December 1998.

Tax Credits

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether the applicable amount for housing benefit and council tax benefit will be increased to take non-pensioner tax credits into account. [55030]

Malcolm Wicks: The amounts included in respect of children in housing benefit and council tax benefit applicable amounts will equal the maximum help available for children through child tax credit and child benefit. Both child tax credit and working tax credit will be taken into account as income, in line with the current treatment of working families' tax credit and disabled person's tax credit.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on incentives in the field of employment is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55226]

Malcolm Wicks: The Committee on Community incentive measures in the field of employment is provided for by a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council, which the Council adopted on 6 May 2002, Article 129 of the Amsterdam Treaty. It runs until 31 December 2006.

The programme of employment incentive measures will cover analysis, research and co-operation among the member states to support the European Employment Strategy and help achieve the strategic goals set by the Lisbon European Council. Activities, particularly through pilot projects, will include: the forward-looking evaluation of the Strategy; promoting the exchange of experience and good practice; and increasing information and general awareness of the social partners and relevant local and regional authorities. It also involves raising awareness of the Employment Strategy among European citizens

The work programme for the committee, which will approved at the first meeting on 30 May, will include deciding and managing with the Commission the: general guidelines for the implementation of the activities; breakdown of funding between the activities; proposals for selection criteria for financial support; criteria for assessing activities receiving such support; and the procedure for disseminating and transferring the results. The committee will have an advisory role on the other aspects of the standard comitology decision.

The committee is likely to meet two to three times a year and will be attended by one UK official. The annual cost to public funds of UK attendance is likely to be up to £1,650 of which the Commission will reimburse up to £1,230.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Commission Document 5685/02).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the mandate of the Committee of the European Social Fund is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55227]

Malcolm Wicks: The legal base of the European Social Fund (ESF) Committee is Article 147 of the treaty establishing the European Community. The committee's role is to assist the European Commission in administering the ESF. It delivers opinions on draft Commission proposals relating to the ESF including programming documents and implementing rules. It has met four times over the last 12 months.

The committee is chaired by the Commission and is composed of representatives of member state Governments, trade unions and employers' organisations. The UK has six full members: two officials from the ESF Division of the Joint International Unit of the Department for Work and Pensions and Department for Education and Skills; two representatives from the Trades Union Congress (TUC); and two representatives from the Confederation of British Industry (CBI). There are also three alternate members from the UK who are entitled to attend in the absence of a full member from their respective category: an official from the UK Permanent Representation to the EU and representatives from the TUC and CBI. The costs to public funds for the Government full members are limited to expenses of approximately £550 per person for a one day-meeting, less reimbursement provided by the Commission.

At its last meeting on 22 March 2002, the committee considered the evaluation of the ESF, local employment initiatives, gender mainstreaming, preparation of national action plans for employment, complementarity with the Leonardo Da Vinci vocational training programme and lifelong learning.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has responsibility for ESF policy within the UK and is accountable to Parliament for the work of the UK Government members on the ESF committee. The Department for Work and Pensions prepares explanatory memoranda on EU documents on the ESF committee that are deposited in Parliament for scrutiny. These arrangements will continue.

Disability Benefit

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of his programme to enable people receiving disability benefit to take employment. [57112]

Maria Eagle: We have a wide range of programmes that have proved successful in helping people with disabilities secure work where they are ready and able to do so.

Over 8,200 people have already been helped into work through the New Deal for Disabled People pilots. Building on that success we extended the New Deal for Disabled People and we now have a national network of job brokers from the public, private and voluntary sectors who work closely with employers, voluntary groups and health services to help people with health conditions and disabilities move into work. A further 2,304 people have been helped into work through the extension.

Disability employment advisers continue to provide specialist support to disabled jobseekers, and disabled employees and their employers. The roll-out of integrated Jobcentre Plus offices will provide disabled people with work-focused meetings with a personal adviser to ensure they are aware of all the help and opportunities available to them.

A range of other Government programmes are also available to help people with health conditions and disabilities find and keep employment, including Access to Work, Workstep and Work Preparation. All the programmes are subject to evaluation, and reports are published. They are available free of charge from the Department and are also accessible on the internet.

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of single pensioners with gross weekly incomes of between (i) £78 and £134 and (ii) £122 and £134; and if he will estimate the (1) number and

(2) percentage of pensioner couples with gross weekly incomes of between (A) £124 and £200 and (B) £188 and £200. [58030]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is in the table.

	Gross weekly income (£)	*Number*	*Percentage*
Single pensioners	78–134	1,730,000	40
	122–134	470,000	11
Pensioner couples	124–200	1,000,000	25
	188–200	170,000	4

Notes:

1. The estimates are from the Family Resources Survey 1999–00 and are rounded to the nearest 10,000 or 1 per cent. As with data from any survey, these estimates should not be treated as exact as they are subject to sampling error. This is the latest year for which results are available and the survey covers Great Britain.
2. The Family Resources Survey does not include information on pensioners living in residential care or nursing homes.
3. Gross weekly income is at July 1999 prices.
4. Single pensioners are defined as single (non-cohabiting) people aged 60 or over. Pensioner couples are defined as couples (married or co-habiting) where either partner is aged 60 or over. This differs from the definition used in the Pensioners' Incomes Series (singles over state pension age (65 and over for men, 60 and over for women) and couples where the man is over state pension age).

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the impact on payment to pensioners and those in receipt of other benefits of Consignia's plans for urban sub-post offices. [58124]

Mr. McCartney: Access for customers will be a key feature of the Post Office's restructuring programme. Even after restructuring, it is expected that well over 95 per cent. of customers in urban areas will still live within a mile of a post office branch and the majority will live within half a mile. And the branches which make up the network should have a sounder commercial basis upon which to develop customer service.

Pensions

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) for each of the past five years, how many people were contracted out of SERPS; and what proportion of the workforce were contracted out; [58521]

(2) how many people are contracted out of the additional pension; and what the equivalent number was in each of the last five years. [58522]

(3) how many and what proportion of the workforce are contracted out of the additional pension, broken down by level of income. [58523]

(4) for each *(a)* month and *(b)* quarter over the past four years, how many people were contracted out of SERPS; and what proportion of the workforce are contracted out. [58524]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is set out as follows:

The number of people who were contracted out of the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme in 1995–96, the latest year for which figures are available, is 14.8 million. The workforce for the same year was 28.7 million; the proportion of the workforce estimated to be contracted out of the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme was 52 per cent.

Note:

Workforce means "economically active people" which is defined in the "Labour Force Survey" as being all those who are either in employment or unemployed.

Source:

"Second Tier Pension Provision 1995–96" and "Labour Force Survey"—Department for Work and Pensions' Analytical Services Division.

Pension Service

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what advice and information will be provided by staff in the new pension centres to encourage *(a)* new and *(b)* existing pensioners to (i) claim the minimum income guarantee and (ii) receive payments directly from post offices. [58208]

Mr. McCartney: The Pension Service will provide a modern, efficient and customer focused service for both today's and future pensioners. It will play a crucial role in our aim to tackle pensioner poverty. We are committed to encouraging pensioners to claim their full entitlements. We have already conducted a very successful minimum income guarantee (MIG) campaign which resulted in an extra 134,000 pensioners making successful claims to MIG receiving on average an extra £20 a week.

We are continuing to look at more effective ways of encouraging eligible pensioners to claim the MIG. Initiatives include:

A MIG claim line on freephone 0800 028 1111. This is available to enable our customers to apply for MIG easily and simply.

A new shortened claim form available on the internet at www.thepensionservice.gov.uk.

Since April 2002, all customers contacting the Retirement Pension Teleclaims Centre are offered information on MIG and asked if they would like someone to call them back with more information and pursue a claim. Those customers who do not wish to claim MIG via the RP telecentre are sent a MIG information leaflet with their RP claim pack.

Additionally, we will:

Issue mailshots to pensioners who claimed RP and who may also be entitled to MIG, encouraging them to claim. Around 100,000 pensioners will receive a mailshot over the April-June period.

Use "trigger" questions which identify customers who have a match with one or more predetermined 'key life events' that may indicate a potential entitlement to MIG, for example, when customers aged 60 and over receive a new award of one or more benefits, such as attendance allowance, industrial injuries benefit or housing benefit. A letter explaining the possible entitlement and inviting customers to claim MIG is sent to all customers identified in this way.

Training material for Pension Service staff includes guidance on identifying potential entitlement to MIG. If, during the course of any inquiry, it becomes evident that the pensioner might be entitled to MIG they will be encouraged to claim.

Also, the local service will work closely with local authorities, the voluntary sector and other service providers to give a proactive service and ensure that customers receive their full benefit entitlement. In time local service staff will be trained to provide a more joined-up service covering the broad range of services older people may need to access. The local service will include surgeries. a home visiting where there is a special need and joint benefit take-up campaigns.

At the moment, pensioners can choose to be paid by order book or have their money paid directly into a bank or building society account. From April 2003, payments directly into accounts will become the normal method of payment. People will still be able to collect their money from the post office and will be provided with information to enable them to choose the most appropriate account.

Final Salary Pension Schemes

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the company practice of dishonouring final salary pension schemes. [58051]

Mr. McCartney: There has been a long-term decline in the coverage of final salary pension schemes, which has accelerated as a result of increased longevity and the recent fall in the stock markets. Many companies have had to consider the financial impact on their business of continuing to run a final salary scheme for all employees.

Employers should take a long-term view of pensions, rather than basing their decisions on short-term considerations. Where employers do change their pension schemes, we believe that they have a responsibility to make it absolutely clear what the implications are for employee pensions.

The Sandler review of the long-term retail savings market and Pickering review of pension regulation will report in the summer. The Inland Revenue is also reviewing the taxation of occupational pension schemes. We will issue proposals in the autumn, aimed at making pension provision more attractive for individuals and pension providers. This will build on the reforms that have been introduced since 1998. Pension Credit will ensure that it always pays to save. State second pension will benefit 14 million low and moderate earners, and four million carers and disabled people who will get a second pension for the first time. We have introduced pension forecasts to provide individuals with the right information to make an informed decision about their retirement. And the introduction of stakeholder pensions means that everyone now has access to low-charge, flexible pension provision.

E-Envoy (Contractors)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list by *(a)* date, *(b)* value and *(c)* contractor contracts for consultancy and research into (i) smart card and (ii) e-business which have been placed by or for the office of the E-Envoy by (A) competition or (B) single tender in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [56977]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

(i) Smart card technology

The office of e-Envoy has had two studies over the past 12 months and the details are as follows:

(1) *(a)* 31 August 2001 *(b)* £5,000 *(c)* Alco Partnership. This was by single tender action.

(2) *(b)* 3 August 2001 *(b)* £69,000 *(c)* Logica. This was by competition.

(ii) e-Business

The office of e-Envoy has had five contracts for consultancy and research that cross over onto the e-Business sector that we have listed. Please note these are not solely e-Business as these studies cover other areas such as citizen and public sector.

(1) *(a)* 14 July 2001 *(b)* £516,000 *(c)* Analysis. This was a study that was to take place over a three-year period looking at international and UK benchmarking (broadband). This was by competition.

(2) *(a)* 24 July 2001 *(b)* £400,000 *(c)* Analysis\Booz Allen. Consultancy support to the broadband: demand and aggregation in the public sector. This was by competition.

(3) *(a)* 23 August 2001 *(b)* £47,000 *(c)* Hall Aitken. This was research into internet use in the voluntary and community sectors. Single tender action.

(4) *(a)* 11 September 20001 *(b)* £48,000 (c) De Montfort university. This study was looking at ISP (internet service provider) data to research the business and household internet take up. This was by single tender.

(5) *(a)* 13 March 2002 *(b)* £310,000 *(c)* Booz Allen. This is research into international benchmarking of the e-Economy. This was by competition.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Wrongfully Convicted Prisoners

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has concluded his consideration of the report of the working group on an advice service for wrongfully convicted prisoners; if he has made final decisions on the matter; and if he will make a statement. [59013]

Beverley Hughes: After careful consideration of the report and recommendations of the working group, I have announced today my decision to establish an advice service for such individuals. The service will operate as a pilot project for an initial period of 12 months and will be provided by the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux. The project will be subject to rigorous monitoring and evaluation during this pilot phase. Decisions on future service provision will be made in the light of evidence from the evaluation. To inform the evaluation process I have also decided to establish a consultative group, whose members will be drawn from a range of organisations and individuals with an interest in this issue. Expressions of interest in membership of this group are now being invited.

Juvenile Crime

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to apply electronic monitoring technology to juveniles released from the custodial part of the detention and training order. [59797]

Beverley Hughes: Section 62 of the Criminal Justice and Courts Services Act 2000 provides for the electronic monitoring of prisoners released on licence. By virtue of section 62(5)(a), this includes young people during the community element of a detention and training order (DTO).

Electronic monitoring of those released from detention and training orders is already available in 84 youth offending team areas as part of the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme overseen by the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales.

Section 102(4) of the Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000 empowers the Secretary of State to release an offender:

> in the case of an order of eight months or more but less than 18 months, one month before the half-way point; and
>
> in the case of an order of 18 months or more, one month or two months before that point.

The availability of electronic monitoring enables me to consider how we can make further use of the powers in section 102(4) to provide a useful transitional phase in the reintegration of trainees from custody back into the community.

I therefore propose to use electronic monitoring as a condition of the release of trainees serving a DTO of eight months or more for a period of one or two months prior to their current release at the half-way point. This form of release will be a normal feature of DTOs except in the case of trainees convicted of sex offences or serious violent offences. The possibility of release on electronic monitoring at this stage in the DTO will not be available to trainees who have exhibited violent or destructive behaviour to people or property within the secure facility; made exceptionally bad progress against the training plan as a result of consistent failure to co-operate or failure to take responsibility for their behaviour.

Annie Millhouse

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to take a decision on the application for leave to remain on the basis of marriage of Annie Millhouse (Home Office ref: M718839). [56524]

Angela Eagle: A decision on this case was taken on 16 May 2002. Mrs. Millhouse will be notified of the result shortly.

Alisa Masokha

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to issue a travel document to Alisa Masokha (Home Office ref: J1052415). [56525]

Angela Eagle: The Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) are not responsible for issuing foreign national travel documents.

IND have no evidence of receiving Ms Masokha's national travel document in their offices. However, arrangements will shortly be made to issue Ms Masokha with a status letter which will enable her to obtain a replacement document from her national authorities.

Naturalisation

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long people granted naturalisation on grounds of *(a)* residence and *(b)* marriage in April or the latest month for which figures are available had waited before receiving the decision; and how long persons who have applied for naturalisation on each ground in 2002 can expect to wait for a decision. [56544]

Angela Eagle: The information available relates to the average waiting time for citizenship (naturalisation and registrations). The most recent published data relate to March 2001, when the average waiting time was 11.6 months.

I regret that information on waiting times for naturalisation applications only is not available.

We aim to reduce the average time taken to grant citizenship to qualifying applicants to 4.5 months by March 2003. It is expected that performance on this target will be reported on in due course, after the end of the financial year.

Drugs

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many probation and drugs treatment services have adopted oral fluid testing for drug abuse. [58514]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Home Office recently issued a probation circular, (PC7/2002:Revision of National Standards of Supervision of Offenders in the Community) which notified probation areas that they were no longer required to obtain specific written authority from the Home Office to use oral fluid testing in respect of the Drug Treatment and Testing Order. Prior to this announcement, twenty-three Probation Areas had requested the use of oral fluid testing. Oral fluid testing is also currently being used in the three probation areas piloting the drug testing provisions contained in the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000.

Information regarding the practices of drug treatment services is not held centrally.

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drug treatment or testing orders have been made which require the use of Naltrexone. [56542]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: This information is not held centrally and could not be determined except at disproportionate cost.

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the economic cost of drug misuse in the last year for which figures are available. [56713]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The University of York Centre for Criminal Justice Economics and Psychology (Culyer A, Eaton G, Godfrey C et al, 2002) has recently completed a research report for the Home Office entitled "The Economic and Social Costs of Class A Drugs Misuse in England and Wales, 2000". The report will be published as a Home Office Research Study (HORS) early to mid-summer, 2002.

Key findings from the research have been released (Home Office News Release, 12 February 2002). Annual economic costs (mainly to health service, criminal justice system and state benefits) are estimated to be between £3.7 billion and £6.8 billion. Adding social costs (mainly victim costs of crime) increases figures to between £10.9 billion and £18.8 billion. Problematic drug users account for around 99 per cent. of these costs with annual economic costs at £11,000 each compared with less than £20 for a non-problematic user.

Throckmorton

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the scope of the environmental impact assessment in relation to the proposed asylum accommodation centre at Throckmorton. [57341]

Angela Eagle: An environmental impact assessment will be included with the planning notification to be submitted shortly in relation to the proposed accommodation centre at Throckmorton. We are currently in discussions with Wychavon District Council to establish its scope.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the timetable for the planning process in relation to the application for the asylum accommodation centre at Throckmorton. [57236]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* We intend to submit a planning notification shortly. We will advise the hon. Member when the notification is submitted.

Asylum Accommodation Centres

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department by what date he estimates the first asylum accommodation centre will be open. [57343]

Angela Eagle: It is envisaged that the first centre will open in 2003.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate his Department has made of the number of dependants of asylum seekers under 18-years-old who will be housed in pilot accommodation centres. [51135]

Angela Eagle: We have yet to make a final decision.

Asylum Seekers

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to deter applications for asylum from citizens of countries that have democratic benign Governments. [57262]

Angela Eagle: The White Paper 'Secure Borders, Safe Haven' and the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill set out a range of measures to create an effective end-to-end system which will enable us to return swiftly those not in need of protection. There are also measures to combat illegal entry and illegal working. These measures should deter those who attempt to pursue unfounded asylum applications in the United Kingdom.

A key part of our strategy has been the use of the Oakington Reception Centre which allows us to process quickly those whose claims are determined to be manifestly unfounded.

We have also operated pre-clearance operations in Prague and we have deployed a network of airline liaison officers to prevent improperly documented passengers travelling to the United Kingdom.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he plans to establish an independent documentation centre to provide information about countries from which people have fled. [57999]

Angela Eagle: We have commissioned an evaluation of the content and accessibility of country information in the asylum process. This evaluation includes an assessment of whether the information provided by the Country Information Policy Unit, including the country assessments, meets the needs of its users. The finalised report will provide systematic, additional evidence on which to base decisions as to whether any further mechanisms might prove useful, and enable us to reach a decision on the need for an independent documentation centre.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill will allow families with children who are seeking asylum to be detained at the beginning of the asylum process. [57998]

Angela Eagle: The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill makes no change to the policy with regard to the detention of asylum seeking families. The policy for the detention of families is detailed in the White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven" which makes it clear that families may, when appropriate, be detained while their identities and basis of claim are established, or because there is a reasonable belief they would abscond, or as part of the fast-track asylum process at Oakington Reception Centre, or to effect their removal.

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what research his Department is conducting on the return of dispersed asylum seekers to the Greater London area; [57634]

(2) how many asylum seekers dispersed from the Greater London area returned to live in London between April 2001 and April 2002. [57633]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* There are no statistics on the number of asylum seekers who have returned to London following dispersal to another area of the country. Nor are statistics available on those accepted as refugees or granted exceptional leave to remain (ELR) who, in both cases, are free to live where ever they like. The National Asylum Support Services (NASS) cannot require asylum seekers to remain in the accommodation provided. If they choose to leave the accommodation they can seek to alter their support package from subsistence and accommodation to subsistence only. Generally speaking asylum seekers are not provided with accommodation in London. The Home Office is currently reviewing the extent of and reasons for asylum seekers leaving their dispersal accommodation. The results will be made available as soon as possible following the completion of the project.

Ms Gracie Allen

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department will lodge an appeal about the adjudicator's decision over the visa application by Ms Gracie Allen (HO ref A1127781; Appeal No. THS 1272/2001); and if he will make a statement. [57559]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The Home Office has decided not to apply for leave to appeal to the Immigration Appeal Tribunal against the adjudicator's decision to grant Mrs. Allen entry clearance.

European Security

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy towards the initiative of Spain setting up a European network for the protection of public figures (2002/C42/08). [57864]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Working Party on Police Co-operation meeting held on 5 to 6 February 2002, proposed the setting up of a European network for the protection of public figures to be chaired by the member state holding the Presidency of the Council. Its remit was to standardise the package of support and protection afforded to visiting dignitaries against agreed criteria, as well as the exchange of resources and information.

Negotiations are ongoing and it is expected that a decision on the implementation of the Network's proposals will be taken in June. However, the Government feel that the United Kingdom (UK) has much to offer in the exchange of best practice ideas and procedures in the area of public figure protection. One of the key issues that the Government have sought to maintain is the principle that it is the right of the host state to determine the appropriate package of support according to the specific threat to the individual visiting that country. The network will have no power to make legislative changes to UK law.

Correspondence

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Totnes of 17 April about Mrs. Roberta Parr and Miss Dominyka Gajauskite regarding their visa applications and the return of their Lithuanian passports for work purposes. [57507]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* My right hon. and noble Friend, Minister of State, Home Department (Lord Rooker), wrote to the hon. Member on 14 May 2002.

Drugs Offences

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been serving prison sentences for drugs offences in each year since 1979; and what percentage of the prison population this represents in each reporting period. [56236]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* Data on the number of people in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales broken down by type of offence on 30 June is published each year in 'Prison Statistics England and Wales' available in the Library.

The Table shows the number of drug offenders received into Prison Service establishments in England and Wales in each year between 1992 (the earliest data available) and 2000 (the latest confirmed data available), and what percentage of the total sentenced receptions they represent in each year.

%

	Number of drug offenders received	*Percentage of total sentenced receptions*
1992	3,636	5.2
1993	3,761	5.2
1994	3,953	4.7
1995	5,206	5.8
1996	6,412	7.7
1997	7,371	8.5
1998	7,655	8.4
1999	7,844	8.3
2000	7,353	7.8

Animal Experiments

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of animal experiments carried out in the last year for which figures are available were mandatory, pursuant to legislative requirements and where the use of non-animal alternatives would not have met those requirements. [57924]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* Under the provisions of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, animals can only be used in licensed scientific procedures when there is no alternative way to achieve the objective concerned, such as testing products using computer models, cell cultures and other in vitro methods. Animals are only used where fully justified and where the benefits outweigh the costs to the animals involved.

The Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals Great Britain 2000, the last year for which figures are available, records that procedures for toxicological purposes—the category where legislative testing requirements usually apply—accounted for 17 per cent. of all procedures started in 2000. This proportion compares with 20 per cent. in 1999 and 25 per cent. in 1995.

The majority of these toxicology/safety procedures (some 84 per cent.)—amounting to just over 14 per cent. of all procedures carried out in all categories—were performed to conform to legislative requirements. The procedures of this type carried out for non-legislative purposes include studies for refinement or replacement of live animal use in safety testing, as well as ecological studies.

It may be additionally worth noting that pharmaceutical safety/efficacy evaluation purposes accounted for 60 per cent. of all procedures for toxicology, other safety and efficacy evaluations, and that no procedures were performed in 2000 for the purpose of evaluating the safety of either cosmetic products or ingredients.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it his policy to require the numbers of animals bred for experimentation purposes but subsequently found to be unsuitable for such purposes or surplus to requirements to be included in the annual statistics on animal use under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. [57925]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* The published annual statistics relate solely to animals used in scientific procedures regulated under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. This meets the requirement, in section 21 of the Act, to provide related information to Parliament.

With the exception of the production of genetically modified animals—which is itself a regulated procedure—the number of animals bred but not eventually used for scientific purposes has not been considered appropriate for inclusion in these statistics. The Government have at present no plans to change that.

The Animal Procedures Committee looked at the issue of the over-breeding of animals for use in scientific procedures as part of its 10-year review of the 1986 Act. It concluded that although some over-breeding was unavoidable, it can and should be minimised, and it recommended principles of best practice to help to achieve this.

The committee also undertook to liaise with the Laboratory Animal Science Association, which has also been considering the issue of over-breeding and how it can be minimised, to refine these principles before finalising its advice. I expect to receive the Committee's report by the summer and will carefully consider the further advice it provides.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the mandate is of the Advisory Committee on the implementation of the Community Action Programme to combat social exclusion; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55231]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

The Programme Committee set up pursuant to Decision No. 50/2002/EC of 7 December 2001, establishing a programme of Community action to encourage co-operation between member states to combat social exclusion, is mandated to assist the Commission in implementing that Decision. It has met three times (once on an informal basis as it predated the coming into legal force of the Decision) over the last 12 months. The UK was represented by either one or two officials from the Department for Work and Pensions at these meetings. Costs to UK public funds were limited to their expenses, approximately £2,650, less reimbursements provided by the Commission. There are no items currently under consideration by the Programme Committee.

The first annual report by the Commission required by Council Decision 1999/468/EC on the working of committees was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Commission Document COM (2001) 783 Final). The UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the action programme to promote gender equality is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55238]

Mrs. Roche: The legal basis for the fifth action programme (2001–05) is Article 13 of the Treaty and Council Decision 2001/51/EC of 20 December 2000. The programme is one of the components of the overall Community strategy on gender equality (which embraces a range of Community policies and action aimed at achieving gender equality), including both mainstreaming gender into general policies and targeting specific actions towards women.

The committee which implements the programme is composed of member states' representatives. The current UK nominee is the responsible official in the Cabinet Office's Women and Equality Unit. It has met three times during the last 12 months. As per Article 6 of the Council Decision establishing the programme, the committee's agenda includes:

> the general guidelines for the implementation of the programme;
>
> the annual plan of work for the implementation of the programme's actions;
>
> the financial support to be supplied by the Community;
>
> the annual budget and the distribution of funding between the various actions of the programme;
>
> the procedures for selecting the actions to be supported by the Community and the draft list of actions to receive such support submitted by the Commission;
>
> the criteria for monitoring and evaluating the programme, in particular its costs-effectiveness, and the arrangements for the dissemination of results.

The funds of the fifth action programme are made available by the commission to member states and to individual contractors. The programme has a financial reference amount for the period 2001–05 of 50 million euro, and a budget line of around 10 million euro/year.

Travel costs for officials attending committee meetings are reimbursed by the European Commission; subsistence costs average less than £250 per year.

The principles and conditions concerning public access to the committee's documents (Article 13 of the rules of procedure for the committee) are the same as those applying to commission documents. The European Scrutiny Committee receives Explanatory Memoranda about work undertaken under this programme.

Together with member states, the commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of committees into line with Council

Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this decision, the commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Recruitment

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many net additional staff his Department has recruited in each month since June 2001 at *(a)* executive officer level and *(b)* administrative level. [52432]

Mr. Leslie: The net additional staff recruited in the Cabinet Office including Government Car and Despatch Agency and Central Office of Information since June 2001 at *(a)* executive officer level and *(b)* administrative level:

Month/ Type of staff	*Executive officer level* Headcount	*Executive officer level* Full-time equivalent	*Administrative level* Headcount	*Administrative level* Full-time equivalent
June 2001				
Permanent	3	3	2	2.11
Casual	1	1	–1	–1
Total	4	4	1	1.11
July 2001				
Permanent	0	0	0	0.33
Casual	11	10.28	10	10
Total	11	10.28	10	9.67
August 2001				
Permanent	3	3	0	0.39
Casual	–1	–1	–7	–7
Total	2	2	–7	–6.61
September 2001				
Permanent	3	3	2	2
Casual	–1	–1	–8	–8
Total	2	2	–6	–6
October 2001				
Permanent	5	5	4	3.9
Casual	1	0.8	5	4.67
Total	6	5.8	9	8.57
November 2001				
Permanent	–1	–0.61	2	0.13
Casual	2	2	0	–0.24
Total	1	1.39	2	–0.11
December 2001				
Permanent	2	2	2	2
Casual	0	0	0	0
Total	2	2	2	2
January 2002				
Permanent	7	7	4	4
Casual	2	2	6	6
Total	9	9	10	10
February 2002				
Permanent	4	3.67	–5	–5
Casual	1	0.59	1	1.24
Total	5	4.26	–4	–3.76
March 2002				
Permanent	3	3	–4	–4.5
Casual	1	1.72	–2	–1.4
Total	4	4.72	–6	–5.9

Civil Servants

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many job vacancies there were at *(a)* administrative assistant or equivalent, *(b)* administrative officer or equivalent, *(c)* administrative executive officer, *(d)* higher executive officer, *(e)* senior executive officer, *(f)* grade 7 principal and *(g)* all positions above grade 7 level in each Government Department for jobs located in (i) London and (ii) the south-east in each year since 1995. [52093]

Mr. Leslie: This information is not held centrally for all Government Departments; the following is for the Cabinet Office only.

Recruitment records have been held electronically and centrally since 1 April 2001; therefore the figures provided are for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 only. Figures prior to 1 April 2001 and divided between London and the south-east could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Figures on Government Office's senior civil service posts advertised could not be provided as Government offices do not collect this information centrally.

Grade/payband	*Number of posts advertised*
Senior civil service	38
Band A (grade 6 and 7)	159
Band B2 (grade HEO and SEO)	232
Band B1 (grade EO)	195
Band C2 (grade AO)	214
Band C1 (grade AA)	58

Electronic Services

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what is being done to increase the usage of Government Departments and agencies websites and the take-up of their electronic services. [55989]

Mr. Leslie: A survey published by the Office for National Statistics in April 2002 shows that 19 per cent. of UK internet users have used or accessed government/official services online.

The UK online national media campaign is playing a key role in persuading more individuals to get online and enjoy the benefits of e-commerce and e-government services. In addition, the range and scope of take-up targets for e-services are being considered as part of the Spending Review.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress has been made by each Government Department and agency towards the Prime Minister's target for electronically available services by 2005. [55984]

Mr. Leslie: The last survey of Department's progress in meeting the target showed that just over half of services (274) are available electronically. The following breakdown by Departments and agencies was included in the National Audit Office report, "Better Public Services through e-government", published on 4 April 2002:

	Number
British Trade International	1
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	4
Department for Education and Skills	36
Department for International Development	2
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	54
Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions	45
Department for Work and Pensions	5
Department of Health	14
Department of Trade and Industry	32
Export Credits Guarantee Department	2
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	8
HM Treasury	6
Home Office	29
Land Registry	1
Lord Chancellor's Department	4
Ministry of Defence	14
Office for National Statistics	3
Ordnance Survey	7
Public Record Office	7

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps are being taken to encourage Government sector agencies to put in place management information to monitor usage of their websites and electronic services, and to play back this information to the content providers and divisions responsible for originating web materials and internet services. [56001]

Mr. Leslie: Since December 1999 Government webmasters have been tasked with collecting particular statistics on usage. This advice has been updated and revised in the "Guidelines for UK Government Websites: Framework for Senior Managers" published in November 2001.

A much larger handbook for web management teams, that was widely consulted on within Government for a year and is scheduled for final publication in mid-May, recommends customer relationship management techniques and other means for ensuring evaluation of websites. The forthcoming "Quality Framework for UK Government Web Design" gives guidance in building in user testing in order to continually improve website content.

A newly-developed central infrastructure being delivered by the Office of the e-Envoy will provide central server hosting and applications. A new statistical analysis solution will be part of the offering for Departments that use this service.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister of the central Government Departments and agencies required to meet the Prime Minister's target for electronically available services by 2005, how many hits the *(a)* most and *(b)* least used have received in the last year; and what steps are being taken to analyse user behaviour. [56000]

Mr. Leslie: The latest Office for National Statistics data shows that 3.84 million citizens use the internet to use or access Government services.

Since 1999 all Government websites have been given guidance on the key statistics they should collect. The "Guidelines for UK Government Websites" specify that at a minimum:

the number of users (visitors)

number of visits (unique visits)

and number of page impressions (page views)

should be collected. Further performance and access statistics are recommended in addition to these minimum statistics.

However, such information is not currently collated centrally. The Government are examining the nature and adequacy of the statistics available on Government websites as part of the process of considering its response to the NAO report, 'Government on the Web II'.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the role played by the development of electronic public services in making the UK a congenial location for e-business and e-commerce to develop. [55874]

Mr. Leslie: The Government recognise the key role played by electronic service delivery on the development of the UK's e-commerce environment. The scale of Government interaction with business and the public, through its own supply and distribution chains, places it in a position to be a strong driver of e-commerce.

A broad assessment was published in "e-commerce@its.best.uk" in 1999. Subsequently our strategy for leveraging e-Government as a key driver for growth of the wider e-economy has been set out in the UK online annual reports published by the e-Minister and the e-Envoy in 2000 and 2001.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what information he publishes about the development of central Government services on the web. [55988]

Mr. Leslie: The second UK online annual report was published by the e-Minister and e-Envoy in December 2001. The report sets out the progress that has been made in meeting the Government's objectives for being at the forefront of the knowledge economy.

Among its five overarching themes is 'getting Government online'. The report also provides an updated UK online strategy, setting out the commitments made by the Government to further the e-Agenda.

Each month, the e-Minister and e-Envoy provide a joint report to the Prime Minister. These reports set out the progress on the UK online strategy.

There are also a number of development frameworks and guidance documents published. Among the key documents are:

e-Government Interoperability Framework Version 4

e-Government Metadata Standard

Guidelines for UK Government Websites: Framework for Senior Managers

Framework for e-Service Delivery.

All these documents can be downloaded for the publication option on the office of the e-Envoy website www.e-envoy.gov.uk.

Information on the Government Gateway is available from: http://www.govtalk.gov.uk/gateway—partnerlink/

Disclosure of Interests

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what rules apply to the disclosure of interests on the part of those serving on public bodies which are responsible to his Department. [56460]

Mr. Leslie: All advisory and executive non-departmental public bodies are required to adopt a board members' code, based on guidance produced by my Department, and they should have registers of interests. The definition of interests is ultimately for individual Departments since they are best placed to decide what might be thought to influence members of their NDPBs.

The table lists the NDPBs sponsored by this Department and in each case indicates what the relevant Code of Practice is and where it is available.

Name of body	*Board members code of practice*	*Code of practice for board members of advisory NDPBs*	*Where available*
Advisory Committee on Advertising		Yes	Upon request from the secretary
Advisory Committee on Business Appointments		Under review	Not yet available
Advisory Committees on Justices of the Peace for Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside		Yes	Upon request from the secretary
Better Regulation Taskforce		Yes	Upon request from the secretary
Civil Service Appeal Board		Yes	On request from the secretary
Committee on Standards in Public Life		Yes	On internet at www.public-standards.gov.uk or on request from the secretary
Equal Opportunities Commission	Yes		Incorporated in the EOC corporate governance document—available from the EOC
Honours Scrutiny Committee			No code in place. (Interest declared on the House of Lords' Register)
House of Lords Appointments Commission		Yes	On internet at www.houseoflordsappointmentscommission.gov.uk or on request from the secretary
Security Commission		Yes	On request from the secretary
Security Vetting Appeals Panel		Yes	On request from the secretary
Senior Salaries Review Body		Under review	Not yet available
Women's National Commission		Yes	On request from the Women's National Commission

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much was spent by his Department on paying pensions to retired employees of his Department in 2001–02; if he will estimate the corresponding amounts to be spent in *(a)* five years' time, *(b)* 10 years' time, *(c)* 20 years' time and *(d)* 30 years' time; if he will estimate in each case the proportion of such liabilities which will arise from (i) unfunded pension schemes and (ii) pre-funded pension schemes; and in the case of pre-funded schemes, if he will estimate the value of the corresponding pre-funded funds in each of these years. [57355]

Mr. Leslie: The Cabinet Office has responsibility for the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (PCSPS)—the occupational pension arrangement for civil servants.

The PCSPS is an unfunded public service scheme made under the Superannuation Act 1972. all payments of pension and related benefits to former members of the PCSPS or their dependants are made from the Civil Superannuation Vote, for which the Cabinet Office are accountable.

Net expenditure on civil service pension and related benefits for the year 2001–02 was as follows:

Expenditure—2001–02

	£ billion
Gross	2.8
Net of employer and employee contributions	1.4

Estimated net expenditure in five years' time, 10 years' time, 20 years' time and 30 years' time is estimated by GAD as follows:

Expenditure

£ billion

	Gross	*Net of employer and employee contributions*
5 years	3.0	1.1
10 years	3.2	1.2
20 years	3.6	1.6
30 years	3.7	1.6

New pension arrangements for the civil service are being introduced from 1 October 2002. These will give existing staff the choice between remaining in the existing scheme or moving to a new defined benefit scheme; new entrants will have a choice between joining the new defined benefit scheme or a good quality defined contribution arrangement. It has been assumed, solely for the purpose of these projections, that:

all existing staff will opt to remain in the existing scheme and continue to pay an employee contribution of 1.5 per cent. of pay; and

all new entrants will opt to join the new defined benefit scheme with an employee contribution of 3.5 per cent. of pay.

Options exercised by existing staff and new entrants are likely to differ from these assumptions but:

in circumstances where the future pattern of options is not known; and

the changes in pension arrangement are cost neutral for employers the projections provide a reasonable estimate of future expenditure.

Constant earnings, as at 2001–02, have been assumed throughout.

Temporary Staff

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many employees under contract from temping agencies were working in his Department and how much was spent on temporary staff *(a)* as a total and *(b)* as a percentage of the total staffing budget in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [58187]

Mr. Leslie: The number of employees working in the Cabinet Office under contract from temping agencies is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Estimated expenditure on temporary staff in the Cabinet Office is as follows:

Year	*£000*	*Percentage of total staffing budget*
1997–98	1,135	2.1
1998–99	1,589	2.6
1999–2000	1,907	2.7
2000–01	3,250	4.0

Final figures for 2001–02 are not yet available.

The figures include the Central Office of Information which, although not part of the Cabinet Office, also reports to me.

Sick Leave

Mr. Heald: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many days of sick leave were taken in his Department last year; how many related to employees suffering from *(a)* stress and *(b)* other mental health problems; and what the cost was to his Department. [56482]

Mr. Leslie: Cabinet Office publishes an analysis of sickness absence in the civil service each year. The most recently published figures (available on the Cabinet office website) are for calendar year 2000. Cabinet Office Departments (which included in that year GCDA and COI but not RCU) had an average of 4.6 working days absence per staff year.

The report estimates the overall cost of sickness absence within the civil service but does not provide a breakdown by Department.

Cabinet Office's internal records show the following levels of absence for *(a)* stress related illness and *(b)* other mental health problems.

2001	*Number*
Working days lost through:	
stress related illness and sickness	1,321
other mental health illness	0

Neither GCDA nor COI holds this information.

A breakdown of the specific cost of these absences is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The Cabinet Office is committed to improving levels of attendance. It is aware of its responsibilities as an employer to provide a safe and healthy working environment and is actively working to ensure that working days lost through work-related injury or illness are minimal.

TREASURY

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 246W, what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of unpaid advisers who have assisted the work of his Department since June 1997 but are not included in (i) the Cabinet Office's annual report "Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews 2000–01" and (ii) his previous answer. [57043]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* There is nothing I can usefully add to my answer of 10 April.

Disclosure of Interests

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what rules apply to the disclosure of interests on the part of those serving on public bodies which are responsible to his Department. [56456]

Ruth Kelly: All advisory and executive non-departmental public bodies are required to adopt a board members' code, based on guidance produced by the Cabinet Office, and they should have registers of members' interests. The definition of interests is ultimately for individual Departments since they are best placed to decide what might be thought to influence members of their NDPBs.

The following table lists the NDPBs sponsored by this Department and in each case indicates what the relevant Code of Practice is; where it is available and where information may be found on registers of members interests.

Name and status of body	*Location of Code of Practice and register of members interests*
Statistics Commission[1]	Published on Statistics Commission public website (address www.statscom.org.uk, in the "how we operate section"). Also available in that section is the register of Commissioners' interests
Public Service Productivity Panel[1]	The panel's Code of Conduct is available on application to the secretary of the panel, and will soon be available on the HM Treasury website (address http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/Documents/Public Spending and Services/Public Services Productivity Panel/pss psp backgrd.cfm) The register of members interests is in the process of being updated and the new version will be available on the panel's web

[1] Advisory NDPB

National Insurance (Care Homes)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the increased revenue from national insurance employees' contribution from the care home sector. [57180]

Dawn Primarolo: I regret that it would be possible to provide a reliable estimate only at disproportionate cost.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the mandate of the Committee on the mutual assistance in customs and agricultural markets, including operation of the CIS is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [58436]

Ruth Kelly: The legal base for the Committee on mutual assistance on customs and agricultural matters is set out in Council Regulation (EC) No. 515/97. It has a mandate to examine all matters relating to the application of this regulation and the effectiveness of its operation.

The Committee has met three times in the last 12 months.

Representation is normally two officials from HM Customs and Excise. Officials from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Office of the Information Commissioner also attend when necessary.

Travel expenses for two officials are reimbursed by the Commission. The usual cost of overnight accommodation and subsistence per day per official is 217.95 euro (£134.70).

The main item under consideration at present is the development of the Customs Information System, an automated information system being set up to assist in preventing, investigating and prosecuting operations which are in breach of customs or agricultural legislation.

Accountability and transparency to Parliament are ensured by the regular EU scrutiny process: documents agreed by various Council (ECOFIN, JHA, etc.) are submitted to Parliament along with explanatory memorandums and are examined by the Scrutiny Committees.

Mortgage Rates

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average mortgage rate was in each of the last 20 years. [58665]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Chris Ruane, dated 23 May 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning the average mortgage rate in each of the last 20 years. (58665)

The rates shown below are compiled by the Financial Services Authority. They are average rates for mortgages with Building Societies. Comparable figures prior to 1984 are not available.

Average rates for mortgages with building societies, 1984–2001[1]

	Average rate[2]	*Basic rate*[3]
1984	12.19	11.88
1985	13.01	12.75
1986	12.32	12.30
1987	10.34	10.30
1988	12.75	12.77
1989	14.44	14.42
1990	14.34	14.48
1991	11.39	11.52
1992	8.98	8.98
1993	7.94	7.99
1994	7.84	8.14
1995	7.48	7.98
1996	6.51	7.00
1997	7.58	8.16
1998	7.29	7.75
1999	6.49	6.77
2000	6.65	7.31
2001	5.17	5.34

[1] The average rates are based on information provided by building societies. The figures reflect rates at the end of the year.

[2] These data represent the weighted average of individual reporters' own weighted average rates on their overall residential loan book.

[3] These data represent the weighted average of the individual reporters' standard variable (headline) rate applying to the majority of mortgage accounts at the end of reporting period.

Unemployment

Paul Holmes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will restore the 1979 methods of calculating the official level of unemployment; [58760]

(2) if he will estimate the level of current unemployment using methods of counting claimants used in 1979; [58758]

(3) what changes were made between 1979 and 1997 to the way in which the official level of unemployment was calculated. [58759]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician, who has been asked to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Paul Holmes, dated 23 May 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary questions; (a) if he will restore the 1979 methods of calculating the official level of unemployment, (b) if he will estimate the level of current unemployment using methods of claimants used in 1979 and (c) what changes were made between 1979 and 1997 to the way in which the official level of unemployment was calculated. (58758, 58759, 58760)

The monthly measure of UK unemployment used in 1979 was the count of registrants at Jobcentres. This was based on an administrative system which no longer exists. Consequently it is not possible to restore the 1979 method of calculation nor to estimate the current level on the same basis.

Since April 1998, monthly statistics of unemployment in the UK have been compiled and published, following the internationally standard definition, from the Labour Force Survey (LFS). This counts as unemployed people who are: a) without a paid job; b) available to start work within the next two weeks and c) have either looked for work in the last four weeks or are waiting to start a job already obtained. The Labour Force Survey measure of unemployment has been compiled and published on the same definition—following the guidelines of the International Labour Organisation—since 1984.

The ONS also publishes monthly statistics of the numbers of people who are claiming unemployment-related benefits, known as the claimant count. Details of changes which have affected the coverage or calculation of these monthly figures between 1979 and 1997 are detailed in articles in the November 1995 and April 1998 editions of Labour Market Trends.

Tonnage Tax

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to review the tonnage tax. [59720]

Dawn Primarolo: The tonnage tax was introduced in 2000 as part of a package of measures to revive the UK shipping industry. In accordance with commitments given at the time, I am asking the Inland Revenue to begin a review of the way the regime is operating. As the review develops, it will contribute to the Government's evaluation of the whole package of measures including the impact on employment and training. Details about how representations can be made to the review will be available on the Inland Revenue's website. www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/consult_new/tonnagetax.pdf

Departmental Land

Mr. Luff: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the land that his Department is *(a)* offering for sale and *(b)* plans to offer in the next 12 months, giving its (i) location and (ii) size. [59059]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury does not plan to sell any land over this period.

European Council Decisions

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy towards Recital 22 of Council Decision 2002/177/EC (OJ L60, 1 Mar 02), on making visible a gender perspective across all pillars. [57905]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

Council Decision 2202/177/EC, dated 18 February 2002, is on the 'guidelines for member states employment policies for the year 2002'. Recital 22 states that member states should strengthen their efforts to include and make visible a gender perspective across all the pillars (of the Employment Guidelines). This Recital clarifies the intention of the Council, and reflects the wishes of the European Parliament, that gender equality should be a horizontal objective for member states when they take the Guidelines into account in their national employment policies.

The UK Government fully supports the principle that a concern for gender equality needs to be reflected across the full range of employment policy. The Government principally achieves that outcome through the Policy Appraisal for Equal Treatment Guidelines, issued to all Departments in November 1998, and through the Gender Impact Assessment framework, which will be produced during 2002–03.

The website of the Women and Equality Unit of the Cabinet Office publicises this activity, which is also reported on in the UK Employment Action Plan 2002, along with a gender breakdown of performance data. The LKP will be placed in the Library shortly.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the *(a)* size of fleet and *(b)* type and age of vehicles was in each division of Customs and Excise in the last three years; [53478]

(2) what percentage of the vehicle fleet of Customs and Excise were equipped with online computer terminals in each of the last three years. [53477]

Mr. Boateng: Like all their equipment and staff, Customs' vehicles are deployed in a flexible way based on the latest assessments of risk, rather than located exclusively in any one region. On a national basis, the total Customs' vehicle fleet has increased from 2,085 in 1999–2000 to 2,143 in 2001–02.

The average age of the vehicle fleet has remained constant at around 4.5 years. The proportions of different vehicle types which make up the fleet have also remained broadly constant with approximately 78.3 per cent. designated as cars, 8 per cent. as car-derived vans, 8.5 per cent. as light commercial vehicles and 5.2 per cent. as specialist/heavy goods vehicles.

The percentage of the vehicle fleet fitted with online computer terminals, used either for satellite navigation or covert tracking, has risen from approximately 3 per cent. in 1999–2000 to approximately 8 per cent. in 2001–02.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff were employed at the HM Customs and Excise Coventry International Hub in each year since 1995. [58086]

Mr. Boateng: HM Customs and Excise's station at Coventry International HUB opened in October 1999.

Staff employed (headcount) at the station in 2000, 2001 and 2002 (1 April each year) were as follows:

	Number of staff employed
2000	63
2001	68
2002	59

Funding (Luton, South)

Margaret Moran: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what moneys have been provided *(a)* directly and *(b)* via agencies for which the Department has responsibility to the Luton, South constituency since 1997. [58584]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury's expenditure relates to the conduct of national economic and financial policies. It does not make grants or other payments which can be attributed to individual parts of the country.

Negative Equity

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of mortgage holders experiencing negative equity in each of the last 20 years. [58635]

Ruth Kelly: HM Treasury do not make estimates of negative equity. Estimates from the DTLR are shown in the table. Figures were not produced pre-1989, and have not been produced post-1997 on the grounds that with rising house prices the number of cases are likely to be negligible.

DTLR end year estimates of numbers of mortgage holders with negative equity

	Thousand
1989	78
1990	340
1991	507
1992	1,221
1993	894
1994	677
1995[1]	907
1996[1]	226
1997[1]	30

[1] Different methodology used for estimates from 1995.

Euro

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the objective of the preliminary technical work on the five economic tests which is being carried out by the Treasury is; and if he will make a statement. [58819]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the comments I made during the adjournment debate on the preliminary and technical work held on the Floor of the House on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 267.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many times the Cross-party Committee on Euro Preparations has met since 7 June 2001; what meetings are planned over the next six months; and if he will make a statement; [58791]

(2) if he will make a statement on the recent work of the Cross-party Euro Preparations Committee. [58792]

Ruth Kelly: The Cross-party Group on Euro Preparations has met on five occasions since 7 June 2001. The Group continues to hold regular meetings looking at euro preparations from the perspective of different sectors of the UK economy. Recent meetings of the Cross-party Group on Euro Preparations have focused on the cash changeover in the euro area, UK business preparations for working with the euro now, and public sector euro preparations.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what meetings *(a)* he, *(b)* his Ministers and *(c)* special advisers have had since 1 January with Conservative hon. Members on the subject of the euro; and if he will make a statement. [58816]

Ruth Kelly: Ministers and special advisers from HM Treasury have had no meetings since 1 January with Conservative hon. Members on the subject of the euro.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the time it will take to assess whether the five economic tests for euro entry have been met, from the time when the assessment is begun; and if he will make a statement; [58793]

(2) whether it is his policy to make a public statement when the preliminary technical work on the five economic tests for euro entry is completed and the formal assessment of the tests is begun; and if he will make a statement; [58794]

(3) whether he has started the assessment of the five economic tests for membership of the euro; and if he will make a statement. [58807]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to him on 2 July, *Official Report*, column 67W.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will publish the preliminary technical work so far completed on the five economic tests for the euro; and if he will make a statement; [58798]

(2) if he will make a statement on the recent progress on the preliminary technical work relating to the five economic tests for membership of the euro. [58808]

Ruth Kelly: The assessment has not yet started, but the preliminary analysis—technical work that is necessary to allow us to undertake the assessment within two years as we promised—is under way. The Government have said that they will complete the assessment within two years of the start of this Parliament. Once the assessment is complete, the Government will publish the conclusions and the report.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many individuals within HM Treasury were working on the preliminary technical work on the five economic tests on the latest day for which information is available; and if he will make a statement; [58801]

(2) how many people in the Treasury will be involved in the formal assessment of the five economic tests for euro entry; who they are; and if he will make a statement; [58795]

(3) which *(a)* units and *(b)* individuals within HM Treasury will complete the work to establish whether the UK has met the five economic tests for euro entry; and if he will make a statement; [58802]

(4) whether HM Treasury will be involving officials from other Departments in the final evaluation of the five economic tests for euro entry; [58803]

(5) whether HM Treasury is involving officials from any other Government Departments in the preliminary technical work on the five economic tests for euro entry; and if he will make a statement. [58804]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the comments I made during the adjournment debate on the preliminary and technical work held on the Floor of the House on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 268.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what opinion polling has been carried out by his Department since 7 June 2001 into public attitudes to the euro; what the cost has been of such polling; if he will publish the results; and if he will make a statement. [58796]

Ruth Kelly: No opinion polling into public attitudes to the euro has been carried out by HM Treasury either since 7 June 2001, or before then.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the outside academic work which has been commissioned since June 2001 by HM Treasury as part of the preliminary work on the assessment of the five economic tests for euro entry; and if he will make a statement. [58818]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury on 6 February, *Official Report*, column 959W.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had since 1 January with Ministers from the Department of Trade and Industry about the Government's plans for the euro; and if he will make a statement. [58797]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor has regular discussions with Ministers in other Government Departments on a wide range of issues.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had since 1 January with *(a)* trade unionists, *(b)* business leaders and *(c)* the CBI, about Government policy on the euro; and if he will make a statement. [58817]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor frequently meets representatives from outside organisations to discuss a range of issues.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had since 1 January with other EU Governments about British policy on the euro; and if he will make a statement. [58813]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor has frequent discussions on a wide range of issues with his European counterparts.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many individuals from the Bank of England are seconded to HM Treasury to work on the preliminary technical work on the euro; and if he will make a statement. [58799]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the comments I made during the Adjournment debate on the Floor of the House on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 268.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the relative positions in the economic cycle of the United Kingdom in relation to the economy of the euro zone; and if he will make a statement. [58790]

Ruth Kelly: The Government will not give a running commentary on the five tests. The assessment of the five economic tests has not yet started, but the necessary preliminary analysis—technical work that is necessary to allow us to undertake the assessment within two years as promised—is under way.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are employed within the euro preparations section of HM Treasury; how many were employed on *(a)* 31 December 2000 and *(b)* 31 December 2001; and if he will make a statement. [58809]

Ruth Kelly: The number of staff in the Euro Preparations Unit in the Treasury on the dates requested is as follows:

	EPU staffing[1]
31 December 2000	12
31 December 2001	14
1 April 2002	14

[1] Full-time equivalents

The aims and objectives of the Euro Preparations Unit were set out in Treasury Press Notice 156/97 of 5 December 1997.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made recently of the competitiveness of the pound against the euro; and if he will make a statement [58812]

Ruth Kelly: The Government do not comment on day-to-day developments in the value of sterling, as they believe this could have destabilising effects. However, a stable and competitive exchange rate is sought over the medium-term.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the implications of British membership of the euro for British fiscal policy autonomy; and if he will make a statement. [58815]

Ruth Kelly: The Government have said that they will complete an assessment of the five economic tests within two years of the start of this Parliament. All relevant economic issues will be dealt with as part of the assessment.

Growth Rate

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he predicts that the Scottish GDP growth rate will match the overall UK GDP growth rate. [59397]

Ruth Kelly: Neither the UK Government nor the Scottish Executive produce GDP forecasts for Scotland, or any other country or region of the UK.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what levels of growth the Scottish GDP would have to attain in 2002–03 to keep pace with the projected EU average. [59396]

Ruth Kelly: The latest EC GDP growth forecast for the EU-15 in 2002 and 2003, as published on 24 April 2002 in 'European Economy—Economic Forecasts Spring 2002' (ref no. 2/2002), was 1.5 per cent. and 2.9 per cent. respectively.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how he devised the UK GDP growth rate that was announced in the Budget. [59395]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's latest forecasts for UK GDP growth are based on a comprehensive assessment of domestic and world economic developments and prospects, as set out in Chapter B of the Financial Statement and Budget Report (HC592). This assessment takes into account a wide range of economic data from official and private sector sources.

[illegible]lmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the GDP growth rate for Scotland was in each of the last five years for which data was available; what it is projected to be for this year; and if he will make a statement. [59394]

Ruth Kelly: The Scottish Executive produces a constant price index of Scottish Output (Gross Value Added). These data are available on the Scottish Executive website.

Neither the Scottish Executive nor the UK Government produce GDP forecasts for Scotland or any of the other countries and regions of the UK.

National Insurance Fund

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the size of the usable surplus in the national insurance fund; and what restrictions there are on the future use of the fund. [58204]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer my hon. Friend to the report of the Government Actuary (Cm 5383) published in February 2002. The report estimates the receipts of and payments from the national insurance fund for the years 2001–02 and 2002–03 and the balance in the fund at the start and end of each year. Under the Social Security Administration Act 1992 the national insurance fund can only be spent on contributory benefits and related expenditure, and certain redundancy payments. Any surplus is invested in Government securities.

Offshore Tax Havens

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent research his Department has commissioned on the effects of company offshore tax havens on United Kingdom tax revenue. [58211]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue regularly monitor the effects of other jurisdictions' tax policies on UK tax revenues.

EU Tax Harmonisation

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on tax harmonisation within the European Union. [58814]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government's approach to EU tax issues is based on fair tax competition rather than tax harmonisation.

EU Stability and Growth Pact

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress his Department is making in working with other EU Governments to reform the Stability and Growth Pact; and if he will make a statement. [58811]

Ruth Kelly: The Government support a prudent interpretation of the Stability Pact, which takes into account the impact of the economic cycle, sustainability and the important role of public investment. We continue to discuss this with our EU colleagues.

Equitable Life

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects the final report by Lord Penrose into Equitable Life; and if he will make a statement. [57606]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 214W.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer under what circumstances special advisers within his Department see draft answers to parliamentary questions; whether they make comments on these; and if he will make a statement. [58806]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 958W.

Bank of England Governor

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he proposes to announce the appointment of the next Governor of the Bank of England; and if he will make a statement. [58800]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave him on 21 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 523W.

Temporary Staff

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employees under contract from temping agencies were working in his Department and how much was spent on temporary staff *(a)* as a total and *(b)* as a percentage of the total staffing budget in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [58186]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* The total cost of temp services for the last five financial years along with a comparative percentage of total staffing costs is as follows:

	Temp costs £	*Percentage of total staffing costs*
1997–98	156,823	0.5
1998–99	462,521	1.4
1999–2000	614,706	1.7
2000–01	929,800	2.4
2001–02	1,012,776	2.4

Actual numbers of staff under contract from temping agencies are not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

HEALTH

Mobility Products

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce a statutory code of practice governing the sale of mobility products for elderly people. [58021]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

I have agreed to meet Age Concern to discuss their recent report on sales techniques used in selling assistive products. There are however no plans to introduce a statutory code of practice.

Job Advertisements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the job advertisements placed by his Department in the last 12 months specifying where the advertisements were placed and the cost in each case. [39068]

Ms Blears: The information requested is shown in the table. Details of where the advertisements are placed are not centrally recorded. Regional offices and agency recruitment details are not collated centrally.

Senior and specialist posts are advertised nationally and/or in specialist press.

The Department has a robust external recruitment policy which complies with the rules and requirements of "Minister's Rules for Selection", "The Civil Service Order Council", Treasury and equal opportunity and employment protection legislation.

£

Job vacancy	*Advertising cost*
Admin and secretarial posts	52,885.54
Branch head posts	81,905.87
Business manager posts	16,843.15
Communications specialist posts	69,031.88
Director posts	88,261.90
Economist/analyst posts	51,629.96
Human resource professional posts	13,587.70
Information/librarian specialist posts	4,282.88
Local public service agreement coordinator posts	3,390.56
Management accountant posts	5,710.88
Mental health group manager posts	2,286.93
Policy officer posts	12,192.73
Primary care nursing adviser posts	4,789.76
Pharmaceutical specialist posts	10,262.17
Project manager posts	20,821.26
Researcher posts	12,803.15
Risk management officer and quality inspector posts	15,108.32
Scientific specialist posts	10,211.78
Senior auditor posts	9,486.76
Senior forensic mental health specialist posts	2,670.46
Senior medical officer posts	17,243.81
Senior quality assurance coordinator posts	10,979.32
Social services inspectors posts	14,435.67
Valuing people regional worker posts	3,188.20
Web development manager posts	4,753.49
Total cost	538,764.00

Source:

Department of Health central recruitment data March 2001 to February 2002.

RSV

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the *(a)* effectiveness, *(b)* cost-effectiveness and *(c)* affordability of a programme of RSV immunisation for (i) all premature infants before their first or second winter and (ii) infants with a history of, or with, a lung or heart condition. [41473]

Yvette Cooper: The Department of Health has not undertaken a study to assess the cost effectiveness of a programme of respiratory syncytial virus immunisation in premature infants and those with a history of a lung or heart condition. The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation has considered this and has asked for more information.

Oral Contraceptive Pills

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many oral contraceptive pills were dispensed to teenage girls in each of the last five years, broken down by *(a)* age and *(b)* region. [42328]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 11 March 2002]:* The information requested is not collected by the Department. Data on general practitioners prescriptions are not broken down by age.

Information about the number of first contacts with girls age under 16, and between 16 and 19 years of age at family planning clinics, where the primary method of birth control was the oral contraceptive, is given below. The figures for England are published in "NHS Contraceptive Services, England: 2000–01", a copy of which is available in the Library.

Because regional health authority boundaries changed in April 1998, the information is presented in two tables, one for the pre-1998 boundaries and one for the boundaries introduced in 1998.

First contacts with teenage girls at family planning clinics where the primary method of birth control was the oral contraceptive.

(a) 1996–97 and 1997–98: Health regions in existence before April 1998

	Age under 16	*Age 16–19*
England	22,968	110,115
Regions 1996–97		
Northern and Yorkshire	3,979	14,372
Trent	2,464	9,070
Anglia and Oxford	1,787	9,968
North Thames	2,528	15,826
South Thames	3,081	16,265
South and West	2,912	14,876
West Midlands	2,706	13,169
North West	3,511	16,569
1997–98		
England	22,675	115,879
Regions 1996–97		
Northern and Yorkshire	3,788	16,861
Trent	2,421	9,086
Anglia and Oxford	1,712	9,776
North Thames	2,431	17,087
South Thames	3,506	17,037
South and West	2,864	15,186
West Midlands	2,475	13,217
North West	3,478	17,647

Source:

Department of Health Statistics Division SD2B, form KT31

(b) 1998–99 to 2000–01: New health regions from 1998

	Age under 16	*Age 16–19*
1998–99		
England	21,830	114,959
New regions from 1998–99		
Northern and Yorkshire	3,922	15,719
Trent	2,309	9,283
Eastern	1,491	10,691
London	3,232	19,416
South East	3,412	17,748
South West	2,094	10,440
West Midlands	2,297	13,678
North West	3,073	17,984

(b) 1998–99 to 2000–01: New health regions from 1998

	Age under 16	*Age 16–19*
1999–2000		
England	22,736	118,752
New regions from 1998–99		
Northern and Yorkshire	3,939	16,201
Trent	2,479	2,524
Eastern	1,733	10,806
London	3,251	20,698
South East	3,811	19,394
South West	1,560	9,215
West Midlands	2,726	14,248
North West	3,237	18,666
2000–01		
England	23,911	116,682
New regions from 1998–99		
Northern and Yorkshire	3,930	16,342
Trent	2,522	9,676
Eastern	1,814	10,406
London	3,494	19,707
South East	4,072	18,798
South West	1,614	8,174
West Midlands	2,773	14,194
North West	3,692	19,385

Source:
Department of Health Statistics Division SD2B, form KT31

Hearing Aids

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how long the average wait has been to receive an NHS hearing aid in each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement; [48573]

(2) how old the average recipient of an NHS hearing aid has been in each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement; [48574]

(3) how many people have been on a waiting list to receive an NHS hearing aid in each of the past 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [48572]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not available centrally. However according to the Institute of Hearing Research, the mean age of adults supplied with hearing aids as part of the modernising hearing aid services project is 71 (with a median age of 74). The Department is working in partnership with the Royal National Institute for Deaf People to modernise hearing aid services. The project includes provision of digital hearing aids as part of a modernised service designed to meet the needs of people with hearing impairments. Over £30 million has been invested to support the modernisation project.

Mount Vernon Hospital

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors and nurses have worked in each service provided at Mount Vernon hospital in each of the last 10 years; and how many doctor and nurse vacancies there have been in each service provided in each of the last 10 years. [48907]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested will be placed in the Library.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what services are provided at Mount Vernon hospital; how many patients were treated as *(a)* out-patients and *(b)* in-patients in each of the last five years, broken down by service area; whether each of the services will continue to be provided in the next five years; and if he will make a statement. [48910]

Mr. Hutton: Hillingdon Hospital National Health Service Trust provides the following services on the Mount Vernon site: general medical and surgical out-patient care (including orthopaedics and urology), endoscopy day care and in-patient general surgery, urology, orthopaedics, rehabilitation and continuing care.

West Hertfordshire Hospitals National Health Service Trust provides specialist services on site such as cancer services and burns and plastics. They also provide pharmacy, medical physics and haematology services.

The future of cancer services at Mount Vernon is currently under review. The long term review of the Mount Vernon cancer network and centre is scheduled to be published in June 2002. A review of burns and plastics services has already been undertaken and these services are due to move to the Northwick Park site by 2004.

Information is not collected centrally with regard to the number of patients treated as in-patients and out-patients in each of the last five years, broken down by service area. The data are collected annually at NHS trust level, rather than by individual hospital site. NHS trusts provide health care but may provide it at more than one hospital site.

Smoking Czar

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 276W, when *(a)* he and *(b)* his Ministers last met Nikki Griffiths of his Tobacco Policy Team. [53068]

Yvette Cooper: No meetings have taken place between Nikki Griffiths, alliance network co-ordinator, and either my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health or any of his ministerial colleagues.

Renal Transplant Services

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the relative benefits of transferring renal services from St. George's to St. Helier hospitals. [54280]

Mr. Hutton: 10 criteria were considered as part of the assessment of the relative benefits of centralising transplantation services at Epsom and St. Helier national health service trust, St. George's healthcare national health service trust or Guy's and St. Thomas' national health service trust. These criteria included access; clinical quality; standard of facilities; staff recruitment and retention; strategic fit; education, training and research; clinical links; resource effectiveness and affordability; achievability; methods for patient and carer involvement. These criteria were agreed by clinical and managerial staff of Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth health authority, Brighton and Sussex university hospitals national healthcare service trust, St. George's healthcare national healthcare service trust, Epsom and St. Helier national healthcare service trust, their kidney patient associations and Merton and Sutton community health council.

Proposals to centralise services at St. George's hospital are currently subject to a three month public consultation which concludes on 25 June 2002.

NHS Appointments (Non-attendance)

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will rank in order of non-attendance the level of failed appointments in each health authority for each hospital in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [55789]

Mr. Hutton: Data on the number of failed appointments due to non-attendance are not available at health authority or hospital level.

Data ranked by the level of failed appointments due to non-attendance in national health service trusts during 2000–01 have been placed in the Library.

NHS Dentistry

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to increase the number of dentists taking NHS patients in the Boston and Skegness constituency. [56148]

Yvette Cooper: All health authorities in England have in place dentistry action plans to ensure that everyone in their local area can access NHS dentistry if they want it, within a reasonable time and distance. These plans identify shortfalls in service provision and ways of tackling user demand.

Based on information held by NHS Direct, one practice in both Boston and Skegness are accepting NHS patients. Action is being taken to improve this situation. Lincolnshire is one of the third wave personal dental service pilots. The pilot will see the development of a dental access centre at six sites across the county, including Boston and Skegness, through a combination of new buildings and conversion of existing community dental services. £877,000 capital and £340,000 revenue were allocated to the pilot in 2000–01 with a further £270,000 capital and £91,000 revenue in 2001–02.

In addition, Lincolnshire has received dental care development funding amounting to £95,000 in 2000–01 and £185,000 in 2001–02 for expansion and modernisation of practices in areas of poor access which are already offering significant NHS commitment and are prepared to increase numbers of NHS patients. A further allocation of £407,000 has been made from the dental modernisation fund to modernise premises and upgrade equipment and from the dental practice. £17,000 has been allocated from the dental practice grant to set up quality assurance systems in each dental practice.

Waiting Times

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the maximum waiting time for radiotherapy in Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells has been in the last 12 months; and what the target is for maximum waiting times for radiotherapy. [56273]

Yvette Cooper: Information on radiotherapy waiting times is not collected centrally.

The Government are committed to improving the whole cancer pathway from referral to diagnosis and, if needed, treatment. We have set out a series of targets that will come into force during the next few years. By 2005, there will be a maximum one month wait from diagnosis to treatment for all cancers and a maximum two month wait from urgent referral to treatment for all cancers. Information to monitor the achievement of these targets will be collected and published.

Hospital Treatment

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many emergency patients attending Oldchurch A and E department received in-patient treatment in *(a)* each half-yearly period from 1994–95 to date and *(b)* each of the last 12 months. [56520]

Mr. Hutton: Data on patients admitted from accident and emergency are not available for the individual hospital requested. The Oldchurch hospital is part of Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospitals NHS Trust, which was formed in April 2001. Information on the number of patients admitted from an accident and emergency department is shown in the table. Previous years' figures are not available as this information was collected at health authority level.

Admission from accident and emergency departments, for Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospitals NHS trust, 2001–02 quarters one to three

2001–02	*Number of patients admitted through A and E*
Quarter three	7,369
Quarter two	6,338
Quarter one	6,120

Source:
"Your guide to the NHS" form

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients failed to attend for in-patient and day-care treatment in each of the past 10 years in England. [56527]

Mr. Hutton: Data on the number of in-patients and day-cases that failed to attend (FTAs) are shown in the table.

In-patient and day-case FTAs—NHS Trusts, England

	Quarter	*Patients admitted*	*Patient DNAs*	*DNA rate percentage*
1991–92	—	2,993,532	192,068	6.0
1992–93	—	3,111,627	180,538	5.5
1993–94	—	3,110,477	179,594	5.5
1994–95	—	3,376,016	199,535	5.6
1995–96	—	3,500,353	207,515	5.6
1996–97	—	3,549,073	223,255	5.9
1998–99	—	3,826,507	171,382	4.3
1999–2000	—	3,682,180	146,599	3.8
2000–01	—	3,467,338	125,860	3.5
2001–02	1	791,623	28,299	3.5
2001–02	2	814,973	28,393	3.4
2001–02	3	822,616	28,681	3.4

Note:
Data for 1997–98 was collected at year end only, not on a quarterly basis, and is not included because of issues surrounding the quality of the data.

Source:
Department of Health form KH06

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people attended the A and E department at Oldchurch hospital in Havering in *(a)* 1992–93 and in each subsequent year to 2000–01 and *(b)* each of the last 12 months. [56521]

Mr. Hutton: Data on accident and emergency (A and E) attendances are not collected on a monthly basis. From 2001–02, the information is available on a quarterly basis and previous to this on an annual basis. A and E data are not available for the individual hospital requested. The Oldchurch hospital is part of Barking, Havering and Redbridge hospitals national health service trust, which was formed in April 2001 (previously it was part of Havering hospitals NHS trust). Information on the number of A and E attendances at the NHS organisation that contained the Oldchurch hospital is given in the table.

Accident and emergency service activity, for the selected NHS trust, 1992–93 to 2001–02 quarter 4

	Name	*First attendances*	*Follow-up attendances*	*Total attendances*
2001–02 quarter 4	Barking, Havering and Redbridge hospitals NHS trust	41,846	2,000	43,846
2001–02 quarter 3	Barking, Havering and Redbridge hospitals NHS trust	43,709	2,587	46,296
2001–02 quarter 2	Barking, Havering and Redbridge hospitals NHS trust	43,382	1,940	45,322
2001–02 quarter 1	Barking, Havering and Redbridge hospitals NHS trust	43,770	1,904	45,674
2000–01	Havering hospitals NHS trust	76,416	3,744	80,160
1999–2000	Havering hospitals NHS trust	79,973	3,684	83,657
1998–99	Havering hospitals NHS trust	86,118	6,240	92,358
1997–98	Havering hospitals NHS trust	88,182	6,869	95,051
1996–97	Havering hospitals NHS trust	89,273	8,516	97,789
1995–96	Havering hospitals NHS trust	86,167	8,603	94,770
1994–95	Havering hospitals NHS trust	93,356	9,191	102,547
1993–94	Havering hospitals NHS trust	100,627	12,856	113,483
1992–93	Barking, Havering and Brentwood DHA	110,529	15,850	126,379

Source:
Department of Health form KH09

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the advisory committee on training in nursing is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56756]

Mr. Hutton: The advisory committee on training in nursing (ACTN) is one of a group of committees set up to advise the European Commission and member states on matters relating to the training of workers whose professions come under sectoral directives guaranteeing free movement and automatic recognition of qualifications.

The ACTN was set up by Council Decision 77/454/EEC. Its mandate is set down in Article 2, which states that:

> 1. The task of the Committee shall be to help ensure a comparably demanding standard in the training of the various categories of nursing personnel throughout the Community.
>
> 2. It shall carry out this task, in particular, by the following means:
>
> exchange of comprehensive information as to the training methods and the content, level and structure of theoretical and practical courses provided in the member states,
>
> discussion and consultation with the object of developing common approaches to the standard to be attained in the training [illegible] nursing personnel, and, as appropriate, to the structure and content of such training,
>
> keeping under the review the adaption of the above-mentioned training to developments in nursing practice, medical and social science and teaching methods.
>
> 3. The Committee shall communicate to the Commission and the Member States its opinions and recommendations including, when it considers it appropriate, suggestions for amendments to be made to the provisions concerning training in the Directives relating to nursing activities as in Directives 77/452 EEC and 77/453/EEC.
>
> 4. The Committee shall also advise the Commission on any matter which the Commission may refer to it in relation to the training of nursing personnel.

Each advisory committee has three members per member state—one each from the practising profession, the education establishments and the competent authorities concerned. Three alternates are also appointed. Members and alternates are nominated by Ministers following consultation with the relevant professional bodies.

Advisory committee expenses fall to be paid by the Commission (or on occasion by the professions concerned). There is thus no direct charge to public funds.

Member states are currently considering Commission proposals for streamlining the directives and processes relating to free movement of professionals. None of the advisory committees has met during the last 12 months; and none of them has any items under consideration.

In April this year, the issues arising from the Commission's proposals for the future of professional recognition were submitted to the Parliamentary Scrutiny Committees (Explanatory Memorandum No. 7239/02-COM(2002)119final).

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the advisory committee on medical training is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56755]

Mr. Hutton: The advisory committee on medical training (ACMT) is one of a group of committees set up to advise the European Commission and member states on matters relating to the training of workers whose professions come under sectoral directives guaranteeing free movement and automatic recognition of qualifications.

The ACMT was set up by Council Decision 75/364/EEC. Its mandate is set down in Article 2, which states that:

> 1. "The Task of the Committee shall be to help to ensure a comparably demanding standard of medical training in the Community, with regard both to basic training and further training".
> 2. It shall carry out this task, in particular, by the following means:
>
> exchange of comprehensive information as to the training methods and the content, level and structure of theoretical and practical courses provided in the member states;
>
> discussion and consultation with the object of developing common approaches to the standard to be attained in the training of doctors and, as appropriate, to the structure and content of such training;
>
> keeping under review the adaptation of medical training to developments in medical science and teaching methods.
>
> 3. The Committee shall communicate to the Commission and the member states its opinions and recommendations including, when it considers it appropriate, suggestions for amendments to be made to the Articles relating to the training of doctors as in Directives 75/362/EEC and 75/363/EEC.
> 4. The Committee shall also advise the Commission on any matter which the Commission may refer to it in relation to the training of doctors.

Each advisory committee has three members per member state—one each from the practising profession, the education establishments and the competent authorities concerned. Three alternates are also appointed. Members and alternates are nominated by Ministers following consultation with the relevant professional bodies.

Advisory committee expenses fall to be paid by the Commission (or on occasion by the professions concerned).

Member states are currently considering Commission proposals for streamlining the directives and processes relating to free movement of professionals. None of the advisory committees has met during the last 12 months; and none of them has any items under consideration.

In April this year, the issues arising from the Commission's proposals for the future of professional recognition were submitted to the parliamentary Scrutiny Committees (Explanatory Memorandum No. 7239/02—COM(2002)119 final).

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the advisory committee on the training of dental practitioners is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56758]

Mr. Hutton: The advisory committee on dental training (ACDT) is one of a group of committees set up to advise the European Commission and member states on matters relating to the training of workers whose professions come under sectoral directives guaranteeing free movement and automatic recognition of qualifications.

The ACDT was set up by Council Decision 78/688/EEC. Its mandate is set down in Article 2, which states that:

> 1. The Task of the Committee shall be to help ensure a comparably demanding standard in the training of dental practitioners in the Community, with regard both to the training of dental practitioners and that of practitioners of specialised dentistry.
> 2. It shall carry out this task, in particular, by the following means:
>
> exchange of comprehensive information as to the training methods and the content, level and structure of theoretical and practical courses provided in the member states,
>
> discussion and consultation with the object of developing common approaches to the standard to be attained in the training of dental practitioners and, as appropriate, to the structure and content of such training,
>
> keeping under the review the adaptation of the training of dental practitioners to developments in dental science and teaching methods.
>
> 3. The Committee shall communicate to the Commission and the member states its opinions and recommendations including, when it considers it appropriate, suggestions for amendments to be made to the Articles relating to the training of dental practitioners as in Directives 78/686/EEC and 78/687/EEC.
> 4. The Committee shall also advise the Commission on any matter which the Commission may refer to it in relation to the training of dental practitioners.

Each advisory committee has three members per member state—one each from the practising profession, the education establishments and the competent authorities concerned. Three alternates are also appointed. Members and alternates are nominated by Ministers following consultation with the relevant professional bodies.

Advisory committee expenses fall to be paid by the Commission (or on occasion by the professions concerned).

Member states are currently considering Commission proposals for streamlining the directives and processes relating to free movement of professionals. None of the advisory committees has met during the last 12 months; and none of them has any items under consideration.

In April this year, the issues arising from the Commission's proposals for the future of professional recognition were submitted to the parliamentary Scrutiny Committees (Explanatory Memorandum No. 7239/02—COM(2002)119 final).

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the advisory committee on the training of midwives is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56757]

Mr. Hutton: The advisory committee on the training of midwives (ACTM) is one of a group of committees set up to advise the European Commission and member states on matters relating to the training of workers whose professions come under sectoral directives guaranteeing free movement and automatic recognition of qualifications.

The ACTM was set up by Council Decision 80/156/EEC. Its mandate is set down in Article 2, which states that:

> 1. The Task of the Committee shall be to help ensure throughout the Community a comparably high standard in the training of midwives.
>
> 2. It shall carry out this task, in particular, by the following means:
>
> exchange of comprehensive information as to the training methods and the content, level and structure of theoretical and practical courses provided in the member states,
>
> discussion and consultation with the object of developing common approaches to the standard to be attained in the training of midwives. and, as appropriate, to the structure and content of such training,
>
> keeping under the review the adaptation of the above-mentioned training to developments in midwifery practice, medical and social science and teaching methods.
>
> 3. The Committee shall communicate to the Commission and the Member States its opinions and recommendations including, when it considers it appropriate, suggestions for amendments to be made to the articles concerning training of midwives in Directives 80/154/EEC and 80/155/EEC.
>
> 4. The Committee shall also advise the Commission on any matter which the Commission may refer to it in relation to the training of midwives.

Each advisory committee has three members per member state—one each from the practising profession, the education establishments and the competent authorities concerned. Three alternates are also appointed. Members and alternates are nominated by Ministers following consultation with the relevant professional bodies.

Advisory committee expenses fall to be paid by the Commission (or on occasion by the professions concerned). There is thus no direct charge to public funds.

Member states are currently considering Commission proposals for streamlining the directives and processes relating to free movement of professionals. None of the advisory committees has met during the last 12 months; and none of them has any items under consideration.

In April this year, the issues arising from the Commission's proposals for the future of professional recognition were submitted to the Parliamentary Scrutiny Committees (Explanatory Memorandum No. 7239/02-COM(2002) 119final).

GPs

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of general practitioners he estimates will opt out of 24-hour responsibility. [56918]

Mr. Hutton: It is too early to estimate what proportion of general practitioners will respond to the opportunities offered by the planned new national GP contract.

Breast Cancer

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women were screened for breast cancer in each of the last five years. [56910]

Yvette Cooper: The number of women screened by the NHS breast screening programme in England in each of the last five years are contained in the following table.

Number of women, aged 45 or over, screened for breast cancer in England, 1996–2001

	Number of women screened
2000–01	1,298,752
1999–2000	1,322,891
1998–99	1,232,310
1997–98	1,179,658
1996–97	1,109,845

Source:

Department of Health Statistics Division 3G KC62.

Waiting Lists

• **Dr. Fox:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 25 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 1121W, on waiting lists, when the results of the regional office reviews of the listed trusts will be *(a)* completed and *(b)* published. [57024]

Mr. Hutton: The National Audit Office (NAO) report "Inappropriate Adjustments to NHS Waiting Lists" recommended that the Department investigate trusts where more than 10 per cent. of patients are suspended and which have more than 2 per cent. of patients waiting more than 12 months for treatment. There were 13 trusts that met both these criteria at the time of the report.

An investigation was already taking place in Royal United Hospitals Bath, one of the 13 trusts that met the NAO criteria. This commenced in December 2001 with the findings being made public in a press release (ref: 2001/0201) on 3 May 2002.

Between December 2001 and early May 2002, regional offices reviewed the waiting list position at the 12 other national health service trusts and found no evidence of inappropriate adjustments to waiting lists taking place. The findings of these reviews were also announced on 3 May.

Infectious Diseases

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of running each of the high security infectious diseases units in each of the past five years. [56996]

Yvette Cooper: The Department provided funding for the running costs of the high security infectious disease units at Coppett's Wood and Newcastle in the past five financial years as shown in the table:

£

	Coppett's Wood	*Newcastle*
1997–98	333,405	171,169
1998–99	366,543	170,000
1999–2000	340,000	185,000
2000–01	321,000	180,000
2001–02	321,000	180,000

Note:

The figures for 1999–2000 to 2001–2002 include an annual transfer of £47,000 from the Scottish Executive.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients in each of the last five years were treated in the high security infectious disease units in *(a)* London and *(b)* Newcastle; [57001]

(2) for what diseases patients were admitted, and how many patients there were in each case, to each of the high security infectious disease units in each of the past five years; [57002]

(3) what the staffing levels were at each high security infectious diseases unit in each of the past five years. [56997]

Yvette Cooper: Patient admissions and diagnoses at the high security infectious disease units at Coppett's Wood (north London) and Newcastle from 1997 to 2001 are shown in the table:

	Coppett's Wood	*Newcastle*
1997	0	0
1998	0	0
1999	0	0
2000	[1]1	[2]1
2001	0	0

[1] Lassa fever

[2] Suspected Lassa fever, subsequently diagnosed as malaria

These units exist as a contingency arrangement to provide secure and specialist clinical care for patients with or suspected of having rare, highly contagious and serious infectious diseases such as Ebola and Lassa fevers. Admissions are therefore infrequent.

Sufficient medical, nursing and laboratory staff, who are routinely involved in the treatment, care and diagnosis of patients with infectious diseases, are on call for the medium and high security infectious disease units. This ensures that they maintain equipment and participate in regular training exercises so that the units remain in a state of readiness to admit and care for patients securely.

48-hour Access Target

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the NHS Plan 48-hour access target will apply in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland. [56928]

Mr. Hutton: This target applies only in England.

Vaccine Contracts

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the value was of contracts awarded for supply of *(a)* BCG vaccines, *(b)* Tuberculin PPD solutions and *(c)* influenza vaccines in the last 12 months. [56655]

Yvette Cooper: No tenders were sought and no contracts awarded in the last 12 months for BCG vaccine or Tuberculin PPD solutions.

The value of the contract for a contingency supply of influenza vaccine cannot be disclosed as it is commercially confidential.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were employed in the National Clinical Assessment Authority at 1 April; and what proportion of those staff have clinical contact with NHS patients. [56859]

Yvette Cooper: The National Clinical Assessment Authority employs 38 staff. Of those, 10 have clinical contact with national health service patients.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many staff were employed in the General Osteopathic Council at 1 April; and what proportion of those staff have clinical contact with NHS patients; [56869]

(2) how many staff were employed in the Retained Organs Commission at 1 April; and what proportion of those staff have clinical contact with NHS patients; [56856]

(3) how many staff were employed in the General Optical Council at 1 April; and what proportion of those staff have clinical contact with NHS patients; [56871]

(4) how many staff were employed in the Nursing and Midwifery Council at 1 April; and what proportion of those staff have clinical contact with NHS patients; [56867]

(5) how many staff were employed in the General Medical Council at 1 April; and what proportion of those staff have clinical contact with NHS patients; [56866]

(6) how many staff were employed in the General Dental Council at 1 April; and what proportion of those staff have clinical contact with NHS patients; [56872]

(7) how many staff were employed in the Health Professions Council at 1 April; and what proportion of those staff have clinical contact with NHS patients. [56868]

Yvette Cooper: The table shows the number of people employed at 1 April 2002 in the seven independent health profession regulatory bodies. None of the staff have clinical contact.

Name of regulatory body	*Number of staff employed at 1 April 2002*
General Osteopathic Council	20
General Chiropractic Council	8
General Optical Council	13
Nursing and Midwifery Council	139
General Medical Council	294
General Dental Council	60
Health Professions Council	51

Note:

Figures are based on head count.

Speech Therapists (Vacancies)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies there are for speech and language therapists; and if he will make a statement. [57087]

Mr. Hutton: As at 31 March 2001 there were 200 vacancies for speech and language therapists that had lasted for three months or more.

Between 1997 and 2001 the number of speech and language therapists working in the national health service has increased by 810 (11 per cent.) and the number of training places available for students has increased by over a hundred since 1998. There will be further increases in the number of students entering training as a result of the NHS Plan commitment to provide 4,450 more training places each year for therapists and other health professionals by 2004. The increased investment in training, work to make the NHS a better employer and encourage return to practice, will result in a continued increase in the number of speech therapists available to work in the NHS.

Surgical Outsourcing

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the rate of outsourcing of surgical interventions has been in the last 12 months. [57155]

Mr. Hutton: Based on a survey of national health service organisations carried out in October 2001, we estimate that in the first six months of 2001–02 the number of surgical procedures carried out by independent providers on behalf of the NHS was equivalent to around 1.2 per cent. of total NHS acute elective in-patient and day-case surgical activity.

Smear Tests

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many women have failed to make appointments for their regular smear test in each of the last three years; how many appointments for smear tests have been broken in each of the last three years; how many cases of cervical cancer have not received their regular smear test in that time; and if he will make a statement. [57349]

Yvette Cooper: Cervical screening is not a test for cancer but for abnormalities which, if left undetected and untreated, may develop into cancer. The national computerised call/recall system for cervical screening invites women aged 20 to 64 for a free cervical screening test every three to five years.

The figures are not available in the form requested. 83 per cent. of eligible women were screened at least once in the last five years. Detailed statistics on the number of invitations and the number of women tested are available in Tables 3 and 5 of Statistical Bulletin: Cervical Screening Programme, England: 1998–99, Statistical Bulletin: Cervical Screening Programme, England: 1999–2000, and Statistical Bulletin: Cervical Screening Programme, England: 2000–01, copies of which are available in the Library.

Paediatric Pathologists

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to address the shortage of paediatric pathologists. [57202]

Mr. Hutton: The Department is aware of the difficulties facing national health service paediatric pathology services, highlighted in the recent report by the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health 'The Future of Paediatric Pathology Services.' We are committed to working closely with the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health and the Royal College of Pathologists to improve long-term staffing levels in this speciality. The establishment of three histopathology training schools and of international fellowships to attract experienced histopathologists to work in the NHS will both increase the pool from which paediatric pathologists can be recruited. The children's care group workforce team also plans to start work on this issue in June.

Food Allergies

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have died as a result of a food allergy in each of the past five years; and if he will make a statement. [57256]

Yvette Cooper: Reliable data are not available for the number of deaths associated with food allergy. This is because deaths due to allergy are often attributed on the death certificate to asthma or some other symptom rather than to actual food allergy. The committee on toxicity reported in 2000 that of about 20 deaths annually attributed to fatal anaphylactic shock, 30 per cent. (i.e. about seven) are due to foods, the most commonly implicated food being peanut.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the UK have been diagnosed as having a potentially fatal food allergy. [57255]

Yvette Cooper: Reliable data are not available for the precise incidence of potentially fatal food allergy. Most allergic reactions to food are mild, although reactions can be severe, even life threatening in a small number of cases. The food most commonly associated with fatal food allergic reactions is peanuts. In the UK, a recent study published in the *British Medical Journal* has shown that 1 in 200 children suffer from peanut allergy.

Physiotherapists

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many physiotherapists there are per head of population in each of the National Health Service trust areas in England. [57299]

Mr. Hutton: Population data are not available by trust but have been given by health authority as shown in the table.

Between 1997 and 2001 the number of physiotherapists has increased by 1,640 or 14 per cent.

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS): qualified scientific, therapeutic and technical staff within the physiotherapy area of work by health authority area and per population as at 30 September 2001

Health authority	*Whole-time equivalents*	*Per 100,000 population*	*Per head of population*	*Headcount*
England	12,990	26	0.0003	16,210
Northern and Yorkshire	1,880	30	0.0003	2,270
QDD—Bradford	160	33	0.0003	190
QDE—County Durham and Darlington	110	18	0.0002	130
QDF—East Riding and Hull	140	24	0.0002	160
QDG—Gateshead and South Tyneside	80	23	0.0002	90
QDH—Leeds	280	38	0.0004	330

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS): qualified scientific, therapeutic and technical staff within the physiotherapy area of work by health authority area and per population as at 30 September 2001

Health authority	*Whole-time equivalents*	*Per 100,000 population*	*Per head of population*	*Headcount*
QDJ—Newcastle and North Tyneside	150	33	0.0003	180
QDK—North Cumbria	110	33	0.0003	130
QDM—Northumberland	150	49	0.0005	180
QDN—Sunderland	80	27	0.0003	90
QDP—Tees	180	33	0.0003	220
QDQ—Wakefield	90	29	0.0003	100
QDR—North Yorkshire	180	24	0.0002	240
QDT—Calderdale and Kirklees	170	28	0.0003	200
Trent	1,330	26	0.0003	1,600
QCG—Barnsley	60	27	0.0003	70
QCH—North Derbyshire	90	25	0.0003	120
QCJ—South Derbyshire	120	22	0.0002	160
QCK—Doncaster	90	31	0.0003	100
QCL—Leicestershire	200	21	0.0002	240
QCM—Lincolnshire	120	18	0.0002	140
QCN—North Nottinghamshire	110	27	0.0003	130
QCP—Nottingham	210	32	0.0003	250
QCQ—Rotherham	80	33	0.0003	100
QCR—Sheffield	230	43	0.0004	270
QDL—South Humber	20	8	0.0001	20
West Midlands	1,360	25	0.0003	1,750
QD9—Birmingham	330	33	0.0003	390
QEA—Coventry	80	27	0.0003	110
QEC—Dudley	70	23	0.0002	90
QED—Herefordshire	40	22	0.0002	60
QEE—Sandwell	50	17	0.0002	60
QEF—Shropshire	140	32	0.0003	190
QEG—Solihull	20	8	0.0001	30
QEH—North Staffordshire	160	34	0.003	200
QEJ—South Staffordshire	120	20	0.0002	160
QEK—Walsall	40	15	0.0001	40
QEL—Warwickshire	130	25	0.0002	160
QEM—Wolverhampton	60	25	0.0002	70
QEN—Worcestershire	130	24	0.0002	180
North West	1,940	29	0.0003	2,360
QC1—South Lancashire	60	18	0.0002	80
QC2—Liverpool	150	33	0.0003	170
QC3—Manchester	270	63	0.0006	310
QC4—Morecambe Bay	90	29	0.0003	130
QC5—St. Helen's and Knowsley	70	23	0.0002	90
QC6—Salford and Trafford	140	31	0.0003	160
QC7—Sefton	120	41	0.0004	130
QC8—Stockport	70	23	0.0002	80
QC9—West Pennine	100	21	0.0002	110
QCT—Bury and Rochdale	70	18	0.0002	80
QCV—North Cheshire	110	35	0.0004	140
QCW—South Cheshire	160	23	0.0002	220
QCX—East Lancashire	110	22	0.0002	140
QCY—North West Lancashire	120	27	0.0003	160
QDA—Wigan and Bolton	190	34	0.0003	230
QDC—Wirral	110	35	0.0003	150
Eastern	1,110	20	0.0002	1,400
QA6—Bedfordshire	100	17	0.0002	120
QAX—North Essex	150	16	0.0002	200
QAY—South Essex	120	17	0.0002	140
QCF—Suffolk	150	22	0.0002	210
QER—Cambridgeshire	200	26	0.0003	250
QET—Norfolk	210	26	0.0003	260
QEX—Hertfordshire	180	17	0.0002	220
London	2,000	27	0.0003	2,320
QA2—Hillingdon	30	13	0.0001	40
QA3—Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	210	52	0.0005	250
QA5—Redbridge and Waltham Forest	50	11	0.0001	60
QAD—Croydon	70	21	0.0002	90
QAG—Kingston and Richmond	60	16	0.0002	70
QAH—Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	260	34	0.0003	280

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS): qualified scientific, therapeutic and technical staff within the physiotherapy area of work by health authority area and per population as at 30 September 2001

Health authority	*Whole-time equivalents*	*Per 100,000 population*	*Per head of population*	*Headcount*
QAJ—Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	260	40	0.0004	310
QAP—Barking and Havering	100	26	0.0003	110
QAR—Brent and Harrow	130	27	0.0003	160
QAT—Camden and Islington	210	55	0.0006	230
QAV—Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	140	21	0.0002	170
QAW—East London and the City	170	26	0.0003	180
QEW—Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	170	20	0.0002	210
QEY—Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	140	19	0.0002	180
South-East	2,000	23	0.0002	2,670
QA7—Berkshire	160	20	0.0002	230
QA8—Buckinghamshire	150	22	0.0002	210
QAE—East Kent	150	26	0.0003	190
QAF—West Kent	190	19	0.0002	260
QAK—East Surrey	90	21	0.0002	120
QAL—West Surrey	210	32	0.0003	280
QAM—East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	190	25	0.0002	250
QAN—West Sussex	150	20	0.0002	200
QCC—Northamptonshire	100	17	0.0002	140
QCE—Oxfordshire	200	32	0.0003	280
QD1—North and Mid Hampshire	100	18	0.0002	130
QD3—Southampton and South West Hampshire	140	26	0.0003	190
QEV—Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	150	22	0.0002	190
South West	1,370	27	0.0003	1,850
QD5—Somerset	130	26	0.0003	200
QD6—South and West Devon	180	30	0.0003	220
QD7—Wiltshire	150	25	0.0002	240
QD8—Avon	310	30	0.0003	390
QDV—Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	120	24	0.0002	150
QDW—Dorset	180	26	0.0003	260
QDX—North and East Devon	150	31	0.0003	200
QDY—Gloucestershire	150	27	0.0003	200

Notes:

1. Staff figures are rounded to the nearest 10
2. Population rates are rounded to the nearest whole number and four decimal places
3. Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts

Source:

Department of Health non-medical workforce census

Chiropody

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to increase the numbers of persons entering training as chiropodists. [57218]

Mr. Hutton: Chiropodists are included within the NHS Plan target for 4,450 more therapists and other key professional staff entering training each year by 2004. Our latest forecast or meeting this target suggest an increase of more than a hundred places (34 per cent.) over current levels by 2004.

We intend to work with the society of chiropodists and podiatrists to raise the profile of the profession and encourage students to enter training.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued to strategic health authorities and primary care trusts on the provision of chiropody services; and if he will make a statement. [58515]

Jacqui Smith: No guidance has been issued to strategic health authorities or primary care trusts (PCTs) on provision of chiropody services. However, chiropody/podiatry services are essential parts of the national service frameworks for older people and diabetes. The Department has also launched a "National Primary and Care Trust programme (NatPaCT)" designed to support PCTs in delivering their key functions which will be:

improving the health of the community,

securing the provision of high quality services, and

integrating health and social care locally.

As local organisations, PCTs are best placed to understand the needs of their patient populations. This will ensure that the right services are delivered to the right people in the right location at the right time.

Violent Incidents

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish figures for violent incidents against NHS staff. [58348]

Mr. Hutton: The analysis of data collected on the levels of reported violent incidents, together with data on the levels of reported accidents and sickness absence should be complete by the end of May. A copy will be placed in the Library.

Scanners

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many MRI scanners the NHS has. [57513]

Yvette Cooper: There are currently 198 magnetic resonance imaging scanners (MRI) installed in the national health service in England.

In September 1999 the new opportunities fund (NOF) provided funding for the purchase of equipment in support of the diagnosis and treatment of cancer, which included 38 new and replacement MRI scanners. Of these, 30 have been delivered and are operational.

NOF announced further funding in November 2001 for 16 MRI scanners to be used for the diagnosis of stroke. 11 of these scanners will be additional and five will be replacement. All are due to be installed by the end of 2003.

The NHS Plan and NHS Cancer Plan make a commitment for a further 50 additional MRI scanners to be installed in the NHS by 2004.

Flu Vaccine

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the take-up rates for flu vaccine were at *(a)* 1 November and *(b)* 1 December 2001 for each health authority. [58035]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* Information received from flu co-ordinators show the uptake rates in those aged 65 years and over at 1 November and 1 December for each health authority as follows:

	November 2001	*December 2001*
Eastern		
Bedfordshire	45.6	59.3
Cambridgeshire	55.5	70.5
Hertfordshire	47.9	61.3
Norfolk	51.7	65.6
North Essex	55.7	65.5
South Essex	50.9	63.4
Suffolk	55.1	65.7
Northern and Yorkshire		
Bradford	53.3	64.3
Calderdale and Kirklees	55.3	64.2
County Durham and Darlington	52.8	63.9
East Riding and Hull	42.5	67.3
Gateshead and South Tyneside	55.1	67.7
Leeds	56.3	69.7
Newcastle and North Tyneside	57.0	66.7
North Cumbria	54.9	67.6
North Yorkshire	58.5	70.6
Northumberland	58.6	68.9
Sunderland	55.4	65.5
Tees	51.4	64.8
Wakefield	56.6	66.4
South-east		
Berkshire	53.9	67.3
Buckinghamshire	51.7	65.2
East Kent	57.0	65.0
East Surrey	45.6	62.3
East Sussex, Brighton/Hove	54.9	68.5
North and Mid-Hants	37.9	69.5
Northamptonshire	58.2	66.[illegible]
Oxfordshire	54.3	69.4
Portsmouth and South-east Hants	51.8	65.7
Southampton and South-west Hants	57.8	68.1
West Kent	55.0	64.0
West Surrey	47.0	41.9
West Sussex	57.2	63.5
North-west		
Bury and Rochdale	42.9	59.4
East Lancashire	49.1	63.3
Liverpool	48.6	61.1
Manchester	46.8	55.4
Morecambe Bay	47.2	65.2
North Cheshire	54.1	62.8
North-west Lancashire	38.6	56.7
Salford and Trafford	51.2	64.5
Sefton	54.4	66.7
South Cheshire	57.0	68.4
South Lancashire	55.5	67.1
St. Helen's and Knowsley	54.3	65.0
Stockport	52.4	67.9
West Pennine	49.2	63.3
Wigan and Bolton	53.4	63.9
Wirral	48.1	62.8
London		
Barking and Havering	50.2	64.1
Bexley and Greenwich (Bromley)	49.2	60.0
Brent and Harrow	47.5	61.9
Camden and Islington	43.4	50.1
Croydon	44.1	59.5
Ealing, Hammersmith, Hounslow	42.7	56.4
East London and City	47.0	56.5
Enfield and Haringey (Barnet)	50.1	65.6
Hillingdon	68.6	63.4
Kensington, Chelsea, Westminster	35.7	46.9
Kingston and Richmond	50.3	61.5
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	38.4	47.5
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	46.7	60.6
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	50.7	63.3
South and West		
Avon	49.0	67.5
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	49.4	60.6
Dorset	53.5	65.2
Gloucestershire	53.4	67.8
North and East Devon	55.6	66.5
Somerset	50.9	63.1
South and West Devon	51.1	65.7
Wiltshire	52.8	63.9
Trent		
Barnsley	49.4	63.8
Doncaster	55.9	68.3
Leicestershire	49.7	61.9
Lincolnshire	54.9	66.3
North Derbyshire	61.5	72.1
North Nottinghamshire	54.0	65.4
Nottingham	57.3	66.5
Rotherham	57.8	74.9
Sheffield	54.2	70.7
Southern Derbyshire	58.2	68.3
South Humber	55.7	68.3
West Midlands		
Birmingham	51.1	60.4
Coventry	48.9	61.1
Dudley	50.8	63.2
Herefordshire	63.1	68.7
North Staffordshire	57.9	68.2

	November 2001	*December 2001*
Sandwell	48.8	57.4
Shropshire	55.6	67.2
Solihull	56.9	67.4
South Staffordshire	53.8	65.3
Walsall	53.2	61.7
Warwickshire	57.6	69.6
Wolverhampton	50.2	64.2
Worcester	54.6	67.5

MMR

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason children given measles, mumps and rubella vaccinations singly have the rubella vaccination first. [57528]

Yvette Cooper: The Government do not recommend the use of separate vaccines to protect children against rubella, measles or mumps and are therefore unable to comment. We recommend that children are vaccinated with the combined measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine, as the safest way for parents to protect their children against these potentially very serious diseases.

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if MMR is included in the research into the causes of autism undertaken by his Department. [57529]

Yvette Cooper: The Medical Research Council (MRC)—which receives most of its income via grant-in-aid from the office of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry—is the main Government agency that funds research into the causes of medical conditions. Their most recent review of the epidemiology and causes of autism, published in December last year, notes that autism seems likely to result from a range of causes but that the strongest evidence to date is for a major genetic component. The report states that several genes may interact to create susceptibility to the disorder. In relation to the combined MMR vaccine, it advises that the evidence does not support the proposed causal link between MMR and autism.

We have since announced the allocation of a further £2.5 million to the MRC for autism research. This will complement and add to the MRC's current support for research in this field. The MRC welcomes high quality applications for support in any scientific area which will further our understanding of autism, and especially those areas which were highlighted in the recent MRC review of autism: causes and epidemiology; this does not preclude research involving MMR.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 24 May 2002

PRIME MINISTER

Kyoto Protocol

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Prime Minister when he will next meet the President of the United States of America to discuss the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol on climate change; and if he will make a statement. [58367]

The Prime Minister: I have regular discussions with President Bush on a wide range of international issues. I expect to see him next on 28 May in Rome for the NATO/Russia Summit and on 25–27 June in Kananaskis for the G8 Summit.

We welcome the US's recognition that climate change is a serious problem and the fact that they are taking domestic action. The UK continues to believe that the Kyoto Protocol remains the only workable basis to take forward international action to tackle climate change. We are maintaining a constructive dialogue with US ministers and officials.

Illegal Timber Trade

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Prime Minister what measures the United Kingdom will be proposing to tackle the illegal timber trade at the G8 Heads of State meeting in Vancouver, Canada. [56673]

The Prime Minister: The UK led the G8 work on illegal logging in the 1998 action plan, and has taken many actions to support measures by timber producing countries to control illegal logging. The G8 report on the action programme on forests will be published in the run-up to the G8 meeting in Canada. We want to concentrate on implementation of the programme.

Euro

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Prime Minister if it is his policy to introduce legislation to allow a referendum on whether Britain should join the euro to Parliament before the five economic tests are assessed as having been met. [59807]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave the right hon. Members for Ross, Skye and Inverness West (Mr. Kennedy) and for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) in the House on Wednesday 22 May, *Official Report,* columns 286–7 and 289–90.

European Commission

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions *(a)* his Office and *(b)* the Government have held with the European Commission on the appointment of the next head of the Commission Representation in the United Kingdom; when that post will become vacant; if the role of the Commission in a single currency referendum has been discussed, with particular reference to influencing public opinion; and if he will make a statement. [58770]

The Prime Minister: The Government has kept in close contact with the Commission as the recruitment procedure moves forward, while, naturally, respecting the Commission's independence in this process.

The Commission has Representations in all Member States. Their role is to represent the Commission to the media, report to the Commission on political, economic and social development in the host state, and disseminate information about the EU through recognised outlets.

The Government's position on the Single Currency remains a matter for the Government.

The position was advertised as the subject of an open competition on 17 July 2001. An exact date for appointment of the new incumbent will depend on his or her individual circumstances.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Prime Minister when he was first informed of the *(a)* candidates and *(b)* short list for the replacement for the head of the Commission delegation to the UK. [58773]

The Prime Minister: The Commission has kept the Government informed at all stages about the procedure for the selection of the next Head of the European Commission Representation to the UK.

The shortlist for the open competition for the position was published in the Official Journal of the European Communities on 21 March of this year.

Scottish Executive

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Prime Minister (1) how many representations the Scottish Executive has made to his office since May 1999 broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date the representation was made; [59505]

(2) how many times his Office has made representations to the Scottish Executive since May 1999 broken down by *(a)* the Scottish Executive department approached, *(b)* subject of the representation and *(c)* date the representation was made. [59506]

The Prime Minister: Information is not available in the form requested. Both formal and informal contacts take place regularly between Government departments, including the Scotland Office, and departments of the Scottish Executive. My Office and the Scottish Executive are in contact from time to time. In addition, I have meetings with the First Minister on a regular basis, both bilaterally and through the Joint Ministerial Committee, to discuss matters of mutual interest.

Reserved Powers

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Prime Minister, what plans he has to transfer the administration of reserved powers or functions of UK government departments, their executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies within their remit from those departments to the Scotland Office. (59504)

The Prime Minister: None.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Timber

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what areas were identified under the G8 programme of action on forests where the United Kingdom needed to improve its performance to combat the trade in illegally harvested timber; [56671]

(2) what action the United Kingdom *(a)* has taken and *(b)* intends to take to follow up the G8 action programme on forests, agreed at the Birmingham G8 meeting in 1998; [56672]

(3) what work has been taken, under the G8 action programme of action on forests by the United Kingdom to develop and implement counter measures against the trade in illegally harvested timber. [56674]

Clare Short: The UK led the G8 work on illegal logging in the 1998 action plan. The G8 report on the action programme on forests will be published in the run-up to the G8 meeting in Canada. It identifies the actions that have been taken by G8 members to combat illegal logging and associated trade. The UK has taken many actions to support measures by timber producing countries to control illegal logging. These include access to better information and analysis, establishment of monitoring and verification processes and policy and institutional reforms.

Internationally we have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Indonesia that commits both parties to work together to combat illegal logging and stop the trade in illegally logged timber between our countries. This important bilateral agreement for joint action by producer and consumer countries is the first of its kind. It is highly influential and is acting as a catalyst for the development of further agreements.

In addition to our work within the G8 action programme we are working within the EU and with international organisations to broaden the base of countries engaged in actions to control illegal logging. The EU is developing an action programme that is examining the need for new legislation to provide effective enforcement. The UK, with others, is supporting a forest law enforcement process in Africa that will learn from the successful process started in Asia last year. We need to demonstrate progress with bilateral agreements and build these into regional and multilateral arrangements.

Domestically the Government now requires all Departments to seek to procure only legally and sustainably harvested timber and wood products.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Chemical Weapons

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons will be governed until a replacement for Jose Bustani is appointed. [57950]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Executive Council, which is the Executive organ of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, will continue to function as normal. Its next meeting is on 31 May. The Director-General heads the Technical Secretariat that is responsible for assisting the Executive Council in the performance of its function. Until a new Director-General is appointed, the Technical Secretariat will be headed by the Deputy Director-General.

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects a new Director General of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons to be appointed. [57949]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Special Conference of States Parties (The Hague, 21–24 April) decided that it would reconvene no later than 10 June to appoint a new Director-General, following the formal recommendation of the Executive Council which is due to meet on 31 May.

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the countries that are members of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. [57948]

Mr. Bradshaw: There are currently 145 State Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). All States Parties to the CWC are members of the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW). They are as follows: Albania, Algeria, Armenia, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belarus, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Brunei Darussalam, Bulgaria, Burundi, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, Cook Islands, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Dominica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Fiji, Finland, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, France, Gabon, Gambia, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Guinea, Guyana, Holy See, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Ireland, Italy, Jamaica, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kiribati, Kuwait, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lesotho, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malawi, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Malta, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Micronesia (Federated States of), Monaco, Mongolia, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nauru, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Niger, Nigeria, Norway, Oman, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Saint Lucia, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Seychelles, Singapore, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Sweden, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, Turkey, Turkmenistan, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United Republic of Tanzania, United States of America, Uruguay, Uzbekistan, Venezuela, Vietnam, Yemen, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) how many chemical weapons inspectors have been employed by the OPCW in each year since its creation; and what the projected numbers are for 2003; [58088]

(2) if he will list the staff at directorate and branch head level in the OPCW, together with the nationality of the *(a)* current and *(b)* immediate past incumbent. [58087]

Mr. Bradshaw: We do not hold this information. We will make enquiries and I will write to my hon. Friend, and place a copy of the letter in the Library of the House.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaneau Gwent (Llew Smith), of 8 May, *Official Report*, column 241W, on the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, if he will make a statement on the reasons underlying his assessement that Mr. Bustani has lost confidence of a significant number of the OPCW's Executive Council. [57938]

Mr. Bradshaw: The assessment was based on the views expressed by members of the OPCW represented on the Executive Council. It was borne out by the subsequent vote in which 17 supported the vote of no confidence, 18 abstained and only 5 opposed.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his definition is of major shareholder in the context of member states of the OPCW; and what the implications are of the definition for the independence of the organisations. [58091]

Mr. Bradshaw: There is no agreed definition of a major shareholder in the context of the OPCW. The use of this term has no implications for the independence of the Organisation, where each member has one vote. This term has, however, occasionally been used to describe those members who have continually been represented on the Executive Council, and the six largest financial contributors who provide approximately 70 per cent of the OPCW budget (the US, Japan, Germany, France, the UK and Italy).

Burma

Mr. Luke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance has been offered to British companies who retain an economic presence in Burma in the last 12 months. [58025]

Mr. Bradshaw: HMG does not encourage trade, investment or tourism with Burma. Companies asking for advice are informed about the political and human rights situation in Burma and told we will not provide any assistance.

Mr. Luke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions his Department has had with the military Government of Burma. [58026]

Mr. Bradshaw: The UK maintains formal diplomatic links with Burma. Contact with the military regime in Burma is limited by the EU Common Position which contains a visa ban on senior members of the regime visiting the EU and a ban on High Level visitors from the EU travelling to Burma. There has however been contact at official level, most recently in late February/early March.

An EU Troika mission also visited Burma in March 2002 for discussions with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, representatives of the ethnic minority groups and also members of the regime.

Mr. Luke: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent meetings his Department has had with *(a)* the NLD and *(b)* Aung San Sun Kyi as to how the British Government may aid them in bringing about democratic Government, equality before the law and enhanced human rights in Burma. [58023]

Mr. Bradshaw: Our Embassy staff in Burma and visiting FCO officials meet regularly with representatives of the National League for Democracy. Our Ambassador has also met Aung San Suu Kyi since her release from house arrest.

The EU Common Position on Burma includes an arms embargo, a ban on non-humanitarian aid, a ban on items that may be used for torture, a ban on high level visits and a visa ban and asset freeze on senior members of the regime. In addition the European Community suspended Burma's trading privileges in 1997 in response to concerns over the use of forced labour and the Government does not encourage trade, investment or tourism with Burma.

Together with other EU partners, the Government takes every opportunity to encourage the military government, the democratic opposition and the ethnic minorities to press ahead with national reconciliation, with the aim of re-establishing democracy and the rule of law.

Chinese Christians

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made about the case of the imprisonment of Chinese Christians who were imprisoned for bible transportation. [58157]

Mr. Macshane: We have been following closely the cases of three Chinese Christians imprisoned for bible transportation earlier this year. We welcome the fact that two of them have been released on health grounds. At the latest round of the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue in Beijing on 15 May we raised our concerns about the protection of religious freedom in China.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the level of persecution of Christians in China and if he will make representations to the Chinese authorities about the persecution of Christians in China. [58156]

Mr. Macshane: We are deeply concerned about the treatment of Christians in China and raise religious freedom regularly with the Chinese. We raised the treatment of Christians most recently at the UK-China Human Rights Dialogue in Beijing on 15 May.

Counter-Terrorism

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the member state submissions on their national counter-terrorism programmes made to the United Nations Security Council, pursuant to SC resolution 1373 (2001). [57990]

Mr. Macshane: Most of the UN's member states have submitted reports on their compliance with UNSCR 1373 (2001) to the UN Security Council's Counter Terrorism Committee (CTC), which is chaired by the UK's permanent representative to the United Nations in New York. The CTC is analysing these reports collectively, with the help of independent expert advisers. At this stage, the CTC is seeking further information from all states that have submitted such reports.

EU Applicant Countries

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list EU funds available for information campaigns in applicant countries; what the United Kingdom's share is; what measures exist to ensure impartiality; if he will list organisations which are recipients; and if he will make a statement. [58772]

Peter Hain: In the Candidate Countries for accession to the European Union, information activities are carried out by the European Commission's Delegations.

The following table shows the EC funding in euros for each delegation in 2001.

Country	*Budget 2001—€*
Bratislava	650,000
Bucharest	850,000
Budapest	1,000,000
Ljublijana	720,000
Prague	900,000
Riga	670,000
Sofia	550,000
Tallinn	611,375
Vilnius	680,000
Warsaw	1,559,000
Turkey	600,000
Cyprus	200,000
Malta	200,000

In accordance with normal budgetary principles, the own resources contributions of the Member States are not allocated to specific expenditure lines.

The overall strategy for the information initiatives has been endorsed by the Council and implementation on the ground takes place in full consultation with the national Government concerned as well as with the embassies of the Member States in the relevant capital.

Vancouver Summit

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who will make up the delegation representing the United Kingdom Government at the G8 Heads of State meeting in Vancouver, Canada. [56670]

Peter Hain: The G8 Summit of Heads of Government will be held on 26–27 June in Kananaskis, Alberta, Canada. The UK delegation will be led by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and include Baroness Amos, his Personal Representative on Africa. Around 25 officials from No. 10, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and HM Treasury will join them as necessary.

Afghanistan

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if Afghan prisoners in Shebarghan prison are being held under the Geneva Convention. [59408]

Mr. Bradshaw: It has not yet been possible to verify whether or not the prisoners in Shebarghan prison are being held in accordance with the Geneva Convention. However, we remain concerned about the reported conditions in which prisoners are being held in certain parts of Afghanistan.

Security considerations have so far prevented our Embassy staff in Kabul from visiting these prisons. But they are in frequent contact with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which closely monitors the situation and welfare of all prisoners in Afghanistan.

We have made clear to the Afghan Interim Administration that we expect them to respect their international obligations, including treating their prisoners in accordance with the Geneva Conventions.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on Afghan prisoners held at Shebarghan being sold back to their families. [59407]

Mr. Bradshaw: We are concerned about reports that some prisoners previously held in Sheberghan have been ransomed.

Security considerations have so far prevented our Embassy staff in Kabul from visiting these prisons. But they are in frequent contact with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which closely monitors the situation and welfare of all prisoners in Afghanistan.

Throughout the conflict last autumn, we urged the Northern Alliance to respect the tenets of the Geneva Conventions and to treat humanely all those who surrendered and were taken prisoner. Since then, we have made clear to the Afghan Interim Administration that we expect them to respect their international obligations, including to treat their prisoners humanely.

Military Exports

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when a substantive reply will be given to Eric and Kathleen Rodham's letter of 5 February, concerning an embargo on military exports to India, Pakistan and Israel, acknowledged on 11 February. [59227]

Mr. Bradshaw: I sent a response on 9 May. I apologise for the delay in responding.

Indonesia

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he and his

Department have had with the Indonesian Government on the enforcement of the Malino II agreement in the Moluccas Islands. [59235]

Mr. Bradshaw: We welcome the agreement brokered by the Indonesian Government between the warring factions in Maluku to end the fighting. However, this is only the first small step to reconcile the warring communities and start the process of reconstruction and repatriation.

The UK's message to the Indonesian government is clear and consistent: a long-term solution to regional conflicts can be achieved only through political negotiation and consultation with the people. Together with our European partners we are in regular, top-level dialogue with the Indonesian government, and urge them to maintain law and order and promote reconciliation in areas of conflict. The UK together with the EU issued a declaration welcoming the Malino peace agreement on 11 March. The declaration called on the Indonesian Government to take the necessary measures to enforce the Malino agreement.

International Organisations

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make it his policy to promote the principle that activities of international organisations should be in the interest of all member states, with equal weight given to each vote. [58092]

Mr. Macshane: Within international organisations, HMG seeks to build consensus but when votes are necessary in an organisation, HMG abides by the rules governing voting within that organisation. When these rules are drawn up or amended, government policy is to promote an equitable system of voting.

DEFENCE

Medical Treatment

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by what criteria armed forces personnel have been selected for medical treatment in the private sector; and if he will make a statement. [54134]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 7 May 2002]:* In broad terms the criteria used for referral to private healthcare providers under recent and current schemes relates to the likelihood of individuals returning rapidly to full fitness and to the operational priority of their particular role or trade, although the details vary between the different arrangements.

Strategic Sealift Service

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) pursuant to his answer of 24 April, *Official Report,* column 259W, whether the reimbursement by AWSR Ltd. for Government purchase of two ro-ro vessels built by Harland & Wolff will include interest; [56119]

(2) whether guarantees have been given by his Department in respect of the ro-ro vessels being built at Flensburg for AWSR Ltd. as part of the Strategic Sealift Service. [56120]

Mr. Ingram: AWSR Shipping Ltd.'s reimbursement of the purchase price of the two Harland and Wolff built vessels will not include interest as the overall PFI arrangement will take the funding of the ships into account. At the time the four shipbuilding contracts were placed with Flensburger of Germany, the department accepted that it would assume responsibility for them in the event of a PFI contract failing to come to fruition.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 24 April, *Official Report,* column 259W, what date was estimated by his Department for signature of the contract for the provision of the Strategic Sealift Service when AWSR Ltd. was announced as preferred bidder on 26 October 2000. [56116]

Mr. Ingram: In October 2000 the Ministry of Defence estimated that contract negotiations could be concluded by the spring of 2001.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, (1) pursuant to his answer of 24 April, *Official Report,* column 259W, which *(a)* Government departments and *(b)* regional and industrial bodies with an interest in the Strategic Sealift Service competition were consulted formally by his Department; on what dates; and on what dates responses to this consultation exercise were received; [56117]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 24 April, *Official Report,* column 259W, what discussion took place with Ministers outside his Department regarding the Strategic Sealift Service prior to 26 October 2000; [56118]

(3) pursuant to his answer of 30 April, *Official Report,* column 742W, on what dates after 26 October 2000 *(a)* he, *(b)* his Ministers and *(c)* his officials met (i) AWSR Ltd., (ii) NUMAST and (iii) RMT to discuss the Strategic Sealift Service; and what matters were discussed. [56112]

Mr. Ingram: Ministers have not met with AWSR Shipping Ltd to discuss the strategic sealift service. MOD officials have met them frequently as part of the contract negotiations. My hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence met with representatives of the Seafarers' Unions at their request on 19 July 2001, specifically to discuss matters related to crewing of the strategic sealift service. MOD officials have met with those unions on a number of occasions. Consultation with Government Departments and regional and industrial bodies with an interest in the strategic sealift service competition was not on a formal basis and Ministerial discussions prior to 26 October 2000 were ad hoc. Details could only be gathered at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, (1) pursuant to his answer of 30 April, *Official Report,* column 742W, whether the price quoted by AWSR Ltd. for provision of the Strategic Sealift Service and accepted by him in selecting AWSR as preferred bidder for the contract was based upon using sponsored reserve crews on the six ships when they were in Ministry of Defence use, with British officers and multinational crews when the ships were on commercial work; [56107]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 30 April, *Official Report,* column 742W, what the preferred crewing arrangements were of the three unsuccessful shortlisted bidders for the Strategic Sealift Service; [56109]

(3) pursuant to his answer of 30 April, *Official Report*, column 742W, when the decision to use British crews at all times on all six vessels provided by AWSR Ltd. was announced; [56108]

(4) pursuant to his answer of 30 April, *Official Report*, column 742W, by what percentage the costs of the Strategic Sealift Service will change as a result of the use of British crews on all six vessels at all times. [56110]

Mr. Ingram: AWSR's initial price reflected the arrangements described in my earlier answer. ASWR have not formally announced their intention to man the ships with British crews at all times but they made their negotiated position clear to the Trade Unions by 13 September 2001. The crewing arrangements underlying the unsuccessful bids are a matter for the companies concerned. Details of AWSR's bid costs are commercially sensitive and I am withholding the requested information under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) pursuant to his answer of 30 April, *Official Report*, column 742W, what the cost will be to the Exchequer of the introduction of a tonnage tax regime by AWSR Ltd. in the provision of six vessels for the Strategic Sealift Service; [56111]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 30 April, *Official Report*, column 742W, when *(a)* the Goverment's White Paper, "British Shipping: Charting a New Course" was published and *(b)* the revised and confirmed best and final offer by AWSR Ltd. for provision of the Strategic Sealift Service was submitted; [56113]

(3) pursuant to his answer of 30 April, *Official Report*, column 742W, what commitments to the training and recruitment of new officers and ratings have been given by AWSR Ltd. under the negotiations for the Strategic Sealift Service; [56115]

(4) pursuant to his answer of 30 April, *Official Report*, column 742W, which companies in membership of the consortium selected as preferred bidder for the Strategic Sealift Service *(a)* participated in the Government's shipping working party and *(b)* have registered vessels under the tonnage tax. [56114]

Mr. Ingram: The Government White Paper "British Shipping Charting a New Course" was published on 16 December 1998. The associated fiscal support was announced in the Finance Act 2000 and made available from 28 July 2000. Along with all the other bidders in the competition, AWSR Shipping Ltd made their final bid on 6 July 2000. The strategic sealift service proposed by AWSR Shipping Ltd. will create 184 new jobs, all of which will be filled by officers and ratings eligible to be Sponsored Reserves and recruited on the open market. AWSR Shipping Ltd. has assured the Ministry of Defence that it is committed to a level of training that meets the government's British Shipping Policy. Details of AWSR's bid are commercially sensitive and I am therefore withholding details of the costs associated with their tonnage tax position under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Of the companies making up the AWSR consortium, only James Fisher & Sons plc took part in the Government's shipping working party and only this company has ships registered under tonnage tax.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what alternatives to the Harland and Wolff Ro-Ro contract were considered; what assessment was made of the alternatives; and if he will make a statement. [57353]

Mr. Ingram: Bidders in the strategic sealift competition proposed various means of meeting the Ministry of Defence's requirement. All bids were assessed comparatively in terms of value for money having regard to price, delivery and quality. AWSR Shipping Ltd's bid, which provided for early introduction of the RoRo service through ship construction divided between Harland and Wolff and Flensburger, won on merit. Once the process of evaluation had been completed and the selection made, alternatives to Harland and Wolff were not a consideration.

Eurofighter

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the delays in the delivery of the first Eurofighter and on the cost of these delays. [56694]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 477W, to my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Mr. Smith).

Sea Harrier Decommissioning

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if Flight Lieutenant Holland's and Lieutenant Hamblin's letter in *The Times* on 13 May was approved by their commanding officers. [56705]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 16 May, *Official Report*, column 777W, to the hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Mr. Soames).

QinetiQ

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list land in the ownership of QinetiQ; and what development proposals are under consideration for each such piece of land; [57335]

(2) if he will make a statement on his proposals for the development of Throckmorton airfield. [57334]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 5 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 856W, regarding the ownership of the Throckmorton airfield site (known as Pershore), and the answers I gave to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) on 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1162W–1164W, where I listed all the freehold and leasehold sites transferred to QinetiQ plc as part of the DERA PPP process, and commented on their development in the future.

Military Support Vehicle

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future military support vehicle contract. [58159]

Mr. Ingram: Bids for the future military vehicle contract are expected from industry by the 25 June 2002.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many companies were invited to tender for the military support vehicle contract plan to manufacture the vehicle in the United Kingdom. [58161]

Mr. Ingram: We expect to receive bids by the 25 June 2002. We are therefore not aware of the companies manufacturing plans at this stage.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many companies have been asked to tender for the military support vehicle contract. [58160]

Mr. Ingram: Five companies have been invited to tender for the military support vehicle contract.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the employment opportunities in the United Kingdom created by the contract for military support vehicles. [58162]

Mr. Ingram: No assessment has yet been made of the employment opportunities in the United Kingdom created by the contract for Military Support Vehicles. Companies tendering for the contract have been asked to include proposals for UK Industrial Participation in their bids. The bids are expected by the 25 June 2002.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what financial checks will be made on each of the companies bidding for the contract for military support vehicles by his Department before a decision is taken. [58163]

Mr. Ingram: Following expressions of interest in this procurement prior to the issue of invitations to tender, a financial check of each potential bidder was undertaken. A further assessment will be made upon receipt of bids.

Dysentry

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soliders have been affected by dysentry in the last 12 months; if it is clear what caused it; how many soldiers have been put into quarantine in Afghanistan; if the source of any poisoning has been found; and whether other coalition forces have been affected. [57795]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* According to available records, over the 12 months period up to 30 April 2002, there were six cases of dysentery amongst Army personnel. Two were cases of amoebic dysentery which is caused by a parasitic infection, and four were cases of Shigella Sonnei dysentery caused by a bacterial infection.

Twenty-eight Service personnel in Afghanistan are being or have been treated by 34 Field Hospital for Winter Vomiting Disease. Winter Vomiting Disease is caused by an organism called small round structured virus (SRSV) which is the most common cause of gut infection in this country. Some 340 Service personnel in Afghanistan were placed in isolation while the nature of the illness was being investigated. Following confirmation of the underlying cause and measures put in place to control the outbreak, the quarantine of 34 Field Hospital and the Camp in which it is located has now been lifted. We are not aware of any coalition forces who are similarly affected.

In addition, other personnel deployed in Afghanistan have suffered at various times from diarrhoea. This is not uncommon in this type of theatre.

Afghanistan

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of Parachute Regiment personnel deployed in Afghanistan were Territorial Army; and what was the overall personnel shortfall. [57878]

Mr. Ingram: A contingent from the 2nd Battalion The Parachute Regiment was deployed to Afghanistan between 1 January and 10 April 2002. The size of the contingent was dictated by the assessment of the mission at the time. There was no personnel shortfall and therefore no need to augment the contingent from elsewhere in the Regular Army or the Territorial Army (TA). Two members of the TA from the Parachute Regiment have been mobilised for service in Afghanistan, and they have served in the brigade headquarters.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of the total costs of UK operations in Afghanistan will come from the Ministry of Defence budget; and if he will make a statement. [58863]

Mr. Hoon: All the additional costs incurred on Operations in Afghanistan identified in 2001–02 were funded from the Conflict Prevention Pool budget and the Treasury Reserve as detailed in the Spring Supplementary Estimates 2001–02.

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what actions British forces in Afghanistan are undertaking to destroy heroin stockpiles. [58915]

Mr. Ingram: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 12 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 870W. The task force formed around 45 Commando is concentrating on operations against remnants of the Taliban and Al Qaeda.

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on British military involvement in Afghanistan. [59224]

Mr. Hoon: British troops in Afghanistan have been carrying out both security assistance and combat tasks; this dual role has not caused any significant problems. The United Kingdom has led, and made a substantial contribution to, the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul since its inception. Our troops have been widely praised for their work in helping the Interim Administration to maintain security and stability in Kabul as the Afghans begin the rebuilding of their shattered country. The number of British troops committed to ISAF in Kabul is now under 1,400, compared with 2,100 at its peak. We welcomed Turkey's announcement on 29 April that it would take over the leadership from the UK, and are finalising the arrangements.

The deployment to Afghanistan of a battlegroup of up to 1,700 troops formed around 45 Commando Royal Marines has also produced significant results. The Royal Marines have so far completed three operations. All three have contributed towards denying the terrorists the opportunity to regroup, operate, and destabilise the peace process in Afghanistan. This is vital if Afghan society is to return to normality.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what was *(a)* the start date, *(b)* the conclusion date and *(c)* the cost of (i) Operation Ptarmigan, (ii) Operation Snipe and (iii) Operation Condor; and if he will make a statement; [58864]

(2) what the average cost is *(a)* per month, *(b)* per day and *(c)* in total of United Kingdom contributions to ISAF; and if he will make a statement; [58862]

(3) what the average cost is *(a)* per month, *(b)* per day and *(c)* in total of Royal Marine operations in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [58861]

Mr. Hoon: Operation PTARMIGAN began on 15 April and concluded on 18 April. Operation SNIPE began on 1 May and concluded on 13 May. Operation CONDOR commenced on 17 May and concluded on 22 May. The costs of these Operations cannot be separated from the overall cost of Operation JACANA.

The costs of the United Kingdom contributions to ISAF and the Royal Marines operations in Afghanistan are not incurred on a daily basis and to make such a calculation would be artificial and misleading. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as an estimate has been produced and actual monthly costs are available, and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Air Transport

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if there are annual flying mile restraints on the leased C17s. [58133]

Mr. Ingram: Under the terms of the lease contract for the four C17 aircraft, there are no restrictions on the number of miles or hours that may be flown.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many C130J aircraft are on order; how many are operational; and when they will all be in service. [58154]

Mr. Ingram: A total of 25 C130J aircraft have been delivered to the Ministry of Defence and no further aircraft are on order. Twenty-three are in-service with the RAF and the remaining two are on loan to QinetiQ.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how far lack of availability of C17 aircraft has increased dependency on C130 Mk1 and C130 Mk3; what effect this has had on forces' training that would normally involve C130 Mk1 and C130 Mk3; and what resulting cancellations there have been in training in the last two years. [58153]

Mr. Ingram: At no point during its service to date has unavailability of the C17 contributed to an increased dependency on the operation of Hercules C130K aircraft. The high flying rate of the C17 has, in part, been as a result of attempts to relieve the workload on other aircraft, including the Hercules C130. Increased utilisation of the C130 is attributable only to the upsurge in Operational flying and would have been exacerbated had the C17 aircraft not been available.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what restrictions there are on the use of the leased C17s; and if these differ from restrictions imposed on the USAF in their lease of the C17. [58134]

Mr. Ingram: There are no contract restrictions on our use of the leased C17 aircraft. The C17 aircraft operated by the USAF were purchased, not leased, from Boeing.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the current operational status and serviceability of the RAF's four leased C17A Globemaster III transport aircraft. [59278]

Mr. Ingram: There are four C17 aircraft in operational service with the RAF, which provide an outsize strategic airlift capability and supplement the existing air transport capability. On 22 May 2002, three of the four aircraft were fully serviceable and conducting operations. One aircraft was undergoing routine pre-planned maintenance. Since the arrival of the C17 into RAF service, it has consistently performed above expectations, while its serviceability record has been comparable with that of the Hercules fleet.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many C17 transport aircraft are *(a)* fully serviceable and *(b)* unserviceable; and if he will make a statement. [59232]

Mr. Ingram: On 22 May, three C17 aircraft were fully serviceable and one C17 aircraft was undergoing pre-planned routine maintenance.

Temporary Staff

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many employees under contract from temping agencies were working in his Department; and how much will be spent on temporary staff *(a)* in total and *(b)* as a percentage of the total staffing budget in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [58185]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* This information is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Temporary staff are generally used as an interim measure to fill posts that cannot be filled conventionally in the required timescale or to cover short term peaks in workload.

Service Housing

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many houses the armed forces have in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* Scotland. [58576]

Mr. Ingram: At 1 May 2002 the Defence Housing Executive managed some 52,100 homes for Service families in mainland UK. Of these some 3,400 properties are in Scotland. An additional 3,200 properties in Northern Ireland are managed by the staff of the General Officer Commanding, Northern Ireland.

Medical Services

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on access to medical services within the armed forces. [57972]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* On operational deployments medical support to the Armed Forces is provided by the Defence Medical Services, or in some circumstances through joint arrangements with allies and partners, particularly on sustained operations where this represents a sensible use of medical resources.

Healthcare for personnel who are not deployed is normally provided by Service and civilian Ministry of Defence personnel and through the NHS, although some limited use is made of the private sector to meet particular needs. In Germany, healthcare is provided under arrangements that also involve the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmen's Families Association and five German hospitals.

RAF Stations (Commercial Use)

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria are applied to the commercial use by private firms of RAF stations. [59229]

Mr. Ingram: Under the Government's Wider Markets Initiative, the RAF seeks to maximise use of irreducible spare capacity. Sustained commercial activity on an RAF station is usually exposed to full and open competition. Short-term use of the Ministry of Defence assets, including its estate, is subject to an appropriate licence, lease or contract. In all circumstances, military operations would retain primacy.

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent approaches have been made by private airlines to develop commercial civilian services from *(a)* RAF Kinross and *(b)* RAF Lossiemouth. [59228]

Mr. Ingram: No formal proposals have been put forward by airline companies for the development of commercial civilian services from RAF Kinloss and RAF Lossiemouth.

TRANSPORT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

Rail Franchises

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will state, for each train operating company, *(a)* when the franchise was first renewed, *(b)* the length of the original franchise awarded, *(c)* the dates on which the franchise has since been awarded, *(d)* when the franchise is next due to be awarded, *(e)* the changes in the ownership which have taken place since the franchise was first awarded and *(f)* changes in the franchise since December 2001. [56563]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested has been placed in the Library of the House and most of it is also available on the SRA's website as SRA.gov.uk except for details of changes to franchise agreements since December 2001 which are held on the Strategic Rail Authority's Public Register, available for inspection at their offices or for purchase.

Voting Arrangements

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent assessment has been made of the success of *(a)* the postal vote and *(b)* other experimental voting systems; and what assessment has been made of extending the postal vote to general elections. [57160]

Dr. Whitehead: The Electoral Commission began its evaluation on 3 May of the electoral pilot schemes which took place in the recent local elections, and will provide a detailed assessment of the impact of new voting methods to the Secretary of State by 2 August 2002. Early indications are that all-postal ballots can increase turnout and the various electronic means of voting were positively received. We will wish to consider the Commission's evaluations carefully before making decisions on the future use of postal voting in elections.

Vandalism (Railways)

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many cases of vandalism of railway tracks were reported in each of the past five years; what the average annual cost of repairing vandalism to the rail network has been in the last five years; and what initiatives are being pursued to prevent vandalism of the rail network. [58062]

Mr. Jamieson: Information held by the British Transport Police on reported vandalism offences in each of the last five years is contained in the following table:

Year	
1997–1998	13,751
1998–1999	12,855
1999–2000	13,743
2000–2001	13,349
2001–2002	15,075

(Vandalism offences include offences such as criminal damage, arson, graffiti, vandalism rolling stock, etc., endangering safety, obstructing trains, throwing missiles and stonethrowing.)

Railway Safety have estimated that the repair bill for the industry resulting from vandalism is some £25 million per year.

Current initiatives to reduce vandalism of the rail network include:

"Leave Sites Safe and Secure"—a Railtrack campaign to clear lineside debris which could be used in acts of vandalism. The overall aim of the campaign is to remove or safely secure all lineside materials by October 2002. The railway industry is working closely with HM Railway Inspectorate (HMRI) to achieve this objective;

"National Route Crime Week" 17–25 June sponsored by the National Co-ordinating Group for Trespass and Vandalism (an SRA/Railway Safety body). There will be a number of activities including an open debate at the Health and Safety Commission's (HSC) Rail Industry Advisory Committee meeting on 25 June;

Industry programmes for reducing vandalism, including a range of targeted engineering measures such as improved railway fencing and caging bridges at vulnerable locations. HMRI monitor these programmes and take action if necessary.

Railtrack

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what advice he has commissioned on rail safety and the state of Railtrack's assets since the appointment of an administrator for Railtrack. [58015]

Mr. Byers: Although the general safety record of the railway is good, the industry continues to focus on putting right specific weaknesses including those revealed by major accidents and in particular acting on the recommendations by Lord Cullen. It is for the Health and Safety Executive to ensure that the safety case for Railtrack is complied with.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many engineers and trained safety staff have left Railtrack Plc in the last seven months. [58018]

Mr. Byers: Railtrack has told the Department that they continue to attract good numbers of high quality candidates for vacancies at all levels of the organisation. They are doubling their graduate intake from 35 to 70 and are particularly pleased with the number and strength of the applications received. Since 8 October Railtrack have recruited 69 qualified engineers. They are on course to achieve the target of 1,000 engineers in post within 18 months. Overall turnover rates, at some 10 per cent remain steady, with engineers lower at 6 per cent.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what advice on safety he received in the weekly and four-weekly management reports from Railtrack in Administration. [58010]

Mr. Byers: The weekly and four weekly reports that the Department receives deal exclusively with financial matters.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what advice the former Deputy Chief Inspector of Railways gave to the Administrator of Railtrack and himself following his appointment last year to ensure that safety in the railways is maintained. [58009]

Mr. Byers: Alan Cooksey, the Health and Safety Executive's former Deputy Chief Inspector of Railways was recruited by the Administrator to ensure that technical safety issues are properly considered. His responsibilities are to the Administrator and not to the Secretary of State.

Railway Lines (Trespass)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many children have been found trespassing on railway lines in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [58339]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* Information held by the British Transport Police on the number of juvenile trespassers each year since 1997 is contained in the following table:

Year	*No.*
1998–1999	4188
1999–2000	3573
2000–2001	3175
2001–2002	2647

(Juvenile trespassers include those 17 or under.)

Hendy Cross Junction

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) whether the pavement condition assessment undertaken by the Highways Agency at Hendy Cross junction has been completed; and when it will be published; [58620]

(2) whether the geotechnical investigation undertaken by the Highways Agency at Hendy Cross junction has been completed; and when it will be published; [58619]

(3) whether a pre-order exhibition concerning the Hendy Cross junction will be held in High Wycombe in the autumn; [58669]

(4) when he will publish the environmental statement in relation to the Hendy Cross junction; [58618]

(5) when he will publish statutory orders under the Highways Act 1980 in relation to the Hendy Cross junction; [58617]

(6) whether the Highways Agency has decided to use an early design and build contract for construction of the improvements at Hendy Cross junction; [58627]

(7) whether short-term improvements to Hendy Cross junction are complete. [58616]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Kevin Davies to Mr. Paul Goodman, dated 24 May 2002:

I have been asked by the Transport Minister, David Jamieson, to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the long-term improvements to the M40/A404 Handy Cross Junction. I am replying in the absence of Tim Matthews, the Chief Executive who is currently on leave.

The Highways Agency has undertaken considerable work since the publication of the Integrated Transport Study in January 2001. The short-term improvements identified in the study have been substantially completed and we have also completed a validation of the long-term proposals including further preliminary design work. To assist in this validation we have collected more detailed information on traffic movements through the junction together with pavement condition assessment and geotechnical investigations. The results of these investigations would not normally be published at this stage because they are working documents.

It is too early to outline the future programme for this work, or to state how it would be processed. However, we would consider the advantages of appointing a contractor under our Early Design and Build Contract. We would want to see what innovations a contractor can bring to the scheme in terms of both design and construction techniques before publishing the draft orders. Following the appointment of a contractor a pre draft Orders exhibition would be held. This would then be followed by publication of the Environmental Statement and draft Orders.

If you would like to discuss this further please contact the Agency's Project Sponsor, Andy Finch. He can be contacted at our Dorking office on 01306 878342.

Electronic Voting

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what projects have been commissioned by his Department into electronic voting since June 2001; which local authorities used electronic voting in the May 2002 elections; and in each case what the voting levels were in *(a)* 2002 and *(b)* the previous local authority elections. [58573]

Dr. Whitehead: In August 2001, we jointly commissioned research by a team led by De Montfort University into the potential barriers to electronic voting.

Our partners in this research included the Electoral Commission and the Local Government Association. The findings from this research were published on 23 May 2002.

The local authorities that used electronic processes in the May 2002 local and Mayoral elections, and the turnout figures for them have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Freight Trains

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many freight trains operated between France and the UK in the week of *(a)* 1 March 2001, *(b)* 11 November 2001, *(c)* 23 December 2001 and *(d)* 12 May 2002. [R] [58742]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand from the railway operator that the figures are as follows:

Date	
Week of 1 March 2001	78 trains*
Week commencing 11 November 2001	23 trains
Week commencing 23 December 2001	11 trains**
Week commencing 12 May 2002	27 trains

*1 March 2001 was a Thursday whereas the three other dates are Sundays. This figure is calculated from the total train movements for March 2001.

**This week covered the holiday period.

Housing Pilots (Teenage Parents)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in which areas the housing pilots for lone parents under 18 years of age will be sited; who is running each of the pilots; how much the pilots have cost so far; what form the evaluation of the pilots will take; and when the pilots are due to finish. [58765]

Ms Keeble: The table below provides the information requested on the housing pilots for teenage parents under 18 being funded through the Housing Corporation's Approved Development Programme and Supported Housing Management Grant.

Teenage Pregnancy Pilot Schemes

Registered Social Landlord	*Area*	*Approved Development Programme (capital) spend to date*	*Supported Housing Management Grant (revenue) spend to date*
Metropolitan HA	Brixton, Lambeth	141,050	0
Nottingham Community HA	Nottingham	87,500	6,454
Tuntum HA	Nottingham	130,000	37,002
West Penine HA	Oldham	265,042	18,991
Bromford Carinthia HA	Stoke on Trent	165,000	0
Bromford Carinthia HA	Sandwell	0	17,006
Bromford Carinthia HA	Sandwell	171,600	0

The Department will shortly commission research to monitor and evaluate the Approved Development Programme pilots for teenage mothers and supported accommodation provision funded through the Safer Communities Supported Housing Fund. The research will track the users of the supported accommodation, assess how well it meets their requirements and support needs, and how successful they are in achieving independence when they are ready to move on. The research will also assess the success of the schemes in terms of outcomes achieved, relative to their cost.

We anticipate that these schemes will lose their pilot status on completion of the evaluation study in December 2003.

Scottish Executive

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many representations the Scottish Executive has made to his Department since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date; [59520]

(2) how many times his Office has made representations to the Scottish Executive since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive department approached, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [59521]

Mr. Raynsford: My Department has regular exchanges with the Scottish Executive, both formal and informal, at Ministerial and official level. Details are not collated centrally.

Reserved Powers

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to transfer the administration of reserved powers and functions of his Department, its executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies within its remit from to his Department the Scotland Office. [59519]

Mr. Raynsford: None.

Fire Stations

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many fire stations there were in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales in each year since 1997. [58903]

Dr. Whitehead: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) on 19 March 2002, *Official Report,* columns 239–242.

Franchise

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what consultation his Department has initiated on the extension of the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds. [58867]

Dr. Whitehead: We have initiated no consultation on the extension of the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds. However, as I informed the House in my answer of 22 November 2001 to the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Opik), *Official Report,* columns 755W, we would welcome a public debate on the issue. It is also open to the Electoral Commission to consider it and make recommendations for future policy.

Electoral Arrangements

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many and what total amount of fines were imposed on those who failed to register on the electoral register in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* Greater London and *(c)* Enfield in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement; [58966]

(2) how many cases of failure to register on the electoral register have been prosecuted in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* Greater London and *(c)* Enfield in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement; [58965]

(3) if he will estimate how much expenditure was undertaken in compiling the electoral register in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* Greater London and *(c)* Enfield in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement; [58969]

(4) if he will estimate how much income was derived from the electoral register in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* Greater London and *(c)* Enfield in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [58968]

Dr. Whitehead: This information is not centrally recorded.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what action he is taking to increase the take up of *(a)* postal voting and *(b)* proxy voting to increase turnouts in elections; and if he will make a statement. [58964]

(2) what action is being taken to increase the numbers registered on the electoral register; and if he will make a statement. [58971]

(3) what action is being taken to publicise the need to register on the electoral register; and if he will make a statement. [58970]

Dr. Whitehead: Under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, responsibility for promoting public awareness of electoral systems and carrying out programmes of education and information is now for The Electoral Commission. I understand that The Electoral Commission is this year launching two main advertising campaigns to promote public awareness of the availability of absent votes and to encourage completion and return of the annual electoral registration form.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with the Electoral Commission regarding a review of election law; and if he will make a statement. [58963]

Dr. Whitehead: In its report on the 2001 general election, The Electoral Commission outlined its plans to review a number of areas of electoral law and practice. Many of those reviews are now under way and my Department is heavily involved with them. I understand that the Commission intends to produce recommendations in time for them to be considered before the next election. In addition, there is considerable day-to-day contact between the Commission and the Department on a range of electoral issues.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many prosecutions have been undertaken for non-registration with electoral registration officers; and if he will make a statement about the future of this offence in relation to access to electoral roll data without the consent of the voter. [59172]

Dr. Whitehead: Information on the number of prosecutions for non-registration is not held centrally. There are no plans to amend the legislation requiring electors to supply information for registration. We published on 13th May our proposals to restrict access to, and sale and supply of, the electoral registers and the purposes for which they may be used. Our intention, subject to consultation and Parliamentary approval, is to make regulations before the summer recess. The increased privacy afforded by our proposals will reassure electors when providing information for registration.

Speed Limiters

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what progress has been made in developing technology to limit the speed of motor vehicles on public roads. [58878]

Mr. Jamieson: A research project into External Vehicle Speed Control was carried out on behalf of the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions between 1997 and 2000. An Executive Summary of the results is available on the Department's website and copies have been placed in the library.

A further project into Intelligent Speed Adaptation began last year and is expected to end in 2005.

Traffic Management

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what action he intends to take to reduce the number of pedal cyclists who ride through red traffic lights. [59109]

Mr. Byers: The Highway Code and road traffic law apply to cyclists as much as to anyone else. It is an offence under section 36 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 to fail to comply with a traffic sign and the maximum fine is £1,000. The police can also prosecute cyclists who ride carelessly or dangerously and these offences carry maximum fines of £1,000 and £2,500 respectively. Enforcement of the law is a matter for the police.

Ports

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent forecasts of future trends in UK port traffic have been made by his Department; and what steps he is taking to ensure that sufficient port capacity will be available to meet predicted demand. [58832]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock) on 22 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 57W, in which I referred to our ports policy paper, "Modern Ports—A UK Policy", published in November 2000, and a discussion paper, "Recent developments and prospects in UK container ports", published in July 2001. Copies of both documents were placed in the Library. The Department plans to undertake shortly a further study like the one on containers on roll-on roll-off ferry capacity.

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what studies his Department has carried out to assess the likely contribution of port development to *(a)* integrated transport policy and *(b)* wider sustainable development objectives. [58833]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to our ports policy paper, "Modern Ports—A UK Policy", copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of the House. The paper recognises the importance of ports in integrated transport and the importance of addressing this in regional planning guidance, and associated regional transport strategies.

Speed Cameras

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what revised guidance he has issued about the siting and operation of speed cameras. [58826]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* The most recent announcement was made by my right hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Transport on 3 December. The rules announced ensure cameras will be visible and conspicuous as a condition of the Netting-Off arrangements whereby safety camera partnerships may recover their costs from revenue raised from fixed penalty tickets.

Infrastructure Projects

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which proposals for new ports are under consideration that fall into the category of major infrastructure projects as defined by the Government's consultation paper, New Parliamentary Procedures for Processing Major Infrastructure Projects. [58888]

Mr. Jamieson: Proposals for port developments are handled under a range of existing legislation (including the Harbours Act, the Transport and Works Act and the Town and Country Planning Act). Under the proposals for New Parliamentary Procedures for Processing Major Infrastructure Projects set out in the Government's consultation paper, only those projects of national importance which are designated by the Secretary of State, in the light of the definition proposed in Annex C of the paper, would be put to Parliament as major infrastructure projects for its consideration in principle. Designation of projects will be on a case by case basis under the proposed new legislation if enacted.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if his Department will include the reduction of age discrimination in access to employment and services in future guidance on the evaluation and accreditation of local strategic partnerships. [59001]

Ms Keeble: The Government does not intend to include the reduction of age discrimination in access to employment within guidance on the accreditation of Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). It is for the LSP to decide its objectives and priorities for action based on an assessment of local needs and in consultation with partners from the public, private, voluntary and community sectors.

Regional Assemblies

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the estimated cost is of establishing an elected South West Regional Assembly including the costs of a referendum and of the first elections; and what the estimated running costs are in each of the first three years. [60024]

Mr. Raynsford: The costs of establishing elected regional assemblies will vary from region to region, mainly because of different sizes of their electorates. But we expect them all to fall in a range around £15 million to £30 million a region, including the costs of a referendum and of the first assembly elections. The South West is likely to be towards the middle of this range. Chapter 5 of the White Paper, *Your Region, Your Choice,* gave our estimate of the running costs of an elected assembly—around £25 million a year, or around £20 million excluding the costs of staff who will transfer from existing public bodies.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if an elected regional assembly will have the power to impose unitary authorities on existing county and district councils if so recommended by the Boundary Committee. [60025]

Mr. Raynsford: Our proposals for local government reorganisation in regions which have voted to have an elected assembly are set out in paragraphs 9.8 to 9.11 of the White Paper, *Your Region, Your Choice,* published on 9 May. The orders required to implement a reorganisation will be made by the Secretary of State and will need to be approved by Parliament. This process will run in parallel with the process for establishing an elected assembly for the region. But the assembly will have no powers or responsibilities involving the structure of local government in its region.

Road Safety

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what further steps he proposes to take to ensure that road safety targets for 2010 are met; to what extent the most recent road safety statistics are in line with current targets. [59603]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government's strategy for achieving its casualty reduction targets for 2010 was set out in *Tomorrow's roads—safer for everyone* published in March 2000. We publish quarterly progress reports on the department's website.

There were 41,564 road deaths and serious injuries in Great Britain in 2000—the latest figure currently available. This was 2 per cent down on the figure for 1999 and represented a 13 per cent reduction against the average for 1994 to 1998 which is the baseline for the 40 per cent reduction that we want to achieve by 2010.

There were 5,202 child road deaths and serious injuries. This was 9 per cent down on the figure for 1999 and a 24 per cent reduction against the 1994–1998 baseline for the 50 per cent reduction we want to achieve by 2010.

Parliamentary Questions

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he will reply to the Questions from the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham Ref. 42127 tabled on 6 March and Ref. 47381 tabled on 10 April. [59548]

Ms Keeble: I answered Question Ref. 42217 (not 42127 as stated in the text of this question) on Monday 11 March, *Official Report,* column 753W.

I understand Question Ref. 47381 was tabled to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and is not therefore a matter for my Department.

Regional Government

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what future role *(a)* regional development agencies and *(b)* Government offices for specific regions will play in areas that introduce elected regional assemblies. [59551]

Mr. Raynsford: Chapter 4 of the White Paper *Your Region, Your Choice* (Cm 5511) sets out the role of elected regional assemblies in relation to Regional Development Agencies and some functions currently discharged by the Government Offices. Chapter 8 of the White Paper describes the continuing role of the Government Offices.

Best Value Audits

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the cost of complying with best value auditing requirements on councils *(a)* in England and *(b)* each council in England. [59437]

Dr. Whitehead: In 2001, the most recent year for which figures are available, the total cost of undertaking Best Value Performance Plan audits was £11.45 million. The average cost to councils, by type, was:

£52,500—London Boroughs

£43,400—Metropolitan Councils

£37,500—Unitary Authorities

£37,500—County Councils

£21,500—District Councils

Supporting People Partnership

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the cost is of the Supporting People Partnership *(a)* nationally and *(b)* in West Sussex. [59588]

Ms Keeble: The Government allocated £25 million in 2001/02 and £48 million in 2002/03 to implement the Supporting People programme. Implementation grants to West Sussex, including its district authorities, total about £222,000 and £456,000 in the same years.

Multi-modal Studies

Phil Hope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has to provide guidance to regional planning bodies on their consideration of multi-modal studies. [60379]

Mr. Byers: I have today written to the Chair of each Regional Planning Body in the following terms.

> I am writing about two issues relating to the handling of decisions on the recommended strategies which are now being produced by the multi-modal studies. These are the assumptions to be made about the possible future introduction of road user charging and the timetable for the submission to Ministers of RPB advice on study recommendations.
>
> I know that a number of multi-modal studies have been looking at the possible effects of distance based user charging on the inter-urban road network. As we set out in the 10 Year Plan for Transport, no decision on the role of charging in reducing congestion on the inter-urban network has been taken. As a practical matter, the hurdles involved in developing and testing the technology necessary to implement inter-urban road charging for cars and introducing it to 26 million private cars mean that it is extremely unlikely to be possible to introduce it before the end of this decade. This will also allow time to build experience with the distance charging system and associated technology for lorries. And it will provide time to continue the improvements in transport facilities and public transport for which the 10-year plan provides.
>
> Given the practical considerations, we do not believe that a system of road user charging for cars could be introduced this decade; accordingly the Government has no plans to do so. However, this is a subject where further work and research is needed and we will revisit it when sufficient progress has been made in clarifying the technical and practical issues involved. In the meantime, we note the arguments put forward by the Commission for Integrated Transport, RAC and others in favour of inter-urban charging, and others against, and are listening to the debate.
>
> As a consequence, the study recommendations should build in flexibility as to what should be done now given that we do not believe that a system of road user charging for cars could be introduced this decade and that no decisions have been made about the longer term introduction of road user charging. My Department will be re-emphasising this to the study teams.
>
> On the second issue, we have always recognised that before the Government takes decisions on the recommendations from the multi-modal studies it is important to have advice from Regional Planning Bodies on the way in which the recommendations fit with, and will contribute to, the Regional Transport Strategy and Regional Planning Guidance.
>
> However, it is also important to recognise that the studies have taken up to two years to produce their recommendations; that they have addressed the key issues in considerable detail in close consultation with local and regional interests; and that the Regional Planning Bodies have been represented on the study steering groups. This being the case, I believe that it is essential that we make decisions on the study recommendations, and start to resolve the problems on the transport network, as quickly as possible.
>
> I understand that, in the case of a number of studies, the Regional Planning Bodies are planning to take as long as six months to consider the study recommendations and submit advice to the Government. Since the Planning Bodies will have developed a good understanding of the key issues during the study process, I am not convinced that it is necessary to take this length of time to produce sound advice. I should therefore be grateful if, from now on, Regional Planning Bodies could normally aim to provide advice to Government within three months of receiving each study's recommendations. I realise that in some cases this may necessitate re-timing meetings of the full RPB. Nevertheless, given the need to maintain momentum in delivering the 10 Year Plan for Transport, I must ask you to do this where it is necessary to meet the three month deadline.

On the timetable I have acknowledged the particular difficulty faced by the West Midlands RPB who are currently consulting on their regional planning guidance.

Constructionline

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement about the Consultation document "Accelerating Change"; what role Constructionline will play in public sector tendering; when Constructionline was formed; what percentage of public sector tenders were vetted by this company in each of the last three years; how many are expected in each of the next three years; what financial sanctions will be imposed on those public sector bodies that do not use Constructionline; and what investigations he has carried out into the cost effectiveness of alternative companies to Constructionline. [57252]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

I welcome the efforts of the Strategic Forum for Construction, which launched the Accelerating Change consultation document on 22 April. It is important that Rethinking Construction principles are adopted deeply and widely throughout the industry and among its clients. The challenge for the Forum, with support from DTI, is to ensure the final document secures widespread commitment to deliver change.

Constructionline saves its clients (and registered firms) the bureaucracy and time otherwise required to process information about construction firms' underlying capacity and capability to undertake the types of work for which they offer themselves. Constructionline was formed in 1998. It does not vet tenders—it addresses pre-tender enquiries. It is a voluntary service free to clients. Constructionline is owned by government and operated by a private sector partner following a tendering exercise.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Regional Development Agencies

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the board memberships for each regional development agency; whom she has consulted as representatives of local authorities whose areas fall within the agency's area before making the appointments to the board for each regional development agency; against what criteria applicants to the board of regional development agencies were judged; and what representations she has received concerning her appointments of the board members of regional development agencies. [58388]

Alan Johnson: In accordance with the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998, representatives of employers, employees, local authorities and those who live, work or carry out rural issues are consulted before appointments are made to the RDA boards. All stakeholders are consulted on all appointments.

RDA appointments are made in accordance with the Office for the Commissioner of Public Appointments' Code of Practice. The selection criteria are drawn up for each round of appointments. I have placed in the library of the House the Information for Candidates for the last two apointments rounds, which includes the job specifications. There have been many replies to the various appointments rounds and details of these cannot be produced except at disproportionate cost.

Fireworks

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will publish the fireworks injury statistics for 2001; and if she will make a statement. [42754]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The total number of persons recorded as attending hospital casualty departments in Great Britain during the 2001 bonfire night period was 1362. This represents an increase of 40 per cent on the previous year's total of 972. There were no deaths in the 2001 Bonfire period but we are aware of one death occurring outside the recording period.

The increase in recorded accidents causes great concerns. We continue to do all we can to promote safety and to prevent misuse of fireworks.

I am arranging for copies of the injury figures together with the analytical and regional tables to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses as well as on the DTI website: www.dti.gov.uk.

E-commerce

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reason the proposed transposition of the EU e-commerce Directive into UK law, as set out in the Government's consultation document, is materially different from the form of transposition adopted by Germany. [54877]

Mr. Alexander: The aim of transposition is to reproduce faithfully the meaning of a Directive in—and in accordance with the practice of—national legislation. Member States may therefore adopt different wording in order to achieve the same effect and often do so. Whatever the textual differences, the Government's understanding is that the German legislation transposing the E-Commerce Directive has the same intention as the draft UK Regulations on which public consultation closed on 2 May. The Government is now considering whether the wording of the UK Regulations giving effect to that intention can be improved.

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from *(a)* the e-envoy and *(b)* the Cabinet Office with regard to the implementation of the EU e-commerce Directive. [54878]

Mr. Alexander: The Department has worked closely with all branches of Government, including the Office of the e-Envoy and the Cabinet Office, in formulating its approach to, and proposals for, implementing the E-Commerce Directive and will continue to do so in finalising those proposals in the light of responses to the recent public consultation.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of the world's electronic commerce business was conducted in Britain, *(a)* in March 2000 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available. [57553]

Mr. Alexander: We have been unable to locate official statistics through ONS, OECD (or any other international group) that would allow a comparison between the UK and global levels of e-commerce value.

Consignia

Sandra Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the consultancies which have been commissioned by Consignia in each of the last three years, their remit and their cost. [55588]

Mr. Alexander: Under the commercial freedoms model enshrined in the Postal Services Act 2000, this is a commercial matter for the company.

Dartford Parcelforce Depot

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the decision of Consignia to close the Dartford Parcelforce Depot. [57111]

Mr. Alexander: Parcelforce Worldwide is losing £15 million per month. Despite investment of around £200 million in recent years, Consignia has failed to turn its parcels operation around and a new approach was needed to restructure and re-position the business. Closure of Dartford depot in August will result in business moving to a nearby facility in Charlton.

The loss of jobs as a result of restructuring is regrettable. The company will offer as many as possible of those affected the option of continued employment with a different part of the business or a voluntary redundancy package.

The decision to restructure Parcelforce was taken by the Board of Consignia. The Government accepts that action is necessary to stem the company's losses. Undertaking this action is a commercial matter for the Board of Consignia.

Nuclear Safety

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who from her Department attended the Oslo Meeting from 6–8 May on nuclear accidents; and if she will make a statement. [56129]

Mr. Wilson: No-one from my Department attended the meeting. Representatives from the UK Competent Authorities (DTI and DEFRA) under the International Atomic Energy Agency's Early Notification and Assistance Conventions were invited but were unable to attend owing to prior commitments and the need to prepare for a UK national exercise. The meeting in Oslo was a follow-up meeting to one held in June 2001 which was attended by UK representatives. Officials in DTI and DEFRA will be informed of the proceedings in due course.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the basis and outcome of the ISIS nuclear emergency exercise held in May. [57981]

Mr. Wilson: Exercise Isis was held on 10 May 2002 based on a simulated emergency at Bradwell Power Station. This was part of an ongoing programme of regular off-site exercises for civil nuclear installations. These test the off-site facility for each site, in this case based at Essex Police HQ in Chelmsford, and involve a wide range of local and national agencies. As this was the National (level 3) exercise for 2002/03, this also tested the various government departments at their headquarters. The exercise tested the response to an event with off-site consequences wider than those usually tested.

Preliminary indications are that this was a successful and worthwhile exercise. It is too early to comment in detail, as the process of collecting the considered comments of all participating organisations is still ongoing. As with all such exercises, the lessons will be fully evaluated and taken forward in future planning.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the recent international convention on nuclear safety; which members of her Department attended it; what was discussed; and what conclusions were reached. [58536]

Mr. Wilson: Officials from my Department and from the Health and Safety Executive attended the second Review Meeting of the Contracting Parties of the Convention on Nuclear Safety held in Vienna from 15–26 April 2002.

The purpose of the meeting was to review the national reports of the Contracting Parties, which focused on the measures they have taken to implement the obligations of the Convention. The United Kingdom presented its report at the meeting, as did other Contracting Parties, and each report was subject to questions and debate by the Contracting Parties.

Discussion of country reports during the review meeting is confidential. However, a Summary Report of the meeting, including conclusions and recommendations, is available on the IAEA website www.iaea.org. Publication of country reports is at the discretion of each Contracting Party. The United Kingdom's National Report and the reports of other Contracting Parties can be found on this site.

Confectionery (Safety)

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 19 April 2002, *Offical Report,* column 1202W, whether her Department has received a report by RoSPA on the safety of confectionery products containing toys. [57296]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The department received the RoSPA Report in May 2002.

Broadband

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to offer assistance to small businesses in rural areas to enable them to access broadband communications, as they become available. [57211]

Mr. Alexander There are already a range of incentives to stimulate take up of ICT in the economy, notably 100 per cent capital allowance for ICT investment for small businesses and tax breaks for employees loaned a PC at home by their employer.

In addition, some of the £30 million UK broadband fund will be used by Regional Development Agencies and the devolved administrations assist SMEs in getting broadband. Further work is being carried out to encourage infrastructure-sharing by telecommunications companies to reduce the cost of rollout, cutting red tape which may be holding back deployment of satellite broadband services and aggregating broadband procurement by the public sector in order to provide guaranteed levels of demand in rural areas.

UK online for business covers the whole of the UK and has teams of business advisers in every part of the country based in Business Links run by the Small Business Service (and their equivalents in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland). Advisers provide practical, tailored, impartial jargon free advice on a wide variety of e-business and ICT topics, including broadband, to rural businesses. Business advisers are involved in a number of projects with local businesses in rural areas to ensure that they are able to exploit the benefits of ICTs and broadband for commercial advantage.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when broadband will be available in the 01884 exchange area. [58177]

Mr. Alexander *[holding answer 21 May 2002:]* Broadband can be delivered by a variety of technologies of which only digital subscriber lines are fixed to telephone exchanges. Broadband is available by satellite throughout the UK. Rollout of other technologies is a commercial decision for the companies concerned.

A map showing geographical availability of broadband services can be found in the UK Online Annual Report [http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/ukonline/champions/anrep_menu.htm].

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will estimate the percentage of the population unable to make use of *(a)* ISDN and *(b)* broadband at their home address in (i) Scotland, (ii) the UK and (iii) Dumfries and Galloway. [57304]

Mr. Alexander: The Office of Telecommunications (Oftel) holds detailed information regarding the UK telecoms market. ISDN is available from every digital telephone exchange in the country, although it cannot be guaranteed to every customer because of a range of geographical and technical features. Oftel have not made an assessment of percentage availability, since it is heavily dependent on localised factors.

Broadband services by one or more of ADSL, cable and wireless are available to around 66 per cent of the population. Satellite broadband is available throughout the country.

A map showing geographical availability of broadband services can be found in the UK Online Annual Report [http://www.e-envoy.gov.uk/ukonline/champions/anrep_menu.htm].

Enterprise Bill

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations her Department has received regarding the Enterprise Bill during the Committee stage of the Bill in the House. [57326]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department received representations from the following:

Bankruptcy Association

British Property Federation

City of London Law Society

Council of Mortgage Lenders

Oil and Gas Industry

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the economic impact of the additional levy on the oil and gas industry announced in the Budget 2002. [57301]

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact on the amount of oil and gas that will be extracted from the UK continental shelf as a result of the imposition of the supplementary charge on the oil and gas industry. [57440]

Mr. Wilson: The changes announced in his Budget by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer need to be considered as a carefully designed package of measures, with two key elements—the 10 per cent supplementary charge and the generous 100 per cent investment allowance. I refer the hon. Member to the analysis of the likely effect of the measures proposed on new investment attached to the letter of 8 May from my right hon. Friend the Chief Secretary to the right hon. Member for Fylde, a copy of which has been placed in the Libraries of the House. The economic impact will depend principally on the impact on investment.

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact on the PILOT initiative and its targets of the supplementary charge on the oil and gas industry. [57439]

Mr. Wilson: PILOT, the joint Government-oil and gas industry forum, has an extensive action programme to improve the industry's competitiveness. It is pursuing a number of visionary targets for 2010 and last year set interim production and investment targets for 2005. I expect PILOT to continue to monitor progress against these targets. The fiscal regime is one of many influences on the success of the industry in meeting them. The changes announced in his Budget by my right hon Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer need to be considered as a carefully designed package of measures, with two key elements—the 10 per cent supplementary charge and the generous 100 per cent investment allowance.

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact on the 20th licensing round of the supplementary charge on the oil and gas industry. [57438]

Mr. Wilson: The 20th offshore licensing Round closed on 16 April, prior to the Chancellor's proposed changes to the North Sea fiscal regime in his Budget. A slightly higher proportion of blocks offered was applied for in the current Round as in the previous North Sea Round (the 18th).

Universal Bank

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress is being made with the plans to introduce a universal banking system into Post Offices; and if she will make a statement. [58273]

Mr. Alexander: Progress continues to be made and a lot of detailed work is being carried out on implementing universal banking services for delivery in advance of the migration of benefit payment to ACT from April 2003.

The Department for Work and Pensions, together with the Inland Revenue and the Northern Ireland Social Security Agency have agreed contractual terms with Post Office Limited for the provision of the Card Account and are working on implementation. The major High Street banks have also agreed that counter access to their basic bank accounts will also be made available at post offices and are in detailed discussions with Post Office Limited on implementation.

Leisure Park Operators

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultations she has had with representatives of leisure and residential caravan park operators on the maximum retail price provisions for electricity supply which are due to come into force on 1 January 2003. [57723]

Mr. Wilson: The Department received some 25 representations from right hon and hon Members on behalf of park operators. The Office of Gas and Electricity Markets, which is responsible for the new arrangements, received over 300 representations and responses to its consultation papers on this subject and held discussions with the various trade organisations before finalising the new arrangements.

Marina Industry (Utility Prices)

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made by OFGEM in working with the leisure marine industry to produce guidelines for the implementation by marina operators of the maximum resale price provisions of the Utilities Act 2000. [58261]

Mr. Wilson: Ofgem is aware of the particular concerns of the marina industry. I understand that it is currently drafting guidance which will assist the industry (as well as landlords and tenants) in understanding and implementing the revised rules. The material will be made available for comment within the next few weeks.

Scottish Dairy Sector

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations *(a)* she and *(b)* the Competition Commission have received regarding competition in the Scottish dairy sector. [57570]

Miss Melanie Johnson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has since December 2000 received correspondence about the Competition Commission report on the supply of fresh processed milk in Scotland. Correspondence has also been received about the current operation of the dairy market in Scotland which has been forwarded to the Director General of Fair Trading. The Competition Commission has also received two letters about their report. Anyone with concerns about the operation of the market in Scotland should put them directly to the Director General of Fair Trading.

"Your Guide"

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the "Your Guide" scheme will be introduced across the UK. [57946]

Mr. Alexander: The evaluation of the pilot of the "Your Guide" service of post offices as Government as General practitioners is well advanced. All relevant evidence from the pilot is being fully evaluated to determine whether the concept works. Further work to establish whether a national scheme could provide value for money to Government and help revitalise the post office network is being completed. The decision whether or not to roll out a national service, the form in which it would be offered and the timing of roll-out, will depend on the outcome of this work.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had about the United Kingdom's renewable energy manufacturing industry with *(a)* the devolved Administrations, *(b)* the regional development agencies, *(c)* her Department's sustainable energy policy unit and *(d)* other Government departments; and if she will make a statement. [58542]

Mr. Wilson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary and State for Trade and Industry and I have regular meetings with the various parties mentioned on matters including energy policy.

The development of the UK's renewable energy manufacturing industry is an integral part of the Government's strategy for renewable energy, to ensure that the UK obtains maximum advantage, in terms of new jobs and investment opportunities, from the planned expansion in renewable energy generation over the years ahead. We recently established the new unit, Renewables UK, with a specific responsibility to support the UK renewable energy manufacturing industry.

Coal Industry Pensions

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the reports of the Asset Liability Study carried out by the Mineworkers Pension Scheme and the British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme have been received by *(a)* the trustees of the two schemes and *(b)* her Department. [57825]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* The results from the Asset Liability Studies commissioned by the Trustees of the Mineworkers' Pension Scheme and the British Coal Staff Superannuation Scheme have been presented to the two Schemes' Trustees and also made available to my Department in its capacity as the Guarantor of the two Schemes.

Beer Sales

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on Government policy towards ending short beer measures. [57375]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* Under existing case law, trading standards departments have difficulty in securing convictions for short measure beer unless the quantity of liquid served is less than 90 per cent after the collapse of the head of froth. On 18 March the Department published a consultation paper inviting comments on the proposal that measures should comprise not less than 95 per cent liquid after the collapse of the head of froth.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact on the brewing trade's revenue of proposals to allow public houses and other establishments to serve a pint at 95 per cent. of volume. [57374]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* The Department estimates that in order to serve measures containing not less than 95 per cent liquid, licensees would have to buy extra beer from brewers at a total cost of about £38 million at wholesale prices.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received from consumer groups about proposals to allow public houses and other establishments to serve a pint at 95 per cent of volume. [57373]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* The consultation period runs until 1 July. To date, I have received a representation from the Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA).

Tourism

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what guidance she is providing to regional development agencies on the importance of tourism in setting priorities for capital investment in their regions. [58582]

Alan Johnson: It is for the Regional Development Agencies to determine how best to deliver their Regional Economic Strategies, in consultation with their regional partners. Under the Single Budget, operating since 1 April this year, the Agencies have much greater flexibility to target their resources on regional priorities, which may include appropriate tourism-linked measures. However, corporate planning guidance issued to the Agencies in October 2001 set out the Government's expectations of the Agencies in terms of the development and implementation from April 2002 of sustainable tourism strategies. We expect that Regional Development agencies will take account of the importance of capital investment in their regions in planning all their activities, including those related to tourism.

MOX Fuel Shipments

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to what extent the approval process for the shipment and the transport package for the MOX fuel due to be returned from Japan to Sellafield, and the nuclear safety case associated therewith, has taken account of *(a)* reasonably foreseeable actions from malicious intent that could arise in United Kingdom territorial waters and during docking, handling and onward transport from Barrow to Sellafield, *(b)* how such actions have been incorporated in the nuclear safety assessment and licensing process as specific design basis threats, *(c)* whether the personnel and systems involved in all elements of the transportation and transfer from one mode of transport to another have been tested and trialled against a simulation of the appropriate design basis threat and *(d)* how each element has been assessed in terms of the personnel and systems deployed being shown to be adequate to maintain the MOX fuel in a safe state. [56103]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* The transport of MOX fuel at all stages is subject to the most stringent regulation. The Government's security advisers have assessed the potential threats posed to this shipment and are satisfied that the thorough precautions taken to prevent theft or sabotage are adequate and make the security risks associated with the shipment negligible. The precautions taken are designed to cope with all credible threats and comply with all relevant international obligations and recommendations on the physical protection of nuclear material and ensure that the security risks associated with this shipment are negligible. The shipment is accompanied by armed police officers from the United Kingdoms Atomic Energy Authority Constabulary who are trained to deal with any threats to the transportation.

Temporary Workers Directive

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her Department's policy on the proposed European Commission Directive on temporary workers. [58205]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the Explanatory Memorandum on the proposed directive on temporary agency workers, a copy of which is in the Libraries of the House. I intend to hold a public consultation on the proposed directive in due course.

Timeshares

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when her Department will publish the results of its consultation paper "Timeshare Sales—Improving the protection of consumers". [60382]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department has today published a response to the consultation. I have placed copies of the document in the Libraries of the House.

Departmental Boards

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will announce the names of the independent members to be appointed to the Strategy, Executive and other Departmental Boards. [60381]

Ms Hewitt: Further to my announcement to Parliament on 1 February, *Official Report,* column 619W, on the procedure by which independent members were to be appointed to my Department's new Boards, I am pleased to announce that the following people have now been appointed to the Boards. This information is also available on the DTI website.

	Current position
Strategy Board	
Sir Richard Sykes	Rector, Imperial College of Science, Technology & Medicine
Mair Barnes	Non Executive Director, Scottish Power, Littlewoods plc, Patientline Ltd, Woolworths Holdings Ltd (South Africa)
Tony Cooper	Joint General Secretary, Prospect, Member of the Postal Services Commission and the Forestry Commission
Executive Board	
Fields Wicker-Miurin	Director, Vesta Capital Advisors Ltd
Mary McAnally	Former Managing Director, Meridian Broadcasting Ltd, Board Member of the South East of England Development Agency
Crawford Gillies	Managing Director Europe, Bain & Company Inc
Business Group Board	
Nicholas Brayshaw	Group Chief Executive, Wagon
Richard Maudslay	Managing Director, House of Hardy
James Strachan	Chief Executive, RNID
Dianne Thompson	Chief Executive, Camelot
Energy Board	
Nicholas Baldwin	Chief Executive, Powergen Plc
Hon. Barbara Thomas	Chairman, Private Equity Investor plc & Deputy Chairman, Friends Provident
Fair Markets Board	
Rodney Buse	Ex-Group Personnel Director, W H Smith; currently Vice Chair NCVO, chair of the voluntary sector's Quality Standards Task Group, Non Executive Director for various charities, including ICAN.
Patricia Calway	Director, Knowledgelink
Margaret Prosser OBE	Deputy General Secretary, TGWU
Julia Unwin OBE	Freelance consultant, Charity Commissioner and Board member, National Consumer Council
Innovation Board	
Shahzad Khan MBE	Director, Kensal Group
Caroline Whitfield	Chief Executive, Rapid Access Technology Partners
Bill Callaghan	Chair, Health and Safety Commission
Services Board	
Mair Barnes	Non Executive Director, Scottish Power, Littlewoods plc, Patientline Ltd, Woolworths Holdings Ltd (South Africa)
Lesley James	Non Executive Director, Selfridges plc, West Bromwich Building Society plc, Care UK plc and Queens Moat Houses plc. Former HR Director, Tesco plc.
Alan Jones, OBE	Managing Director, TNT Express

Information Security

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on progress with the report referred to on 28 March 2001 by the then Minister of State, Home Office on confidence in the information security consultancy sector. [60375]

Ms Hewitt: I will place in the Libraries of the House copies of a report commissioned by Department on this subject. The report concludes that there are issues facing the sector and its customers and makes recommendations to both Government and the industry on how confidence in the industry may be enhanced. We are happy to take forward those recommendations which fall to the Department of Trade and Industry. The report does, however, conclude that there is no evidence to support the view that there is a serious problem in relation to confidence in the supply of information security consultancy services.

Entrepreneurship

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent measures have been taken to foster entrepreneurship in Coventry. [59008]

Alan Johnson: The Small Business Service, working through its restructured national network of Business Links, provides information, advice, and access to experts on all aspects of starting and running a business. Additionally, it has this month launched a consultation on "A Comprehensive Strategy for Start-Ups" which looks to strengthen and increase the UK's business stock.

Business Link Coventry and Warwickshire directly assist around 300 companies a year to start trading. Recognising the need to have a more proactive and coordinated approach they convened a meeting of local partners, Local Authorities, the University Science Park, and Local Development Agencies, in February of this year. As a result of this meeting, they have agreed to work more closely together, and to adopt measures to increase the number of Start ups in Coventry and the surrounding areas.

Two of the partners, Coventry and Warwickshire Co-operative Development Agency, and the Women's Business Development Agency with the support of the Business Link have both received funding from the SBS's Phoenix Fund. Over £500,000 has been awarded to these two projects to help support Women Entrepreneurs across the Region and Social Entrepreneurship in the most deprived wards in the Coventry area.

Government Agencies (South-East)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what were *(a)* the cost of establishing, *(b)* the running costs since it was established and *(c)* the costs this year of (i) the South East England Development Agency and (ii) the Government Office for the South East. [59550]

Alan Johnson: Central Government expenditure of £12,800,000 in support of Regional Development Agencies administration is recorded for 1998–99—the year prior to the establishment of the RDAs on 1 April 1999—of which £461,000 was allocated to the South East of England Development Agency (SEEDA).

The administration costs of the Agency for the following three financial years are set out below:

SEEDA: Administration Costs (£000s)

Financial Year	*Cost (£000s)*
1999–2000	6,267
2000–01	6,817
2001–02	9,805

Running costs for 2002–03 onwards were subsumed into the RDAs' Single Programme when it was introduced on 1 April 2002, and are no longer allocated separately. This was one of a number of flexibilities that underpin the Programme, and is intended to give the RDAs the freedom, and the responsibility, to determine their running costs so as best to achieve their objective and targets, within the confines of prudent financial management. However, the RDAs' financial management framework does include a requirement on each RDA to specify its running costs budget in its corporate plan, which has to be approved by Ministers. The running costs identified in SEEDA's approved corporate plan are £11,200,000 for the current financial year.

The Regional Coordination Unit of the Cabinet Office have provided information in respect of the Government Office for the South East (GOSE). There is no record of the costs of setting up the Government Office, which was established in 1994, and there are no running costs figures available for the financial year 1994–95.

The running cost of GOSE for the following seven financial years are set out below:

GOSE: Administration Costs (£000s)

Financial Year	*Cost (£000s)*
1995–96	8,331
1996–97	8,406
1997–98	8,545
1998–99	8,561
1999–2000	8,659
2000–01	8,953
2001–02	10,312

For 2002–03, the initial running cost allocation for the financial year is £9,798,000.

Sellafield

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, when he last met representatives of the Irish Government to discuss safety at the Sellafield plant. [58575]

Mr. Wilson: I have had no such meeting. The relevant regulatory bodies from the UK and Ireland have regular contacts, and arrangements are in place under which officials from my department meet Irish counterparts on a range of regulatory issues.

Government Online Procurement

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of Government procurement is done online; and if she will make a statement. [57554]

Mr. Andrew Smith: I have been asked to reply.

This information is not held centrally.

However, the Office of Government Commerce collects information on the proportion of low value purchasing transactions which are carried out electronically by central government departments and agencies. 57 per cent of low value purchases were undertaken electronically in the quarter October–December 2001 (the most recent figures analysed). This percentage includes online procurement over the Internet of low value goods & services, but specific figures for online procurement are not separately identified.

Plans for further development of e-procurement in government purchasing will be announced later this year.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Annual Report

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department's Annual report for 2002 will be published. [60264]

Margaret Beckett: The Annual Report for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs 2002 is published today.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how she intends the UK Greenhouse Gas Emissions Trading Scheme 2002 will relate to the Clean Development Mechanism in the Kyoto Protocol. [48982]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, intends to allow in principle companies within the UK Emissions Trading Scheme to use CDM related credits to help them meet their domestic obligations, and will make a final decision on the role of CDM credits within the scheme once the detailed rules on CDM have been agreed at international level. These rules are currently under discussion at the CDM Executive Board. We understand that the European Commission also intends to make a proposal on the project mechanisms, including the CDM, and their relationship to the European Emissions Trading Scheme early next year.

Coastal Byelaws

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will introduce legislation to implement the recommendations of the Review of Byelaws for the Coast published in 1998. [58360]

Alun Michael: Many of the recommendations arising from the Review of Byelaws for the Coast published in 1998 do not require legislation and we have given them priority. For example, we wrote earlier this year to local authorities encouraging them to implement those involving voluntary action on their part. Sport England is writing to the relevant sports governing bodies encouraging them to continue to promote good practice among their members. We are also planning to produce a comprehensive guide for local authorities on their powers and responsibilities. The guide will include examples of successful mixes of voluntary and legislative action by local authorities to regulate recreational activity on the coast. We shall take forward the recommendations requiring legislation after that.

Illegal Timber

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment has been made by the Government of the potential for legislation at a European level to combat the trade in illegally harvested timber; and if he will make a statement. [56675]

Mr. Meacher: In its communication to the Council and the European Parliament of 13 February 2002 on a global partnership for sustainable development, the Commission stated that it will develop an European Union (EU) action plan by end 2002 on forest law enforcement, governance and trade and to strengthen international co-operation to address violations of forest law.

An international workshop on Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade, including measures to combat illegal logging, was hosted by the European Commission in Brussels on 22–24 April 2002 to help develop its action plan. The workshop discussed what measures could be taken by wood-producing and importing countries to combat illegal logging and the associated trade in illegally logged wood products.

We supported the conclusions of the workshop that recognise the need for legislation to enforce the control of access to the EU market of illegally logged timber and timber products. The EU plan of action will include consideration of legislative requirements.

Flood and Coastal Defence

Mr. Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will publish reports received under her Department's high level targets for flood and coastal defence; and if she will make a statement. [60263]

Mr. Morley: I am today publishing four reports and placing copies in the House Libraries. These reports relate to:

Target 1—Policy statements;
Target 2—Provision of flood warnings;
Target 3—Emergency exercises and emergency plans; and
Target 9—Biodiversity.

I am grateful to the Environment Agency for providing these reports and to the other operating authorities who have contributed to the work which is being reported upon. The severe floods of Autumn 2000 created inevitable delays in producing these reports. Some other reports will be produced later this year, covering a two year period.

The high level targets initiative is designed to secure a more certain delivery of the Government's policy aim and objectives for flood and coastal defence. In the difficult circumstances of the past year or so the results being reported today are encouraging though they do point to the need for further work to be done, including by some operating authorities, to offer a more consistent approach to service delivery.

On target 1, I am pleased that the great majority of operating authorities have produced a suitable statement of their policy towards flood and coastal defence. While there is a significant minority of local authorities who have not produced statements, many of them are understood to have little or no flood and coastal defence responsibilities. Nevertheless there are some local authorities who have more significant responsibilities and we will be working with the Environment Agency and Local Government Association in encouraging them to produce statements.

On target 2, I note that overall some two-thirds of the Environment Agency's severe flood warnings were issued in accordance with their service standards. This is encouraging especially in the face of the severe demands of the 2000 floods. The Agency nevertheless recognise that there is room for improvement and are working on a new investment strategy. It is also worth recording that since Autumn 2000 a further 322,000 properties are covered by the Agency's flood warning arrangements.

On target 3, programmes of emergency exercises were disrupted by the 2000 floods, foot and mouth disease and, to some extent, the events of September 11. Nevertheless 22 emergency exercises were carried out in 2001 and lessons learned from them are identified in the report. 27 local or regional exercises are planned for this year and a national exercise is planned for 2003. I am also pleased to note that good progress has been made in ensuring that local emergency plans cover flooding and that there are arrangements in hand for these to be reviewed, particularly to cover the local sources of flooding and provision of sandbags.

On target 9, the report shows that flood and coastal defence works have resulted in net gains in a number of habitats covered by Biodiversity Action Plans. This work is often alleged to be damaging to the environment but the report provides evidence to the contrary. While this is very encouraging, work is in hand to ensure more rigorous collection of this information for future reports.

I expect to publish further reports later this year. We will also be working with the operating authorities in reviewing the operation of high level targets with a view to refining and extending the initiative.

Institute for Animal Health

Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the Department Accounting Officer has decided that he will take steps to recover the public money committed to the Institute for Animal Health study into sheep TSEs. [60378]

Margaret Beckett: In his capacity as the Departmental Accounting Officer, the Permanent Secretary for DEFRA has secured the assurance of the BBSRC, IAH's sponsoring organisation, that the sum of £100,000 has been invested to examine and improve quality control procedures for the specialist work that IAH carries out on behalf of DEFRA. This investment equates to the value of the work which IAH undertook into the TSE experiments. There were unique features surrounding this particular experiment and we recognise the outstanding contribution that IAH has made in this field of research. I believe that this outcome satisfactorily resolves the issues for both the Department and the Institute.

A404 (Bisham)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what advice she has received from the Government Office for the South East on the use of her powers to create an order for a footpath under the flood arch on the A404 at Bisham, Berkshire, as a diversion of footpath Bisham. [58825]

Alun Michael *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* The question refers to a footpath (Bisham 9) which crosses the A404 near Maidenhead, a busy dual carriageway which links the M4 and M40. Although the path is well used and traffic speeds are typically 60–70 mph, no crossing facilities are provided. Accidents have occurred and the situation is recognised as being dangerous. It was suggested by the Ramblers Association that a culvert under the road a short distance away could be used by walkers. The Highways agency has no objection to this, but it would require the diversion of the path to the culvert crossing point. The Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, as highway authority, made a diversion order under S119 of the Highways Act, but when the landowner objected they withdrew the order, rather than sending to the Secretary of State for confirmation. Instead, they proposed a new route taking the path some half a kilometre along the road to another culvert, which is already to be used as a crossing for another path. The Ramblers say that the alternative path is circuitous, inconvenient and inferior to their proposed route in many ways. It would also leave the present dangerous crossing point open. From the information that we gathered from the parties concerned, there appears to be some justification in these criticisms, I have asked lawyers for advice on these issues in order to come to a conclusion on the way forward as quickly as possible.

Hunting

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* submissions the Minister for Rural Affairs has received and *(b)* meetings he has attended with outside organisations concerning the current consultation on hunting with dogs. [57257]

Alun Michael: Following my statement to the House on 21 March, in which I announced a process of consultation on the practical issues of detail with a wide variety of interested parties, I then wrote to every member of the House of Commons and the House of Lords. At the same time, I also wrote to a wide range of interested organisation and members of the public. I have received over 7,000 letters and submissions in response.

Since my statement to the House on the 21 March, I have met the Countryside Alliance and its Campaign for Hunting; the Campaign for the Protection of Hunted Animals, comprising the RSPCA, the League Against Cruel Sports and the International Fund for Animal Welfare; and the Middle Way Group. I have promised to continue to engage with all three of these main groups. I have also met the Independent Supervisory Authority for Hunting, the National Coursing Club and Protect our Wild Animals. I plan to hold meetings with various other organisations, including further meetings with the three main interest groups, over the coming weeks. In addition to these meetings, I have met delegations from the Countryside Alliance on a variety of occasions at various locations around the country, including the North of England, the East Midlands, the South West, Yorkshire and North Wales.

Many of those responding to my letter of 10 April simply expressed strongly held and passionate views either for or against hunting with dogs. Others addressed the principles on which the legislation will be based—the principles of cruelty and utility—and included some very interesting comments from organisations and individuals with relevant experience. I shall continue to engage on the issues with the main representative groups and with other organisations with a particular interest in hunting with dogs.

While the volume of responses has put pressure on the team within DEFRA, the work of analysing the responses is almost complete. I shall write again shortly to all MPs, Peers, Assembly Members and a wide range of interested organisations, providing a further opportunity to submit facts and evidence on what have emerged as the specific topics and key issues that need to be addressed on how the principles which will underpin the legislation should be applied to practical situations.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Digital Television

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the number of subscriptions to *(a)* digital terrestrial, *(b)* digital satellite and *(c)* digital cable television held by her Department for services in any departmental building from which Ministers work, stating for each subscription its (i) cost and (ii) purpose. [48335]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The DCMS' provider of additional television channels cannot currently offer digital television to the Westminster area. Therefore DCMS receives all its additional television services through analogue cable television.

Broadband

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the cost of providing broad band services per *(a)* urban dwelling and *(b)* rural dwelling. [55822]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

There are a number of technologies used to provide broadband services. Each of these has a different cost structure and may suit different markets, including those defined by geography. The Government takes a technology neutral approach and aims to make the market more extensive and competitive.

National Stadium

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if the Government will reimburse Birmingham City Council for the cost of the Birmingham bid for the National Football Stadium. [56573]

Tessa Jowell: No. Those local authorities and other bodies who made proposals to the English National Stadium Review team did so on their own volition.

British Museum

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the items in the British Museum's collection that have been *(a)* sold and *(b)* otherwise disposed of since 1972. [57687]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The Trustees of the British Museum are permitted by the British Museum Act 1963, Section 5 to dispose of items in the collection where they are duplicates or unfit.

The British Museum sold 21 duplicate prints in 1986 and a duplicate set of Hiroshige woodblock prints in 1995. Some 2,600 duplicate coins, medals and badges and 117 duplicate western prints have been exchanged for similar material since 1972. Two bronze plaques from Benin were exchanged for a unique bronze horseman in the style of the Lower Niger Bronze industry in 1972. A relic of cannibalism, judged unfit to be retained in the Museum's collection was exchanged with Fiji for a collection of prehistoric sherds in 1975.

Playing Fields

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will provide a breakdown by region in England of the number of planning consultations received by Sport England in relation to change of use of playing fields in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02; and how many of these had planning permission granted. [57628]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The breakdown by region in England of the number of planning applications affecting playing fields received by Sport England for the years 1999–2000 and 2000–01 (figures for 2001–02 are not available); and how many received planning permission are shown in the following table:

Region	*1999–2000*	*Planning Permission granted*	*2000–2001*	*Planning Permission granted*
East	38	21	93	65
East Midlands	33	21	75	55
London	31	8	37	17
North East	39	22	36	28
North West	95	64	132	93
South East	152	106	226	147
South West	57	33	43	25
West Midlands	111	89	162	121
Yorkshire	101	67	98	60
Total	657	431	902	611

Planning applications affecting playing fields can often involve a change of use that benefits sport rather than resulting in the outright sale of playing fields or their development. It should also be noted that where planning permission is granted this does not necessarily mean that the proposed development or change of use went ahead. Comprehensive data is not collected centrally on whether planning applications are actually implemented.

National Insurance

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 7 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 63–64W, what her latest assessment is of the wage costs of *(a)* community amateur sports clubs and *(b)* the fitness industry. [58662]

Mr. Caborn: This information is not available. The wage costs of individual economic sectors are analysed each year in the New Earnings Survey, a publication of the Office of National Statistics. Trends in wages in the fitness industry, and among the non-volunteer staff of community amateur sports clubs, are not separately analysed.

Reserved Powers

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to transfer the administration of reserved powers and functions of her Department, its executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies within its remit from her Department to the Scotland Office. [59525]

Mr. Caborn: There are no plans to transfer any reserved powers and functions to the Scotland Office.

Scottish Executive

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many times her Office has made representations to the Scottish Executive since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* department approached, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [59527]

Mr. Caborn: This information is not collated by the Department. The Department has regular contact with the Scottish Executive at all levels across the full range of subjects for which the Department is responsible.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many representations the Scottish Executive has made to her Department since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [59526]

Mr. Caborn: This information is not collated by the Department. The Department has regular contact with the Scottish Executive at all levels across the full range of subjects for which the Department is responsible.

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many press releases have been issued by her Department to date in each month of 2002. [59501]

Mr. Caborn: The number of press releases issued by the Department for Culture Media and Sport to date in each month of 2002 is as follows:

Press Releases for 2002 per Month	
January	27
February	15
March	33
April	26
May (so far)	15
Total to present date	87

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many press releases were issued by her Department *(a)* in each month between May and December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [59500]

Mr. Caborn: The number of press releases issued by the Department for Culture Media and Sport in each month *(a)* between May and December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive is as follows:

(a)

May—December 1997	
May	27
June	29
July	40
August	14
September	27
October	41
November	34
December	35
Total	247

(b)

1998–2001	
1998	319
1999	315
2000	332
2001	324
Total	1290

Golden Jubilee

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 58W, if she will list the events ministers will attend as part of the Queen's Golden Jubilee celebrations. [60261]

Tessa Jowell: My right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister, Ministers from other Departments and I will attend a number of the national events in central London over the Jubilee Weekend of 1–4 June 2002 including the Service of Celebration and Thanksgiving at St. Paul's Cathedral on 4 June 2002.

The Prime Minister will also be celebrating with his constituents over the Jubilee Weekend and with others elsewhere in the region. Other Ministers have already accepted invitations to attend Jubilee events in their constituencies during The Queen's programme of visits around the United Kingdom and taking place as part of the celebrations in local communities throughout the summer months.

Details of The Queen's visits and many other Jubilee events can be found on the official Golden Jubilee website at www.goldenjubilee.gov.uk

British Board of Film Classification

Mr. Challen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when the British Board of Film Classification's Annual report will be published. [60260]

Tessa Jowell: The British Board of Film Classification's Annual Report is published today and I have arranged for copies to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Parliamentary Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of parliamentary advisers appointed to serve her Department. [56983]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* Ministers in this Department have made no such appointments. The following Members have, however, been asked to act as sport liaison Members, providing a conduit of communication in order to extend relations with particular sports, integrating contacts and increasing mutual understanding. These are unpaid, non-governmental positions.

Member for . . .	*Sport*
Birmingham, Northfield	Motor Sports
Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath	Cricket
Eccles	Defence Sports
Jarrow	Football
Luton, North	Yachting
Mansfield	Horse Racing
Newcastle upon Tyne, North	Athletics
Nottingham, South	Tennis
Reading, East	Cycling
Reading, West	Shooting & Fishing
Rugby and Kenilworth	Golf
Sittingbourne and Sheppey	Rugby Union
Tyne Bridge	Greyhound Racing
Wakefield	Rugby League

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what the duties are of hon. Members appointed as sponsors to her Department; and what assistance is given by officials in her Department to them in carrying out these duties; [59978]

(2) which hon. Members have been appointed as sponsors to her Department since 7 June 2001; and when each of them were appointed. [59963]

Mr. Caborn: I refer the hon. Member to the Answer above to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith).

WORK AND PENSIONS

Workless Households

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the number of workless households. [48855]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have introduced a range of initiatives, including the New Deals, to help people move from dependence on benefits to independence through work. Our new Jobcentre Plus service brings together benefits and employment to provide an integrated work-focused service to ensure that all people of working age claiming benefits are aware of the help and support available to enable them to move into work. There are also 63 Action Teams for Jobs in some of the most deprived areas of the UK. Action Teams provide tailored support to enable people on all working age benefits to move back to work.

In 1997 the number of workless households in Great Britain stood at 3,174,000. The most recent information for 2001 shows this figure has fallen to 2,952,500, a decrease of 221,500 (7.0 per cent).

Source:

Labour Force Survey, National Statistics.

Employment Action Teams (Newcastle)

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which wards of the City of Newcastle upon Tyne are covered by the services of Employment Action teams; what criteria were used to determine the coverage of the teams; who set those criteria; and whether they are under review. [51486]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The wards being targeted by the Newcastle upon Tyne Action Team for Jobs are Monkchester, West City, Walker, Byker, Elswick, Benwell, Scotswood, Woolsington, Fawdon, and Kenton. They were selected because their working age employment rate was 58.5 per cent or below. The selection criteria were set by labour market economists in the former Department for Education and Employment and agreed by the Treasury. The wards targeted by the Action Team will be reviewed if there is significant depopulation in any of them.

New Deal

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much on average of the resources allocated to New Deal training is spent on *(a)* training and *(b)* administration. [53742]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The full contract price is payable to New Deal providers. It is not possible to identify separately how much of their funding providers allocate to administration and how much to training. In some circumstances the provider may subcontract some of the training provision. Where this is the case, the provider may retain a management or administration fee. We do not specify the amount that should be retained for this purpose, but we would not expect it to exceed 10 per cent of the contract price. Where an administration fee is retained, it is normally around 6 per cent of the contract price. The appropriateness of the level of administration is assessed as part of the contract tendering process.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will conduct an inquiry into the level of administration in the New Deal programme. [53743]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We keep the level of New Deal administration under constant review. Significant reductions have already been made, for example, in the number of forms needing completion. We are looking at ways to reduce administrative burdens even further. For instance, we are considering how we can use information technology more effectively as a means of exchanging information between providers and Jobcentre Plus.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will conduct an inquiry into the proportion of the budget spent on administration by individual training providers under the New Deal programmes. [53745]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Providers are already subject to contractual and quality audits, which cover their administrative arrangements. Jobcentre Plus Regional Contracts Managers, District Quality Management Teams and the Adult Learning Inspectorate conduct individual provider assessments and reviews which cover the administration, delivery, quality and propriety of the provision being delivered. Providers' administrative arrangements are monitored to ensure appropriate records are being kept for audit purposes.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to ensure that the resources allocated for training under the New Deal are spent on training. [53746]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: New Deal providers are subject to thorough contractual and quality audits. These specifically consider the delivery of training against the requirements set out in providers' contracts. Jobcentre Plus Regional Contracts Managers, District Quality Management Teams and the Adult Learning Inspectorate conduct individual provider assessments and reviews, which cover the administration, delivery, quality and propriety of the provision being delivered.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the mandate [illegible] the Advisory Committee on Employment is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55225]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The legal base of the Employment Committee is Article 130 of the Treaty establishing the European Community.

The Committee's mandate is to promote co-ordination between Member Sates on employment and labour market policies. The Committee has the tasks of: monitoring the employment situation and employment policies in the Member States and in the Community; formulating opinion at the request of either the Council or the Commission; and, contributing to the preparation of the European Employment Strategy.

The Committee has met seven times over the past 12 months.

The size of UK delegation (drawn from officials in the Department for Work and Pensions and the department for Education and Skills) varies between two and three depending on the agenda for the meeting. In addition, for the next 12 months, the Committee is chaired by a UK official.

The cost to public funds of UK attendance for Committee meetings in Brussels was approximately £11,550. The Commission reimburses the travel costs of two delegates per meeting. Over the period, this reimbursement amounted to some £5,600. The Chairman's costs are funded directly by the Commission.

The Committee's agenda over the next few months will focus on examining the National Employment Action Plans for 2002 which were submitted by the Member States on 1 May 2002 and considering proposals for the future of the European Employment Strategy.

My right hon. Friend, The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has responsibility for UK employment policy and is accountable to Parliament for the work of the UK Government members on the Committee. The Department for Work and Pensions prepares explanatory memoranda on EU documents that are deposited in Parliament for scrutiny. These arrangements will continue.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on social security for migrant workers is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55232]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Advisory Committee on Social Security for Migrant Workers is set up under Articles 82 and 83 of Regulation (EEC) 1408/71, which contains the rules for co-ordination of Member States' social security schemes for workers who move within the European Economic Area. Its role is to examine questions arising from the implementation of Regulation 1408/71 and Regulation (EEC) 574/72 (the procedures for implementing Regulation 1408/71), to formulate opinions for the Administrative Commission and proposals for revision of the Regulations.

The Committee has met once during the last twelve months. It is chaired by the Presidency of the day and the UK representation consists of two officials from the Department for Work and Pensions (normally only one attends), three trade union representatives and three employers' representatives. Costs to UK public funds were limited to the official's expenses, approximately £500, less any reimbursements provided by the European Commission.

On the agenda at the last meeting were the Chairman's report on changes to Community legislation, a report of the work of the Administrative Commission from its Chairman, a report on the decisions of the European Court of Justice since the last Committee meeting, a report on developments in the Technical Commission programme and information on the state of play in the process of enlargement of the EU.

Any proposals for revision of the social security co-ordinating regulations made by the Committee and adopted by the European Commission would be subject to scrutiny by the UK Parliament.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on the free movement of workers is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55233]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Advisory Committee on the freedom of movement of workers is set up under Articles 24 and 25 of Regulation (EEC) No 1612/68, on the freedom of movement of workers within the European Community. Its role is to assist the European Commission in the examination of any questions arising from the application of the Treaty in matters concerning the freedom of movement of workers and their employment.

The Committee normally meets twice a year. The UK representatives are two officials from the Department of Work and Pensions, two employers' representatives and two trades union representatives. Costs to UK public funds are limited to the expenses of the one or two officials who attend each meeting, approximately £1,500 per annum less any reimbursements provided by the Commission.

On the agenda at the last meeting were reports from the European Commission on enlargement of the European Union, latest developments of the European Employment Services network, developments on a Communication from the Commission: "New European Labour Markets, open to all with access to All", implementation of Directive 96/71/EEC on posting of workers and on the Commission's legislative and policy initiatives concerning third country nationals; and a report on relevant judgements of the European Court of Justice since the previous Committee meeting.

The Committee assists the European Commission in matters concerning the free movement of workers. Any proposals it made for revising Regulation (EEC) 1612/68 that were adopted by the Commission would be subject to UK Parliamentary scrutiny.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the mandate of the Technical Committee for the implementation of regulations concerning the free movement and employment of workers is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55234]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Technical Commission is set up under Article 117c of Regulation (EEC) 574/72, which lays down the procedures for implementing Regulation (EEC) 1408/71 (coordination of Member

States' social security schemes for workers who move within the European Economic Area). The Commission's mandate is to improve and modernise the administration of Regulation 1408/71, with particular regard to the increased use of information technology.

The Commission meets four times a year. It is chaired by the Presidency of the day and the UK representation consists of two officials of the Department for Work and Pensions and a specialist from the Department's IT provider. Costs to UK public funds are about £2,000 per annum, after reimbursements provided by the European Commission.

Items of work currently under consideration include, replacing present paper based exchanges of data with electronic methods; improving clearance times for old age pension claims by documenting best practice in member states; linking of national web sites to improve information to people moving abroad to work and the proposed European Health Insurance Card.

The Technical Commission is accountable to the Administrative Commission for Social Security for Migrant Workers to whom it presents an annual work plan and progress report.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the mandate of the Administrative Commission on social security for migrant workers (and working parties) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55235]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Administrative Commission on social security for migrant workers is set up under Articles 80 and 81 of Regulation EC 1408/71, which lays down the rules for co-ordination of Member States' social security schemes for workers who move within the European Economic Area. The Administrative Commission's main function is to deal with administrative questions and questions of interpretation of the provisions of Regulation 1408/71. This enables consistency in implementation across the Member States. Among its other tasks are the fostering and development of co-operation between Member States in social security matters and it may submit proposals for revising the Regulation.

The Administrative Commission has met five times in the last year (and there have been three meetings of the working party). It is chaired by the Presidency of the day and the UK representation is normally two officials from the Department for Work and Pensions and one each from the Department of Health and the Inland Revenue (the latter has responsibility for National Insurance and tax credits, both of which come within the scope of the Regulation). Normally only one or two officials attend working party meetings. Annual cost to UK public funds is limited to expenses, amounting to about £12,000, less any reimbursements provided by the European Commission.

Items on the agenda of the last meeting of the Administrative Commission included technical adaptations to be made to Regulation 1408/71 with a view to the next enlargement of the EU; a report on the implementation of the Regulation's provisions for posted workers; questions relating to the social security insurance liability of certain categories of worker; the proposed European Health Insurance card; questions relating to the benefit entitlement of pensioners staying in a Member State other than the one where they live, changes to a form Member States use to facilitate benefit claims when more than one State is involved and matters relating to electronic issue of documents. Working party meetings discuss in more depth questions arising from the Regulation and from the procedures for implementing it.

Any proposals for new or revised Regulations made by the Administrative Commission and adopted by the European Commission would be subject to UK Parliamentary scrutiny.

Pensioner Incomes

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of *(a)* male pensioners aged 70 years and under and *(b)* male pensioners aged 81 years and over, had incomes in (i) the bottom, (ii) the second bottom, (iii) middle, (iv) second top and (v) top income quintile in each of the past six years. [57968]

Mr. McCartney: The information is in the tables:

Percentage distribution of income for male pensioners. Excluding the self-employed

Percentage of pensioners	*Net equivalised disposable household income*					
	Bottom quintile	*Second quintile*	*Third quintile*	*Fourth quintile*	*Top quintile*	*Total (millions)*
Before Housing Costs						
Male pensioners						
1995–6	26	28	21	14	11	3.5
1996–7	22	29	22	15	12	3.5
1997–8	23	30	21	15	11	3.5
1998–9	25	29	20	15	11	3.5
1999–2000	23	30	21	14	11	3.6
2000–01	24	29	21	15	11	3.6
of which: aged 70 and under						
1995–6	20	26	24	17	14	1.4
1996–7	16	28	24	18	15	1.4
1997–8	18	27	23	18	14	1.4
1998–9	19	27	23	17	14	1.4
1999–2000	17	29	23	17	14	1.4
2000–01	18	27	24	16	14	1.4

Percentage of pensioners	*Net equivalised disposable household income*					
	Bottom quintile	*Second quintile*	*Third quintile*	*Fourth quintile*	*Top quintile*	*Total (millions)*
aged over 80						
1995–6	29	28	21	13	9	0.5
1996–7	29	32	20	11	8	0.5
1997–8	26	31	21	14	8	0.5
1998–9	31	30	16	14	10	0.5
1999–2000	32	27	22	12	7	0.5
2000–01	28	30	21	12	10	0.6

Percentage distribution of income for male pensioners. Excluding the self-employed

Percentage of pensioners	*Net equivalised disposable household income*					
	Bottom quintile	*Second quintile*	*Third quintile*	*Fourth quintile*	*Top quintile*	*Total (millions)*
After Housing Costs						
Male pensioners						
1995–6	18	31	22	16	13	3.5
1996–7	16	31	22	17	14	3.5
1997–8	18	31	22	17	13	3.5
1998–9	18	30	21	16	14	3.5
1999–2000	17	31	22	16	14	3.6
2000–01	18	29	22	16	15	3.6
of which: aged 70 and under						
1995–6	14	27	24	18	17	1.4
1996–7	12	27	24	21	16	1.4
1997–8	14	26	23	20	17	1.4
1998–9	15	25	23	18	18	1.4
1999–2000	14	27	22	20	17	1.4
2000–01	14	25	23	20	17	1.4
aged over 80						
1995–6	22	33	19	15	11	0.5
1996–7	23	36	18	13	10	0.5
1997–8	19	34	21	15	10	0.5
1998–9	23	32	17	15	12	0.5
1999–2000	25	33	20	12	11	0.5
2000–01	22	34	19	13	13	0.6

Notes for tables:

1. All figures are estimates and are taken from the Households Below Average Income (HBAI) series, which is derived from the Family Resources Survey (FRS). The FRS does not include Northern Ireland, and the latest year for which data is available is 2000–01.
2. The estimates are sample counts, which have been adjusted for non-response using multipurpose grossing factors. Estimates are subject to both sampling error and to variability in non-response. The income measure used is weekly net (disposable) equivalised household income (that is to say income that is adjusted to reflect the composition of the household).
3. The estimates are presented on both a Before Housing Costs (BHC) and an After Housing Costs (AHC) basis in line with HBAI conventions. Figures are provided excluding the self-employed, as research suggests that, for self-employed people, income as reported in surveys is often a poor indicator of living standards. HBAI convention is to present results excluding the self-employed, presenting results including the self-employed where the two differ significantly.

Minimum Income Guarantee

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners are in receipt of the minimum income guarantee in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* Midlothian. [58563]

Mr. McCartney: As at February 2002, there were 181,000 MIG recipients in Scotland and of these there were 1600 recipients in the parliamentary constituency of Midlothian.

Source:

Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry, February 2002.

Mr. Woodward: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many pensioners in *(a)* St Helens, South, *(b)* St Helens MBC area, *(c)* Merseyside, *(d)* the North West and *(e)* England are eligible to claim the minimum income guarantee. [44717]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[pursuant to his answer, 26 March 2002, c. 997–99]:* Estimates of the number of people eligible for the Minimum Income Guarantee are not available below National level. Figures for the number of pensioners who may be entitled to but are not receiving the MIG are contained in the publication, "Take Up of Income Related Benefits: Statistics for 1999–2000."

The figures in the report pre-date the MIG take up campaign in May 2000 which, up to the end of January 2002 has resulted in 128, 163 additional successful claims—pensioners are on average £20 a week better off as a result.

The table below shows the number of MIG recipients as at November 2001, by area:

Area	*Number of MIG claimants*
St Helens South Parliamentary Constituency	3,200
St Helens MBC	6,300
Merseyside	61,800
North West GOR	245,400
England	1,459,200

Source:

Income Support Statistics Quarterly Enquiry November 2001.

Funding (Luton, South)

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what moneys have been provided *(a)* directly and *(b)* via agencies for which the Department has responsibility to the Luton, South constituency since 1997. [58590]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department does not maintain expenditure information in respect of individual Parliamentary constituencies.

EMI (Redundancies)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures the Government have taken to assist those made redundant recently by EMI. [59011]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: In March, EMI announced that they would be making 1,800 redundancies spread across their operations in 50 countries. Of these, over 250 were in the UK—190 in Swindon and 66 in London.

Where significant redundancies occur, we aim to support those affected by helping them to move quickly into new jobs and preventing them from becoming detached from the labour market.

Jobcentre Plus have met with EMI and arranged briefings for all the employees to ensure that those affected by the redundancies receive the help they need to make the transition into sustainable new jobs. Like other unemployed people, those who have been made redundant can access the range of help provided by Jobcentre Plus.

Pensions

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to allow investors in SERPS-related funds freedom to transfer funds to alternative providers when a particular provider is under-performing in the market; and if he will make a statement. [59293]

Mr. McCartney: Individual members can already transfer their funds to alternative providers if they wish to do so. Current legislation allows individuals in either a personal pension scheme or stakeholder pension scheme who receive the contracted-out rebate to transfer funds to another appropriate personal pension or stakeholder pension scheme operated by another provider. We have no plans to amend this practice.

Incapacity Benefit

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have been diagnosed as being clinically obese and are in receipt of incapacity benefit. [59438]

Mr. Brown: As at 3 November 2001, 700 people receiving Incapacity Benefit had obesity (E66) recorded as their primary diagnosis.

Source:

The figure is based on a 5 per cent sample of the Incapacity Benefit computer system which excludes a small number of clerically held cases. It is rounded to the nearest hundred.

Notes:

1. Diagnoses are coded using the International Classification of Diseases, 10th Edition. (ICD10), published by the World Health Organisation. The code in brackets shows the ICD10 code.
2. If a person has more than one medical condition only the primary diagnosis is recorded.

War Widows Pensions (Care Costs)

Mr. MacDonald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the total loss of income to local authorities that would result from disregarding war widows pensions when calculating the cost of residential and nursing care under the National Assistance Regulations; and how many people currently paying charges under the regulations would be affected. [58149]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has no plans to disregard the full amount of the war widows pension from the financial assessment for residential care.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Young People

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on what subjects and on which dates her Department has consulted organisations representing young people; and if she will list such organisations. [52504]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The precise information requested is not held centrally in the manner requested and could only be secured at disproportionate cost. The Department is in regular contact with organisations which represent young people, including for example the Millennium Volunteers National Forum and the British Youth Council. We have involved young people and the organisations which represent them in many of the Department's initiatives, including consulting pupils on the Education White Paper and engaging young people in the development of the Connexions Service. We are currently consulting young people on our 14–19 proposals. On 20 May the Department invited over 130 young people from around the country to our offices to give their opinions on our education policies.

The Department is committed to the new core principles for the involvement of children and young people published by the Minister for Young People in November 2001. The Department will shortly be publishing an action plan setting out for the first time how it will implement these principles to extend the participation of children and young people in the design, provision and evaluation of policies and services that affect them. The action plan will describe our recent achievements in involving children and young people as well as our plans for the future.

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her Department's policy is on the promotion of Her Majesty The Queen's Golden Jubilee in schools; and how this policy is being integrated into the regime of Ofsted. [57327]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department has encouraged school children to play an active role in the Jubilee celebrations through its support of a range of projects, including a National Poetry Competition, the Commonwealth Games Spirit of Friendship Festival and the Millennium Children's Tapestry of Hope. Information about these projects and others, as well as helpful links to many useful resources for schools, is available on my Department's website at www.dfes/gov.uk/jubilee. I welcome the exciting and imaginative contributions school children are already making to the celebrations.

OFSTED's policy in relation to HM The Queen's Golden Jubilee is a matter for HM Chief Inspector of Schools and I have therefore asked David Bell to write to the hon. Member and to place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Post-16 Education

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what was the average number of teaching hours per week for *(a)* 16 to 18-year-old students studying full-time in further education colleges and *(b)* 16 to 18-year-old students with special needs studying full-time in further education colleges in the last academic year. [56681]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* In FE, teaching hours are expressed as guided learning hours per year. The average number of guided learning hours for full-time students aged 16 to 18 in FE colleges was 720 hours per year in 2000–01. For those students with special needs, the average was 731 hours per year.

European Council

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what progress there has been on the agreement at the European Council's meeting at Lisbon to establish a new Europe-wide database on jobs and learning opportunities. [57547]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: At the Barcelona Council in March 2002, the Council decided that a one stop European Job Mobility web site should be established with a view to its full operability by the end of 2003 at the latest.

The Commission is currently developing an Internet portal aimed at providing access to information on job and learning opportunities. The launch of the portal is scheduled for November 2002.

Child Care

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many family centre places were provided by local authorities on 1 April; [57714]

(2) how many places were provided in school holiday schemes in each of the past five years; [57715]

(3) how many places in after-school clubs were provided in each of the past five years; [57716]

(4) how many places were provided by playgroups in each of the last five years; [57717]

(5) how many playgroups there were in each of the past five years; [57718]

(6) how many registered childminders there were in each of the past five years; [57719]

(7) how many places there were in day nurseries in each of the past five years. [57720]

Margaret Hodge: The available information is shown in the tables.

The information was provided by Local Authorities.

Latest figures on Day Care facilities in England were published by the Department in the Statistical Bulletin "Children's Day Care facilities at 31 March 2001 (08/01)" in October 2001, a copy of which is available from the Library. An electronic copy of this publication is also available on the Department's web-site at www.dfes.gov.uk/ statistics

Table 1: Number of daycare providers by type,[1] England 1997–2001. Position at 31 March each year

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Day nurseries	6,100	6,700	7,000	7,500	7,800
Registered childminders	98,500	94,700	82,200	75,600	72,300
Playgroups and pre-schools	15,800	15,700	15,000	14,300	14,000
Out of school clubs	2,600	3,100	3,800	4,400	4,900
Holiday schemes[2]	5,300	6,200	10,200	11,700	12,900
Family centres	480	490	470	440	430

[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

[2] Holiday schemes are counted once for each holiday period in which they operate.

Table 2: Number of daycare places by provider type,[1] England 1997–2001. Position at 31 March each year

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Day nurseries	193,800	223,000	247,700	264,200	285,100
Registered childminders	365,200	370,700	336,600	320,400	304,600
Playgroups and pre-schools	383,700	383,600	347,200	353,100	330,200
Out of school clubs	78,700	92,300	113,800	141,100	152,800
Holiday schemes[2]	209,000	256,500	435,300	490,400	598,000
Family centres	..	..	..	..	..

[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

[2] Holiday schemes are counted once for each holiday period in which they operate.

Education Act

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many representations she has received from local authorities concerning sections 39 and 40 of the Education Act 2001. [57591]

Mr. Timms: My right hon. Friend has received a number of representations on sections 39 and 40 of the Education Act 2001 from local authorities and the Local Government Association, including a number of responses from local authorities to the Achieving Success White Paper consultation.

Standard Assessment Tests

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what consideration she has given to investigating the effects on primary schools' performance statistics resulting from children who have been registered for year 6 SATS but are subsequently unable to sit them through illness or unauthorised absence. [58543]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The primary school performance tables are wholly inclusive and as such report on the achievements of all pupils at the end of Key Stage 2—including those absent on the day of the tests. For some schools this can have an effect on the percentage of pupils achieving Level 4 or above. The qualitative average point score, however, disregards pupils absent on the day of the tests, which redresses the balance of information presented in the tables.

Press and Public Relations

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much expenditure her Department has incurred between 1997 and 1999 on employing external consultants to deal with the press or public relations of her Department. [59482]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Isle of Wight on 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 963W and 964W.

There was no expenditure on press consultants.

PR consultants have been employed to organise support for Departmental campaigns such as Millennium Volunteers, the "Get On" adult basic skills campaign, the Aim higher campaign to widen participation in higher education and the Dads & Sons campaign to encourage fathers to get more involved in the education of their 11–14 year old sons.

These PR companies do not duplicate the conventional press handling for the Department which is carried out internally.

Land Sales

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the land that her Department is *(a)* offering for sale and *(b)* plans to offer in the next 12 months, giving its (i) location and (ii) size. [59056]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department currently has no land for sale and no plans to offer any within the next 12 months.

TREASURY

Sick Leave

Mr. Heald: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many days of sick leave were taken in his Department last year; how many related to employees suffering *(a)* stress and *(b)* other mental health problems; and what the cost was to his Department. [56471]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* The latest published information covering 2000 is contained in the annual report "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service" published by the Cabinet Office. That report shows an average number of working days sickness absence per staff year of 9.9 days for non-industrial civil servants. The Treasury figure was 3.9 days per staff year. Around 14 per cent of sick absence in 2000 in the Treasury was for mental health conditions (including stress) and around 4 per cent was for stress. Information on costs could only be provided at a disproportionate cost. The Treasury has a legal obligation to provide a safe working environment for all employees and is committed to minimising the number of working days lost generally due to work related injuries and illness.

Pensioner Income

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hillsborough (Helen Jackson) of 9 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 399W on pensioner income, if he will break down the figure given for the increase in the income of the average pensioner household, by the different tax and benefit changes to which he attributes the increase. [58782]

Dawn Primarolo: The average pensioner household will be around £400 per year better off due to the Government's personal tax and benefit changes announced in the latest Budget and Pre Budget Report. The breakdown by the different tax and benefit changes is as follows:

	£
Pension Credit	320
Winter Fuel Payments	50
Basic State Pension	35

Investment Institutions (Failures)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the Financial Services Authority on contingency plans for the failure of *(a)* Equitable Life and *(b)* other major investment institutions. [59106]

Ruth Kelly: The Financial Services Authority and HM Treasury have regular contacts and discuss a range of regulatory issues.

Savings Gateway

Ms Walley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of the need for savers in the Savings Gateway to be able to access their funds and the Government's matched contribution to meet unexpected needs; [59021]

(2) what estimate has been made of the number of low-income families who will benefit from the Savings Gateway once it is implemented nationally; [58994]

(3) what tendering process was used to award Halifax plc partner status in the four Savings Gateway pilot projects; [59019]

(4) what plans he has to allow investments in the Savings Gateway to include methods of deposit other than cash; [59020]

(5) what role he plans for private sector financial services providers and mutual societies in delivering the Savings Gateway; [58995]

(6) what assessment he has made of the *(a)* open market model and *(b)* licensed-provider approach in delivering the Child Trust Fund; and if he will make a statement. [59018]

(7) what criteria have been used to determine the eligibility of families to participate in the Savings Gateway in the pilot areas of *(a)* Gorton, *(b)* Tower Hamlets, *(c)* Cumbria and *(d)* Cambridgeshire; [59017]

(8) what incentive he will establish for a single service provider of the Savings Gateway to invest in and innovate the service; [59022]

(9) what restrictions will be placed on the use of matured assets in the *(a)* Child Trust Fund and *(b)* Savings Gateway; [59024]

(10) what role he plans for private sector financial services providers and mutual societies in delivering *(a)* deposit capability, *(b)* investment management and *(c)* advice and information when managing the child Trust Fund; [59023]

(11) what level of redress there will be for children born before the Child Trust Fund's deadline for tax free saving; and if he will make a statement. [58993]

Ruth Kelly: The Government announced more detailed plans for the Child Trust Fund and Saving Gateway in *Delivering Saving and Assets,* published in November 2001. This document also raised some questions about the Child Trust Fund for further consultation and announced the Government's intention to pilot the Saving Gateway.

As set out in *Delivering Saving and Assets,* eligibility for the Saving Gateway is intended to be through a "passport" to an existing working-age benefit, tax credit or measure of income used in a tax credit. The number of people who could benefit from the national Saving Gateway will depend on the exact eligibility criteria chosen. As stated in *Delivering Saving and Assets,* the Government believes that it is important for low-income savers in the Saving Gateway to be able to withdraw their own savings without restriction, to ensure that they have access to their financial assets in order to meet unexpected needs. For this and other reasons, the Government believes that the Saving Gateway should be a cash-based account, as stated in *Delivering Saving and Assets.* When a Saving Gateway account matures, it is intended that savers will be able to access the Government's "matched contribution" without restriction. Although methods for making deposits into the Saving Gateway remain to be decided, easy accessibility will be very important. In line with the results from previous consultation, the Government stated in *Delivering Saving and Assets* that the optimum model for delivering the Saving Gateway would be for a single provider, ideally with a branch network. Such a provider might be either a single financial services or a consortium of providers operating in some form of partnership. Decisions on the respective roles of the private sector, including mutual societies, and arrangements to encourage innovation have not been taken.

Pilots for the Saving Gateway are being established. They will be used to test aspects of the delivery of the Saving Gateway. The pilots require the involvement of a financial service provider with branches to operate the accounts. The Government raised this issue with the British Bankers Association and Building Societies Association, and requested these organisations to ask their members to indicate whether they would be interested in participating. After discussions with a small number of potential partners, the Government accepted an offer from Halifax to provide the required branches, branch staff and account management systems for the pilots. Eligibility for savers to participate in the Saving Gateway pilots in the areas selected will be based on criteria reflecting the intention for the national Saving Gateway to be available through a "passport" to an existing working-age benefit, tax credit or measure of income used in a tax credit.

In *Delivering Saving and Assets,* the Government states that it sees a key role for private sector financial service providers, including mutual societies, in delivering the Child Trust Fund, including aspects relating to financial education. The document presents two options for the involvement of financial services providers: open market competition and a licensed provider approach. Consultation on these two different models is now closed and the Government will be reporting back on the results of this consultation, including an analysis of these options, in due course. *Delivering Saving and Assets* indicated that the Government does not intend that the use of assets from a maturing Child Trust Fund at maturity will be restricted. The Government has not taken any decisions about arrangements, if any, for children born before the launch of the Child Trust Fund. Most children in the UK are not liable for income or capital gains tax because they do not earn incomes, from saving or other sources, to take them above the relevant thresholds. Parents can currently save on behalf of their children in a variety of tax-advantaged ways.

Credit Unions

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employer-based credit unions were operating in the UK in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [58869]

Ruth Kelly: In 1997 there were 87 wholly employer-based credit unions operating in the UK. In 2000 there were 93. The information for 2001 is not readily available.

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many community-based credit unions were operating in the UK in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001. [58870]

Ruth Kelly: In 1997 there were 382 wholly community-based credit unions operating in the UK. In 2000 there were 375. The information for 2001 is not readily available.

Census Records

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the estimated annual storage costs are for each of the *(a)* 1921, *(b)* 1951, *(c)* 1961 and *(d)* 1971 decennial population census records for England and Wales; and which Department is responsible for paying those storage costs. [59067]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Taylor, dated 24 May 2002:

As National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking what the estimated annual storage costs are for each of the 1921, 1951, 1961 and 1971 decennial population census records for England and Wales; and which Department is responsible for paying those storage costs. (59067)

Currently the estimated annual storage costs for each of these censuses are:—

1921	£9,500
1951	£17,000
1961	£26,500
1971	£69,000
Total	£122,000

As Registrar General, I am responsible for the custody of these census records and the Office for National Statistics is responsible for paying these storage costs.

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many press releases have been issued by his Department in each month of 2002. [59488]

Ruth Kelly: The information required is set out below.

	No.
January	3
February	12
March	15
April	11
May	7 (as at 22/5/02)

Pete Wishart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many press releases were issued by his Department in each month between May and December 1997. [59487]

Ruth Kelly: The information required is set out below.

	No.
May	19
June	14
July	25
August	6
September	13
October	16
November	18
December	19

Financial Services Ombudsman

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many complaints there have been about the Financial Ombudsman's handling of casework *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in the Blackpool, South constituency in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [58831]

Ruth Kelly: *(a)* Ahead of assuming its full powers on 1 December 2001, the Financial Ombudsman Service consolidated and revised the different procedures that the eight predecessor schemes had in place for handling complaints against themselves. The Financial Ombudsman Service Board appointed an Independent Assessor on 1 December 2001 and, in the period since his appointment up to 31 March 2002, he received 50 complaints. Of these, 12 were upheld (in whole or in part), 14 were rejected, 8 were determined to be outside the Independent Assessor's terms of reference and 16 awaited a decision. Earlier figures for complaints against the eight predecessor schemes are incomplete. *(b)* Of the 50 complaints received by the Independent Assessor, none came from the Blackpool South constituency (postcodes FY4, FY3 and FY1).

Endowment Mortgages (Mis-Selling)

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many complaints have been received about the mis-selling of endowment mortgages by *(a)* the Financial Services Authority and *(b)* the Financial Ombudsman (i) in the UK and (ii) in the Blackpool South constituency in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [58830]

Ruth Kelly: *(a)* The Financial Services Authority does not deal with complaints but can answer general queries about financial products and services, including about endowment mortgages and who to contact if consumers have a complaint about one. Since August 2000 the FSA has had a total of 25,309 enquiries about endowments in general. Separate figures for the Blackpool South constituency are not available.

(*b*) The Personal Investment Authority Ombudsman Bureau dealt with endowment mortgage complaints until 1 December 2001 when it was succeeded by the Financial Ombudsman Service. (i) The total number of endowment mortgage complaints received by these bodies was:

Year		
1997–1998	2,751	PIAOB
1998–1999	2,856	PIAOB
1999–2000	3,135	PIAOB
2000–2001	9,067	PIAOB
2001–2002	14,595	PIAOB/FOS

(ii) Separate figures for the Blackpool South constituency (postcodes FY4, FY3 and FY1) are only available for the year 2001–2002, when 20 complaints were received.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of ordinary written Questions for his Department were answered within a week of tabling in each month since June 2001; and what proportion of questions for named day received a substantive answer on that day in each month since June 2001. [58974]

Mr. Boateng: 3,558 of the 4,563 written Parliamentary questions tabled to the Treasury in the present session have been answered on time, the detailed breakdown sought by the hon. Gentleman being as follows.

	Named Day questions answered on the nominated day (per cent)	*Ordinary Written questions answered within a week of being tabled (per cent)*
June	95.4	77.4
July	72.9	85.8
October	65.4	75.3
November	70.3	82.3
December	74.7	77.0
January	77.4	73.3
February	83.3	77.7
March	63.3	80.9
April	43.9	88.4
May (to date)	88.2	83.3

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to the question from the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham Ref. 31887 tabled on 28 January; and if he will make a statement as to the cause of the delay. [59433]

Ruth Kelly: I answered the hon. Gentleman's question on 13 March, *Official Report*, columns 1108–9W.

Euro

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what analysis he has made of which industries are most likely to benefit from the UK joining the European single currency market. [59545]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East on 25 March, *Official Report*, column 775W.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a further statement on when the Government intends to conduct a referendum on the euro. [59543]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Buckingham on 2 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 885W.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the Government will inform the public of the issues at stake before a euro referendum. [59544]

Ruth Kelly: The Government has said that it will complete an assessment of the Five Economic Tests within two years of the start of this Parliament. Once the assessment is complete, the Government will publish the conclusions and the report.

If, on the basis of the assessment, a decision to recommend joining is taken by the Government, it will be put to a vote in Parliament and then to a referendum of the British people.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take account of the CFA franc zone's effect on monetary policy in the Eurozone in assessing the five economic tests for joining the euro; and if he will make a statement. [59884]

Ruth Kelly: The Government has said that it will complete an assessment of the five economic tests within two years of the start of this Parliament. All relevant economic issues will be dealt with as part of the assessment.

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the criteria by which he will judge whether the five economic tests have been met clearly and unambiguously. [59806]

Ruth Kelly: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Yeovil on 17 January *Official Report*, column 438W.

Financial Services Authority

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the forecast income is to the FSA from fees charged to WI markets under the Registrar of Friendly Societies responsibilities being transferred to the FSA from 1 December 2001. [59435]

Ruth Kelly: The Financial Services Authority estimates the income from fees it charged to all WI markets societies between the period December 2001 to March 2002 at £2400.

Departmental Reports

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the 2002 Departmental reports will be published. [60376]

Mr. Andrew Smith: The planned publication dates of the 2002 Departmental Reports are as follows:

	Date
Department for International Development	24 April
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	23 May
Department for Work and Pensions	23 May

Departments listed below; week beginning 10 June:

- British Trade International
- Cabinet Office
- Charity Commission for England and Wales
- Department for Culture, Media and Sport
- Department for Education & Skills and Office for Standards in Education
- Department of Health
- Department of Trade and Industry
- Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions
- Export Credits Guarantee Department
- Food Standards Agency
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office
- Government Actuary's Department
- Her Majesty's Customs & Excise
- HM Treasury
- Inland Revenue
- Lord Chancellor's Departments
- Ministry of Defence
- National Savings & Investments
- Northern Ireland Office
- Office for National Statistics
- Office of Fair Trading
- Scotland Office
- The Law Officers' Departments
- Wales Office

Care Homes

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the cost of the increases in National Insurance rates on care homes. [59436]

Ruth Kelly: I regret that it would only be possible to provide a reliable estimate at disproportionate cost.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Volunteers

Mr. Allen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he has taken since May 1997 to invite members of the public to volunteer to serve on *(a)* taskforces and *(b)* other ad hoc advisory bodies; and how many such volunteers have been appointed. [52228]

Mr. Leslie: Task forces, ad hoc advisory groups and reviews are by their nature created to provide advice on a particular subject or subject area. Ministers can, and often do, seek participants from a wide range of backgrounds to provide the best possible advice. Many of them give their time and efforts freely, though precise details are not held centrally.

Public Appointments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list members of local and national public appointments commissions, stating in each case *(a)* what other public appointments each has held and when, *(b)* what political affiliation each has recorded, and when, and *(c)* the postal district of their place of residence. [55291]

Mr. Leslie: The post of the Commissioner for Public Appointments was established by the previous administration in 1995, in response to a recommendation made by the Committee on Standards in Public Life in its First Report (Cm 2580). The Commissioner is appointed by the Queen under the Public Appointments Order in Council 1995, as amended by the Public Appointments Order in Council 1998, and is independent of both the Government and the Civil Service.

The present Commissioner is Dame Rennie Fritchie, who was appointed for an original three-year term in 1999, and who has since been re-appointed to serve a further three-year term from March 2002 to February 2005.

Dame Rennie was previously Chair of Gloucester Health Authority from 1988–1992; South-Western Regional Health Authority from 1992–1994; South and Western Region NHS Executive (formerly South and Western Regional Health Authority) from 1994–1997. There is no requirement on holders of this office to record their political affiliation, if any. I am advised by the Commissioner's Office that the postal district of Dame Rennie's place of residence is GL1.

In April 2001, the Government established an independent NHS Appointments Commission. At present there are around 4,000 chairs and non-executives on NHS boards whose appointments are now the responsibility of the Commission. The Commission has a Chair, Sir William Wells and eight Regional Commissioners namely, Mrs. Gillian Camm, Mrs. Jane Isaacs, Dr. John Marshall, Sir Ian Mills, Mrs. Brenda Sills, Mr. Michael Taylor, Mrs. Rosie Varley and Mr. Bernard Williams. Details of previous public appointments that they have held are contained in the press releases announcing their appointments, copies of which are in the libraries of the House. There is no requirement on the Chair or the Regional Commissioners to record their political affiliation, if any.

I am advised by the NHS Appointments Commission that the Chair and the Regional Commissioners live in the following postal districts, Sir William Wells (TW10), Mrs. Camm (GL13), Mrs. Isaacs (WV1), Dr. Marshall (DL2), Sir Ian Mills (SE13), Mrs. Sills (NG31), Mr. Taylor (CH1), Mrs. Varley (IP33) and Mr. Williams (SL6).

Regional Observatories

Mrs. May: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what the estimated expenditure by regional observatories is in England in the current financial year; and what proportion of this expenditure will by financed by central Government; [55191]

(2) which Government department has responsibility for overseeing the regional observatories and if he will make a statement on their purpose. [55190]

Mrs. Roche: Regional observatories are independent entities formed by partnerships of regional organisations, including academic institutions, regional assemblies, regional development agencies, and Government Offices for the Regions. They aim to share the production, analysis and dissemination of intelligence and research related to regional policy. No Government department has responsibility for overseeing them.

Each regional observatory has been established as a local initiative. Funding has to date been from a variety of sources and is often in kind. The table below shows the current progress of each observatory and sources of funding.

It has not been possible to itemise the amount of funding for each observatory, given the mix of funding from different sources. Government Office of the Region contributions have been in staff time rather than financial contribution and the table includes estimates. Some of the expenditure would have been incurred in any case by the various sponsor organisations.

Progress of Regional Observatories and Current Funding

Region	*Status*	*Lead Partners*	*Funding Source*	*Government Office Input*
North East	Planning Stage	ONE North East, North East Regional Assembly, Government Office for the North East	None as yet	8 per cent of 1 staff year
North West	Operational as the North West Regional Intelligence Unit	North West Development Agency	Mainly North West Development Agency	7 per cent of 1 staff year
Yorkshire & the Humber	Operational as Yorkshire Futures Regional Intelligence Network	Yorkshire Forward, Government Office for Yorkshire & Humberside, South Yorks Learning & Skills Council, Yorkshire Universities, Northern & Yorkshire and Trent Public Health Observatories	Yorkshire Forward, Skills Development Fund, European Social Fund Objective 3	5 per cent of 1 staff year
East Midlands	Operational as East Midlands Observatory	East Midlands Development Agency, Regional Assembly, East Midlands Local Government Association, Government Office for the East Midlands	East Midlands Development Agency, Regional Assembly, East Midlands Local Government Association, European Social Fund Objective 3, Northants Chamber of Commerce	11 per cent of 1 staff year
West Midlands	Planning Stage	Advantage West Midlands	**Advantage West Midlands, European Social Fund Objective 2, European Union Framework 6*	20 per cent of 1 staff year
East of England	Operational as East of England Observatory	East of England Development Agency, Government Office for the East of England, County Local Economic Partnerships, Local Govt Conference, Eastern Region Public Health Observatory	East of England Development Agency, Regional Innovation Fund	9 per cent of 1 staff year
London	Not operational	Greater London Authority	None as yet	Minimal
South East	Not operational	Government Office of the South East, South East England Development Agency, Regional Assembly	None as yet	10 per cent of 1 staff year
South West	Under Development	South West Regional Assembly, South West Regional Development Agency, Department of Health, GOSW, Environment Agency, SW Higher Education Regional Development Association	South West Regional Development Agency, Department of Health, Environment Agency, South West Regional Assembly	7 per cent of 1 staff year

**Proposed Funding.*

Overseas Visits

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people will accompany him at public expense on his forthcoming trip to Bali; and what the total cost of the visit will be. [57655]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: I will not attend the Bali Preparatory Conference and have never intended to. This is a matter for the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs who will lead the delegation in the normal way as I explained to the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale at Cabinet Office questions on 22 May, *Official Report,* column 282.

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs estimated the cost of the UK delegation to be approximately £180,000, inclusive of air fares, hotel rooms, subsistence and office accommodation. This figure represents less than half of the total cost incurred in responding to questions tabled by the hon. Member since the 2001 election.

Legislation

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the Government's policy is on when it is appropriate for it publicly to consult on potential changes in legislation; and if he will make a statement. [59374]

Mr. Leslie: Other than statutory requirements, it is for individual government departments and agencies to decide when it is appropriate for them publicly to consult on potential changes to legislation. The Cabinet Office encourages departments undertaking public consultations to follow the principles set out in the Code of Practice on Written Consultation.

Correspondence

Mr. Tony Clarke: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will publish figures showing *(a)* the volume of correspondence received by ministers and agency chief executives from hon. Members in 2001, *(b)* the target times set for replies and *(c)* the number of replies sent within target times. [60380]

Mr. Leslie: The attached table sets out Departments' and Agencies' performance in handling hon. Members' correspondence during the 2001 calendar year. It also sets out comparative figures for 2000 (first published on 6 April 2001, *Official Report,* columns 324W–327W). I am pleased to report that the table continues to show a steady improvement in overall performance.

The footnotes to the table provide general background information on how the figures have been compiled.

Correspondence from MPs to Ministers and Agency Chief Executives[1]

	2000			2001		
Department or Agency	*Target set for reply (working days)*	*Number of letters received*	*per cent of replies within target*	*Target set for reply (working days)*	*Number of letters received*	*per cent of replies within target*
Cabinet Office	15	902	88	15	599	90
Leader of the House of Lord's Office[2]	—	—	—	15	53	80
Crown Prosecution Service[3]	15	18	100	15	97	94
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	18	3,240	82	18	4,416	90
HM Customs and Excise[4]	18	2,977	68	18	2,452	62
Ministry of Defence[5]	15	4,592	78	15	5,350	85
Army Personnel Centre	15	38	95	15	34	97
DERA	15	21	91	—	—	—
Meteorological Office	15	16	94	15	20	80
Pay & Personnel Agency	10	31	43	—	—	—
War Pensions Agency[6]	20	395	99	20	279	99
Department for Education and Skills[7]	15	22,318	72	15	18,237	76
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs[8]	15	6,137	30	15	9,905	34
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	20	9,020	78	20	10,275	79
Joint Entry Clearance Unit	—	—	—	15	8,276	78
Department of Health	20	18,621	50	20	19,665	60
Food Standards Agency	—	—	—	20	770	70
NHS Pensions Agency	15	54	85	15	65	98
Medicines Control Agency	15	25	68	10	17	82
Home Office[9]						
**Non Prison Service correspondence*	15	18,748	41	15	*16,251	35
***Prison Service correspondence*	20	1,289	79	20[10]	**1,210	78
HM Prison Service	20	2,306	75	20	1,272	75
UK Passport Agency	10	188	100	10	279	87
Inland Revenue						
**All ministerial correspondence*	18	5,770	72	18	*3,356	77
***Replies by departmental officials*	23	533	53	18[11]	**382	75
Valuation Office	23	240	92	23	30	90
Department for International Development[12]	15	1,769	82	15	1,740	87
Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers	15	204	93	15	284	96
Lord Chancellor's Department	20	1,844	74	20	1,737	74
Court Service[13]	20	845	66	15	591	68
HM Land Registry	20	41	93	20	24	79
Public Records Office	20	26	100	10	11	100
Public Guardianship Office[14]	15	124	88	15	126	62
Northern Ireland Office[15]	10	594	71	10	358	49
Compensation Agency for NI	7	16	100	7	27	93
Northern Ireland Prison Service	10	37	70	10	27	78
Office for National Savings	10	154	86	15	63	62
Office for National Statistics				15	192	77
**Letters where Chief Executive replied on Minister's behalf*	10	167	79	10	154*	63
President of the Council's Office	15	271	94	15	237	74
Scotland Office	15	125	64	15	96	75
Department for Trade and Industry[16]	10	18,858	60	10	9,260	49
Companies House	10	44	100	10	50	100
Employment Tribunals Service	10	30	97	15	12	100
Insolvency Service[17]	10	334	87	10	292	80
Patent Office	10	311	99	10	154	95
Radiocommunications Agency	15	20	100	15	15	100
Small Business Service[18]	—	—	—	10	47	96
Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions[19]	15	19,636	69	15	14,375	84
Driving Standards Agency	15	91	99	15	82	100
DVLA	10	1,136	99	10	915	98
Highways Agency	15	314	78	15	322	96
Maritime and Coastguard Agency	15	19	100	15	21	95
Planning Inspectorate	8	310	90	8	364	94
Vehicle Inspectorate	15	13	100	15	32	94
HM Treasury[20]	15	4,061	60	15	4,039	78

Correspondence from MPs to Ministers and Agency Chief Executives[1]

	2000			2001		
Department or Agency	*Target set for reply (working days)*	*Number of letters received*	*per cent of replies within target*	*Target set for reply (working days)*	*Number of letters received*	*per cent of replies within target*
Treasury Solicitor's Department	10	35	100	10	39	100
Wales Office	15	344	42	15	91	63
Department for Work and Pensions[21]	20	16,283	75	20	12,698	66
Appeals Service[22]	—	—	—	15	87	64
Benefits Agency	20	2,642	45	20	2,529	90
Child Support Agency[23]	18	5,806	97	20	3,293	58
Employment Service[24]	15	592	98	15	520	94

[1] The 2000 figures are taken from the 6 April 2001, *Official Report*, columns 324W–327W. Please refer to relevant footnotes regarding 2000 figures. Departments and Agencies who received a total of 10 letters or less from MPs during 2001 are not shown in this table.

[2] The figures relate to correspondence until General Election and are in connection with Baroness Jay's role as Minister for Women. Correspondence after Election refers to House business only, therefore, information on that is not included.

[3] Letters in 2001 addressed to the Law Officers, but subsequently replied to by the Director of Public Prosecutions. In addition the CPS received 480 letters direct from MPs in 2001. 92 per cent replied to within 15 working days.

[4] Includes all Ministerial replies, not only replies to letters from MPs.

[5] Figures include correspondence from Members of Devolved Legislatures, MEPs and Peers.

[6] Agency transferred across from the former Department of Social Security with effect from 11 June 2001.

[7] 2000 figures are for the Department for Education and Employment. 2001 figures reflect machinery of government changes at the General Election, include figures for former Department for Education and Employment.

[8] 2000 figures are for the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. 2001 figures reflect machinery of government changes at the General Election, include figures for former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. Progress to improve MAFF/DEFRA's performance on correspondence in 2001 was severely hindered by the foot and mouth disease crisis, as well as convergence issues arising from the creation of the new Department. DEFRA's performance is now much improved, with most letters receiving responses within a month of receipt, and around 50 per cent of responses currently issuing within the Departmental target of 15 working days.

[9] Home Office is aware of the poor performance in 2001, however, the Home Secretary is taking the necessary steps to improve performance in 2002. This has had a positive impact on the performance for the first quarter of this year.

[10] The 20 working day target takes account of particular geographical circumstances. The target is the same whether replies are sent by Minister or by the Director General.

[11] Target has been reduced from 23 days to 18.

[12] If replies to letters about the Afghanistan crisis were excluded (Sept–Dec) overall per cent of replies within targets would be 92 per cent.

[13] Letters signed by the Agency Chief Executive of the Court Service, whether received direct or transferred from Ministers.

[14] Formerly the Public Trust Office, re-named as the PGO with effect from 1 April 2001.

[15] Reflects the impact of devolution and requirements for consultation with outside agencies.

[16] 2001 figures reflect correspondence from MPs only. 2000 figures reflect all Ministerial correspondence. DTI aware of poor performance in 2001 and are currently reviewing their correspondence handling system.

[17] 94 per cent of letters were answered within agreed extended deadlines.

[18] Response time recorded for 32 of letters received. No response time recorded for 15 letters.

[19] 2000 figures are for the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions. 2001 figures reflect machinery of government changes at the General Election, include figures for former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

[20] Includes all Ministerial replies, not only replies to letters from MPs.

[21] 2000 figures are for the Department of Social Security. 2001 figures reflect machinery of government changes at the General Election, include figures for former Department of Social Security. In the period from June 2001, following the introduction of the Department for Work and Pensions, the average response time was reduced from 18 to 15 working days and 71 per cent of the replies were sent within target.

[22] The average handling time, which covers all letters, was 14 working days. For the second half of the period 1 June to 31 December the percentage of replies within the target rose to 82 per cent.

[23] The average handling time which covers all letters was 21 working days. CSA has now changed its complaints handling process. Senior managers are more responsible for the timeliness and quality of responses. The role of the Parliamentary Correspondence Unit has been changed to an active performance management and escalation function reporting directly to the Chief Executive.

[24] An Agency of DWP following machinery of government changes at the General Election. 2001 figures also include letters received when an Agency of the former Department for Education and Employment.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many written submissions the Special Advisers Remuneration Committee has received from Cabinet ministers asking for a special adviser to be appointed on a point scale above the lowest point scale of each of the special adviser pay bands since 2 May 1997; [58718]

(2) how many times the Special Advisers Remuneration Committee has met since 2 May 1997. [58716]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: Information relating to internal meetings and advice is not provided under exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister who the members are of the Special Advisers Remuneration Committee. [58717]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: My noble Friend, Lord Williams, the Leader of the House of Lords chairs the Special Advisers Remuneration Committee. The other members of the Committee are the Minister for the Cabinet Office and the Economic Secretary. The Permanent Secretary of the Cabinet Office attends meetings of the Committee as an observer to offer an Accounting Officer perspective.

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many special advisers fall into Band *(a)* A, *(b)* B and *(c)* C of the special adviser pay system; [58715]

(2) what the equivalent Civil Service grade is of a special adviser on *(a)* Band A, *(b)* Band B and *(c)* Band C of the special advisers' pay system. [58719]

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State: As the Government has already announced, the previous Special Adviser Pay Bands of A, B and C were superseded from June 2001 by a new pay system, based on individual job evaluation. A description of this pay system is in the House Library. The process of individual job evaluation is still under way. Information on the outcome of this process will be provided once it is completed. There is no direct comparison between Civil Service grades and Special Adviser posts as roles and responsibilities are different.

Government Car and Despatch Agency

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what performance targets he has set for the Government Car and Despatch Agency for 2002–03. [60262]

Mr. Leslie: I have set the Government Car and Despatch Agency the following key performance targets for the financial year, 2002–03.

Financial:

to achieve break even on an accruals basis.

Quality of Service:

to maintain customer satisfaction index at the out-turn level for 2001–02

to evaluate customer dissatisfaction against a new benchmark established in March 2002 and review statistical reliability of the measure.

Environment:

to convert to alternative environmentally friendly fuels 75 per cent of the cars purchased in the year and capable of such conversion.

to develop a new environmental target to operate from 2003–04 based on reducing Carbon Dioxide emissions from the GCDA fleet.

Departmental Sponsors

Mr. Weir: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) which hon. Members have been appointed as sponsors to his Department since 7 June 2001; and when each of them were appointed; [59964]

(2) what the duties are of hon. Members appointed as sponsors to his Department; and what assistance is given by officials in his Department to them in carrying out these duties. [59979]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed on 22 May, *Official Report,* column 337W.

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many press releases were issued by his Department in each month between May and December 1997; [59479]

(2) how many press releases have been issued by his Department in each month of 2002. [59480]

Mr. Leslie: The number of press releases issued by the Cabinet Office for each month to date in 2002 is as follows:

Date	*No.*
January 2002	5
February 2002	13
March 2002	8
April 2002	4
To 22 May 2002	5

The number of press releases issued each month between May and December 1997 inclusive are listed follows:

Date	*No.*
May 1997	15
June 1997	13
July 1997	21
August 1997	5
September 1997	9
October 1997	12
November 1997	22
December 1997	7

The figures provided above for both 1997 and 2002 do not include operational notes/invitations, but do include Privy Council Office press releases which are issued on its behalf by the Cabinet Office press office.

Lists and copies of Cabinet Office press releases are available on its public Internet website.

HEALTH

Agency Staff

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent by each acute trust on agency staff excluding doctors and nurses *(a)* in cash terms, *(b)* as a proportion of the annual expenditure on doctors salaries and *(c)* as a proportion of the total operating expenses, in each of the last five years for which records are available. [47994]

Mr. Hutton: Information in the format requested is not held centrally.

Post-Operative Home Visits

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many post-operative home visits were made to patients in settlements with under 3,000 people in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001. [46452]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 15 April 2002]:* These statistics are not held centrally.

Primary care trusts have the responsibility for assessing the needs of their local populations and ensuring provision of health care to meet those needs. This includes post-operative care.

An increase in day surgery, often to improve the patient's experience, has required changes in the design of services along the patients care pathway. Immediate post-operative care is often now being provided within the patient's home.

Health Funding System

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the level of salaries that are being paid to overseas doctors and nurses who are recruited through agencies; if he will make a statement on his Department's review of the health funding system; if the new funding system will target funds in areas of poor health; and if it will take into account *(a)* the number of people in each area who have access to private medical care and *(b)* the early death rates in areas with high levels of deprivation. [51276]

Mr. Hutton: Doctors and nurses recruited through international recruitment exercises should be paid in accordance with existing National Health Service pay arrangements.

We allocate funding to health authorities and primary care trusts on the basis of the relative needs of their populations. A wide-ranging review of the weighted capitation formula used to allocate resources is currently taking place. A key criterion of the new formula will be to contribute to the reduction of avoidable health inequalities.

It is too soon to predict the outcome of the review. However, the intention is that following the review, the new formula will be ready for 2003–04 allocations.

Disability Facilities

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what impact he expects the budget announcement on health and social services spending to have on waiting time for disability facilities grants. [53315]

Jacqui Smith: The extra cash will help to bring on line the extra capacity that the National Health Service needs to make care better and faster for patients. We would not expect a direct impact on disabled facilities grants because these are mandatory grants provided by housing departments with part funding by the Department for Transport, Local Government, and the Regions.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 2 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 994W, on disability facilities, if the provision of walk-in showers is included in the national project; and if he will make a statement. [58351]

Jacqui Smith: The provision of walk-in showers requires building work of a permanent and substantial nature, and these are usually arranged by councils' housing departments. Such major adaptations are often facilitated through disabled facilities grants. They are usually beyond the scope of equipment services, and so housing departments are outside the remit of the project to integrate community equipment services. When statutory services decide what to provide, the guiding principle should be to meet individually assessed needs.

Information For Health Strategy

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 11 March, *Official Report,* column 806W, on information for health strategy, what assessment he has made of the report by Professor Protti on the Information for Health Strategy; and if he will place a copy of the report in the Library. [53195]

Mr. Hutton: The report from Professor Protti is still under consideration. It is informing the preparation of the delivery plan for information and information technology that the Department is preparing as part of taking forward "Delivering the NHS Plan", published in April 2002. Professor Protti's report will be put in the public domain after our delivery plan for information and IT has been announced later in the year.

Primary Care Facilities

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the connection between the level of deprivation in an area and the quality of its primary care facilities. [53368]

Mr. Hutton: Reducing health inequalities is a key Government priority. It is widely recognised that primary care facilities in relatively deprived localities are generally poorer than elsewhere. We are addressing this by targeting resources and management capacity through the National Health Service resource allocation formula, additional specific funding for general practitioners' premises and the NHS local investment finance trust initiative.

Acute Psychiatric Beds

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many acute psychiatric beds were available for *(a)* children, *(b)* the elderly and *(c)* other ages in secure units within the Newcastle and North Tyneside Health Authority Area in (i) 1996–97 and (ii) the most recent available period; what the occupancy rate was; and what delayed discharge issues occurred. [54691]

Jacqui Smith: Data are not collected in the format requested. Information on beds in wards designated as mental illness short stay/secure is given in the table.

Average daily number of available and occupied beds in Acute Mental Illness-wards, for NHS Trusts in Newcastle & North Tyneside Health Authority area, 2000–01 and 1996–97

	2000–01		
	Available beds	*Occupied beds*	*% occupancy*
Newcastle City Health NHS Trust			
Mental Illness—Children—short stay	19	11	60.9
Mental Illness—Elderly—short stay	62	50	80.1
Mental Illness—Secure unit—other ages	37	32	87.8
Mental Illness—other ages—short stay	169	162	95.6
Total Acute Mental Illness beds for NHS Trusts in Newcastle & North Tyneside Health Authority area, 2000–01	287	255	89.0

	1996–97		
	Available beds	*Occupied beds*	*% occupancy*
Newcastle City Health NHS Trust			
Mental Illness—Children—short stay	23	16	71.0
Mental Illness—Elderly—short stay	68	47	69.3
Mental Illness—Secure unit—other ages	31	29	92.8
Mental Illness—other ages—short stay	192	172	89.4
North Tyneside Health Care NHS Trust			
Mental Illness—Elderly—short stay	33	24	73.3
Total Acute Mental Illness beds for NHS Trusts in Newcastle & North Tyneside Health Authority area, 1996–97	347	288	83.0

Source:

KH03—Bed availability and occupancy.

Notes:

1. The figures shown in the table are not a true reflection of beds in the Newcastle and North Tyneside Health Authority area as in its area it may contain hospitals that come under a different NHS Trust whose main site may fall into a different health authority.
2. The mental health services provided by Newcastle City Health and Northumberland Mental Health Trust merged on the 1 April 2001, to form Newcastle, North Tyneside and Northumberland Mental Health NHS Trust.
3. North Tyneside Health Care NHS Trust does not appear for 2000–01 as it merged in 1998 with Northumberland Community Health and Cheviot and Wansbeck to form Northumbria Healthcare NHS Trust. The main site for the newly formed NHS Trust falls into another Health Authority.

NHS Pension Scheme

Ms Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take into account when calculating widowers' pensions for women doctors in the NHS Pension Scheme their service since 25 March 1972. [55460]

Mr. Hutton: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the former Member for North Norfolk (Mr. Prior) on 13 January 1999, *Official Report,* column 2.

Myalgic Encephalomyelitis

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assistance has been given to research into myalgic encephalomyelitis since 1997; [56261]

(2) what *(a)* medical, *(b)* welfare and *(c)* benefit provisions are made for those suffering from myalgic encephalomyelitis; [56263]

(3) what plans he has for a comprehensive epidemiological study into myalgic encephalomyelitis. [56262]

Jacqui Smith: Since 1997 the Department of Health and Medical Research Council (MRC) invested approximately £370,000 on research projects relevant to myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS/ME).

In addition to specific projects, the Department provides support for research commissioned by charities and the research councils that takes place in the National Health Service. Management of much of the research supported by NHS research & development funding is devolved and expenditure at project level is not held centrally by the Department. The total investment is considerably greater than the spend on directly commissioned projects.

There are currently no plans to commission a national epidemiology study. The Department has asked the MRC to develop a broad strategy for advancing biomedical and health services research on CFS/ME.

It is the role of primary care trusts, to decide what services to provide for their populations including those with CFS/ME. They are best placed to understand local health needs and commission services to meet them.

Section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 places local authorities under a duty to arrange services for individual disabled people where they are satisfied that they are necessary to meet the person's needs. The services concerned include practical assistance in the home; recreational facilities; assistance in travelling to services; assistance in arranging adaptations to the home, or the provision of additional facilities designed to secure greater safety, comfort or convenience; facilitating the taking of holidays; the provision of meals and the provision of a telephone and any special equipment necessary to enable the disabled person to use it.

Entitlement to benefit is not dependent on a claimant having any particular diagnosis but the resulting care and mobility needs in the case of Disability Living Allowance or its effects on the person's ability to perform prescribed work-related function in the Personal Capability Assessment for incapacity benefits. Where a clinical diagnosis of CFS/ME has been made full account will be taken of its disabling effects.

General Practitioners

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what he estimates will be the average cost to general practitioners of opting out of 24-hour responsibility. [56919]

Mr. Hutton: This will be addressed as part of the process for pricing the new general practitioner contract.

Waiting Times

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the waiting list times are for *(a)* CT scans, *(b)* MRI scans, *(c)* angiograms and *(d)* radiotherapy in each NHS trust in England and Wales at the latest date for which figures are available. [56914]

Mr. Hutton: We do not collect data on waiting times for computed tomography (CT) and magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scans, angiograms or radiotherapy. However we are taking action to improve access to services by investing in a programme of upgrading and expansion of diagnostic and therapeutic equipment, as well as in staff training and streamlining of care processes.

The NHS Cancer Plan targets for waits from urgent general practitioner referral to first treatment cover the diagnostic phase of treatment and for some patients this will involve CT and/or MRI scans. The targets are to meet this standard for breast cancer by the end of 2002 and for all cancers by 2005. We are currently putting in place data collection mechanisms to show performance against this target.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have waited over *(a)* 12 months and *(b)* 15 months for an operation in Hull and the East Riding. [57592]

Jacqui Smith: As at March 2002, 303 people in East Riding and Hull were waiting over 12 months for an operation, no one has been waiting over 15 months.

Intermediate Care Beds

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 16 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 926W, on community hospitals, how much will be spent on establishing the 5,000 intermediate care beds by 2004; and what proportion of funding and beds will be allocated to rural areas. [57469]

Jacqui Smith: The NHS Plan announced an extra £900 million annually by 2003–04 for new intermediate care and related services to promote independence and improve quality of care for older people, together with targets for additional intermediate care beds and non-residential places and the number of people to benefit.

Full details are in the intermediate care circular HSC 2001–01 : LAC (2001)1 published in January last year. Copies are available in the Library.

The proportion of funding and additional intermediate care services that will be allocated to rural areas is not known.

Overseas Doctors

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is mandatory for general practitioners from the Commonwealth coming to the UK to spend six months as a registrar; and if he will make a statement. [57963]

Mr. Hutton: There is no mandatory requirement in law for general practitioners coming to this country from the Commonwealth to spend time in training as a general practitioner registrar.

Doctors wanting to practise as a GP in the United Kingdom must meet the standard of being "suitably experienced" required by the NHS Act 1977. The joint committee on postgraduate training for general practice (JCPTGP), currently has the responsibility of assessing incoming doctors to see if they are in fact "suitably experienced" and issuing a certificate to those who are. We are aware that the JCPTGP invariably requires doctors from the Commonwealth to undertake training in the UK before issuing a certificate.

We announced in the NHS Plan that we would replace the JCPTGP and the specialist training authority, the parallel body for hospital doctors, with a new body to be known as the postgraduate medical education and training board. We will also introduce for the first time a GP register, and it will become a requirement to be registered, instead of being "suitably experienced", before practising as a GP in the National Health Service in the UK.

DXA Scanners

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many DXA scanners there are in *(a)* Hull and the East Riding and *(b)* England and Wales; [57580]

(2) what plans his Department has for the purchase of new DXA scanners. [57581]

Jacqui Smith: Decisions about the purchase of dual energy X-ray absorptiometry (DXA) scanners are made by NHS trusts in the light of local needs and priorities.

Information about the number of DXA scanners is not available centrally. Information relating to Wales is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many DXA scans have been completed in Hull and the East Riding since 1 January 2001. [57582]

Jacqui Smith: Since the 1 January 2001, a total of 9223 dual energy X-ray absorptiometry (DXA) scans have been completed in Hull and the East Riding.

Osteoporosis

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the *(a)* East Yorkshire Primary Care Trust and *(b)* West Hull Primary Care Trust have a strategy for osteoporosis management. [57576]

Jacqui Smith: Yes, both the East Yorkshire Primary Care Trust and West Hull Primary Care Trust are represented on an East Riding and Hull-wide "Osteoporosis Strategy Group" and have in place strategies for osteoporosis management.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds were blocked as a result of osteoporotic hip fractures in *(a)* Hull and the East Riding and *(b)* England and Wales in the last two quarters for which figures are available. [57574]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not collect such information.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many elective operations were postponed due to osteoporotic hip fractures in *(a)* Hull and the East Riding and *(b)* England and Wales in the last two quarters for which figures are available. [57573]

Jacqui Smith: Data on the number of operations postponed or cancelled due to osteoporotic hip fractures are not available.

Data on the number of operations cancelled by the hospital for non-clinical reasons on, or after, the day the patient was due to be admitted are available in the Library.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of patients on 7.5 mg of corticosteroids for over six months are on osteoporotic preventive therapy in *(a)* Hull and the East Riding and *(b)* England and Wales; [57578]

(2) how many primary care trusts and groups have a strategy for osteoporosis management; [57577]

(3) what percentage of fracture patients aged over 50 years received an osteoporosis risk assessment in *(a)* Hull and the East Riding and *(b)* England and Wales, in the last two quarters for which figures are available. [57571]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not available centrally. Information relating to Wales is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many osteoporotic hip fractures there have been in *(a)* the East Yorkshire Primary Care Trust and *(b)* the West Hull Primary Care Trust since 1 January 2001. [57579]

Jacqui Smith: The information is not collected in the format requested.

National Service Framework for Older People

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what measures he has implemented to ensure standard six of the National Service Framework for Older People is met; [57583]

(2) what targets his Department has set in relation to standard six of the National Service Framework for Older People. [57584]

Jacqui Smith: Standard six of the national service framework for older people requires that "the National Health Service working in partnership with councils, takes action to prevent falls and reduce resultant fractures or other injuries in their populations of older people. Older people who have fallen receive effective treatment and prevention and, with their cares, receive advice on prevention through a specialised falls service." It sets milestones for ensuring the delivery of this standard by:

April 2003 local health care providers (health, social services and the independent sector) should have audited their procedures and put in place risk management procedures to reduce the risk of older people falling.

April 2004 the Health Improvement Plan, and other relevant local plans developed with local authority and independent sector partners, should include the development of an integrated falls service.

April 2005 all local health and social care systems should have established this service.

Detailed work with professional and voluntary bodies is taking place that will support delivery of these milestones and action is being taken piloting and mapping approaches to improved service delivery and local service and community collaborations. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence has begun work to prepare clinical guidelines for the NHS in England and Wales for the assessment and prevention of falls including recurrent falls in older people.

Primary Care Trusts

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the prescribing budget is of the *(a)* East Yorkshire Primary Care Trust and *(b)* West Hull Primary Care Trust. [57594]

Jacqui Smith: The current prescribing budgets allocated to general practice in the East Yorkshire and West Hull Primary Care Trust's is £18.8 million and £20.3 million respectively.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the level of financial deficit is for the *(a)* East Yorkshire Primary Care Trust and *(b)* the West Hull Primary Care Trust. [57593]

Jacqui Smith: East Yorkshire Primary Care Trust currently have expenditure plans which exceed income by £1 million but are expecting to achieve financial balance by the end of the financial year.

West Hull Primary Care Trust currently have expenditure plans which exceed income by £0.5 million but are expecting to achieve financial balance by the end of the financial year.

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list each body which has been given funding to deliver the teaching PCT objectives, together with the sum involved in each case. [58085]

Mr. Hutton: The following primary care trusts (PCTs) have been approved in principle to become teaching PCTs from April 2003:

Bournemouth
City & Hackney
Coventry
Eastern Hull and West Hull (joint bid)
Greenwich
Merseyside (confederation of Bebington & West Wirral, Birkenhead and Wallasey, Central Liverpool, Knowsley, North Liverpool, South Liverpool, South Sefton, Southport & Formby, and St Helens)
North Peterborough Confederation (North Peterborough, South Peterborough and Fenland)
Plymouth
Portsmouth & City
South Stoke and North Stoke (joint bid)
Walsall

Each of these eleven has been given £20,000 development money in 2002–03.

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what resources have been given directly to each teaching PCT for their work as teaching PCTs in 2002–03. [58084]

Mr. Hutton: The following primary care trusts (PCTs) have received funding in 2002–03, as detailed, for their work as teaching PCTs:

Teaching PCT	*£000s*
First wave	
Bradford City	516
Salford	516
Sunderland West	516
Second wave	
Blackburn & Darwin	300
North Tees	300
Haringey	300
Lincolnshire South West	300

Teaching PCT	£000s
Luton	250
Slough	250
Bristol North & South	249
Heart of Birmingham	247

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which primary care trusts have been given teaching PCT status. [58083]

Mr. Hutton: The following primary care trusts have been given teaching primary care trust status:

First wave, from April 2001

Bradford City

Salford

Sunderland West

Second wave, from April 2002

Blackburn & Darwen

Bristol North and Bristol South & West (joint bid)

Haringey

Heart of Birmingham

Lincolnshire South West

Luton

North Tees

Slough

Lung Cancer

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of people in England diagnosed with non-small cell lung cancer received *(a)* surgery, *(b)* chemotherapy and *(c)* palliative care only in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [57942]

Yvette Cooper: The Department does not collect information in the form requested. Information on hospital episodes for lung cancer is available at: http://www.doh.gov.uk/hes/standard–data/available_tables/primarydiagnosis/tb01200a.pdf

Myalgic Encephalitis

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many myalgic encephalitis specialist neurologists work in the NHS in each region of England. [58057]

Jacqui Smith: Information about myalgic encaphalitis specialist neurologists is not collected. Information about the number of consultant neurologists is shown in the table.

Hospital medical consultants within the Neurology specialty by region

As at 30 September 2001	numbers
England	359
Northern and Yorkshire	42
Trent	22
West Midlands	22
North West	40
Eastern	29
London	136
South East	60
South Western	25

Source:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census.

Notes:
Where regions are shown, staff holding appointments in more than one region are included separately in each region. The sum of regional totals therefore differs slightly from the England total and a direct comparison is not advised.

Nurses

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses are employed in the NHS; and how many there were in 1997. [57617]

Mr. Hutton: Workforce information is collected annually as at 30 September. In 1997 there were 318,860 nurses employed in the National Health Service. In 2001 there were 350,380, an increase of 31,520 (9.9 per cent).

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses are training; and how many were training in 1997. [57620]

Mr. Hutton: Latest figures show over 60,800 nursing and midwifery students being trained compared to nearly 36,377 in 1996–97, a 67 per cent increase.

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action is being taken to expedite the registration of recently trained nurses. [57947]

Mr. Hutton: The registration of nurses, midwives and health visitors is a matter for the Nursing and Midwifery Council. The new council, which was established on 1 April 2002, is concerned to ensure that registration is completed quickly and is looking at ways in which the current registration processes can be made more efficient.

Obesity

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what research he has commissioned into the use of sport and exercise in tackling obesity; [58309]

(2) what he is doing to promote sport and exercise for health purposes; and if he will make a statement on the role of sport and exercise in tackling obesity. [58310]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* Both physical activity and eating habits play a role in overweight and obesity. We have put in place major cross Government programmes of work to improve access to opportunities to participate in a wide range of physical and sporting activities. This includes £581 million from the New Opportunities Fund for a physical education and sports programme. We recently announced the launch of a new £2.5 million programme on access to physical activity, which is being developed with Sport England and the Countryside Agency. The work forms part of a partnership between the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Health.

This programme will support local strategies on promoting physical activity and reducing overweight and obesity which are already being developed as part of the national service framework for coronary heart disease.

The National Audit Office report "Tackling Obesity in England", published last year, looked into the prevalence and costs of obesity, and the causes of the problem. The report highlighted that changes in eating patterns and increasingly sedentary lifestyles are the main reasons for the rising trend in obesity.

There is on-going research of £1.1 million via the health technology assessment programme. This includes evaluation of randomised trials on exercise, exercise referral schemes and the cost-effectiveness of supervised exercise programmes in patient management.

Care Homes (Lancashire)

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ask the Social Services Department to undertake a review of Lancashire County Council's proposals to reduce the number of residential care homes, taking into account the responses of the county council's consultation on the issue. [58000]

Jacqui Smith: The social services inspectorate is closely monitoring Lancashire County Council's proposals to assess its future care provision, to close some of its care homes and to consult on future strategies. I understand that the Council is reviewing its approach to the proposed closures and intends to hold a further series of meetings with residents and their relatives and other interested parties.

Arts Prosthotists

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many arts prosthotists there are per head of population in each of the National Health Service trust areas in England. [57965]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Directors of Public Health

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many PCTs have *(a)* appointed and *(b)* not appointed a Director of Public Health. [57670]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* Of the 302 primary care trusts and one care trust in England, 186 have a director of public health (DPH). Of those DPHs, 24 posts are in an acting capacity and five PCTs are sharing a director. The remaining 117 PCTs are in the process of appointing a director of public health.

Donor Cards

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals his Department has to promote the carrying of donor cards. [57527]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 22 May]:* The Department has a public information campaign with a current annual budget of £900,000 which funds a number of wide-ranging initiatives in England to raise the public's awareness of the shortage of organs for transplantation and to promote organ donor registration. A public information leaflet, incorporating the organ donor card is widely distributed, and is also available through the organ donor literature line. The campaign secures free TV airtime for short public information films, maintains a campaign website and has partnership arrangements with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, the Passport Agency, Rotarian Clubs, Boots the Chemist and with some banks who have chosen to support organ donation.

The Department runs a special campaign to raise awareness among members of the Asian community and a similar campaign targeting the African and African-Caribbean communities has recently been launched. These campaigns include public information leaflets and targeted advertising.

The Department also helps raise awareness by funding the work of some voluntary organisations through the Section 64 grant scheme. This includes funding for the British transplant games to be held in August 2002.

Free Continuing Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he intends to issue guidance to strategic health authorities, primary care trusts and local authorities on the resolution of disputes regarding assessment for free continuing care and registered nursing care, following Cowl v Plymouth City Council, CA 14 December 2001 and the new Pre-Action Protocol of the Adminstrative Court. [57929]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 23 May]:* HSC 2001–015:LAC (2001)18 gives guidance on the existing procedure for continuing care review panels and extends the remit of those panels to other decisions regarding the National Health Service funded element of any care package. There is no intention to alter that guidance because of Cowl v Plymouth County Council or pre-action protocols.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place the eligibility criteria for free continuing care adopted by each strategic health authority as from 1 April in the Library. [57926]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* Eligibility criteria for continuing national health service care are not held centrally by the Department.

Chiropody

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what action his Department has taken following the review of NHS provision of chiropody and podiatry services; [58516]

(2) when he intends to publish the review of chiropody services (Feet First II); and if he will make a statement. [58517]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* "Meeting the Challenge: A Strategy for the Allied Health Professions", published on 15 November 2000, raises the profile of chiropody and podiatry services alongside other allied health professions, and we have no current plans to publish the outcomes of the review of the Feet First.

The NHS Plan commits us to increasing the number of allied health professionals working in the National Health Service, which include chiropodists/podiatrists, by more than 6,500 by 2004. In the 2002 Budget we will build on the 6,500 target and by 2008 we expect the NHS to have net increases over the September 2001 staff census of at least 30,000 therapists and scientists.

We are also committed to reducing waiting times for treatment for vulnerable groups like children and older people. The NHS Plan gives us a target to reduce the maximum waiting time for any stage of treatment to three months. Providing we can recruit the extra staff, and the NHS makes the necessary reforms, we aim to achieve that target by the end of 2008.

Locum Doctors

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many locum doctors worked in NHS trusts on average per day in the last 12 months. [59443]

Mr. Hutton: Data on locums is not collected centrally.

Recruitment and Retention

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) on 26 April, *Official Report*, column 520W, on recruitment and retention, how many NHS consultants there were in the NHS in each year since 1995. [59560]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table. There has been an increase of over 32 per cent in the number of consultants working in the National Health Service between 1995 and 2001.

Hospital, Public Health Medicine, and Community Health Service, (HCHS) medical and dental consultants

England at 30 September	*Numbers*
2001	25,690
2000	24,310
1999	23,220
1998	22,220
1997	21,370
1996	20,300
1995	19,420

Source:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census.

Asthma

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent research his Department has conducted into the causes and significance of asthma; [59562]

(2) how much funding his Department has allocated to charities and industry for research into the causes and curing of asthma. [59563]

Jacqui Smith: The main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC), which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. The MRC spent an estimated £12.2 million in 1999–2000 on research into asthma and respiratory disorders.

The Department is funding a programme of research on the public health aspects of asthma, aimed at providing a clearer scientific understanding of the causes of asthma and hence how it might be prevented. The Department is also funding a programme of research on asthma management and a range of other research in relation to the treatment of, and services for, people with asthma.

Details of projects referred to above and other projects supported through the National Health Service research and development levy can be found on the national research register (NRR) at: www.doh.gov.uk/research.nrr/htm. The NRR contains many details of projects/trials funded by the research councils and other funders.

The Department does not allocate funds directly to charities and industry for research. The Department funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in the National Health Service. Research funds are provided to research contractor on the basis of individual proposals. The Department also provides support to NHS trusts to allow work funded by others such as the research councils, charities and other funders to be conducted within the NHS.

Agency Nurses

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of hospital nursing staff have been provided by private agencies in each of the last five years. [59414]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mortuary Services

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what financial arrangements exist between NHS trusts and coroners for provision of mortuary services; [59430]

(2) which NHS mortuaries levy charges for their services; [59427]

(3) if he will list those NHS trusts which operate public mortuaries; [59425]

(4) what the level of investment is for NHS mortuaries; [59428]

(5) when the responsibility of NHS hospital trusts to provide accommodation for people who die in hospital will end and that of the coroner or undertaker begin; [59431]

(6) what his policy is on NHS mortuaries levying charges to the public. [59426]

Mr. Hutton: When a patient dies in a National Health Service (NHS) hospital, the hospital is responsible for the care of the body until that responsibility can be transferred, either to the executors or administrators or other persons with the duty of disposing of the body, or to the coroner. The NHS does not charge the public for this care.

We do not hold separate information on the level of investment in NHS mortuaries, which are funded through the general allocation to the NHS. Public mortuaries are run and financed by local authorities. Such mortuaries, therefore, are not operated by the NHS.

The Coroner Service is funded through local authorities. Local authorities pay NHS trusts for the use of mortuaries to store bodies until coronial enquiries are complete, although in some cases local coroners manage these financial arrangements directly.

Parliamentary Questions

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the hon. Member for East Worthing and

Shoreham will receive answers to his Questions, Refs 42261, 42328, 42312, 42313 tabled for answer on 11 March. [59555]

Ms Blears: The hon. Member's Parliamentary Questions were replied to as follows:

42261—Wednesday 22 May

42328—Thursday 23 May

42312—Wednesday 22 May

42313—Wednesday 15 May

Neurology and Limb Centres

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what extra funding is being given to neurology and limb centres to offer increased physiotherapy and occupational therapy to treat patients with brachial plexus nerve injury; [59564]

(2) how many neurology and limb centres offer physiotherapy and occupational therapy to patients with brachial plexus neuropathy. [59565]

Jacqui Smith: Substantial extra funding is being made available to the National Health Service. Ministers, however, do not decide on the configuration of local services and whether money should be allocated to particular diagnoses. That is a matter for local primary care trusts and other commissioners as they are best placed to know the health needs of their local populations.

Information on the specific conditions/diagnosis within local services is not held centrally.

Midwives

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many midwives have left the NHS in each of the last five years on account of *(a)* normal retirement age, *(b)* early retirement, *(c)* ill health, *(d)* transfer to other NHS posts and *(e)* other causes. [59411]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

The Department's non-medical workforce census records the net change in the number of midwives employed in the National Health Service. There were 700 more midwives working in the NHS at September 2001 than there were in September 1997.

Matrons

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the new NHS matrons announced previously worked in the NHS; and at what grades. [59577]

Mr. Hutton: Guidance issued to the National Health Service in April 2001 (HSC 2000–10) indicated that modern matron posts should be graded using the existing clinical grading structure. The great majority of appointments will have been made from within trusts. However, information on individual posts is not available.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the Committee overseeing the conditions governing imports of agricultural products originating in third countries following the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power station is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56723]

Yvette Cooper: The mandate of this comitology committee is to advise the European Commission on measures needed to control agricultural products originating in third countries affected by fallout from the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power station. Full details are set out in Article 7 of Council Regulation (EEC). No 737/90 of 22 March 1990. The committee has not met in the last 12 months and it is not currently considering any issues. United Kingdom representation on the committee is usually by an official from the Food Standards Agency. The outcome of meetings is usually disseminated within the UK by means of a letter to "interested parties". The cost of the committee to public funds is limited to direct costs incurred in attending meetings and any necessary preparation time.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Defence Scientific Advisory Council

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken to inform the Defence Scientific Advisory Council of the *(a)* training objectives developed by all users of plastic baton rounds to achieve ACPO/MOD policy on the use of the L21A1 baton round and *(b)* changes made in the operational use of the L104 riot gun and sight and in the construction of the baton (i) cartridge and (ii) gun. [17762]

Mr. Denham: I have been asked to reply.

The Defence Scientific Advisory Council has been informed of the training arrangements adopted by all users to ensure compliance with The Association of Chief Police Officers/Ministry of Defence (ACPO/MOD) policy on the use of the L21A1 baton round and of changes made in the ACPO guidance covering the operational use of the L21A1 round. There have been no changes made in the construction of the baton round cartridge or gun.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Parliamentary Questions

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to questions *(a)* 38783, *(b)* 38780, *(c)* 38781 and *(d)* 38778 tabled in relation to the incident of the Yarl's Wood Removal [illegible]ntre. [44091]

Ang[illegible]Eagle: I replied to the questions to which the hon. Memb[illegible]fers on the following dates:

(*a*) 19 March 2002,

(*b*) 21 March 2002,

(*c*) 3 April 2002 and

(*d*) 7 May 2002.

I apologise for the delay in responding.

Police Absence

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes he plans to the regulations to manage attendance in the police service. [44028]

Mr. Denham: On 9 May 2002, the Police Negotiating Board (PNB) agreed a package of reforms to police pay and conditions of service. The PNB is the statutory negotiating body for police pay and conditions throughout the United Kingdom.

As part of a package of reforms, the Police Advisory Board in England and Wales will, during 2002, come to an arrangement through amendments to Police Efficiency Regulations where the aim is to secure improvement in attendance, with sanctions (including the possibility of dismissal) where that fails. The arrangement will include an appropriate appeals mechanism.

It is for Scottish Ministers to make changes to regulations governing conditions of service in Scottish police forces. Scotland has its own Police Advisory Board.

The changes to regulations form part of a range of measures to improve and modernise police pay and conditions of service. The package agreed on 9 May 2002 will provide a modernised pay structure rewarding those at the sharp end and reducing reliance on overtime. In so doing, it both underpins the rest of the police reform programme and demonstrates the Government's commitment to invest in the police service to achieve the reforms needed and to give it the support and flexibility it requires to deliver a first-class service to the public.

Police Protection Services

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much the ring-fenced allowance is for the officers involved in diplomatic protection, surveillance, undercover and kidnap work. [44026]

Mr. Denham: On 9 May 2002, the Police Negotiating Board (PNB) agreed a package of reforms to police pay and conditions of service. The PNB is the statutory negotiating body for police pay and conditions throughout the United Kingdom.

The possibility of a ring-fenced allowance for officers involved in diplomatic protection, surveillance, undercover and kidnap work was an idea considered during the negotiations in the PNB when it was proposed to reduce premium rates of pay. Officers in those four areas would have been hardest hit from reductions in premium rates of pay, and, because the nature of their work requires them to stay on duty for long periods at a time, a ring-fenced allowance would have been one means of protecting their earnings. The Agreement reached on 9 May 2002 does not include any reductions to premium rates of pay, so there is no need for a ring-fenced allowance.

The Agreement included a scheme to manage down overtime in the service. There will be a service-wide target of a 15 per cent reduction in the overtime bill over the three years from 2003–04. There will be local targets, taking account of force strength and effective management action already taken to manage down the overtime bill.

Child Disappearance

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what authorities are informed with regard to the disappearance of a child within the UK. [51646]

Mr. Denham: At present, all missing person cases reported to the police should be submitted to the Police National Missing Persons Bureau (PNMPB) if the individual has been missing for 14 days or longer.

The Home Office is currently working with key stakeholders within the area of missing persons, which includes the police and the National Missing Persons Helpline, in order to develop and implement measures to increase co-operation and information sharing between Government departments, and statutory and non-statutory agencies. A bid to the Invest to Save Budget (ISB), to put in place a new system for handling missing person cases, has been successful. This work is being taken forward by the Cross-Departmental Group on missing persons which is chaired by the Home Office.

Arranged Marriages

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action has been taken to remove from Britain the 24 men who married Sylvia Evans and Gwendoline Sharpe. [53468]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 30 April 2002]:* We are actively looking into the cases of all the men who married either Sylvia Evans or Gwendoline Sharpe. These cases are being investigated and where it is appropriate removal action will be taken.

Police Funding

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the funding available per 1,000 population for Cambridgeshire police authority, broken down into its constituent parts of *(a)* Home Office police grant, *(b)* revenue support grant, *(c)* national non-domestic rates, *(d)* Crime Fighting Fund allocations and *(e)* rural policing fund grants for (i) 2000–2001, (ii) 2001–02 and (iii) 2002–03. [52543]

Mr. Denham: The information is set out in the table.

	Police grant	*National non domestic rates*	*Revenue support grant*	*Crime Fighting fund*	*Rural Policing grant*	*Total*
	£	£	£	£	£	£
2000–01	55,134	23,544	12,877	530	794	92,878
2001–02	56,440	22,970	14,314	1,836	1,552	97,111
2002–03[1]	56,342	25,089	11,971	2,642	1,553	97,597

[1] Figures for 2001–02 are not directly comparable with 2002–03 owing to the changes in funding for the National Crime Squad and the National Criminal Intelligence Service in 2002–03. The comparable adjusted total figure for 2001–02 is £94,660.

Source for population data:
The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Police statistics [Estimates]. Population at June 2000 for 2000–01 and June 2001 for 2001–02 and 2002–03.

Young People

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what subjects and on which dates his Department has recently consulted organisations representing young people; and if he will list such organisations. [52499]

Mr. Denham: This information is not held centrally in the manner requested and could be secured only at disproportionate cost.

The Department is committed to the new core principles for the involvement of children and young people which was published in November 2001. The Department will shortly be publishing an action plan setting out for the first time how it will implement these principles to extend the participation of children and young people in the design, provision and evaluation of policies and services that affect them.

Millennium Stadium (Policing)

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to take account of the cost to the South Wales Police of additional policing resulting from national events at the Millennium Stadium. [51284]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 29 April 2002]:* The Chief Constable (Sir Anthony Burden QPM) requested additional financial assistance for 2002–03 along similar lines to his request last year for a special grant for the extra cost of policing major football events at the Millennium Stadium, Cardiff. My right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) informed the Chief Constable on 8 May 2002 that he would make a special grant payment of £300,000 as a contribution towards the extra costs the force expect to incur for major football finals in 2002–03. A similar grant of £300,000 was made to the South Wales Police in 2001–02.

Police Occupational Health Service

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to develop an occupational health service for the police. [56908]

Mr. Denham: An occupational health strategy for the police service has been developed as part of the police reform programme and it is currently subject to consultation with the staff associations and other representative bodies. The strategy will aim to reduce sickness absence rates and ill health retirements through improved sickness management and occupational health services.

The Home Office will be spending £4 million during 2002–03 to assist forces in improving the quality of their occupational health provision.

Police Training

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what investigations he makes into the background of people coming to the UK on official and reciprocal police training programmes in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [57297]

Mr. Denham: All visitors to the United Kingdom are subject to immigration checks. No special investigations are made into the background of overseas students accepted on to UK national police training programmes. Such students are normally sponsored either by the UK Government or by the government of the student's country. There are also security checks that apply to overseas visitors being given access to official premises, including police training colleges.

Police Probationers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of police officers in *(a)* each basic command unit *(b)* each police force and *(c)* England are probationers; and what restrictions apply to their activities. [57448]

Mr. Denham: Information on the number of probationer constables is collected annually by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary. The latest available is for 31 March 2001. The information is only collected at force level not for Basic Command Units. The table sets out the number of probationers and the proportion of strength for each force.

After attestation, within the first week of joining, a probationer constable has the same routine powers as any other police officer. However, a probationer constable would not be required to go on unsupervised patrol until certified fit for such a duty. This certification occurs as part of the formal training process after about 28 weeks of training.

Probationers in England as at 31 March 2001

Force	*Probationers*	*per cent Probationers of strength at 31 March 2001*
Avon and Somerset	134.0	4.5
Bedfordshire	108.0	10.4
Cambridgeshire	143.0	11.0
Cheshire	117.0	5.8
City of London	29.0	4.1
Cleveland	123.0	8.6
Cumbria	47.0	4.5
Derbyshire	171.0	9.4
Devon and Cornwall	231.0	7.9
Dorset	137.0	10.1
Durham	120.0	7.5
Essex	242.0	8.4
Gloucestershire	140.0	12.0
Greater Manchester	224.0	3.2
Hampshire	290.0	8.4
Hertfordshire	229.0	11.9
Humberside	139.0	7.3
Kent	119.0	3.6
Lancashire	257.0	7.9
Leicestershire	187.0	9.2
Lincolnshire	139.0	11.6
Merseyside	206.0	5.0
Metropolitan Police	1,966.0	7.9

Force	*Probationers*	*per cent Probationers of strength at 31 March 2001*
Norfolk	115.0	8.1
Northamptonshire	91.0	7.9
Northumbria	303.0	7.9
North Yorkshire	73.0	5.6
Nottinghamshire	170.0	7.5
South Yorkshire	165.0	5.2
Staffordshire	80.0	3.8
Suffolk	72.0	6.4
Surrey	399.0	19.3
Sussex	224.0	7.8
Thames Valley	397.0	10.7
Warwickshire	85.0	9.2
West Mercia	78.0	4.0
West Midlands	766.0	10.3
West Yorkshire	262.0	5.4
Wiltshire	80.0	7.1
England	8,858.0	7.6

Retail Crime

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many cases of violent assault there were against (*a*) rail workers, (*b*) benefits agency staff and (*c*) retail staff in the last 12 months for which figures are available; [54624]

(2) how many incidents of *(a)* shop lifting, *(b)* armed robbery and *(c)* assault there have been in high streets shops in the past 12 months; [54563]

(3) how many instances of violence to retail staff there were in the last 12 months for which figures are available; [54568]

(4) what percentage of violent crime was against shop staff in the last year for which figures are available; [54571]

(5) how many instances of retail crime there were in each of the metropolitan boroughs in the last 12 months for which figures are available; [54567]

(6) how many incidents of recorded crime in the last three years have been classed as retail crime, broken down by police force. [54565]

Mr. Denham: Recorded crime statistics do not normally identify the location of offences, or the occupation of victims. The one recorded crime which can be identified as retail crime is theft from a shop, and figures for each police force area for the last three years are given in the table.

Figures on the location of firearms robberies including offences where air weapons, imitation weapons and unidentified firearms were used indicate that there were 1,323 robberies in shops in the 2000–01 financial year. Including offences where air weapons, Imitation Weapons and Unidentified fire arms where used.

The Home Office, together with the Department of Trade and Industry and Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, will shortly be undertaking a major cross-Government survey of crime that affects retail and manufacturing premises across England and Wales. This study is receiving matching funds from the Treasury Evidence Based Policy Fund and will be the first Home Office survey of crime against manufacturers and retailers in England and Wales since 1994. More than 3,000 premises will be surveyed in each of these sectors. The survey will collect detailed information on the circumstances of crime against business, levels of concern about crime, the overall social and economic impact of crime on businesses and levels of satisfaction with police response and advice on crime.

Recorded crime: between 1998–99 to 2000–01 in England and Wales. Theft from shops—number of offences

Police Force Area	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Avon and Somerset	7632	7958	8741
Bedfordshire	2934	3007	3105
Cambridgeshire	3372	3630	3743
Cheshire	4957	4883	4906
Cleveland	5913	6365	6228
Cumbria	2702	2584	2339
Derbyshire	3473	4316	4537
Devon and Cornwall	7007	6346	6414
Dorset	2995	3088	3011
Durham	2351	2944	3042
Essex (1)	6818	7116	[illegible]
Gloucestershire	3285	3471	3697
Greater Manchester	16016	16308	[illegible]6196
Hampshire	9874	10234	9674
Hertfordshire (1)	3054	3328	4060
Humberside	7638	7188	7487
Kent	8010	8059	8191
Lancashire	6922	6680	7123
Leicestershire	4381	4398	4184
Lincolnshire	2644	2709	2948
London, City of	580	619	650
Merseyside	8806	8777	9584
Metropolitan Police (1)	47074	48015	41713
Norfolk	3653	3480	3801
Northamptonshire	3637	3348	3107
Northumbria	9691	9719	10757
North Yorkshire	3597	4053	3949
Nottinghamshire	7857	8533	9226
South Yorkshire	7090	7202	7525
Staffordshire	5154	5981	6287
Suffolk	3092	3118	3404
Surrey (1)	2724	2957	3602
Sussex	7975	8115	7788
Thames Valley	8589	9628	10796
Warwickshire	2045	1976	2100
West Mercia	4818	5732	5792
West Midlands	15824	17891	18877
West Yorkshire	11806	11864	11317
Wiltshire	2718	2623	2509
Dyfed-Powys	1473	1656	1503
Gwent	3152	3213	2909
North Wales	2606	2708	2890
South Wales	6033	6674	6580
Totals:	281972	292494	293080

(1) There was a boundary change on 1 April 2000 in which some parts of the Metropolitan police area were transferred to Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey, so that the police force areas followed county boundaries thereafter. The figures for these forces before and after this date are therefore not directly comparable.

Review Committee (Anti-Terrorism Legislation)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the terms of reference are for the Review Committee of Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001; to whom it reports; what its annual budget and proposed staff are in its first year; what its sphere of competence is; what immunities its members enjoy; and what powers the body has *(a)* to compel witnesses, *(b)* to seize documents, *(c)* to demand disclosure, *(d)* to initiate its own inquiries, *(e)* to publish its reports and address the media by other means, *(f)* to create its own sub-committees and *(g)* to consider complaints by individuals and groups. [54542]

Mr. Blunkett Section 122 of the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 sets out the Parliamentary requirement for a Committee to undertake a review of the Act. The Committee will report to me when they have completed their work. The Act requires them to deliver this by 14 December 2003.

There are no powers for the Committee to compel individuals or organisations to provide information. But the Government would expect and encourage those individuals and organisations who are approached to co-operate fully with any request made to them by the Committee. All questions of procedure and staffing are for the Committee themselves to decide. While no specific budget has been set, the necessary funds will be made available to the Committee to enable them to do their work.

Reparation and Action Plan Orders

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* reparation orders and *(b)* action plan orders have been made to date in each police force area in England and Wales; how many have been (i) discharged and (ii) breached; and if he will make a statement. [55856]

Mr. Denham: The information available, for 1998 to 2000, is contained in the table.

Statistics for 2001 will be published in the autumn.

Offenders given a reparation or action plan order and those breaching an order, by police force area, 1998 to 2000

England and Wales

	Reparation orders						*Action plan orders*					
	Pilot areas 30 Sep 1998–30 June 2000[1]			*All areas 1 June 2000–31 Dec 2000*[1]			*Pilot areas 30 Sep 1998—30 June 2000*[1]			*All areas 1 June 2000–31 Dec 2000*[1]		
Police Force	*Made*	*Breached*[2,3]	*Discharged*	*Made*	*Breached*[3]	*Discharged*	*Made*	*Breached*[2,3]	*Discharged*	*Made*	*Breached*[3]	*Discharged*
Avon and Somerset	*	*	*	15	—	..	*	*	*	87	—	..
Bedfordshire	*	*	*	16	—	..	*	*	*	32	—	..
Cambridgeshire	*	*	*	45	—	..	*	*	*	60	1	..
Cheshire	*	*	*	16	—	..	*	*	*	20	2	..
Cleveland	*	*	*	18	—	..	*	*	*	55	—	..
Cumbria	*	*	*	6	—	..	*	*	*	36	2	..
Derbyshire	*	*	*	41	2	..	*	*	*	53	4	..
Devon and Cornwall	*	*	*	55	—	..	*	*	*	1	—	..
Dorset	*	*	*	36	—	..	*	*	*	13	—	..
Durham	*	*	*	38	—	..	*	*	*	87	1	..
Essex	*	*	*	93	—	..	*	*	*	92	2	..
Gloucestershire	*	*	*	44	—	..	*	*	*	13	—	..
Greater Manchester	*	*	*	337	3	..	*	*	*	367	7	..
Hampshire	822	25	1	298	—	..	550	34	8	233	4	..
Hertfordshire	*	*	*	60	—	..	*	*	*	82	—	..
Humberside	*	*	*	40	1	..	*	*	*	39	1	..
Kent	*	*	*	77	—	..	*	*	*	55	1	..
Lancashire[4]	38	1	—	168	3	..	*	*	*	220	2	..
Leicestershire	*	*	*	54		..	*	*	*	82	2	..
Lincolnshire	*	*	*	51	—	..	*	*	*	42	—	..
London, City of	*	*	*	—	—	..	*	*	*	—	—	..
Merseyside	*	*	*	63	—	..	*	*	*	124	—	..
Metropolitan Police	83	8	4	302	8	..	144	25	14	585	24	..
Norfolk	*	*	*	7	—	..	*	*	*	30	1	..
Northamptonshire	*	*	*	—	—	..	*	*	*	3	—	..
Northumbria	*	*	*	70	—	..	*	*	*	108	—	..
North Yorkshire	*	*	*	50	—	..	*	*	*	36	2	..
Nottinghamshire	*	*	*	226	7	..	*	*	*	206	23	..
South Yorkshire	296	20	—	167	4	..	110	—	—	99	10	..
Staffordshire[5]	*	*	*	..	..	..	*	*	*	..	..	..
Suffolk	*	*	*	9	—	..	*	*	*	15	—	..
Surrey	*	*	*	110	—	..	*	*	*	52	—	..
Sussex	*	*	*	66	—	..	*	*	*	59	—	..
Thames Valley	*	*	*	92	3	..	*	*	*	162	5	..
Warwickshire	*	*	*	36	—	..	*	*	*	40	2	..
West Mercia	*	*	*	35	—	..	*	*	*	96	—	..
West Midlands	192	3	—	376	4	..	171	9	—	387	9	..
West Yorkshire	*	*	*	211	2	..	*	*	*	158	4	..
Wiltshire	*	*	*	31	—	..	*	*	*	14	—	..
Dyfed-Powys	*	*	*	—	—	..	*	*	*	2	—	..
Gwent	*	*	*	56	—	..	*	*	*	18	—	..
North Wales	*	*	*	52	—	..	*	*	*	66	—	..
South Wales	*	*	*	107	—	..	*	*	*	92	—	..
Total England and Wales	1,431	57	5	3,574	37	..	975	68	22	4,021	109	..

* not applicable .. not available

[1] Persons given reparation orders or action plan orders in June 2000 are included in the pilot area figures as well as the national figures.

[2] Details of breaches or discharges not available for the period April to June 2000.

[3] A person is counted once for each separate court appearance on which he/she is found guilty of a breach.

[4] Lancashire pilot area data not available for the period April to June 2000.

Dangerous Driving

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce a vehicle homicide charge, with sentence, for those who cause death by dangerous driving whilst having no insurance, MOT or driving licence and are consistently driving offenders; and if he will make a statement. [56270]

Beverley Hughes: The current offence of gross negligence manslaughter, which carries a maximum penalty of life imprisonment, is appropriate where the driving in question falls so far below the required standard that it amounts to criminal negligence and applies irrespective of the drivers insurance, MOT or licence status. The law of manslaughter is currently under review. Our current proposals for reforming the law are detailed in the consultation paper "Reforming the law on Involuntary Manslaughter: the Government's Proposals" (a copy of which is available in the Library). The proposals do not include the introduction of a specific vehicular manslaughter offence.

If the offender's driving falls far below the required standard but not so far as to support gross negligence manslaughter, the appropriate charge could be causing death by dangerous driving. The maximum penalty available for this offence is currently 10 years' imprisonment. This penalty is under consideration as part of the Government's Review Of Road Traffic Penalties.

As part of the sentencing framework reform, building on the recommendations of the report "Making Punishments Work" published in July 2001, we are looking at ensuring that those who commit offences of violence that carry a maximum penalty of life imprisonment, such as motor manslaughter, will receive that sentence if the court takes the view that they present significant risks of further serious harm to the public.

Racially Motivated Crimes

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the incidence of racially motivated crimes *(a)* per 1,000 population and *(b)* in total were in each police authority area in Wales and England in each year since 1997. [56272]

Mr. Denham: The information requested is given in the attached table. Information on the number of racist incidents for all police force areas is published annually in the Home Office publication under Section 95 of the Criminal Justice Act 1991, Statistics on Race and the Criminal Justice system. Comparisons between the number of racist incidents and resident population may be misleading since this does not adequately describe those people likely to be at risk of being the victim of a racist incident in an area.

Racist incidents for all police force areas 1996–97 to 1999–2000

Police Force Area	*1996–97 Total*	*1996–97 Per 1000 Population*	*1997–98 Total*	*1997–98 Per 1000 Population*	*1998–99 Total*	*1998–99 Per 1000 Population*	*1999–2000 Total*	*1999–2000 Per 1000 Population*
Avon & Somerset	310	0.23	409	0.31	626	0.47	887	0.67
Bedfordshire	77	0.16	75	0.15	134	0.28	300	0.62
Cambridgeshire	141	0.22	147	0.23	205	0.32	519	0.82
Cheshire	92	0.11	78	0.09	158	0.18	421	0.49
Cleveland	68	0.14	76	0.16	147	0.30	204	0.42
Cumbria	37	0.09	46	0.11	45	0.10	85	0.20
Derbyshire	208	0.24	174	0.20	208	0.24	383	0.45
Devon & Cornwall	82	0.06	90	0.06	116	0.08	538	0.39
Dorset	67	0.11	86	0.14	145	0.23	185	0.30
Durham	24	0.04	37	0.07	75	0.14	178	0.33
Essex	116	0.09	160	0.12	229	0.17	431	0.32
Gloucestershire	34	0.07	32	0.06	83	0.17	258	0.52
Greater Manchester	595	0.27	624	0.28	1197	0.54	2,324	1.04
Hampshire	178	0.11	219	0.14	271	0.17	654	0.42
Hertfordshire	295	0.38	288	0.37	325	0.42	703	0.91
Humberside	55	0.07	72	0.09	111	0.14	215	0.28
Kent	256	0.18	276	0.20	273	0.20	914	0.66
Lancashire	337	0.27	311	0.25	450	0.36	917	0.74
Leicestershire	299	0.37	237	0.29	367	0.45	878	1.08
Lincolnshire	7	0.01	6	0.01	14	0.03	19	0.03
London, City of	10	1.85	6	1.11	28	5.19	55	10.19
Merseyside	162	0.13	241	0.20	324	0.26	822	0.67
Metropolitan Police	5,621	0.83	5,862	0.87	11,050	1.64	23,346	3.46
Norfolk	56	0.08	89	0.13	94	0.13	253	0.36
Northamptonshire	195	0.30	318	0.48	282	0.43	597	0.90
Northumbria	488	0.91	444	0.82	623	1.16	1159	2.15
North Yorkshire	43	0.03	41	0.03	64	0.05	96	0.08
Nottinghamshire	330	0.36	391	0.43	475	0.52	714	0.79
South Yorkshire	169	0.15	213	0.19	293	0.26	557	0.49
Staffordshire	225	0.24	214	0.23	220	0.24	404	0.43
Suffolk	74	0.13	54	0.09	150	0.25	234	0.40
Surrey	55	0.08	45	0.06	126	0.18	338	0.48
Sussex	260	0.19	298	0.22	399	0.30	934	0.70
Thames Valley	233	0.13	279	0.15	486	0.26	999	0.54
Warwickshire	66	0.15	107	0.24	111	0.25	150	0.34
West Mercia	64	0.06	57	0.06	83	0.08	464	0.46
West Midlands	725	0.32	632	0.28	988	0.44	1,548	0.68
West Yorkshire	623	0.34	644	0.35	1068	0.58	2,118	1.15
Wiltshire	35	0.07	59	0.11	101	0.19	221	0.42
Dyfed-Powys	18	0.04	17	0.04	37	0.09	99	0.23

Racist incidents for all police force areas 1996–97 to 1999–2000

Police Force Area	*1996–97 Total*	*1996–97 Per 1000 Population*	*1997–98 Total*	*1997–98 Per 1000 Population*	*1998–99 Total*	*1998–99 Per 1000 Population*	*1999–2000 Total*	*1999–2000 Per 1000 Population*
Gwent	60	0.12	45	0.09	98	0.20	213	0.44
North Wales	4	0.01	12	0.02	36	0.06	80	0.14
South Wales	357	0.33	367	0.34	734	0.68	1,602	1.47
England & Wales	13,151	0.29	13,878	0.30	23,049	0.50	48,016	1.04

Shoplifting

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of shoplifting there were in Lancashire in each year since 1997. [56179]

Mr. Denham: The number of crimes of theft from a shop is recorded by the police in Lancashire since 1997 are given in table.

Recorded thefts from a shop in Lancashire

Year	*Number of offences*
1997[1]	7,434
1998–99[2]	6,922
1999–2002[2]	6,680
2000–01[2]	7,123

[1] Calendar year.

[2] Year ending March

There was a change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998. Numbers of recorded crimes before and after this date may not be directly comparable. The 2000–01 figure for Lancashire may have been affected by new recording practices introduced by the force in April 2000.

Police Radio System

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the compatibility of the radio system used by police officers in Lancashire with the one used by the Greater Manchester police force; and what plans he has to improve the systems. [56994]

Mr. Denham: As the Air wave service is rolled out across the United Kingdom, its features will be enhanced by a series of software upgrades. In mid 2003, a software upgrade will provide the potential for full national compatibility.

In Lancashire Constabulary and Greater Manchester Police, an interim arrangement has been put in place. Where appropriate, their radios are being programmed to enable officers to communicate with either force control room. The situation will be further eased by a software upgrade which will take place in September, 2002.

Football Violence

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what discussions have taken place following the acts of violence committed by Millwall supporters following the club's Division One play-off match against Birmingham; [57162]

(2) what further plans he has to combat football hooliganism; [57163]

(3) what recent discussions have taken place between the Government, football authorities and clubs to help eradicate hooliganism. [57164]

Mr. Denham: Government, police and football authorities have worked closely together to make our football stadia among the safest and most secure in the world and to marginalise hooliganism. It has never been claimed that the phenomenon has been eradicated and it is evident that certain clubs continue to attract a disproportionate number of potential troublemakers. Tough legislation is in place for dealing with miscreants and, prior to next season, Government will be hosting discussions with key policing and football agencies to identify what further action is required.

Asylum Accommodation Centres

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what minimum accommodation and other requirements he sets for each asylum accommodation centre; [57449]

(2) what criteria he set for locating asylum accommodation centres. [57450]

Angela Eagle: The criteria for site selection included; sites with the capacity to cater for several hundred residents plus facilities either as new-build or conversion, a non-urban location and a reasonable geographical spread beyond London and Kent. We are seeking to build around four centres of 750 people each to a total capacity of 3,000, although one of the centres may be smaller during the trial period.

Deportation Orders

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many deportation orders have been made against Irish nationals in each full year since 1996. [57203]

Angela Eagle: The latest available information relates to the period 1996 to 2000 and is given in the table.

Deportation orders made against Irish nationals, 1996 to 2000[1]

1996	5
1997	10
1998	15
1999	5
2000[P]	5

[1] Figures rounded to the nearest five.

[P] Provisional data.

Anti-Personnel Landmines

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action is being taken in respect of the British company alleged to be selling illegal anti-personnel landmines at the Arms Trade Fair in Docklands; and if he will make a statement. [57157]

Mr. Denham: I understand that Derbyshire Constabulary are making extensive enquiries to assess whether or not the allegations made can be substantiated; and that Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and the Health and Safety Executive are also seeking to establish whether there have been breaches of the legislation for which they are responsible.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department is taking to stop the illegal manufacture of anti-personnel landmines in the UK. [57158]

Mr. Denham: This would be a matter for the police force for the area concerned, in conjunction as appropriate with the Department of Trade and Industry and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise.

Christopher Stephen-Martin

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the application of Metropolitan Police Conditions of Service *(c)* Chapter 4.3,2 and *(b)* Chapter 4.3 annex C, subsections 1, 8, 9, and 13, to the disciplinary proceedings against Christopher Stephen-Martin. [57352]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that there are no disciplinary proceedings against Mr. Stephen-Martin at present. Also as an investigation into the allegations which have been made and to which this question relates is ongoing it would be inappropriate to comment upon the conduct of any possible disciplinary proceedings at this time.

CS Gas

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many CS gas cannisters are known to be missing from Metropolitan Police stocks; and if he will make a statement. [57444]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that 50 CS spray canisters are known to be missing from Metropolitan Police stocks. All losses of CS canisters are carefully investigated.

Yaba

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the level of use of the drug yaba in the UK. [57690]

Mr. Ainsworth: Those Home Office surveys that ask questions about drug use do not inquire about the consumption of the drug Methylamphetamine (or yaba). No estimate can therefore be provided on the level of use of this drug.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what evidence he has collated on whether the UK is being targeted by producers of the drug yaba from Far East Asia. [57686]

Mr. Ainsworth: Methylamphetamine (or yaba) is controlled as a Class B drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. It is known to be produced in the United States, Europe and East Asia. We understand from the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) that there is no evidence to suggest that the United Kingdom (UK) is being specifically or significantly targeted by producers in East Asia although small quantities of crystal methylamphetamine has been intercepted from the Philippines. It is believed that most UK seizures are produced within Europe.

Greater Manchester Police

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 14 May 2002, ref. 41412, what his reasons were for funding that proportion of the additional costs for Greater Manchester Police as a result of the Commonwealth Games. [57465]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* We took into account the force information supporting the Manchester case, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary's recommendations and the financial circumstances of the Police Authority. Payment up to £5 million also takes account of the costs of the extra security element in the bid post 11 September.

Funds for special grant are limited and the conditions for consideration of special grant are known to the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Association of Police Authorities. Local Police Authorities must expect to make some contribution towards additional policing costs.

Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) of 6 November 2001, *Official Report,* column 175W, on the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, what progress has been made with the Government's review of section 24 of the Act; when he will announce his conclusions; and if he will make a statement. [57598]

Angela Eagle: Section 24 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 creates a criminal offence for the unauthorised disclosure of confidential information relating to the use of animals in scientific procedures by Home Office Ministers and officials, members of the Animal Procedures Committee and others appointed for specific purposes under the Act, other than for the purposes of carrying out functions under the Act. The maximum punishment is two years imprisonment. Following the enactment of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, all statutory bars to the disclosure of information are being reviewed, including section 24 of the 1986 Act.

For some time now the Government has taken the position that greater openness and transparency regarding the regulation and use of animals in scientific procedures is desirable, providing it does not jeopardise the safety of individual scientists and their establishments or their legitimate commercial and intellectual interests. I am continuing my consideration of how these commitments can best be met. I hope to make a decision on whether to repeal or amend section 24 by the summer.

Work-related Illness

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many employees in the *(a)* police force, *(b)* fire service and *(c)* prison service retired through work-related injury or ill-health in the last year for which records are available; and what the total cost to the Department was. [56064]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* There were 1,209 ill health retirements from the police service in 2000–01. I understand from the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions that there were 238 retirements due to work-related ill health from the fire service in 2000–01. This excludes Bedfordshire and Luton, and West Sussex brigades, for which data were not available. There were 221 ill-health retirements from the prison service in 2001–02.

Separate figures are not kept centrally for ill health retirements from the police and prison service which are specifically work-related. In none of the three services is information held centrally as to costs in the form requested. However, the cost in civil service pensions of the ill-health retirements from the prison service in 2001–02 was £4,196,348.

Antisocial Behaviour Orders

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders have been issued (1) in Lancashire in each year since their inception; [57279]

(2) been issued in Wales in each year since their inception. [57285]

Mr. Denham: Official statistics on the number of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBO) issued are based on quarterly returns received from Magistrates' Courts Committees (MCCs). Latest available information is given in the table.

Number of anti-social behaviour orders(1) issued within Lancashire and Wales from 1 April 1999 to 31 December 2001

Area/MCC	*Period*		
	1 Apr 99–31 Dec 00(2)	*1 Jan 01–31 Dec 01*	*Total*
Lancashire	10	7	17
Wales	2	5	7
Dyfed Powys	0	0	0
Gwent	0	2	2
North Wales	1	0	1
South Wales	1	3	4

(1) Introduced under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 on 1 April 1999.

(2) From 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000 information collected on the total number of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders issued by police force area only.

The requirement for further checks for completeness of information reported from MCCs is currently under review.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of antisocial behaviour orders; and if he will make a statement. [56234]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* The Home Office review of anti-social behaviour orders was published on 2 April 2002. This review found that ASBOs are being used successfully to reduce anti-social behaviour and increased public confidence in the partner agencies. The review also found that the use of ASBOs was not consistent between areas and the Government is taking a range of steps in the Police Reform Bill to make anti-social behaviour orders more effective. They include:

an interim order which will protect the community at the start of the court process.

allowing ASBOs to cover a wider geographical area which will remove the need for repeat applications.

allowing ASBOs to be made in county courts and on conviction in criminal courts and thereby reducing the number of times witnesses need to appear and avoiding the need for a separate court process.

When these measures come into force we will produce clear and practical guidance on the legislation and on obtaining ASBOs, including relevant case studies.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidences of *(a)* theft from vehicles, *(b)* armed robbery, *(c)* criminal damage, *(d)* common assault, *(e)* vehicle theft and *(f)* vandalism have been reported in each police area in Wales in each year since 1997. [58028]

Mr. Denham: The number of recorded crimes in each of these categories is given in the table, copies of which have been placed in the Library. Vandalism is included in the figures for criminal damage.

There was a change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998. Numbers of recorded crimes before and after this date may not be directly comparable.

It should be noted that recorded violent crime is subject to changes in reporting and recording. For example, the 2001 British Crime Survey found that, over England and Wales as a whole, reporting to the police of common assault rose from 29 per cent in 1999 to 39 per cent in the year 2000. Also, the British Crime Survey has shown that, in England and Wales as a whole, the number of common assaults recorded in the survey decreased by 14 per cent between the 1999 and 2000 calendar years, whereas common assaults recorded by the police increased by an estimated nine per cent. Common assaults recorded by the police may therefore not necessarily be a reflection of the real level of this offence.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the annual change in the major categories of criminal offences in *(a)* England, *(b)* each English Police Authority in each year since 1985–86; and if he will make a statement. [56222]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* Annual changes in the major categories of recorded crimes have been published in table 2.7 of successive editions of "Criminal Statistics England and Wales", which are available in the Library. This is with the exception of the year ending 1998–99, for which no estimate could be made owing to the change of counting rules for recorded crime which came into effect on 1 April 1998.

World Cup

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations are being made to other European Governments to ensure hooligans from other countries are stopped from travelling to the World Cup. [57536]

Mr. Denham: There is close liaison with the governments and police of European countries competing in the World Cup. England will have around 8,000 supporters in Japan for the first phase of the tournament, but other European countries will have much lower levels of support. Hooligans are not expected to feature among their number. It is for each country to determine whether the behaviour of its supporters warrants the introduction of measures to prevent hooligans from travelling to such tournaments. To date, only Germany has felt it necessary or appropriate to introduce measures comparable to those in place in England and Wales, though a number of European governments are currently reviewing their football-related legislation.

Demonstrations (Policing)

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 29 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 616W, if the guidance on policing of demonstrations issued to police forces by the Association of Chief Police Officers is in accordance with the report of the Metropolitan Police Directorate of Professional Standards arising out of last year's May Day demonstrations in London; and if he will make a statement. [57657]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that the Director of Professional Standards has not compiled a report arising out of last year's May Day demonstrations in London. Following consultation with the Police Complaints Authority, criteria were established by the Metropolitan Police to determine those complaints made against police tactics during the protests which were to be treated as a "direction and control issue", and considered by the Director of Professional Standards. In accordance with Section 67 (4) of the Police Act 1996 these are not recorded as complaints against police. Details of individual complaints are not published.

European Security

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy towards the Initiative of the Spanish Presidency on the setting up of a network of contact points of national authorities responsible for private security (2002/C42/09). [57865]

Mr. Ainsworth: There is currently some doubt as to whether this Initiative should properly be seen as a Third Pillar (Title VI TEU) measure or one designed to improve the operation of the European Single Market. The Spanish Presidency is at present redrafting the proposal to clarify these issues, and the Government will await sight of the new draft before forming an opinion.

Criminal Activity (Deprivation)

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the connection between criminal activity and indicators of deprivation. [56229]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* Work by the Home Office suggests that while many deprived areas do also have high crime rates a significant number do not and some deprived areas have in fact very low crime rates. 66 of the 88 Neighbourhood Renewal Fund areas are also in the top 88 for combined crime rates but 22 (i.e. quarter) are not and of those 22, seven have combined crime rates that are significantly lower than the mean for England. The areas with high deprivation but low crime rates are typified by long-established communities on estates in rural or semi-urban areas.

Conversely some local authorities with significant crime problems are not in the 88 most deprived areas. These are typically city centres or local commercial areas.

Some preliminary analysis has also been carried out using the Multiple Deprivation Index and the British Crime Survey. This suggests that there is a correlation between criminal activity and deprivation. However, the correlation varies significantly between crimes. Neither area of research examines the extent, if any, of causal links between the criminal activity and indicators of deprivation.

Volunteering

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to promote volunteering by older people. [58345]

Angela Eagle: The Home Office is funding the Experience Corps Company, £19.9 million over three years; to promote and encourage people aged 50 + to volunteer. The company can be contacted on 020 7620 0009.

Sikhs

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the status of Sikhs within the Statutory Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality. [57975]

Angela Eagle *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* Sikhs have the same status as all other ethnic and racial groups within the draft Statutory Code of Practice on the Duty to Promote Race Equality currently before Parliament.

Some Sikh organisations have argued that Sikhs should be monitored as a separate ethnic group rather than subsumed in one of the generic monitoring categories used in the 2001 Census. The fact that case law has established Sikhs as an ethnic group for the purposes of the Race Relations Act does not, of itself, justify different treatment from the many other ethnic and racial groups in the United Kingdom.

The draft statutory Code of Practice encourages authorities to use the same ethnic classification system as used in the 2001 Census, or categories that match them very closely. However, the draft statutory Code also recognises that authorities may choose to collect more detailed information to reflect local circumstances. Public authorities with significant Sikh populations in their area may opt to do this. Helpfully, demographic information about British Sikhs will be available for the first time from the results of the religious identity question in the 2001 Census due to be published next February.

European Police College

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress made towards the establishment of the European Police College. [57907]

Mr. Denham: The European Police College has a work programme for 2002, which will deliver up to 6,000 days of training to senior police officers, with strong participation by the United Kingdom (UK). Priorities include non-military crisis management, anti-terrorism, trafficking in human beings and border control. The first phases of the European Police Knowledge Net have now been implemented. In the absence of a decision by the Council on a permanent seat of the Secretariat of CEPOL, the Governing Board has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Danish National Commissioner of Police to locate temporarily the Secretariat in Copenhagen on the understanding that Denmark is not applying for the permanent seat. The UK continues to press for an early decision, and is still promoting its bid for Bramshill to host the Secretariat on a permanent basis. The post of Administrative Director has been filled on a temporary basis, until the permanent seat is decided, and the process of recruiting the Secretariat staff should commence shortly.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy towards the establishment of a European Institute of Police Studies (2002/C42/10); what the relationship is with the European Police College; what account he has taken of Recital 6 on expanding the role of the Institute; what plans exist to centralise the Institute after the initial period is complete; who will constitute the UK delegation to the governing board; for what reason external observers will attend; what manner of expert will attend board meetings; what manner of research activities will be excluded as ultra vires research; and for what reason socioeconomics and political processes will be included as areas of interest. [57866]

Mr. Denham: The Presidency proposal to establish a European Institute of Police Studies has been discussed in the Police Cooperation Working Group. In common with a number of other Member States, the United Kingdom has expressed its concern that the proposal, rather than helping to co-ordinate activity across existing European Union institutions, would actually overlap the activity of those institutions, most particularly the European Police College (CEPOL). The Presidency has now remitted the proposal to the CEPOL Governing Board asking how CEPOL could take forward the proposals. The matter is due to be discussed by the CEPOL Governing Board at its next meeting, at the end of May 2002.

Eurojust Officials

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the status of Eurojust officials with respect to immunities. [57906]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The status of national members of Eurojust is a matter for individual Member States and the United Kingdom member has diplomatic immunity. Under Article 30 of the Council Decision of 28 February 2002 establishing Eurojust, Eurojust staff have the same status as officials and other servants of the European Communities. This confers immunity from legal proceedings in respect of acts performed by them in their official capacity.

Drug Trafficking

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on planned expenditure in the UK under budget line B5-831, combating drug trafficking; and what role Europol will play therein. [57862]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: There are currently no existing or planned bids from United Kingdom authorities in respect of budget line B5-831, combating drug trafficking.

Europol

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the granting of immunities to Europol employees under 2002/C42/07, OJ C42 of 15 February. [57863]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Protocol under cover of the draft Council Act 2002/C42/07, OJ C42 of 15 February 2002 provides that Europol officials may participate in a support capacity in joint investigation teams (although they may not assist in any coercive measures related to arrest or detention).

It also provides that Europol officials shall not be granted immunities in relation to official acts undertaken while participating in joint investigation teams. Such officials would be treated as officials of the Member State of operation with respect to offences committed against them or by them. Europol would also be liable for any damage caused by them in accordance with the law of that Member State.

The Government fully supports these proposals.

Special Constables

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special constables were serving in *(a)* England and *(b)* each Police Authority in each year since 1980–81. [56225]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* Statistics are given in the table. There is no reliable data before 1990. From 1990 to 1995, statistics on the strength of the special constabulary in England and Wales were collected by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary. These were compiled at the end of the calendar year until 1993, and then for the financial year 1994–95. Since 1995, these statistics have been collected by the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate. They are compiled at the end of March and September each year.

Date	*No.*
December 1990	15,075
December 1991	17,543
December 1992	19,035
December 1993	20,573
March 1995	20,026
September 1995	19,655
September 1996	19,451
September 1997	19,163
September 1998	17,296
September 1999	15,727
September 2000	13,487
September 2001	12,068

Figures to March 1995 supplied by HMIC, figures from September 1995 supplied by Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary.

The government is committed to reversing this decline in numbers and achieving a stronger, increasingly professional special constabulary. Measures to achieve this include: A new headline role focusing on intelligence led patrolling and crime reduction initiatives; a new national foundation training package for special constables; joint Home Office/The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) good practice guidance covering recruitment, management and deployment of specials; new conditions of service and conduct regulations.

In January 2002 we ran a press campaign targeting Specials as part of the national recruitment campaign for the regular Police Service. And as my right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) also announced at the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) last week, we will also be working with employers to encourage them to support employees who are specials—in particular by giving them extra paid leave to carry out their police duties

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his estimate is of the average hours worked by special constables in England for the latest period for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [56226]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* Data on the average number of hours worked by special constables is not available.

The government is committed to achieving a stronger, increasingly professional special constabulary. Measures to achieve this would include: A new headline role focusing on intelligence led patrolling and crime reduction initiatives; a new national foundation training package for special constables; joint Home Office/The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) good practice guidance covering recruitment, management and deployment of specials; new conditions of service and conduct regulations and better management information.

In January 2002 we ran a press campaign targeting Specials as part of the national recruitment campaign for the regular Police Service. And as my right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) also announced at the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) last week, we will also be working with employers to encourage them to support employees who are specials—in particular by giving them extra paid leave to carry out their police duties.

Speed Limits

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make 20 mph speed limits enforceable by the police with fixed penalty notices; and if he will make a statement. [56600]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* 20 mph speed limits are already enforceable by the police with fixed penalty notices.

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) issued publicly available guidelines on speed enforcement in February 2000. These suggest that normally a fixed penalty notice should be issued when, in a 20 mph zone, a driver's speed reaches 25 mph. The police will however, use their discretion to take account of the particular circumstances of any individual speeding offence.

20 mph speed limit zones are normally engineered by the use of road humps, chicanes, etc. to be predominantly self-enforcing.

Police Numbers

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of police officers in Avon and Somerset have been on long-term sick leave in each year since 1985–86. [56233]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* The information requested is only available from 1996–97. This is shown in the table. The number of officers on long-term sick leave is as recorded at 31 March for each year. Long-term sick leave is defined as continuous sickness absence of 28 days or more.

Year	*Police Officers on Long-term Sick Leave*	*Average Number of Police Officers*	*Proportion of Police Officers on Long-term Sick Leave (per cent)*
1996–97	285	3,001	9.5
1997–98	342	2,976	11.5
1998–99	59	3,012	2.0
1999–2002	53	2,992	1.8
2000–0	86	2,992	2.9

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there have been *(a)* in England and *(b)* in each police authority in each year since 1980–81. [56232]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* Police strength figures for each force for each year between 1980 and 1993 are published in the appendix to the Annual Reports of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary, copies of which are in the Library.

Table A sets out police strength between March 1981 and September 2001 in England. Table B sets out police strength for each force for each year between March 1994 and September 2001.

TABLE A

Police Numbers—England 1980–81 to 2001–02

Year (as at 31 March)	*Number of Police Officers*
1980–81	110,282
1981–82	112,197
1982–83	113,219
1983–84	113,299
1984–85	112,402
1985–86	113,052
1986–87	114,130
1987–88	115,947
1988–89	117,024
1989–90	118,759
1990–91	119,033
1991–92	119,099
1992–93	119,621
1993–94	119,365
1994–95	118,827
1995–96	118,405
1996–97	118,459
1997–98	118,091
1998–99	117,195
1999–2000	115,324
2000–01	116,440
2001–02 (30 September 2001)	117,835

TABLE B

Police Officer Strength in England (full-time equivalents and excluding secondments)

Police Force	*March 1994*	*March 1995*	*March 1996*	*March 1997*	*March 1998*	*March 1999*	*March 2000*	*March 2001*	*Sept. 2001*
Avon and Somerset	3,033	3,000	2,981	2,989	2,976	2,999	2,934	2,994	3,040
Bedfordshire	1,151	1,126	1,128	1,094	1,079	1,041	1,028	1,036	1,050
Cambridgeshire	1,263	1,261	1,238	1,302	1,291	1,274	1,237	1,296	1,350
Cheshire	1,902	1,932	1,998	2,046	2,042	2,071	2,011	2,002	2,021
Cleveland	1,429	1,438	1,420	1,459	1,483	1,416	1,404	1,407	1,434
Cumbria	1,174	1,167	1,115	1,144	1,164	1,126	1,084	1,048	1,075
Derbyshire	1,820	1,797	1,763	1,791	1,772	1,759	1,777	1,823	1,851
Devon and Cornwall	2,914	2,877	2,899	2,865	2,962	2,887	2,841	2,934	2,972
Dorset	1,297	1,288	1,263	1,284	1,310	1,279	1,306	1,354	1,360
Durham	1,383	1,353	1,401	1,461	1,515	1,568	1,558	1,595	1,600
Essex*	2,937	2,921	2,884	2,961	2,928	2,891	2,806	2,897	2,937
Gloucestershire	1,159	1,163	1,133	1,133	1,104	1,104	1,114	1,173	1,169
Greater Manchester	6,967	7,037	6,938	6,922	6,949	6,810	6,795	6,909	7,036
Hampshire	3,270	3,256	3,347	3,452	3,490	3,473	3,419	3,438	3,449
Hertfordshire*	1,682	1,703	1,712	1,759	1,740	1,724	1,767	1,922	1,843
Humberside	2,039	2,029	2,041	2,045	2,021	1,974	1,932	1,917	1,991
Kent	3,145	3,117	3,120	3,260	3,251	3,201	3,204	3,319	3,367
Lancashire	3,170	3,212	3,171	3,247	3,257	3,245	3,179	3,255	3,288
Leicestershire	1,825	1,839	1,908	1,949	1,983	1,993	1,993	2,032	2,062
Lincolnshire	1,205	1,199	1,145	1,196	1,191	1,140	1,115	1,202	1,184
London, City of	893	885	869	859	825	778	732	703	699
Merseyside	4,693	4,659	4,411	4,230	4,216	4,211	4,085	4,081	4,095
Metropolitan Police*	27,699	27,480	27,343	26,677	26,094	26,073	25,485	24,878	25,374
Norfolk	1,447	1,359	1,401	1,432	1,430	1,381	1,381	1,420	1,436
North Yorkshire	1,318	1,300	1,324	1,338	1,367	1,337	1,283	1,305	1,390
Northamptonshire	1,170	1,156	1,153	1,177	1,169	1,137	1,117	1,157	1,180
Northumbria	3,598	3,606	3,668	3,677	3,769	3,840	3,788	3,857	3,893
Nottinghamshire	2,328	2,319	2,318	2,323	2,323	2,225	2,204	2,275	2,273
South Yorkshire	3,023	3,040	3,073	3,159	3,182	3,168	3,163	3,197	3,223
Staffordshire	2,208	2,231	2,209	2,211	2,292	2,238	2,170	2,129	2,119
Suffolk	1,208	1,191	1,138	1,180	1,186	1,190	1,145	1,133	1,146
Surrey*	1,669	1,676	1,644	1,620	1,608	1,662	1,785	2,066	2,018
Sussex	3,009	2,931	3,074	3,085	2,996	2,847	2,822	2,855	2,837
Thames Valley	3,908	3,854	3,674	3,695	3,776	3,748	3,740	3,703	3,708
Warwickshire	1,046	1,013	979	926	924	908	900	926	930
West Mercia	2,059	2,046	2,017	2,040	2,010	2,025	1,887	1,951	1,994
West Midlands	7,014	7,019	7,145	7,113	7,156	7,321	7,194	7,423	7,432
West Yorkshire	5,046	5,050	5,142	5,209	5,155	4,982	4,822	4,815	4,859
Wiltshire	1,264	1,261	1,218	1,154	1,156	1,151	1,118	1,120	1,152
Total England	119,365	118,827	118,405	118,459	118,138	117,195	115,324	116,548	117,836

Notes:

This table contains full-time equivalent figures that have been rounded to the nearest whole number. Because of rounding, there may be an apparent discrepancy between totals and the sums of the constituent items.

It does not include officers on secondment to NCS/NCIS and their predecessors or to any central service organisation. This is because it is not possible to differentiate between English and Welsh police officers on secondment from Home Office records.

* These forces have been affected by the boundary changes which took place in April 2000.

Illegal Drugs

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what co-operation is in place between his Department and the police service in Jamaica to reduce the amount of illegal drugs being smuggled into the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [56534]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding Answer 21 May 2002]:* I had discussions with the Minister of National Security and the Commissioner of the Jamaica Constabulary Force during my visit to Jamaica in April 2002. There is already close co-operation between the Jamaica

Constabulary Force and the law enforcement authorities in this country and work is in hand to make that co-operation more effective in reducing the volume of drugs being trafficked to the United Kingdom from Jamaica.

My right hon. Friend, the Minister for the Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Boateng) signed a memorandum of understanding with the Jamaican Government on 22 May. The memorandum provides a number of measures designed to stem the flow of cocaine into United Kingdom on flights from Jamaica.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 10 June 2002

WALES

Craig Goch Reservoir

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what representations he has received regarding the proposed expansion of the Craig Goch reservoir in the Elan valley; and if he will make a statement; [58056]

(2) what discussions he has had with members of the National Assembly for Wales and the Welsh Assembly Government, regarding proposals for the expansion of the Craig Goch reservoir in the Elan valley; [58055]

(3) what representations he has *(a)* made to and *(b)* received from the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs regarding the proposed expansion of the Craig Goch reservoir in the Elan valley. [58059]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None. I understand no proposal has been put forward by Severn Trent, or any other water company, to the Environment Agency, or the National Assembly for Wales, in relation to the enlargement of Craig Goch reservoir.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what proportion of ordinary written questions for his Department were answered within a week of tabling in each month since June 2001; and what proportion of questions for named day received a substantive answer on that day in each month since June 2001. [58985]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The information requested is as follows.

Written questions answered within five days of the tabled date		*Named day questions answered on that date*	
Month	*Percentage*	*Month*	*Percentage*
June 2001	100	—	—
July 2001	100	—	—
October 2001	63	October	100
November 2001	64	November	100
December 2001	86	December	89
January 2002	50	January	30
February 2002	29	February	33
March 2002	66	March	64
April 2002	55	April	93

Departmental Sponsors

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the duties are of hon. Members appointed as sponsors to his Department; and what assistance is given by officials in his Department to them in carrying out these duties. [59985]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My Department has no sponsors.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales which hon. Members have been appointed as sponsors to his Department since 7 June 2001; and when each of them were appointed. [59972]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if his Department has a policy of not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age. [59585]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The Wales Office has no formal policy of not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age.

Since all the permanent civil servants in my Department are secondees, mainly from the National Assembly for Wales, account is taken of Assembly's retirement policy during the recruitment process; that is, staff are not employed beyond the age of 65.

Refurbishment Projects

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list the refurbishment projects that *(a)* are in progress and *(b)* will start within the next six months; and what action is being taken to ensure that these will procure certified timber. [59769]

Mr. Paul Murphy: None.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

WTO Agreement

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to discuss with EU colleagues research on the proposal to introduce a development box in the WTO agreement on agriculture. [59892]

Clare Short: The UK Government are due to discuss the research with EU colleagues over the coming months.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's policy on the proposal to introduce a development box in the WTO agreement on agriculture. [59893]

Clare Short: The UK is committed to measures aimed at helping poor countries to develop their economies and take a more active part in international trade. To this end, we are considering the special and differential treatment and development box proposals made by certain, so called "like-minded" developing countries in the WTO's Agriculture Committee. These proposals contain some interesting elements, including developing countries reducing tariffs more slowly, extension of the safeguard mechanism and maintaining the flexibilities for developing countries agreed in the Uruguay Round. We will actively consider these ideas in the context of the agriculture negotiations.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what research her Department has carried out on the proposal for introducing a development box in the WTO agreement on agriculture; and if she will make a statement. [59891]

Clare Short: A number of proposals have been made by developing countries in the WTO's Agriculture Special Session, to include Special and Differential Treatment or Development Box measures in the next agriculture agreement. My Department has commissioned independent analysis of these proposals. This is publicly available on the DFID website.

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to discuss with EU colleagues the findings of the research paper by Oxford Policy Management, commissioned by her Department, on the proposal for introducing a development box in the WTO agreement on agriculture. [60556]

Clare Short: The UK Government are due to discuss the research with EU colleagues over the coming months.

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what research her Department has carried out on the proposal for introducing a development box in the WTO agreement on agriculture. [60557]

Clare Short: A number of proposals have been made by developing countries in the WTO's Agriculture Special Session, to include Special and Differential Treatment or Development Box measures in the next agriculture agreement. My Department has commissioned independent analysis of these proposals. This is publicly available on the DFID website.

Burundi

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid her Department plans to make available to Burundi in the next five years. [60249]

Clare Short: My Department does not have a development programme in Burundi. We have hitherto concentrated on meeting urgent humanitarian need and on support for the peace process, including political efforts, support to the mediation efforts and the Special Protection Force, and some grass-roots peace-building efforts. We also have a programme on HIV/AIDS in Burundi.

We will devote more attention to the needs of Burundi in coming months, with the appointment of an official in the region to cover Burundi for DFID, based either in Bujumbura or, in the first instance, in Kigali. We are also working to ensure that the EC and IFIs re-engage effectively with Burundi to provide much needed assistance.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies have a policy of not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age. [59458]

Clare Short: My Department currently maintains a normal retiring age of 60 and it has not hitherto been the practice to recruit staff above the age at which existing staff are required to retire unless there were exceptional management reasons. However, this policy is currently under review in respect of those staff for whom DFID has delegated authority to determine the normal retiring age (that is, staff below the senior civil service).

Zimbabwe

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what measures have been taken to ensure that international aid is given to known MDC supporters as well as Zanu-PF supporters. [60408]

Clare Short: We are doing all we can to try to prevent humanitarian relief being misused for political purposes in Zimbabwe. Programmes are operating in a number of areas badly affected by food shortages that could be described as both MDC and Zanu-PF dominated. Beneficiaries are selected on the basis of their vulnerability not their political views. All programmes are delivered by non-government organisations. Selection is undertaken at the grass roots level either by NGOs alone, or in local disaster committees including ward councillors and traditional headmen together with the NGOs. All claims that vulnerable people have been excluded from receiving assistance are investigated, whether they are from Zanu-PF or MDC supporters.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimates she has made of the number of children who have been moved from primary schools in Zimbabwe. [60171]

Clare Short: Zimbabwe has a good record in primary school access. Between 1979 and 1996 there was a more than 100 per cent. increase in the numbers of primary schools, and a 102 per cent. expansion in enrolment figures, with 2.49 million children in school. We are concerned that food shortages and economic pressures may be eroding these gains.

DFID has targeted school children in its supplementary feeding programmes. Since September 2001 we have provided one meal a day to over 200,000 primary school children. Monitoring shows that in the areas where our programmes are active, this has helped to increase enrolment.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what funds the Government have made available to the Zimbabwe Government to implement the land reform programme that complies with the principles established by the September 2001 Commonwealth Abuja Agreement and the 1998 international donors' conference on land reform. [60188]

Clare Short: The Government of Zimbabwe do not have a land reform programme that complies with either its undertakings given in the Abuja Agreement, or the principles agreed at the 1998 International Conference.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which organisations that assist evicted farm workers' families in Zimbabwe have *(a)* sought and *(b)* received assistance from (i) her Department and (ii) through international aid supported by Her Majesty's Government. [60170]

Clare Short: I will write to the hon. Member.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimates she has made of the extent to which the reported famine in Zimbabwe results *(a)* from natural causes and *(b)* from disruption of agriculture. [60172]

Clare Short: It is clear that drought has played a large part in the failure of the maize harvest this year. However, the Government of Zimbabwe's policy failures in mishandling food markets; agricultural prices; the exchange rate; and the chaotic land reform programme have also been much to blame, and continue to make matters worse. While it is not possible to attribute between causes with any accuracy, the UNDP estimate that maize production may have been 30 to 60 per cent. affected by land reform alone. The expected drop of at least 60 per cent. in wheat planting this season is almost entirely attributable to disruption of commercial farming activities and state control of prices and markets.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of ordinary written questions for her Department were answered within a week of tabling in each month since June 2001; and what proportion of questions for named day received a substantive answer on that day in each month since June 2001. [58981]

Clare Short: DFID aim to answer all written questions within a week of tabling, and all named day questions on the date specified. The information requested in the question is not easily accessible and would be available only with disproportionate effort.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much was spent by her Department on paying pensions to retired employees of her Department in 2001–02; if she will estimate the corresponding amounts to be spent in *(a)* five years' time, *(b)* 10 years' time, *(c)* 20 years' time and *(d)* 30 years' time; if she will estimate in each case the proportion of such liabilities which will arise from (i) unfunded pension schemes and (ii) pre-funded pension schemes; and in the case of pre-funded schemes, if she will estimate the value of the corresponding pre-funded funds in each of these years. [57362]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 561W.

Poverty Reduction

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the progress of the Africa trade and poverty programme; and what the UK Government's policy aims to assist poverty reduction are. [58569]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 16 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 752W.

Gujarat

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will offer assistance to the Indian Government to provide *(a)* general aid and *(b)* food supplies, to those made homeless in the recent disturbances in the Indian State of Gujarat and who are now living in refugee camps. [58383]

Clare Short: We continue to monitor the situation in Gujarat in co-ordination with the Government of India, international agencies and local partners.

The State Government of Gujarat has up until now refused the assistance of the international community but talks are on-going and we are hopeful that the limited support provided by UNICEF, WHO and international NGOs will soon be increased.

Performance Targets

Tony Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the performance targets that her Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies are required to meet, apart from those set out in the public service agreements for 1999 to 2002 and 2001 to 2004; and if she will specify for each target *(a)* who sets it and *(b)* who monitors achievement against it. [60473]

Clare Short: My Department's performance targets are fully set out in our PSAs for 1999–02 and 2001–04. Progress against these PSAs is reported on annually in DFID's departmental report.

DFID is currently responsible for three non-departmental public bodies:

Commonwealth Scholarship Commission
Crown Agents Holding and Realisation Board
Overseas Service Pensions Scheme Advisory Board.

As none of these bodies employs any staff or has any facilities, the only targets that they are required to meet are the Government's targets on equal opportunities for public appointments. These are set by the Cabinet Office and reported on annually. Full details can be found in "Public Bodies: Opening Up Public Appointments 2002–05" which is readily available in the Library of the House.

Great Lakes

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what help she provides to assist the development of primary education in the Great Lakes Region. [60247]

Clare Short: Since 1998 we have committed over £100 million to help develop and improve the education sectors in Uganda and Rwanda, with particular emphasis on primary education. Both Uganda and Rwanda have made significant achievements and are on track to achieve the International Development Target of Universal Primary Education (UPE) by 2015.

We do not provide direct assistance to education programmes in the other Great Lakes countries, where our main focus is on supporting the peace process and providing humanitarian aid. Full scale development efforts are impossible in countries still in conflict. As progress is made in resolving the conflicts in Burundi and DRC rebuilding the education system will be an important issue and we will look for early opportunities to encourage the IFIs (particularly the EU) to provide effective support for education in these countries. We will also look at the UK's bilateral role in rebuilding these countries.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what funding her Department has allocated in 2002–03 for projects in the Democratic Republic of Congo; and if she will list them. [60248]

Clare Short: My Department has allocated more than £11 million for work in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2002–03. Much of this is to meet urgent humanitarian needs and we expect to make contributions to ICRC and UN appeals. Other sums have been designated for support to different aspects of the Peace Process, including supporting the World bank regional demobilisation programme, and grassroots peace-building initiatives. Expenditure to meet humanitarian need and aspects of the peace process is incurred at very short notice and it is not possible to list projects in advance.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the President of the Council on how many occasions between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [58727]

Mr. Robin Cook: During the specified period, one departmental special adviser travelled abroad in an official capacity. He went to Dublin in October 2001 to visit Dáil Éireann in order to explore their proposals for reforming their Chamber. The total cost of this visit was £348.13.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the President of the Council what proportion of ordinary written questions for his Department were answered within a week of tabling in each month since June 2001; and what proportion of questions for named day received a substantive answer on that day in each month since June 2001. [58991]

Mr. Robin Cook: The information requested is as follows:

Percentage

Month	*Ordinary written questions answered within one week*	*Named day questions answered substantively on that day*
2001		
June	100	[1]—
July	100	100
Oct	100	100
November	75	100
December	78	90
2002		
January	58	100
February	75	100
March	65	100
April	78	100
May	100	100

[1] None tabled

Joint Committee on the Communications Bill

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Council how many e-mail responses have been received by the mediator of the pre-legislative scrutiny regarding the Joint Committee on the Communications Bill's first session of evidence taking; how they have been acknowledged; and if he will make a statement on how successful the pilot has been. [60064]

Mr. Robin Cook: This is a matter for the Joint Committee, not the Government.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Sentence Referrals

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Solicitor-General what assessment she has made of the system for seeking to have sentences reviewed on the grounds of undue lenience. [53446]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 2 May 2002]:* The Attorney-General and I have considered closely the current system and agree with the assessment of Sir Robin Auld in his "Review of the Criminal Courts of England and Wales" that on the whole the procedure appears to be working well. However, we will keep the system under review at all times.

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Solicitor-General what steps her Department has taken to ensure that victims of crime and other interested parties are routinely informed of the procedures and timescale for requesting that a sentence be referred to the Court of Appeal on the grounds of undue lenience. [53395]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 2 May 2002]:* Sections 35 and 36 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 provide that the Law Officers may refer sentences passed in the Crown Court for a limited range of serious offences to the Court of Appeal for review if it appears to the Law Officer that the sentence passed is unduly lenient. The Law Officers must give notice to the Registrar of Criminal Appeals of an application for leave to refer within 28 days from the day on which the sentence was passed. This time limit is fixed by statute and cannot be extended.

It is most often the relevant prosecuting authority, such as the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), the Serious Fraud Office, etc., that gives consideration as to whether the sentence passed in a particular case is so lenient that the matter should be brought to the attention of the Law Officers, for consideration of a referral to the Court of Appeal as an unduly lenient sentence.

In addition, both the Law Officers and the CPS receive complaints from victims of crime, Members of Parliament, members of the public, through the media or otherwise that particular sentences passed were lenient. If, in response to such a complaint, the CPS decides that the sentence does not merit submitting the matter to the Law Officers for consideration it will write to the complainant to complain direct to the Law Officers.

Complaints received by the Law Officers are considered in person by a Law Officer, often with advice from counsel experienced in sentencing law. A reply explaining the Law Officer's decision whether or not to refer the case to the Court of Appeal will be sent to the correspondent.

Since 1988 the CPS, being the principal prosecuting authority in England and Wales and responsible for the vast majority of prosecutions brought before the courts, has identified a substantial number of suitable cases to submit to the Law Officers for consideration of a reference. Advocates acting for the CPS in the Crown Court are instructed to consider whether sentences passed should be submitted to the Law Officers for consideration of a reference.

Experience suggests that victims who are at court at the time of sentencing and who are concerned about the sentence passed will express that concern to the police or prosecution representatives who would be expected to explain the options that may be available in taking those concerns forward.

Under the victim's charter the police have a responsibility for advising victims of the outcome of cases. CPS prosecutors will often advise victims of the case outcome in cases where there is a pre-existing line of communication between the CPS and the victim.

In addition, since 1988 there have been many references to the Court of Appeal, a large proportion of which result in sentences being increased and often receiving national and local media coverage.

DEFENCE

Military Spectrum (Spare Capacity)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the spare capacity in the military spectrum for commercial use; and if he has valued that spare capacity. [14420]

Mr. Ingram: I assume that this question refers to commercial use of the electromagnetic spectrum.

We work closely with the Radiocommunications Agency to assess continuously where spare capacity can be made available for new commercial services from within the radio spectrum that is managed by the Ministry of Defence to meet current and planned operational and training commitments.

The Ministry is currently engaged in releasing the majority of the 410 to 430 MHz band for use by digital public mobile radio services. The value placed on the spectrum already released to the Radiocommunications Agency is £3.5 million per annum. The remainder should be released in 2003 and has a current value of £4.3 million per annum. About 36 MHz of currently MOD managed spectrum is also to be made available for the extension of the 800/900 MHz bands for digital mobile phones and other digital personal mobile radio services. This would be valued at £4.3 million per annum. Spectrum for fixed wireless services in the 3.4 GHz band has very recently been released, with a value of £80,000 per annum. These valuations are based on current spectrum charges that apply equally to civil and military users.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason he has not answered the question from the hon. Member for Buckingham tabled on 12 November 2001 asking what assessment he has made of the spare capacity in the military spectrum for commercial use; and if he has valued that spare capacity. [47793]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I replied to the hon. Member today.

Defence Medical Services (Afghanistan)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which *(a)* regular and *(b)* reserve personnel of the Defence Medical Services broken down by specialty have been deployed to Afghanistan in support of (i) Operation Fingal and (ii) Operation Jacuna; what percentage of UK forces deployed on each operation this represents; and if he will make a statement. [51422]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 24 April 2002]:* The details of the personnel from the Defence Medical Services (DMS) deployed in Afghanistan are contained in the table. The majority of these personnel are members of 34 Field Hospital, which serves all United Kingdom personnel in Afghanistan, although 59 are dedicated to Operation Fingal. DMS personnel account for between 6 and 7 per cent. of the total UK forces in Afghanistan.

Speciality	*Regular*	*Reserve*	*Total*
Staff Officer	6	—	6
Surgeon	4	—	4
Consultant Accident and Emergency	2	—	2
Consultant Anaesthetist	4	1	5
Consultant Physician	1	—	1
Medical Officer	15	—	15
Registered General Nurse	39	2	41
Combat Medical Technician	30	—	30
Medical Assistants	19	—	19
Health Care Assistant	4	—	4
Operating Department Practitioner	10	—	10
Dental Officer	3	—	3
Dental Surgery Assistant	2	—	2
Environmental Health Officer	1	—	1
Environmental Health Technician	5	—	5
Radiographer	2	—	2
Laboratory Technician	2	—	2
Pharmacy Technician	2	—	2
Physiotherapist	2	—	2
Community Psychiatric Nurse	4	—	4
Others	11	—	11
Total	168	3	171

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what arrangements exist for the medical treatment of UK personnel undertaking *(a)* Operation Fingal and *(b)* Operation Jacuna, stating in each case the level of support from (i) the UK Defence Medical Services in Afghanistan, (ii) the Defence Medical Services of other nations deployed in Afghanistan, (iii) medical services based in the UK and (iv) medical services based in other countries; and if he will make a statement. [51423]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 24 April 2002]:* There is a robust medical infrastructure in place to support United Kingdom forces in Afghanistan. Primary health care facilities are available at the unit level and are supported by 34 Field Hospital at Bagram airfield.

Where individuals require evacuation from theatre they are moved using tactical and strategic RAF aeromedical evacuation assets to a UK field hospital in the region and then on to the Centre for Defence Medicine, in Birmingham or other specialist hospitals in the UK, as required.

As a means of making sensible use of international medical facilities in Afghanistan, UK forces deployed in the country may also use the Czech Field Hospital. UK personnel serving with the International Security Assistance Force may additionally have access to the German Field Hospital and French Dressing Station in Kabul. German and French tactical aeromedical aircraft are also available for evacuation from Afghanistan. In certain circumstances, the United States may provide medical care or aeromedical assistance to Operation Jacana forces.

Other nations may also make their medical facilities available to us from time to time.

Private Sector Hospitals

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions the MOD has contracted private sector hospitals to provide medical services in each of the last 12 months; and what the total cost to the MOD budget of contracting private sector hospitals to provide medical services was in each of the last five years. [53870]

Dr. Moonie: Figures are not readily available which break down the numbers of referrals made to private sector health care in each of the past 12 months. The cost to the Ministry of Defence budget of contracting private sector hospitals to provide medical services in each of the last five years is as follows:

£ million

Financial Year	*Cost*
1997–98	0.19
1998–99	0.12
1999–2000	0.17
2000–01	3.05
2001–02	1.88
Total	5.41

The referrals were made to a number of private sector health care providers, under a number of separate schemes.

Correspondence

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answers of 19 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 343W and 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1462W, on correspondence, when he intends to provide a substantive reply. [56605]

Dr. Moonie: I wrote to the hon. Member on 15 May. A copy of my letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many letters were received by each Minister in his Department in each month since June 1997. [59316]

Dr. Moonie: The Cabinet Office, on an annual basis, publishes a report to Parliament on the volume of Members' correspondence received by Departments. The report for 2001 was published on Friday 24 May 2002, *Official Report,* columns 674–76W. Copies of previous reports are available in the Library of the House.

Details of other correspondence received by Ministers is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Medical Categories (Armed Services)

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 8 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 181W, if he will list the medical categories used by the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Royal Navy and *(c)* RAF; and if he will make a statement. [56170]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 15 May 2002]:* The medical condition of personnel in the Royal Navy, the Army and the Royal Air Force is assessed on the basis of a common set of medical categories which range from P2 to P8. A holding category of P0 may also be used for individuals who are in hospital or on hospital sick leave. From this medical grading category each service applies a system of employment categorisation related to its particular operational environment to ensure that individuals are not employed on duties for which they are medically unfit. In all three tables, category refers to their medical category and PES/MES refers to their employment category.

Royal Navy

The main concern of the Royal Navy is to ensure that individuals are fit to deploy to sea. The following table summarises the system used:

Category	*Definition*
P0	Holding category—used when the individual is either in hospital or on hospital sick leave.
P2	Fit for world wide service without restriction.
P2U3	Leadership course restriction only—otherwise fit for world wide service without restriction.
P2L3	Leadership course restriction only—otherwise fit for world wide service without restriction.
P3R	Fit for world wide service, which may include sea service, but with a specific caveat, eg no small ships due to sea sickness.
P3P	Fit for world wide service, which may include sea service, but with a specific caveat, eg no small ships due to sea sickness.
P7RA	UK service only. Ship in harbour or shore service only. Fully employable ashore or in ship in harbour in own trade/skills.
P7RB	UK service only. Ship in harbour or shore service only. Fully employable ashore in own trade/skills.
P7RC	UK service only. Ship in harbour or shore service only. Employable in restricted duty ashore or in ship in harbour in own trade/skills.
P7RD	UK service only. Ship in harbour or shore service only. Employable in restricted duties ashore only.
P8	Permanently unfit naval service.

Categories suffixed "R" are temporary categories. Categories suffixed "P" are permanent categories.

Personnel designated "P8" will remain on naval strength for a variable period of time following boarding depending on entitlement to leave etc.

Army

In areas of active operation, the combat zone is referred to as the forward area (F). Between the forward area and the base area are the lines of communication (L). PES is PULHHEEMS employment standard.

Category P grade	*PES*	*Definition*
P2	FE (Forward everywhere)	Employable in full combatant duties (in any area) in any part of the world.
P3	LE (Lines of Communication everywhere)	Normally employed in the line of communication in or behind A2 echelon or base in any part of the world, but may be employed in a combat zone in any role which is not primarily a fighting one. (Clearance is required from a medical officer prior to deployment to an operational area).
P3	RE(PP)	Pregnant personnel.
P7	CPND—(Geo) (Caveated Posting Non-Deployable)	An individual who is graded P7 and does not meet the criteria for PES LE may be posted to areas in addition to those listed against HO by the APC, having taken advice from the Army Occupational Health Physician APC, to a unit in a specified geographical area but may not deploy from that geographical area without clearance from the Army Occupational Health Physician APC. On unit moves the CO is to obtain clearance from the APC before the individual changes location.
P7	HO (Home Only)	Employable in UK, Germany or Belgium or, Gurkha personnel, employable in Nepal, provided adequate and suitable medical facilities are available to treat the condition for which they have been downgraded.
P7	HO (UK)	Employable in the United Kingdom only.
P7	HONNI	Employable in UK, Germany or Belgium but not in Northern Ireland. Not applicable to R Irish (HS) personnel.
P7	HO(UK)NNI	Employable in UK only but not in Northern Ireland. Not applicable to R Irish (HS) personnel.
P8	None	Unit for military duties.

Royal Air Force

Although the primary role of the RAF is flying, most of its personnel are employed on non-flying duties. To indicate the duties on which an individual may be employed both in the air and on the ground, and the climates in which they are fit to service, each individual is assigned a medical employment standard (MES). The MES is indicated by the letters A, G and Z, relating to duties in the air, on the ground and in various geographical locations and climatic zones.

Fitness for duty in the air

Category P grade	*MES*	*Definition*
P2	A1	Fit for full flying duties of their branch/trade, or restricted employability only because of anthropometric limitations.
P2	A2	Fit for full flying duties of their branch/trade but awarded to aircrew who would be A1 but for: A refractive error. A hearing standard reduced to H2.
P2 or below	A3	Fit for limited flying duties (limitations to be stated).
P2 or below	A4	Fit to fly as a passenger in a normal passenger carrying aircraft or as a patient on an aeromedical evacuation flight.
P3 or below	A5	Unfit to be taken in to the air.
P8	A5	Unfit for service.

Fitness for duty on the ground

Category P grade	*MES*	*Definition*
P2	G1	Fit for full ground duties of their branch/trade, including all general service duties and meets the minimum profile for their branch/trade.
P2	G2	Fit for full ground duties of their branch/trade, including all general service duties but: Requires a medical marker. Does not meet minimum profile in their branch/trade. Has a limitation to non-essential duty.
P3 or below	G3	Fit for full ground duties of their branch/trade but fit for limited essential general service duties only.
Generally P7	G4	Fit for limited ground duties within their branch/trade.
P8	G5	Unfit for service.

Fitness to service in specific zones

Category	*MES*	*Definition*
P2	Z1	Fit to serve anywhere in the world with no climatic restriction.
P3	Z2	Fit to serve anywhere in the world except in environments of low temperature.
P3	Z3	Fit to serve anywhere in the world except in environments of high temperature.
P3	Z4	Fit to serve in temperate climates only.
P7	Z5	Fit to serve in UK only.

Strategic Sealift Service

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 24 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 259W, what discussions he had with ministerial colleagues regarding the financial and order book position of Cammell Laird prior to the announcement of AWSR Ltd. as preferred bidder for the Strategic Sealift Service on 26 October 2000. [56121]

Dr. Moonie: None.

Terrorist Attack (Emergency Services)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what *(a)* consultation he has had with and *(b)* guidelines he has issued to the emergency services about dealing with large-scale terrorist attacks; and if he will make a statement. [57354]

Dr. Moonie: The Home Office is the lead Department for dealing with terrorist attacks. The police have primacy in responding to incidents. The Ministry of Defence provides support.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many claims by ex-service men for pensions claimed as a result of ill health stemming from their service on *(a)* Christmas Island and *(b)* other nuclear test sites are outstanding; [57215]

(2) how many appeals by ex-service men against refusals of pensions as a result of health problems claimed to result from their service on *(a)* Christmas Island and *(b)* other nuclear test sites which have been appealed to the Pensions Appeal Tribunal since 1972 have been successful; and how many such awards have included an award backdated to the original application; [57219]

(3) how many ex-service men have been awarded pensions as a result of health problems resulting from their service on *(a)* Christmas Island and *(b)* other nuclear test sites; [57221]

(4) how many claims by ex-service men for pensions based on health problems claimed to result from their service on *(a)* Christmas Island and *(b)* other nuclear test sites have been (i) refused and (ii) appealed to the Pensions Appeal Tribunal within the last five years; [57220]

Dr. Moonie: It is not possible to provide the precise information requested on claims.

However, as at 16 May 2002, there were 21 claims to War Disablement Pension outstanding from ex-service men relating to service in the South Pacific (Christmas Island and the Malden Islands) and three from other nuclear test sites.

Records maintained since 1998 show 299 awards of pension in relation to service in the South Pacific and 33 to other nuclear test sites.

The information requested on appeals to the Pensions Appeal Tribunal is not available.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what target time scale he has for payment of backdated sums awarded by the Pensions Appeal Tribunal to ex-service men who have successfully appealed refusals of pensions claimed as a result of ill health stemming from their service on *(a)* Christmas Island and *(b)* other nuclear test sites; and how many awards have been paid within the target period. [57216]

Dr. Moonie: The Veterans Agency has a target of 15 working days in which to implement the decision of the Pensions Appeals Tribunal (PAT).

Statistics relating to clearance of awards following Pensions Appeal Tribunal decisions are not separately available for nuclear test veterans. However, figures are held relating to clearance of all cases following PAT decisions (successful and unsuccessful). Latest available figures show that of 3,204 cases cleared from April 2001 to December 2001, 2,679 were cleared within the 15-day target period.

Air Transport

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how far limitations on the use of C17s have been compensated for by the lease of heavy lift civilian aircraft; and what the costs have been for operations in *(a)* Afghanistan and *(b)* the Balkans. [58080]

Mr. Ingram: The sheer size of the operational deployment in Afghanistan, the lack of viable surface lines of communication into a land-locked country together with a very significant sustainment package has required the use of both the heavy lift Antonov and IL-76 civilian aircraft in parallel with the C-17, so that military and political timelines could be achieved.

The cost of heavy lift civilian aircraft for operations into Afghanistan chartered by the Ministry of Defence up to 31 May 2002 is £35 million. No such aircraft have been chartered for operations in the Balkans.

Flying Hours

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the NATO standard of flying hours per year per pilot is. [57804]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* I am withholding this information in accordance with Exemption 1a of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, which relates to defence.

HMS Albion

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when HMS Albion will enter into service with the Royal Navy. [57801]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* HMS Albion is expected to enter service in 2003. The exact date is under review with the company, BAES Marine.

Defence Medical Services

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the impact on spending on the Defence Medical Services of the Chancellor's recent announcement on NHS funding. [R] [57510]

Dr. Moonie: The recent announcement on NHS funding will have no direct impact on spending on the Defence Medical Services.

Land Mines

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what communications his Department has had with the Chemring Group in respect of the manufacture of fragmentation land mines; and if he will list the contracts with their respective values his Department has had each year since 1997 with the Chemring Group. [57980]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has not had any communications with the Chemring Group in respect of the manufacture of fragmentation land mines.

The Chemring Group of companies includes five separate groupings (Air/Land/Sea Countermeasures, Marine Safety, Defence Pyrotechnics, PW (Australia) and Aerospace Wiring Harness). The number and annual value of contracts placed by the MOD with the Chemring Group since 1997 are as follows:

	Number of contracts	*Approximate value (£ million)*
1997	13	23.8
1998	14	9.5
1999	13	11.4
2000	8	2.4
2001	13	11.5
Total	61	58.6

The kinds of equipment these contracts relate to range from Countermeasures, Pyrotechnics, Obscurant Smokes, and Signalling/Distress Flares through to Simulators for Training.

Former Royal Navy Vessels

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from the Canadian Government on the state of purchased former RN submarines; what the cost was of estimated repairs; what the recommended cost was of maintaining these submarines in mothballs; what the actual cost was; what assessment he has made of the operational readiness of other mothballed assets; and if he will make a statement. [58771]

Dr. Moonie: Ministry of Defence officials have not received any representations from the Canadian Government about the condition of the two ex Upholder Class submarines handed over to Canada, and as such have no information about the cost of repairs. Mothballing is not a term that is recognised. Assets are held following decommissioning for possible sale to other friendly and allied Governments. These assets are not operationally ready and they are not declared in our declared force levels. To maintain these assets prior to sale, the minimum amount of maintenance is performed on them to keep them seaworthy and safe.

The cost of maintaining the Upholder Class submarines before their reactivation is commercially sensitive and I am withholding the information in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to preserve serving *(a)* aircraft carriers and *(b)* landing craft platforms for the nation; and if he will establish such as the basis for a museum. [58774]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has no plans to preserve any of the current serving aircraft carriers as a museum when they are taken out of service. Similarly there are no such plans for the Landing Platform Dock (Assault) ships HMS Intrepid and HMS Fearless which were withdrawn from service in July 2001 and March 2002 respectively. As normal practice, ex-service assets are disposed of to maximise the receipt to the taxpayer. While the Ministry of Defence is supportive of work carried out by military museums, the preservation of ships is mainly carried out by charitable trusts.

Territorial Army

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the strength is of the Territorial Army in Scotland; and what the MOD is doing to recruit more soldiers into the TA. [58565]

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has to encourage recruitment to the Territorial Army. [58866]

Dr. Moonie: The strength of the Territorial Army (TA) in Scotland as at 30 April is as follows:

	Number
Officers	474
Other ranks	4,190
Total	4,664

As I said in my answer on 9 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 828W, to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), the current strength of the TA, including those mobilised on operations and on full-time reserve service, almost exactly matches the overall target size of the TA set as a result of the Strategic Defence Review. It is, therefore, in good shape, although there are some specific areas where numbers fall short of target, most notably the Army Medical Service (TA). The "Time to get fitTA" awareness campaign launched in December last year received a good response, although the overall effectiveness of the campaign will not be known until the new figures come out later this year. The annual National Recruiting Campaign which concluded on 18 May with TA Day, and a further Regional Recruiting Campaign to be launched in the autumn, are excellent opportunities for the general public to find out more about the TA. The aim of these campaigns is to keep the TA in its currently healthy state and under current plans they will continue to be a significant feature of the TA recruiting operation.

Angola

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what assistance his Department has *(a)* offered and *(b)* given to the Government and armed forces of Angola with regard to the planned integration of the UNITA rebel forces into the regular army; and if he will make a statement; [58907]

(2) what assistance his Department has *(a)* offered and *(b)* given to the Government and armed forces of Angola (i) from April 2000 to April 2002 and (ii) since April 2002; and if he will make a statement. [58911]

Mr. Ingram: The assistance the Ministry of Defence provides to Governments and armed forces overseas is co-ordinated closely with that provided by other Government Departments. In the case of Angola, no assistance has been offered or given by MOD to the Government and armed forces, either during the time frame in question or in support of the planned integration of UNITA forces. However, Her Majesty's Government remain in close contact with the Angolan Government, the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative for Africa, and international partners, and have offered to the Government of Angola an opportunity to visit Sierra Leone to see at first hand the challenges of integrating ex-combatants. MOD will, of course, be involved as appropriate with this initiative, should it go ahead.

Regional Organisation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what regional organisation his Department has; and if he will list the counties and unitary authorities in each region in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002; [58950]

(2) which of the agencies and NDPBs sponsored by his Department have a regional organisation; and if he will list the counties and unitary authorities in each region in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002. [58951]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

BioReliance

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what purpose officials from his Department visited BioReliance in Stirling at the end of 2001; what other organisations were visited on the same basis; and on what dates these visits took place. [57314]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* During November and December 2001 representatives from Dstl Porton Down and the Medical Supplies Agency visited the facilities of the following biotechnology companies to discuss the procurement of a vaccine against smallpox: Excel Biotech on 12 November 2001, Q1 Biotech on 3 December 2001, BioReliance on 4 December 2001 and Powderject on 7 December 2001. In addition to these visits they also had discussions in London with Bavarian Nordic on 30 November 2001 and Acambis on 19 December 2001.

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many press releases have been issued by his Department in each month of 2002. [59486]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is in the following table:

Month	*Year*	*Press Releases*
January	2002	17
February	2002	20
March	2002	22
April	2002	17
May	[1]2002	09

[1] Information to 27 May only

The figures relate only to those Press Releases issued by the Ministry of Defence's central Press Office. In addition to these, the single Services, the regional defence press offices and Defence Agencies also issue Press Releases. They also reissue some central Press Notices for local distribution. Accurate figures on these, which take account of any "duplicate releases", could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many press releases were issued by his Department *(a)* in each month between May and December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [59485]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is in the following tables:

Press releases issued from May to December 1997:

1997	*Press releases*
May	13
June	13
July	23
August	7
September	23
October	34
November	28
December	35

Press releases issued from 1998 to 2001 inclusive:

	Press releases
1998	202
1999	276
2000	238
2001	150

These figures relate only to those press releases issued by the Ministry of Defence's central press office. In addition to these, the single services, the regional defence press offices and defence agencies issue their own press notices. They also re-issue some central press notices for local distribution. Accurate figures on these, which take account of any "duplicate releases", could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Skill Force

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the pilot Skill Force scheme. [59196]

Dr. Moonie: The Skill Force scheme forms part of the Ministry of Defence's contribution to our wider Government social exclusion policies. The initiative aims to prevent young people from feeling long-term disaffection with school and society. It is currently being piloted in 11 areas and in 47 schools in England and Scotland. Discussions are currently being held with a view to extending the pilot to Wales.

A feature of the scheme is the use of recently retired service personnel as instructors for selected children in years 10 and 11 in a number of state secondary schools; and this has proved very effective. Skill Force emphasises instruction in vocational subjects with the aim of acquiring the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation

Network modular vocational award at bronze/silver level. Participants also take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award; St. John's Ambulance Young Life Saver's award and the OCR First Certificate in Preparation for Employment. The Skill Force scheme is funded by MOD, Department for Education and Skills (DfES), HM Treasury's Invest to Save Budget and local partners.

An integral part of the Skill Force pilot scheme has been rigorous and independent evaluation by the British Market Research Bureau. The most recent evaluation report, based on the two original schemes that started in September 2000 in Newcastle and Norfolk, has been completed. The report has shown that Skill Force has helped to maintain attendance rates of over 90 per cent. among children who would otherwise have been expected to display sharply declining attendance, sometimes leading to exclusion, through years 10 and 11. Exclusions from these schools have been reduced by 72 per cent. compared with those predicted by the head teachers at the start of the scheme.

The Skill Force initiative has been supported by DfES from the outset, with the Invest to Save Budget bid being made jointly by the MOD, Home Office and DfES. In response to the Government's Street Crime Initiative, Skill Force is one of the schemes 11 local education authorities have been invited to consider to help them to deliver part of DfES's Behaviour Improvement Programme. A decision from the London education authorities on whether they wish to use Skill Force is expected shortly.

Devonport

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if the Trident refit complex at Devonport, Plymouth has received all the necessary certificates from the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate; [59639]

(2) what the estimated total cost is to complete the Trident refit complex at Devonport, Plymouth. [59638]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 31 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 502W.

Urban Warfare

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what research programmes are being carried out by the Government *(a)* unilaterally and *(b)* in partnership with other Governments into the development of (i) non-lethal weapons and (ii) new techniques and equipment for use in urban warfare. [59726]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has few research programmes that specifically address non-lethal weapons. There are, however, a wider variety of research programmes that might be considered to contribute to non-lethal capabilities, details of which I am withholding under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. The MOD's main non-lethal weapon is the baton round which is employed in forces world wide.

Work into alternatives to baton rounds and a broader range of public order equipment is currently under way and is being led by the Northern Ireland Office. This is in response to recommendations in the Patten report and from the Association of Chief Police Officers, who are looking to enhance the police's range of less lethal weaponry.

On the question of international partnerships, the United Kingdom does not collaborate with any Government on non-lethal technologies. However, it does have information exchange agreements with both the US and our European partners. No research programmes in the fields of non-lethal weapons or new techniques and equipment for use in urban warfare are being carried out by the Ministry of Defence in partnership with foreign Governments.

On the development of techniques and equipment for use in urban warfare, it is not yet clear to what extent the UK will be involved in fighting in these areas in the future. We are, however, undertaking a number of studies into how existing and planned equipment and doctrine could be developed for use in an urban environment.

Basil Hill Barracks

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to dispose of the underground facilities at Basil Hill Barracks at Corsham. [59750]

Dr. Moonie: There are no current plans to dispose of the underground facilities at Basil Hill Barracks Corsham. However, the Ministry of Defence has commissioned an option study in connection with the landholdings, as part of the intention to rationalise site operations at Corsham.

Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if cadets at the RMA Sandhurst are to receive the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal. [60002]

Dr. Moonie: In accordance with the published qualifying criteria for the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal, if cadets at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst had completed at least five years qualifying service on 6 February 2002, the date of the 50th anniversary of the Queen's accession, they will receive the medal. While those cadets who have entered the Academy direct from full-time education will not qualify, those who have had previous non-commissioned military service, either as a regular or as a member of the Volunteer Reserve Forces, prior to entering Sandhurst may have completed sufficient qualifying service to receive the medal.

Management Consultants

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what projects have been undertaken by management consultants on behalf of his Department since 1997, stating in each case *(a)* the title of the project, *(b)* the contractor, *(c)* the value of the contract, *(d)* when the project started, *(e)* when the project was completed and *(f)* the outputs received by his Department. [60011]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Bullying

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many payments he has made in the past three years to members and former members of

HM armed forces in compensation for ill-treatment, bullying or harassment experienced while serving; and what the total cost was in each year. [59694]

Dr. Moonie: The number of claims settled and the total amounts paid in the past three years to members and former members of HM armed forces in compensation for ill-treatment, bullying or harassment experienced while serving are set out in the table:

	Bullying/ill treatment		*Sexual harassment*		*Racial harassment*	
	Claims settled	*Paid (£)*	*Claims settled*	*Paid (£)*	*Claims settled*	*Paid (£)*
1999–2000	9	34,533	6	49,165	17	132,373
2000–01	2	31.000	3	15,000	1	37,500
2001–02	0	0	1	50,000	1	20,000

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Special Investigation Branch investigations into bullying and harassment are in progress; and what regiments are involved. [59695]

Mr. Ingram: A total of six investigations, where bullying or harassment has been alleged, are in progress with the Royal Military Police Special Investigation Branch worldwide.

The units that are involved are:

School of Electrical and Aeronautical Engineering

23 Pioneer Regiment

Queens Royal Lancers

28 Engineer Regiment

26 Engineer Regiment.

Missing Firearms

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what conclusions he has reached following the RMP investigation into the theft of an automatic pistol from Grosvenor Barracks in February; what weapons have been reported missing from the Royal Irish Regiment in the past two years; how many disciplinary actions have been taken following *(a)* theft and *(b)* loss of firearms; and what the outcome was in each case. [59698]

Mr. Ingram: The investigation into the loss of a pistol from Grosvenor Barracks, Enniskillen on 8 March 2002 is still going on. There are no other reports of any weapons missing from the Royal Irish Regiment armouries in Northern Ireland over the last two years. I am withholding details of the result of internal investigations or any resultant disciplinary action in accordance with Exemption 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Initiation Rites

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress he has made in halting degrading and demeaning initiation rites and ceremonies in HM armed forces; and in what regiments these practices are known to persist. [59696]

Mr. Ingram: If any degrading or demeaning initiation ceremonies were found to exist they would be dealt with swiftly. It is made routinely clear to all armed forces personnel that forcing compliance with initiation rites is classed as bullying and is quite unacceptable. The new armed forces diversity policy goal will aim to achieve an environment free from harassment, intimidation and unlawful discrimination, in which all have equal opportunity and encouragement to realise their full potential. This position is reinforced through single service values and standards and equal opportunities policies, and was reflected in the Armed Forces Code of Social Conduct issued to all personnel in January 2000, where clear guidance was given on what is considered inappropriate personal behaviour within the armed forces. All of these measures are, of course, regularly reviewed and reinforced as necessary.

Royal Regiment of Fusiliers

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and what proportion of members of the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers have applied to leave the regiment in the past two years. [59700]

Mr. Ingram: It is not possible to provide figures for 2nd Battalion of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers only as they are not recorded separately to the 1st Battalion. The figures shown in the table, therefore, represent both the 1st and 2nd Battalion Royal Regiment of Fusiliers.

	Outflow	
Financial Year	*Total*	*Percentage*
Soldiers		
2000–01	166	14.2
2001–02	146	13.4
Total	312	—
Officers		
2000–01	2	1.4
2001–02	7	4.7
Total	9	—

Howe Barracks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints have been received concerning the conduct of off duty RIR soldiers from the Howe Barracks in Kent; how many soldiers have been arrested and charged with drug-related offences; how many disciplinary actions have been taken in the barracks in the past two years; and what the outcome was in each case. [59699]

Mr. Ingram: There have been three cases of complaint involving off duty soldiers from the 1st Battalion The Royal Irish Regiment (1 R Irish) at Howe Barracks in the last two years. Within the same time frame, one soldier has been charged under the military system for possession of drugs and one soldier was arrested by the civil police, also for possession of drugs. There have been a total of 35 case of disciplinary action taken in the barracks in the past two years. The particulars of the cases are detailed as follows.

Offence	*Total return*	*Action taken*
Absence without leave (AWOL)[1]	21	One reduced in ranks One fined £350 19 given military detention from 07–50 days
Disobedience to standing order	1	Reprimand
Abusive behaviour	1	Fined £250
Threatening superior officer	1	Fined £200
Loss of ID card	1	Dismissed
Violent disorder	1	Referred to higher authority
Assault	1	Referred to higher authority
Drunkenness	1	Compensation to offended party
Theft	1	Military fine £280.41
Offering violence	1	Dismissed
Using threatening language	1	14 days detention
Battery	1	Dismissed
Conduct prejudice to good conduct and military discipline	2	Dismissed
Possession of controlled drug	1	42 days detention

[1] Personnel who have been absent for over 24 hours

This does not include minor offences, such as poor turnout or inadequate fitness, which are dealt with at company level.

Absence Without Leave

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence *(a)* how many and *(b)* what proportion of soldiers in each regiment of HM forces went absent without leave in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001; and what measures he plans to take in response. [59693]

Mr. Ingram: The total number of soldiers who went absent without leave (AWOL) over the last three years is as follows:

Year	*Total*
1999	2,077
2000	2,722
2001	2,662
Total	7,461

These figures represent those AWOL cases which were reported to the Royal Military Police (RMP) and are recorded on the database. The actual number of cases may differ to those recorded as some will have been dealt with at unit level where the absence was for a short period only.

It has not been possible to break the figures down by regiment as this information is not held centrally. The central database held by the RMP records total numbers only, therefore, a further breakdown by regiment could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

In an attempt to address the AWOL issue, the Army commenced a pilot scheme in September last year in London called "Reclaim Your Life". The aim of the scheme was to provide a bridge between the absentee and the Army by using a volunteer member of a service charity as an initial point of contact. It was thought that many absentees would be more prepared to return to their unit if they were better informed of the likely disciplinary consequences. This scheme is to be relaunched with greater publicity this year.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence *(a)* how many and *(b)* what proportion of soldiers going absent without leave in the last 12 months for which figures are available have alleged that they were victims of bullying or harassment; how many of these allegations led to disciplinary action against the perpetrators; and what the penalties were in each case. [59692]

Mr. Ingram: In the last 12 months, taken as January to December 2001, the figures for those personnel going absent without leave (AWOL) are shown in the table:

	Number
Total absentees	[1]2,662
Total returned to unit	[1]675
Total charged with AWOL-related offences	[2]129
Total alleging bullying as contributory factor	[2]9
Total alleging bullying as contributory factor	1.3 per cent.
Disciplinary action taken and penalties	[3]Nil return

[1] Figures provided by Central Criminal Records and Intelligence Office (CCRIO) at Chichester.

[2] Figures provided by Personal Services 2 (Army) Post Trials Section. Of these there are two recorded investigations by Royal Military Police but neither allegation was substantiated following investigation and therefore no prosecutions resulted.

[3] Bullying per se is not a recorded crime and any such offence would be recorded as Assault within CCRIO. It is difficult to filter the data to determine whether a service man who had returned from AWOL had alleged harassment since these issues would be recorded separately.

Departmental Sponsors

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) which hon. Members have been appointed as sponsors to his Department since 7 June 2001; and when each of them were appointed; [59962]

(2) what the duties are of hon. Members appointed as sponsors to his Department; and what assistance is given by officials in his Department to them in carrying out these duties. [59977]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer which my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces gave on 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 478W, to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith).

Helicopters

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy vessels are at sea without their Lynx helicopters; and what the shortfall is in helicopters for the Royal Navy. [60018]

Mr. Ingram: As at 23 May there are three vessels at sea not engaged on front line duties which do not have Lynx embarked (HMS Newcastle, HMS Norfolk and HMS Montrose). The Royal Navy has its full required operating fleet of 116 helicopters of various types, and the required level of spare aircraft. There is no overall shortfall.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures the Government are taking to *(a)* increase the lives of rotor heads for helicopters, *(b)* decrease the manufacturing period and *(c)* ensure that enough spare parts are available for the front line and reserve. [60020]

Mr. Ingram: A number of factors influence rotor head life including the helicopter's operational role and weight, any changes to capability during its service, the vibration environment of the helicopter and the cost and ease of maintenance. We continue to work closely with industry to improve the techniques and materials used in the manufacture of rotor heads, and gain a better understanding of the stress under which the rotor head operates. These initiatives are designed both to increase the life of the rotor heads and reduce manufacture lead times. Helicopters now entering service, for example Merlin, benefit from this work.

We are also embarking on a number of innovative partnering arrangements with industry that focus both on greater reliability and improved component performance. More broadly based work to improve the responsiveness of the Defence Supply Chain will also enhance helicopter logistics, and ensure that we are better able to support front line forces.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with the DLO to increase helicopter performance and numbers. [60021]

Mr. Ingram: My right hon. Friend has regular discussions concerning a wide range of logistic support issues including helicopter performance.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what effect the shortfall in operational helicopters has had on front-line forces; and if he will make a statement. [60022]

Mr. Ingram: Problems with Lynx main rotor heads have obliged the Joint Helicopter Command to review helicopter deployments, and Lynx helicopters in the rapid reaction forces not currently deployed on operations are subject to restrictions on the number of hours that can be flown. In addition, to protect front line operations and the flying training programme, some ships not on front line service are currently at sea without an embarked Lynx helicopter.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many helicopters under the Joint Helicopter Command are grounded; and for what reason. [60019]

Mr. Ingram: None. The term "grounded" is normally used only when a whole fleet or mark of aircraft is identified as unsafe to fly because of specific serious engineering or airworthiness problems that call into question the safety of the aircraft type. More generally, the number of aircraft available to operational commanders can vary on a daily basis as aircraft move in and out of maintenance.

Defence Procurement

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence with which countries the Government have Memoranda of Understanding on defence procurement. [59654]

Dr. Moonie: The list of nations with which the Government have Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) on defence procurement based on available records is shown as follows. It includes countries with which we have concluded MoUs on either defence equipment co-operation, specific equipment projects or sales of equipment.

Australia
Austria
Bahrain
Belgium
Brazil
Brunei
Canada
Chile
Czech Republic
Denmark
Egypt
Finland
France
Germany
Greece
Hungary
India
Indonesia
Israel
Italy
Japan
Jordan
Kuwait
Malaysia
Netherlands
Norway
Oman
Pakistan
Philippines
Portugal
Qatar
China
Romania
Saudi Arabia
Slovenia
South Africa
South Korea
Spain
Sweden
Switzerland

Thailand
Turkey
United Arab Emirates
United States of America.

Defence Aviation Repair Agency

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what written instructions the Chief Executive of the Defence Aviation Repair Agency has given to employees of that agency on speaking to their Members of Parliament or local councillors. [60183]

Mr. Ingram: In December 2000, the Chief Executive issued guidance through a memorandum to his employees on contact with MPs as follows:

> "It is a citizen's right in the UK to write to his/her constituency MP on any subject. This absolute right never has or will be challenged in the DARA. Internal correspondence, however, must not be copied to MPs. Any communication with MPs is through Minister (Armed Forces), and via the CE of the Agency. There are no exceptions to this Ministerial direction. If any DARA employee wishes to have an issue raised with their MP, this should be communicated privately from their home address."

No other memorandum has been sent to the workforce since that issue, and the guidance remains unchanged.

QinetiQ

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost is to QinetiQ of its sponsorship of the QinetiQ1 manned space balloon. [60614]

Dr. Moonie: Although QinetiQ is currently owned by the Ministry of Defence, the sponsorship of the QinetiQ1 manned balloon altitude record attempt is a commercial activity undertaken by the company, and no defence funding is committed to this venture. For commercial reasons the company has chosen not to put the cost of their participation in QinetiQ1 into the public domain, and therefore I am withholding the information requested under Exemption 13 of the code of practice on access to government information, which relates to the maintenance of commercial confidences.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies have a policy of not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age. [59452]

Dr. Moonie: Under the Ministry of Defence's equal opportunities policy discriminatory practices, procedures, decisions or actions in recruitment based on gender, marital status, race or ethnic origin, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, age, disability or anything else unconnected with an individual's ability to do the job are unacceptable.

When advertising for civilian staff it is the MOD policy that age limits do not appear in adverts, except when they can be fully justified in terms of allowing the MOD time to benefit from any training investment it might need to make.

The Armed Forces regard the ability to recruit sufficient people of the right age as critical in order to retain the correct balance of youth and experience required to maintain operational effectiveness. All three Services keep the age limit criteria for entry under regular review. Maximum age limits are imposed in order to maintain a balanced age/rank structure, with individuals benefiting from a visible career structure. The Services wish to recruit individuals who are operationally fit and are likely to give a good return of service. When considering upper age limits, the length and cost of training an individual is also taken into consideration.

Armed Forces Pensions

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what legal advice he has sought on the administration of armed forces pensions, regarding section 315 of the Income and Corporation Tax Act 1988 and preceding laws, since 1972. [60544]

Dr. Moonie: Since 1998, when the Ministry of Defence first recognised the current problem with the mistaken taxation of attributable service invaliding pensions, it has sought legal advice on a number of aspects of the application of the Income and Corporation Tax Act (ICTA) 1988, or preceding laws. These have centred on establishing clearly the nature and extent of our responsibilities for remedying the effects of the error, in particular in the following areas:

> Clarification of the specific application of the Act and its predecessors to those receiving a pension under the armed forces pension scheme as a result of being invalided from service.
>
> Clarification of the eligibility of different categories of dependant of a deceased pensioner for a refund in respect of the mistaken taxation of the deceased's pension.
>
> Clarification of the MOD's responsibilities for tracing surviving dependants, or estates of individuals who died before refunds of tax could be made.
>
> The extent of the Government's legal responsibility to backdate refunds, outside the normal Inland Revenue six-year time limit.

Where the MOD has required more general advice on the implications of tax law for pensions paid under the AFPS, such as on the original legal basis of the tax exemption of invaliding pensions, this has been sought from the relevant Inland Revenue policy branch, who have the primary responsibility for tax law.

Information prior to 1998 would require extensive research and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department is taking to ensure that individuals who have been identified as having been incorrectly taxed on retired pay awarded since 1952 have been correctly reimbursed in accordance with section 315 of the Income and Corporation Tax Act 1988 and preceding statutes which shared the same wording. [60545]

Dr. Moonie: The reimbursement of armed forces pensioners identified as having been taxed incorrectly falls to the Inland Revenue and as such, no steps of the manner the hon. Gentleman describe are taken by the Ministry of Defence. On identifying a pension that has been taxed in error, the Ministry of Defence does, however, provide full details to the Inland Revenue of the annual pension paid from the date upon which an error occurred, so that any reimbursement due can be correctly calculated and paid.

Porton Down

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many animal experiments, broken down by recorded category, were carried out at Porton Down in 2001. [59716]

Dr. Moonie: Dstl Porton Down submits annual returns to the Home Office detailing the number of procedures undertaken which involve the use of animals.

In the year 2001 a total of 12,955 procedures were returned to the Home Office by Dstl Porton Down. As defined in the Home Office recorded category of primary purpose: 7,074 of these procedures were undertaken for fundamental biological research; 5,674 of the procedures for applied studies—human medicine; 108 procedures for the protection of man, animals and the environment and 99 procedures for direct diagnosis.

Chinook ZD576

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the parameters provided to Boeing for its simulation of the final five seconds of Chinook ZD576. [60391]

Mr. Ingram: Boeing was provided with data extracted from navigation equipment on the aircraft, data from the report of the Air Accidents investigation Board report, and information about the aircraft and its load.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he estimates that the heading and track of Chinook ZD576 was represented with complete accuracy in the simulation conducted by Boeing; and if he will make a statement. [60503]

Mr. Ingram: The Boeing simulation assumed a straight flight path at an angle of 20 degrees climb and with 30 degrees nose up pitch altitude.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his Department's estimate is of the speed and rate of climb of Chinook ZD576 *(a)* 30 seconds prior to the initial point of impact, *(b)* five seconds prior to impact and *(c)* at the point of impact; and if he will make a statement. [60501]

Mr. Ingram: The Board of Inquiry considered data extracted from the aircraft's systems, the AAIB technical report, the flight path simulations from Boeing Helicopters and a separate investigation from the Defence Research Agency Bedford, together with witness evidence. The board concluded that it was most likely that while approaching the Mull of Kintyre the aircraft was established in a steady climb, with a ground speed of between 160 and 275 kts, until approximately four seconds before impact. The aircraft then flared to an attitude of 30 degrees nose up, and finally impacted with a ground speed of 147 kts.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he estimates that the all-up weight of Chinook ZD576, including variables, was represented with complete accuracy in the simulation conducted by Boeing; and if he will make a statement; [60502]

(2) what his Department's estimate is of the all-up weight of Chinook ZD576, including variables and passengers, baggage and fuel, at *(a)* 30 seconds prior to the initial point of impact, *(b)* five seconds prior to impact and *(c)* at the point of impact; and if he will make a statement. [60504]

Mr. Ingram: The estimated all-up weight of Chinook ZD576 at take off was 38,720 lbs, which included fuel weighing 6,776 lbs. At impact the estimated all-up weight of the aircraft was 37,620 lbs. The weight of the aircraft at any given point during the flight reflects the amount of fuel used by that point. Boeing conducted their simulation of the last five seconds of flight against a gross aircraft weight figure of 37,700 lbs at this point.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his Department's estimate is of the heading and track of Chinook ZD576 *(a)* 30 seconds prior to the initial point of impact, *(b)* five seconds prior to impact and *(c)* at the point of impact; and if he will make a statement. [60500]

Mr. Ingram: The flight plan indicated a route to the Mull of Kintyre lighthouse and then a course change to port on a track following the western shore of the Mull. The first waypoint or landmark the pilots entered on the on-board navigation computer was the Mull of Kintyre lighthouse. At 0.95 nautical miles, or about 20 seconds from impact the crew released the computer from the fix on the lighthouse and set it to indicate the bearing and distance to the next waypoint at Corran 87 miles to the north. The preserved data held by the navigation system indicated that the aircraft was very close to the direct track from RAF Aldergrove to the lighthouse when the waypoint change was made. There is no evidence of any significant change of course before the impact.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement setting out the reasons why a simulation was commissioned for the investigation into the final flight of Chinook ZD576. [60103]

Mr. Ingram: As part of the investigations into the crash of Chinook ZD576, Boeing the aircraft manufacturers were asked to conduct simulations to model the likely flightpath profiles during the final seconds prior to impact. The House of Lords Select Committee was critical of certain aspects of these simulations, which did not include full FADEC parameters. As part of our promised full response to the Select Committee's report, Boeing have been tasked to revisit their original analysis to include a full FADEC simulation.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will publish the information, other than the parameters issuing from the AAIB technical report, that was provided to Boeing for the purposes of the simulation of the final seconds of the flight of ZD576; [60102]

(2) what level of accuracy Boeing stated it achieved in its simulation of the manoeuvres of the final five seconds of flight of Chinook ZD576, in the outline report Boeing presented to his Department to accompany the simulation results; [60106]

(3) if he will place in the Library copies of the information that was provided to Boeing by the *(a)* MOD, *(b)* RAF Board of Inquiry and *(c)* AAIB for the purposes of constructing a simulation of the final seconds of the flight of Chinook ZD576; [60101]

(4) what values were used by Boeing for matching to the final aircraft attitude in its simulation of the final five seconds of the flight of Chinook ZD576; and if he will list the values established as 100 per cent. verifiable from the wreckage of the aircraft in respect of *(a)* rotor speed, *(b)* rotor torque, *(c)* rudder pedal and *(d)* initial rate of climb set by the pilots. [60105]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who commissioned the original Boeing simulation of the final seconds of the flight of ZD576. [60104]

Mr. Ingram: The Air Accidents Investigation Branch for the RAF Board of Inquiry.

Canberra PR9

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the replacement of the capabilities provided by the Canberra PR9. [59791]

Mr. Ingram: The Canberra PR9 reconnaissance aircraft is an important element of our overall capability. We are currently looking at ways in which the aircraft's particular capabilities can be provided in the future. Our thinking will be informed by the Strategic Defence Review New Chapter work.

Israel

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what British-made military equipment has recently been supplied to Israel. [54730]

Dr. Moonie: Information relating to exports of new and surplus military equipment in major categories to individual countries is published in Part III of the Government's annual reports on strategic export controls, copies of which are available from the Library of the House. The 2001 report is currently being prepared.

Afghanistan

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date his Department received reports and representations from the International Committee of the Red Cross regarding the conditions of fighters held in Shibergan prison in Afghanistan; and what action his Department has taken. [58828]

Mr. Hoon: We have not received such reports from the International Committee of the Red Cross, although we understand the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have received the EU Special Representative's report on the camp. Security considerations have so far prevented British embassy staff in Kabul from visiting these prisons. But they are in contact with the International Committee of the Red Cross, which closely monitors the situation and welfare of all prisoners in Afghanistan.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether aircrew and aircraft maintenance staff on non-UK aircraft leased for the transport and supply of UK forces in Afghanistan are security-cleared. [59725]

Mr. Hoon: I am withholding details of security arrangements in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what acclimatisation measures are necessary for operations in mountain terrain; what acclimatisation measures were taken by Royal Marines in preparation for action in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [58865]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* Acclimatisation for operations in mountain terrain depends, in the first instance, on personal physical fitness. As the British armed forces mountain and cold climate specialists, the Royal Marines pay particular attention to this at all times. More specifically, they undertake annual mountain training in climbing, navigation and 'living' techniques, and every year a detachment spends three months training in Norway.

It is standard requirement for units to undertake pre-operational acclimatisation training. Prior to commencing operations, personnel of 45 Commando were deployed to Afghanistan for up to 10 days. This period ended with Operation Ptarmigan, which gave our forces vital experience of operating in Afghanistan.

As a result of this careful planning, the number of cases of ill-effects from altitude and cold reported by 45 Commando have been well within the predicted parameters.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps have been taken to ensure that logistics and supply of forces in Afghanistan are not compromised by unserviceable C17 transport aircraft; what extra costs have been incurred as a result of unserviceable C17 aircraft; and if he will make a statement. [59233]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* Throughout operations in Afghanistan, C17 aircraft have flown missions continuously, performing fully up to our expectations and meeting predicted serviceability parameters. Consequently, no extra costs have been incurred as a result of unserviceable C17 aircraft.

Matthew Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civilians have been *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured in the military action in Afghanistan to date; how many of these have been children; and if he will make a statement. [60063]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the answer that I gave on 12 December 2002, *Official Report,* column 860W, to my hon. Friends the Members for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) and for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham).

NLAW Programme

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the decision to award the Saab Bofors Dynamics team the preferred supplier status for the NLAW programme. [59653]

Dr. Moonie: Saab Bofors Dynamics Ltd (SBD) was selected as the preferred bidder for the armed forces Next Generation Light Anti-Armour Weapons (NLAW) following a competition. Selection of the Saab weapon, known as MBT-LAW, presents an excellent opportunity for United Kingdom industry and is expected to create or sustain more than 500 jobs across the United Kingdom. The weapon also has significant export potential.

The programme is being undertaken in collaboration with the Kingdom of Sweden, enhancing our ties with an EU partner. A memorandum of understanding between our two Governments for the development and production of MBT-LAW is due to be signed shortly.

This competition has been an excellent example of smart acquisition and demonstrates how an effective capability can be achieved at affordable cost.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the anti-armour capability is of British Army infantry regiments. [59652]

Mr. Ingram: The British Army infantry's anti-armour capability is currently provided by the MILAN Anti-tank Guided Missile System and the Light Anti-Armour Weapon (LAW 94mm).

This capability will be enhanced with the introduction of the Light Forces Anti-Tank Guided Weapon System (LF ATGWS) which will replace MILAN between 2005 and 2008 and the Next Generation Light Anti-Armour Weapon (NLAW) which will replace LAW 94mm in 2007.

JTIDS

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which *(a)* present and *(b)* future Royal Air Force and Fleet Air Arm aircraft will be fitted with JTIDS; and at what cost. [59790]

Mr. Ingram: Joint tactical information and distribution system (JTIDS) capability is being fitted to Sea King AEW and Nimrod R and, on current plans, Eurofighter, Nimrod MRA4, ASTOR, A400M and the future strategic tanker will come into service fitted with this capability. The cost of fitting and supporting these aircraft is estimated to be of the order of £560 million. In the longer term, new aircraft types, such as the future joint combat aircraft, are expected to have this capability.

Tornado F3 Fleet

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what further upgrade work will be undertaken on the Tornado F3 fleet; and what the planned cost is of this upgrade work. [59783]

Mr. Ingram: The Tornado F3 fleet is currently undergoing or planned to undergo, a number of upgrade activities that will maintain the aircraft's operational capability for the remainder of its in-service life. The work comprises integration of secure communication equipment, a successor identification friend or foe system, an instrumentation enhancement to aid training and a programme to maximise the effectiveness of the advanced medium range air-to-air missile (AMRAAM).

It is estimated that the total cost of these upgrade programmes will be approximately £125 million.

Harrier

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the length is of the training period required for Harrier GR7 pilots to qualify for flying operations from aircraft carriers. [59786]

Mr. Ingram: The additional training required to qualify Harrier GR7 pilots for aircraft carriers combat ready (Day) and (Night) status has historically taken a minimum of 16 aircraft carrier based flying days during which 15 day time sorties and five night time sorties must be accrued. The night sorties must be undertaken within 72 hours of the last day time sortie. The length of time to complete this training can vary, as it is aircraft carrier availability and weather dependent. It would be rare for the training to be completed within 16 days, however, on occasions when optimum operating conditions have been experienced, some pilots have qualified in a slightly shorter time.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the maximum number of Harrier GR7 pilots is that can be trained for aircraft carrier flying operations at any one time. [59787]

Mr. Ingram: The maximum full front line strength of the three operational Harrier GR7 squadrons is 48 pilots and it is unlikely that there would be a requirement to train more than that number. 36 pilots are currently qualified to fly operations from aircraft carriers. Training to enable Harrier GR7 pilots to conduct aircraft carrier based operations is usually conducted as part of a Squadron's routine training programme. The maximum number of pilots that could be trained for aircraft carrier operations at any one time is dependent on a wide range of factors. These include aircraft carrier availability, operational tempo, pilot requirement for such training, weather conditions and completing training priorities, themselves dictated by anticipated operational requirement.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether all new Harrier GR7 pilots will be trained for aircraft carrier flying operations. [59788]

Mr. Ingram: It is planned that all RAF Harrier GR7 pilots will be trained for aircraft carrier operations at some stage during their first front line tour. All RN Sea Harrier FA2 pilots migrating to the Harrier GR7 will undertake aircraft carrier based training after completing conversion and a Combat Ready work up syllabus.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Harrier GR7 pilots are trained for operations from aircraft carriers; and what plans he has to increase the numbers of Harrier GR7 pilots trained for flying operations from aircraft carriers. [59785]

Mr. Ingram: There is currently an established front line strength of 48 Harrier GR7 pilots, of which 75 per cent., 36 pilots, are currently qualified to fly operations from aircraft carriers. There are currently no plans to increase that ratio.

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken, following the announced early retirement of the Sea Harrier FA2 from service, to ensure that the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force benefit from a common standard of upgraded engine across the Harrier aircraft fleet, with the objective of improving the aircraft's performance and operational efficiency and reducing its cost of ownership. [60563]

Mr. Ingram: We do not currently plan to upgrade the Pegasus engines of the full Harrier GR fleet, as the current partial fleet fit with the upgraded engines fulfils all our operational requirements. While there could be some operational and logistical benefits in a full Harrier fleet engine upgrade, the benefits over the partial fit would be marginal and are not sufficient to outweigh the substantial costs involved, particularly in view of the aircraft's out-of-service date. Our decision to retire the Sea Harriers from service does not alter this position.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost per aircraft is of upgrading the Harrier GR7 to GR9 standard. [59784]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1166–67W to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin).

We will be able to determine the cost per aircraft of the Harrier GR7 upgrade when the total programme cost is finalised.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when work to upgrade Harrier GR7 to GR9 will commence; how many aircraft are planned to be upgraded; and what the yearly delivery schedule is for the upgraded aircraft. [59789]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 21 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 168W.

The yearly delivery schedule for the Harrier GR9 has yet to be determined.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he has taken to identify the author of the letter published in *The Times* on 13 May signed as from Paul Hamblin and Don Holland. [59748]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence established on the day of publication that the signed authors of the letter were not members of the armed forces. We informed *The Times* newspaper that day.

PRIME MINISTER

Recruitment

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Prime Minister how many net additional staff his Office has recruited in each month since June 2001 at *(a)* executive officer and *(b)* administrative level. [52419]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, on 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 556W.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Prime Minister how much was spent by his Department on paying pensions to retired employees of his Department in 2001–02; if he will estimate the corresponding amounts to be spent in *(a)* five years' time, *(b)* 10 years' time, *(c)* 20 years' time and *(d)* 30 years' time; if he will estimate in each case the proportion of such liabilities which will arise from (i) unfunded pension schemes and (ii) pre-funded pension schemes; and in the case of pre-funded schemes, if he will estimate the value of the corresponding pre-funded funds in each of these years. [57357]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, on 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 561–63W.

MOD Pensions

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 30 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 658W, if MOD pensioners may continue to draw cash at post offices if they have an account with the Halifax Bank of Scotland, the Royal Bank of Scotland or Clydesdale Bank plc under the revised arrangements introduced from April. [60096]

The Prime Minister: The facility to draw cash at post offices for the 2 per cent. of armed forces pensioners affected by the revised arrangements does not extend currently to the accounts with any of these banks. As I stated in my answer to the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) on 30 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 658W, pensioners may continue to draw cash at post offices subject to having an account with the Alliance and Leicester, Barclays, Cahoot, Lloyds TSB, Smile or the Co-operative bank. This facility also applies to pensioners who have First Direct accounts, although restricted solely to those residing in Scotland.

From April 2003, however, as part of the universal banking services package, all of the main United Kingdom banks, including those listed in the question, have agreed to make their basic accounts, which include the facility to draw cash, available at post offices.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister if his Office has a policy of not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age. [59586]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, today.

TRANSPORT

Air Traffic Control

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had with the Airline Group about the *(a)* technical issues at and *(b)* the financing of NATS. [60298]

Mr. Jamieson: NATS' financial position is regularly discussed by all parties concerned—NATS, the Airline Group, the Government as the other main shareholder, the Civil Aviation Authority as regulator and the banks. All are making a contribution to ensuring that NATS has a robust financial structure for the foreseeable future.

Technical issues are operational matters for NATS.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of the implications for future air traffic volumes if NATS delivers its investment plan; [60296]

(2) if he will make a statement on the impact on NATS' ability to take advantage of the commercial freedoms offered by the European Union's Single European Sky Policy of a lack of an investment plan. [60295]

Mr. Jamieson: NATS recently announced a £1 billion investment plan, detailing its strategic and operational direction for the next decade. This positions the company for the fundamental changes that are expected to take place in European air traffic management over the next 10 to 15 years and gives it the headroom needed to handle safely a further 1 million flights a year by 2011.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the status is of negotiations to increase investment by other parties in NATS; and what commitments the Government have made in connection with its intention to invest further sums of money in NATS. [60294]

Mr. Jamieson: The competition for a new investor in NATS is being run by the company's chairman on commercially confidential terms.

As a responsible shareholder in NATS, the Government have said that they would be prepared to match appropriate third party investment.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many reports the HSE has issued in connection with the NATS in *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 2001, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 1999. [60300]

Mr. Jamieson: HSE has sent only one report to NATS since the beginning of 1999. That was the one by its expert on display screen equipment on the risks to the health of those operating the air traffic control system at Swanwick following a visit in January 2002.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport on how many occasions in *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000, *(c)* 2001 and *(d)* 2002 the HSE has been notified of problems at NATS. [60306]

Mr. Jamieson: NATS is a large organisation operating at many locations throughout the country. Since the beginning of 1999 NATS has notified HSE of 16 reportable accidents nationally. A yearly breakdown follows. In order to protect complainants and because not all may be justified, HSE does not disclose the number of complaints it receives concerning individual employers.

	Accidents
1999	5
2000	6
2001	5
2002	0

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will publish the reports by the Health and Safety Executive on IT systems in operation at Swanwick and West Drayton. [60304]

Mr. Jamieson: HSE has already sent a copy of its report on the operation of IT systems at Swanwick to the employer, NATS, and to the representatives of the relevant employees in accordance with its duty to keep them informed about matters affecting their health and safety. HSE will endeavour to release the report more widely. However there are statutory restrictions on the disclosure of information obtained by HSE in pursuance of its powers and at present they still apply to this report.

I will write to the hon. Member as soon as I am able to give him any further information on this issue.

There is no corresponding report on the operation of the display screen equipment at West Drayton air traffic control centre.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he will make a statement on the effects of the IT patterns at the Swanwick air traffic control centre on air traffic volumes; [60299]

(2) what discussions he has had with National Air Traffic Services concerning IT problems at Swanwick and West Drayton; [60302]

(3) what assessment he has made of the likely reliability of IT systems at Swanwick and West Drayton over the summer; [60303]

(4) what assurances he has received from the Airline Group about the reliability of NATS IT systems; [60305]

(5) what steps the Government have taken to assess the reliability of the air traffic control systems at Swanwick. [60301]

Mr. Jamieson: Responsibility for the air traffic control systems at Swanwick and West Drayton rests with NATS. NATS has successfully implemented solutions for the recent problems at these centres and have given assurances that they are doing everything they can to ensure that their systems are resilient. Safety was not compromised in any way.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when Swanwick will assume responsibility for all air traffic services from the centres at Manchester and West Drayton; and what conditions will need to be met before this takes place. [60297]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a matter for NATS. I understand that subject to detail planning, the Manchester and West Drayton air traffic services will be moved to Swanwick by 2008.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent discussions he has had with and representations he has received from *(a)* the Health and Safety Executive, *(b)* the Health and Safety Commission, *(c)* the Civil Aviation Authority, *(d)* National Air Traffic Services and *(e)* other organisations relating to health and safety issues associated with the operation of air traffic control centre at Swanwick; and if he will make a statement. [60401]

Mr. Jamieson: No such discussions or representations have taken place.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what impact the financial position of National Air Traffic Services is having on the building of the new air traffic control centre at Prestwick. [59178]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan) on 23 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 862–63W.

Manchester Airport

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent approaches Manchester Airport plc has made to his Department to alter departure routes from Manchester airport. [60312]

Mr. Jamieson: None.

Aviation Security

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment the Government have made of *(a)* the draft EU regulation on establishing common rules in the field of aviation security and *(b)* the recommendation of the European Parliament that member state Governments should meet an equitable share of the costs of airport security. [R] [60012]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are fully committed to the establishment of common rules for aviation security throughout Europe and regards the agreed measures in European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC) Document 30 as the appropriate basis for doing so. It welcomes the EU initiative, which will aid compliance and views many of the amendments proposed by the European Parliament as useful clarification.

However, the UK firmly believes that the financing of aviation security should be for each individual state to determine. It is for aerodromes and airlines to decide how best to comply with the regulation within the context of the UK National Aviation Security Programme, and how associated costs are passed on to the user. This system has been used to good effect in the UK for many years.

Infrastructure Projects

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proposals for *(a)* airports, *(b)* runway extensions and *(c)* airport terminal extensions of which he has been notified fall within the category of major infrastructure projects as defined in the Government's consultation paper, New Parliamentary Procedures for Processing Major Infrastructure Projects. [58887]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The forthcoming series of regional consultation documents on airports and air services will present a range of options for airport development for the next 30 years. Decisions taken following the consultation will lead to an Air Transport White Paper which we aim to publish towards the end of the year.

At present, proposals for airport development are subject to the requirements of the land-use planning system. Under the proposals for New Parliamentary Procedures for Processing Major Infrastructure Projects set out in the December 2001 consultation paper, only those projects of national importance which are designated by the Secretary of State, in the light of the definition proposed in annex C of the consultation paper, will be put to Parliament as major infrastructure projects for their consideration in principle. Designation of these projects will be on a case by case basis under the proposed new legislation.

Heathrow Airport

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what work his Department has done into the technical feasibility of additional runway capacity at Heathrow. [60243]

Mr. Jamieson: The South East and East of England Regional Air Services Study (SERAS) has examined and appraised a wide range of development options for terminal and runway capacity at existing airports and new sites.

The technical study has now been completed. It would be inappropriate to comment on the status of the options considered at this stage. We intend to launch a full public consultation on the final shortlist of options early in the summer.

Shipping

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action the Department will take in relation to the OECD's Maritime Transport Committee's proposals to eradicate substandard shipping. [60162]

Mr. Jamieson: I welcome the OECD Maritime Transport Committee's (MTC) policy statement on substandard shipping. The MTC plays an important role in supporting the efforts of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) and others to eliminate substandard shipping. The policy statement is also a welcome contribution to the International Quality Shipping Campaign, in which the UK plays a leading role. That campaign sets out to eradicate substandard ships through a combination of market action and state action. The UK and like minded flag states will pursue in the IMO the proposals in MTC's policy statement.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the length of time taken by the Maritime Coastguard Agency in approving stability information on the ferry P&OSL Canterbury. [60164]

Mr. Jamieson: P&OSL Canterbury joined the UK shipping register in the summer of 1998. Her stability information booklet (SIB) had been approved in 1992 by the French classification society Bureau Veritas (BV) on behalf of her previous flag administration, the Bahamas. As BV are a classification society authorised by the UK, and the Bahamas is a reputable flag, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) followed established procedures and accepted the stability information on the basis of the previous approvals, and without any further detail checks, by marking the document "provisionally approved".

At no time has the vessel not had approved stability information complying with international standards.

The vessel was preparing for a programme of model testing to demonstrate compliance with the "Stockholm Agreement" standards for stability with the car deck flooded, and a routine displacement check was carried out in November 2000. A number of amendments to the SIB were eventually required and the owner's consultant submitted a "SIB Addendum" on 8 November 2001 which was approved on 16 November, within the MCA's charter standard time for document approval.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to the answer of 21 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 149, how many of the merchant ships which have joined the UK shipping register have met the target of increasing UK cadet numbers by 25 per cent. each year. [60250]

Mr. Jamieson: We are collecting information from individual companies that have joined the tonnage tax regime on the action they have taken to ensure they meet their 1:15 training commitment.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will review the regulations governing ship classification societies regarding the inspection and certification of oil tankers entering British territorial waters. [60582]

Mr. Jamieson: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency as the administration for United Kingdom registered ships, monitors classification society performance where statutory surveys are concerned and, in their role as port state control inspectors, ensures that oil tankers entering United Kingdom territorial waters comply with international regulations.

Annex I of MARPOL 73/78 which details Regulations for the Prevention of Pollution by Oil, is transposed into UK legislation by the Merchant Shipping (Prevention of Oil Pollution) Regulations 1996. In September 2002, the UK will be implementing substantial amendments to these regulations which will include the establishment of a schedule accelerating the phase out of single hull tankers. They will also detail a rigorous new quality test to be applied by classification societies, known as the condition assessment scheme, applicable to single hull oil tankers of 20,000 deadweight tonnes and above.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many groundings of boats in Scottish waters have been attributed to the watchkeeper falling asleep in *(a)* 1995, *(b)* 1996, *(c)* 1997, *(d)* 1998, *(e)* 1999, *(f)* 2000, *(g)* 2001 and *(h)* 2002 to date. [60182]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is as follows:

	Total	*Fishing vessels*	*Merchant vessels*	*Deaths*	*Vessel lost*
1995	6	5	1	1	2
1996	6	5	1	1	1
1997	4	4	—	—	1
1998	2	—	2	—	—
1999	4	4	1	—	—
2000	2	2	—	—	1
2001	4	4	—	—	1
2002[1]	1	1	—	—	—
Total	29	24	5	2	6

[1] To date

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made of trends in the number of lives lost at sea in UK waters. [60163]

Mr. Jamieson: The trends for the number of lives lost in UK waters remain static when compared to incident numbers. However, even one death is too many. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency are, therefore, currently undertaking incident prevention pilot studies in each of their three regions in order to assist in the formulation of a long-term incident prevention strategy. This strategy will address ways of reducing accidents, deaths resulting from accidents, false alarms and hoax calls.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many lives have been lost at sea in UK waters in each year since 1990. [60161]

Mr. Jamieson: A breakdown of the number of lives lost in UK waters for each year 1990 to 2001 is as follows.

	Lives lost
1990	295
1991	201
1992	210
1993	262
1994	272
1995	232
1996	216
1997	251
1998	249
1999	251
2000	236
2001	284

Merchant Navy

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of the cost of upgrading and revalidation of maritime certificates of competence for unemployed merchant seamen will be met by the Merchant Navy Training Provider. [59663]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

SMarT support is paid at fixed rates representing approximately 50 per cent. of the average course costs. This is made available through the Merchant Navy Training Provider (MNTP) for the revalidation of certificates of competency.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many persons resident in Scotland have received assistance through the Merchant Navy Training Provider to upgrade and revalidate certificates of competency. [59672]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

To date, six unemployed people with an address in Scotland have received SMarT funding through the Merchant Navy Training Provider (MNTP).

Note:

The MNTP has only been running since January this year.

Braer

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will commission an independent third party to review the evidence available concerning the loss of the tanker Braer. [60581]

Mr. Jamieson: Marine Accident Investigation Branch inspectors have fully considered the material submitted to them in respect of the Braer and the chief inspector of Marine Accidents has concluded that the material does not provide grounds for reopening the investigation into the grounding of the vessel.

Ferry Services

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 14 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 519W, on ferry services, on what dates and in what locations discussions regarding the EU directive on minimum conditions of service and wages for seafarers took place; what documents were submitted by the UK Government in the course of such discussions; and who represented the UK on each occasion. [60015]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

Discussions on the Commission's draft EU ferry-manning directive have taken place at the European Transport Councils on the following dates:

20–21 December 2000 in Brussels (Lord MacDonald represented the UK)

9–10 December 1999 in Brussels (Lord MacDonald represented the UK)

30 November to 1 December 1998 in Brussels (my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) represented the UK)

17–18 June 1998 in Luxembourg (my right hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh (Dr. Strang) represented the UK).

The outcome of the latest European Transport Council discussion was reported in the other place by the then Minister for Transport (Lord MacDonald) on 1 January 2001, *Official Report*, columns WA 116–18. The UK Government have not submitted any documents for these discussions, which have concerned the Commission's draft proposal.

Multi-Modal Studies

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the costs are of the London to South West and South Wales Multi-Modal Study, broken down by *(a)* staff and *(b)* other costs. [59779]

Mr. Jamieson: The total cost of the London to South West and South Wales MMS is £1.812 million (excluding VAT). This figure incorporates *(a)* staff and *(b)* other costs.

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will respond to the MIDMAN multi-modal study. [60313]

Mr. Jamieson: I will respond to the recommendations of this study once we have received advice from both the West Midlands Local Government Association and North West Regional Assembly.

Aerial Tramways

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment his Department has made of the viability of aerial tramways in the UK. [59360]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

None. It is for local authorities in England to examine all relevant modes of transport to determine the most appropriate solutions for their areas in the context of their local transport plans. My Department undertakes a detailed assessment of any proposal based on the NATA (New Approach To Appraisal) to ensure that any scheme put forward provides not only value for money but also meet wider integrated transport objectives. Separate arrangements, which are outside my Department's responsibility, apply in the rest of the UK and in London this would be a matter for the Mayor and Transport for London.

Severn Crossing

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what policy guidance exists on procedures for restrictions of traffic and closures of the M48 Severn crossing; whether the closures of the M48 Severn crossing are monitored and recorded; and whether a risk assessment of the M48 Severn crossing during adverse weather conditions has been carried out. [60476]

Mr. Jamieson: Operational procedures for restrictions of traffic and closures of the M48 Severn bridge during high winds are agreed between the Avon and Somerset police and the Highways Agency.

Closures are decided by the police, who monitor them by surveillance camera. Severn River Crossing plc keep a record of bridge closures and also monitor wind speeds with anemometers positioned on the bridge.

Current procedures are based on over 30 years of experience of the effect of wind speed and direction on the various types of traffic using the crossing. The Highways Agency is investigating the scope for a formal risk assessment of traffic behaviour on the Severn bridge during adverse weather conditions.

Park and Ride Schemes

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his policy is on promoting park and ride schemes; and if he will make a statement. [60078]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government recognise that, under the right circumstances, park and ride can make a valuable contribution to alleviating congestion, improving the environment and promoting accessibility and travel choice. A number of high quality schemes have been introduced in recent years. Such schemes are carefully sited and accessible, offer safe and secure parking, provide clean and comfortable buses and offer a high frequency of service and fast journey times. Local authorities are being encouraged to consider the role that park and ride can play in their local transport plans. The English Historic Towns Forum, in conjunction with my Department, published the current edition of "Good Practice Guide on bus-based Park and Ride" in May 2000.

Cherished Plates

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many cherished plates have been transferred in *(a)* Angus and *(b)* Scotland in each of the last five years. [60069]

Mr. Jamieson: No information is kept on the number of cherished plate transfers for Angus. However, Angus is included in the catchment area for the DVLA local office at Dundee. During the last five years, the Dundee office has processed the following number of transfer applications:

	Transfer applications processed
1996–97	3,261
1997–98	3,389
1998–99	3,565
1999–2000	3,771
2000–01	3,714

The combined number of applications processed by all five DVLA local offices in Scotland (Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Inverness) for the same period was:

	Transfer applications processed
1996–97	21,267
1997–98	22,415
1998–99	23,961
1999–2000	25,748
2000–01	27,928

Road Risk

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he is taking to implement the recommendations of the Work-Related Road Safety Task Group concerning occupational road risk. [60123]

Mr. Jamieson: Further to my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 801W, I have recently received advice from the Health and Safety Commission on the recommendations made by the Work-Related Road Safety Task Group which we are now considering. A copy of that advice has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Cones Hotline

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many calls the Cones Hotline received in each year since 1995, how many staff were employed on full-time and part-time contracts; and what the running costs for the service were in each year since 1997. [59546]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The Cones Hotline was discontinued in November 1995.

Birmingham North Relief Road

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what the total projected cost was of the Birmingham North Relief Road agreed between his Department and the consortium that is responsible for it; [59330]

(2) what estimate his Department has made of changes to road usage that will arise from the opening of the Birmingham North Relief Road; [59331]

(3) what estimates have been made of the total annual revenue from the Birmingham North Relief Road. [59329]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from G. Rainbow to Mr. Chris Grayling, dated 10 June 2002:

The Transport Minister, David Jamieson, has asked Tim Matthews to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the projected cost of the Birmingham Northern Relief Road (now known as the M6 Toll Road), the changes to road usage that will arise from the opening of the road and estimates of total annual revenue from it. I am replying in Tim's absence on official business.

Under the Concession Agreement between the Department and the consortium building the road, Midland Expressway Ltd. (MEL), the cost of constructing the M6 toll falls to MEL as the concessionaire, MEL has awarded a Design and Construct contract for the project to the CAMBBA Construction Group at a cost of £485.5m. MEL will also bear additional costs to cover scheme preparation, land acquisition and financing. The total costs are a commercial issue for MEL and no total projected cost has been agreed with either the Department or the Highways Agency.

Estimates of changes to road usage because of the M6 Toll were presented in evidence at the Public Inquiry for the scheme. Briefly, it is expected that much of the long distance traffic presently travelling through the West Midlands on the very congested M6 motorway will transfer to M6 Toll. That transfer will allow released capacity on the M6 to be used by traffic currently using congested trunk and local roads within the M6 corridor, thus relieving their overall traffic burden. Traffic flows are expected to increase on some routes which provide access to the new motorway; for example, some sections of the A453 and A5127.

Estimates of the total annual revenue from the M6 Toll are a commercial matter for MEL as Concessionaire and no details are available.

If you require any further information, Richard Willson, the Highways Agency's Project Manager for the M6 Toll scheme, would be pleased to help. He can be contacted at the Agency's offices at Broadway, Broad Street, Birmingham, B15 1BL, or by telephone on 0121 678 8267.

Environmentally Friendly Cars

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions his Department has had with vehicle manufacturers to encourage the development of more environmentally-friendly cars. [59733]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

DTLR together with the DTI, DEFRA and the Treasury published "Powering Future Vehicles, a draft Government Strategy", setting out and inviting comment on the Government's proposals for promoting the development, introduction and take-up of environmentally friendly low-carbon vehicles and fuels. As part of the consultation, the four Ministers held a major discussion seminar with all the stakeholders in the shift to low-carbon transport, including vehicle manufacturers. We are very grateful for their input to the development of the strategy, which includes the setting up of a Low Carbon Vehicle Partnership, involving vehicle manufacturers and other stakeholders in the strategy's implementation. The final Powering Future Vehicles strategy will be published shortly.

Biodiesel

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what proportion of fuel sold in the UK in 2001 was biodiesel; and what proportion of overall fuel sales his Department estimates will be biodiesel in *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 2003, *(c)* 2004, *(d)* 2005 and *(e)* 2006. [59731]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

Currently, we estimate biodiesel production to be approximately 0.1 per cent. of road transport diesel consumption in 2001. The Government expect this figure to rise substantially with the introduction of a 20p fuel duty reduction for biodiesel. Preliminary projections collected from the industry suggest that existing and planned production would represent around 1.5 per cent. pure biodiesel by 2003, likely to be used as a 5 per cent. blend with conventional diesel. The Government have made no further estimates beyond this date.

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what percentage of new cars sold in the last 12 months *(a)* were capable of running on biodiesel and *(b)* had diesel engines. [59732]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

(a) Nearly all diesel car manufacturers warranty their new vehicles to run on blends of at least 5 per cent. biodiesel. Some manufacturers warranty their vehicles at higher blending levels.

(b) The Department's own figures show that 17.83 per cent. of new cars sold in the last 12 months were diesels.

Road Schemes

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which current proposals for road schemes in excess of 30 kilometres in length are *(a)* in the targeted programme for improvement, *(b)* recommended by multi-modal studies and *(c)* supported in local transport plan settlements. [58886]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

There are no road schemes in excess of 30 km in length in the targeted programme of improvements, nor have any local authority schemes of this length been fully or provisionally approved since local transport plans were introduced in 1999. The West Midlands to North West multi-modal study has recommended on-line widening of the M6 between junctions 11a and 19 (a distance of 81 km). The north/south movements in the East Midlands multi-modal study as recommended on-line widening of the M1 between junctions 21 and 28 (40 km). Neither recommendation includes new sections of road.

Mobile Home Owners

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions further to his answer of 16 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 802W, on mobile home owners, since when compensation booklets have been made available at public exhibitions, inquiries and on request to those whose property may be required or affected by road construction. [59193]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

Compensation booklets have been publicly available since 1973. The current booklets that advise owners of mobile homes about the new regulations under which they may claim a noise payment in respect of new road schemes have been available to the public since August 2001.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many names and addresses of vehicle owners and keepers have been disclosed by the DVLA to third parties by virtue of that party showing reasonable cause for the disclosure over the last three years; if he will break down these disclosure statistics by categories of reasonable cause; and if he will make a statement on the number of cases where disclosure has been subsequently shown to be not for a reasonable cause, with the action taken in these cases. [59169]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The number of "reasonable cause" inquiries resulting in the release of vehicle keeper details held on the DVLA register during the last three years was:

Year	*Number*
1999–2000	883,522
2000–01	955,484
2001–02	1,001,421

The majority of requests are from insurance companies and finance houses in respect of insurance claims and vehicle-related loan arrangements. The remainder are from solicitors, car parking enforcement companies and members of the public. Statistics relating to specific categories of "reasonable cause" are not recorded.

The information commissioner has powers under the Data Protection Act to prosecute anyone who knowingly or recklessly obtains information without consent. Any disclosure subsequently used for a purpose other than that stated in the application is referred to the information commissioner to investigate. Seventeen such cases in the last three years have been referred to the information commissioner.

Vehicle Registration Numbers

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to allow third parties to be granted entitlement to a retained vehicle registration number; and if he will make a statement. [59901]

Mr. Jamieson: I plan to extend the vehicle registration number retention facility to cater for third party entitlement as soon as the necessary powers can be obtained. My officials are scanning the legislative programme for an opportunity to take this forward.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what was the value of sales by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency for the sale of cherished number plates in each year since 1997. [59902]

Mr. Jamieson: Gross receipts from the sale of personalised registration numbers for each year from 1996–97 were as follows:

£ million

Financial year	*Revenue*
1996–97	44.95
1997–98	57.47
1998–99	64.92
1999–2000	66.89
2000–01	79.58
2001–02	91.78

Revenue is inclusive of VAT, assignment fees and other fees for the extension of rights or the later addition of nominees.

Vehicle Taxation (Disabled People)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the criteria are for eligibility for exemption from taxation of vehicles used by disabled people; whether such exemption will be extended to non-disabled people who make occasional use of the vehicle; and what evidence there is of abuse of the concession. [59064]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

Eligibility for exemption from paying Vehicle Excise Duty is available in respect of vehicles kept or used for the purposes of those claiming disability living allowance at the higher rate or war pensioners' mobility supplement. There are in addition a number of people who claim exemption under the former Disabled Passenger Scheme via attendance allowance. This was abolished in 1993 but those entitled to exemption from paying Vehicle Excise Duty at the time have remained eligible.

There are no plans to extend eligibility for the exemption.

It has long been recognised that there is potential for abuse of the system. The responsibility for addressing abuse lies with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) and the Department for Work and Pensions. Approximately 250 cases per month are referred to DVLA for investigation, but in no more than a handful of cases each year is the entitlement rescinded.

A5 (Road Accidents)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people have been *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured in road traffic accidents along the A5 road between Shrewsbury and Wrexham in each year since 1992. [59223]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The number of people *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured between Shrewsbury and the Wrexham turning from the A5 are shown in the table.

Number of casualties on A5 between Shrewsbury[1] and the turning for Wrexham[2] 1992 to 2000

	Killed	*Injured*
1992	2	76
1993	7	83
1994	1	70
1995	5	66
1996	2	119
1997	3	74
1998	1	58
1999	5	71
2000	1	85

[1] The roundabout at the junction with A458.

[2] The roundabout at the junction with A483.

M25

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the accident record of junction 13 of the M25 over the last five years. [59447]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

In the five years up to July 2001 67 personal injury accidents have been reported at this junction. Of these five have been serious and the rest slight. There have been no fatalities. Some 72 per cent. of the accidents over this period have been nose to tail shunts.

The number and severity of accidents at this junction are similar to those recorded at other motorway junctions with high volumes of traffic.

Last summer the Highways Agency took action to improve driver awareness of the layout by enhancing the signing at this junction. It is too early to conclude how effective this has been in reducing the number of accidents. Traffic signals are due to be installed at the junction as part of the widening of the M25 between Junctions 12 to 15. The road markings are to be renewed shortly and further improvements to the signing are currently being considered. In the meantime the Highways Agency will continue to monitor the situation.

M4

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of the impact of the M4 bus lane on *(a)* motorcyclists, *(b)* traffic speeds at off-peak hours and *(c)* congestion between Junction 4 and Junction 7 of the M4; [60638]

(2) when he will publish the results of his consultation on the use of the M4 bus lane. [60637]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Fiona Mactaggart, dated 10 June 2002:

I have been asked by the Transport Minister, David Jamieson, to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the M4 Bus Lane.

The Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) monitored use of the Bus lane during its first year of operation including the effects of the bus lane on off-peak traffic and congestion to the west of Junction 4. A copy of their report was placed in the House of Commons Library in January 2001.

The effectiveness of the bus lane has been closely monitored by the Highways Agency. They reported that it continues to alleviate peak congestion on this busy section of the motorway. However they recommended that the scheme could be improved by raising the speed limit between junction 4 and the elevated section to 60 mph and allowing motorcycles to use the lane designated for buses and taxis.

Accident monitoring since the bus lane was introduced in June 1999 indicate that motorcycles are now slightly more at risk in peak periods. The numbers involved are small, but we believe that safety for motorcyclists will be improved by allowing them to use the bus lane.

Roads

Mr. George Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what assessment he has made of the cost of making junction 20 of the M6 fully directional; [60316]

(2) what assessment he has made of the cost of building the proposed M556; [60315]

(3) what plans he has to reduce traffic flows on the A556 between junction 19 of the M6 and the M56. [60317]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. George Osborne, dated 10 June 2002:

The Transport Minister, David Jamieson, has asked me to reply to your three recent Parliamentary Questions about the cost of building a new motorway link between the M6 in the vicinity of J19 and the M56 in the vicinity of J7, plans to reduce traffic flows on the A556, and the cost of making Junction 20 of the M6 Motorway fully directional.

At the time of the Government's trunk roads review of 1998 the estimated cost of constructing the A556(M) was £100m. The cost-estimate is currently under review as part of the A556 Area Study being carried out to inform the West Midlands to North West Conurbations Multi-Modal Study (MIDMAN) consideration. The purpose of MIDMAN was to develop an overarching strategy for transport between the conurbations.

The Highways Agency is currently undertaking the A556 Area Study in support of the MIDMAN Multi-Modal Study, which is also exploring different options for a link between Junction 19 of the M6 and Junction 7 of the M56. Reduction of traffic flows and the associated environmental relief to communities along the A556 are key aims. That report is expected to be completed this Summer.

A scheme, which would make Junction 20 of the M6 fully-directional is currently being investigated as part of the A556 Area Study. The cost-estimate is currently being developed and will form part of the final report on that Study.

I hope this is helpful. If you would like any further information about these issues, please contact Gerald Cooper, Room 703, Sunley Tower, Piccadilly Plaza, Manchester, M1 4BE (telephone 0161–930 5640).

Road Safety

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many children have been *(a)* killed and *(b)* seriously injured in each year since 1997 in road traffic accidents as a result of failing to wear seat belts. [59432]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

These data are not collected because of the difficulty in establishing accurately, after the event, whether seat belts were worn.

Vehicle Safety

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his policy is on pedestrian protection in relation to the tests developed by the European Enhanced Vehicle Safety Committee. [60070]

Mr. Jamieson: The UK will continue actively to support the work of the EEVC working group on pedestrian protection. It is intended that methods developed by this group will be used to assess new car designs against the requirements of the proposed negotiated agreement with the motor industry on pedestrian protection.

Drivers' Hours Regulations

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the EU draft regulations on drivers' hours on the UK livestock industry. [59667]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

My Department carried out an extensive public consultation exercise on the European Commission proposal to amend the existing European Union (EU) drivers' hours rules as part of our consideration of the likely impact of this proposal on UK industry. Those consulted include DEFRA, the Freight Transport Association, the Road Haulage Association, the National Farmers' Union (NFU), NFU Scotland, Farmers Union for Wales, and the Dairy Industry Federation.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what meetings he has had with his counterparts in the other nations of the EU to discuss the impact of the EU draft regulations on drivers' hours on the animal transport industry within the UK. [59669]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

None. There is to be an orientation debate on this issue at the Transport Council on 17 June which will provide the opportunity for Ministers from all member states to express their views. In the meantime, discussions will continue to take place at official level.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with his counterparts in the *(a)* Scottish Executive, *(b)* National Assembly for Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland Assembly on the impact on the UK livestock industry of the EU draft regulations on drivers' hours. [59678]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

My Department carried out an extensive public consultation exercise on the European Commission proposal to amend the existing European Union (EU) drivers' hours rules. The Scottish Executive, the National Assembly for Wales and the Northern Ireland Executive were invited to contribute.

Safety Cameras

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the new criteria are for the siting of safety cameras under the netting off scheme; on what research the new criteria were based; and if he will place a copy of the research in the Library. [60077]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell), on 24 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 623W.

Speed Cameras

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if it is his policy to restrict the siting of speed cameras to sites where serious accidents have already taken place. [60242]

Mr. Jamieson: Guidance on deployment for the siting of cameras is contained in Circular Roads 1/92 which states that cameras should be placed at sites with a history of speed related accidents. That remains key advice to local authorities.

ILO Convention

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the UK's compliance with its obligations under the International Labour Organisation Convention 147. [60168]

Mr. Jamieson: The UK ratified ILO Convention Number 147 in 1980. The UK Government ratifies international conventions only when it is satisfied that measures are in place to ensure compliance. The Government has also ratified the Protocol of 1996 to that Convention, which extends the list of other conventions with which signatory states must comply.

Correspondence

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the right hon. Member for North-West Cambridgeshire will receive a substantive reply to his letter of 28 March on behalf of his constituent Mr. J. Germany. [59718]

Mr. Darling: I apologise for the delay in providing a substantive reply to the right hon. Member of North-West Cambridgeshire's letter of 28 March on behalf of your constituent Mr. J. Germany. My predecessor explained in his reply of 10 April 2002 that Mr. Germany raised some complex issues and that it would take some time to explore these and respond in some detail. However, a full response will be sent today.

Private Finance Initiative

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many non-PFI capital projects fall under the responsibility of his Department and related NDPBs; and what the capital value and nature is of each project. [59814]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

In respect of DTLR the information requested can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many PFI capital projects fall under the responsibility of his Department and related NDPBs; what the capital value and nature is of each project; and what stage they are at in the PFI procurement process. [59834]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested in respect of the former DTLR is set out in the table.

PFI Project	*Capital value (£ million)*	*Nature of project*	*Stage in PFI procurement process*
Highways Agency—A69	9	Road	Operational
Highways Agency—A1(M)	128	Road	Operational
Highways Agency—A417/419	49	Road	Operational
Highways Agency—A50	21	Road	Operational
Highways Agency—A30/35	75	Road	Operational
Highways Agency—M40	65	Road	Operational
Highways Agency—A19	29	Road	Operational
Highways Agency—M1-A1 Link Road	214	Road	Operational
Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre	3	Catering	Operational
Highways Agency—Traffic Control Centre	85	IT	Contract awarded and under construction
Vehicle Inspectorate—MOT Computerisation	31.4	IT	Contract awarded and under construction
Health and Safety Laboratory—Estate Rationalisation	63	Laboratory	Contract awarded and under construction
Highways Agency—A1(M) Dishforth to Darrington	[1]240	Road	In procurement (best and final offer stage)
Health and Safety Executive—Merseyside Accommodation	[2]50	Office accommodation	In procurement (awaiting responses to invitation to negotiate)
Highways Agency—A249 Stockbury to Sheerness	[1]75	Road and bridge	In procurement (pre-qualification stage)
Highways Agency/Government Office for Yorkshire and the Humber/Traffic Area Network—Leeds Accommodation	[1]30	Office accommodation	In procurement (expression of interest stage)
Maritime and Coastguard Agency—helicopter harmonisation (with Ministry of Defence)[3]	Not known	Search and rescue helicopters	Pre-procurement (harmonisation options under consideration)

[1] This is an estimated figure for the construction cost.

[2] This is an estimated figure for the capital cost.

[3] PFI is one of the options under consideration.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the mandate of the EC-Bulgaria Joint Transport Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [58413]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

This Committee is established under the provisions of Article 13 of the Agreement of 26 July 2000 between the European Community and the Republic of Bulgaria establishing certain conditions for the carriage of goods by road and the promotion of combined transport. The remit of the Committee is to ensure the proper implementation of the Agreement. The Committee would be made up of representatives appointed by the Community and Bulgaria. But I am not aware that it has met since the conclusion of the Agreement or that there are any plans for it to meet in the immediate future.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the mandate of the Committee on the movement of air or sea passengers' baggage (principles) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56791]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

I have not been able to identify this committee from the information in the hon. Member's question.

Network Rail

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guarantees concerning *(a)* the state of the track and signals and *(b)* future safety are being sought by the consortium, Network Rail. [58016]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

Network Rail has sought no such guarantees.

Railways

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if it is his policy to modify the provisions of the Railways Act 1993 in relation to Railway Administration. [59333]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

There are no current plans to do so.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the requirement in the Commercial Loan Agreement for the Railtrack administrator to repay commercial loans in September. [59358]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

Under Clause 11.1.1 of the Commercial Loan Agreement, repayment is due on the earlier of, the date notified to the agent as being the date expected to fall seven days before a transfer scheme is made or if no transfer scheme is made, an Alternative Railway Transfer, or discharge of the Railway Administration Order, or 23 September 2002 or the date which is the next business day following any date to which the availability period is extended. The availability period is defined as the period from (and including) financial close to (and including) 20 September 2002 or such later date as may be determined pursuant to Clause 5.5 of the Commercial Loan Agreement.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of the impact of the number of trained staff in Scotland on the implementation of the Strategic Rail Authority's plan in Scotland. [58095]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The Strategic Rail Authority has recognised the need for improvements in training within the industry and is taking the lead on the development of a National Rail Academy, to promote the development of the key skills and competencies needed to run a railway on a safe and effective basis. The SRA has provided £500,000 for development work.

Rail Service (Edinburgh)

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects passenger rail services to begin between Edinburgh Waverley and the proposed Edinburgh Park station. [59201]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

I am not aware that a date has been set. I understand that a formal bid will be put forward to the Strategic Rail Authority for Rail Passenger Partnership funding, the initial proposal having pre-qualified. The Strategic Rail Authority will assess the bid on value for money terms in line with their published planning criteria. The outcome of that process will determine how and when the scheme progresses.

Island Line

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what plans he has for adding the Island Line to the London to Portsmouth railway franchise. [59176]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

At the time the South West Trains franchise replacement process commenced the Strategic Rail Authority considered that the best solution for the Island Line was that it should become A separate micro-franchise. The authority is currently giving further consideration to the future of the Island Line in the light of the consultants' report on future options produced in September 2001 and will make a further announcement in due course.

Crossrail

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to the answer of 29 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 567W, on Crossrail, who the key stakeholders involved in the consultation period are; how the consultation will be carried out; and who will be funding the consultation process, and at what financial cost. [59549]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The key stakeholders which are about to be consulted on the shortlisted Crossrail route options are "line of route" local authorities, development partnerships and significant businesses, either individually or through their representative bodies.

The consultation will be carried out by Cross London Rail Links Ltd., who will be distributing a consultation document, and providing individual and group briefings and presentations as appropriate. I am arranging for a copy of the stakeholder consultation document to be placed in the Library.

The cost of the stakeholder consultation exercise is included in Cross London Rail Link's Crossrail project development budget, and has not been broken down separately.

Road Bridges

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what measures he intends to take to improve road bridges over railway lines as a result of the Great Heck accident. [59371]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The Minister for Transport announced in the House on 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 803–04W, that we had accepted all the recommendations in the reports of the Health and Safety Commission and the Highways Agency into the various issues involving road vehicles obstructing the railway following the Great Heck road/rail accident. There are five streams of work arising from these recommendations:

the development of a protocol for apportioning responsibility and costs of improvements made at locations where roads meet, cross or run close to railways;

the development of tools and data for use at the local level to assess the risk of vehicles leaving the road and getting onto the railway;

the development of good practice guidance on measures to help manage risk at specific sites;

identification of the relevant information that it would be practicable and useful to collect about incidents where road vehicles get onto railway property; and

updating the standards for safety barriers on major roads in a clear and open procedure.

Representations from highway authorities, rail infrastructure authorities and rail safety organisations are supporting this Department in taking forward the recommendations. Our first priority is the protocol on responsibilities and costs which we aim to have agreed by the end of June 2002 and the Minister for Transport has asked for a report on progress on all streams of work by the end of July 2002.

Any measures taken as a result of this work will be the responsibility of the highway authorities and rail infrastructure authorities.

Rail Bridges

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made with the risk assessment of rail bridge safety he ordered as a result of the Great Heck incident. [60409]

Mr. Jamieson: We have accepted all the recommendations in the reports of the Health and Safety Commission and the Highways Agency into the various issues involving road vehicles obstructing the railway following the Great Heck road/rail accident. Representatives from highway authorities, rail infrastructure authorities and rail safety organisations are supporting this Department in taking forward work on:

the development of a protocol for apportioning responsibility and costs of improvements made at locations where roads meet, cross or run close to railways.

The development of tools and data for use at the local level to assess the risk of vehicles leaving the road and getting onto the railway; and

the development of good practice guidance on measures to help manage risk at specific sites.

Our first priority is the protocol on responsibilities and costs which we aim to have agreed by the end of June 2002 and the Minister for Transport has asked for a report on progress on all streams of work by the end of July 2002.

We have also endorsed the prioritisation tool produced by Railtrack and the CSS (formerly the County Surveyors' Society) and have encouraged highway authorities and rail infrastructure authorities to use it on the bridges for which they are responsible.

Any measures taken as a result of this work will be the responsibility of the highway authorities and rail infrastructure authorities.

Rail Safety

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions his Department has had with British Transport Police regarding possible incidents involving track *(a)* maintenance and *(b)* vandalism at (i) Severn tunnel junction, (ii) Bristol parkway and (iii) other locations since January 2000; and if he will make a statement. [59886]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

None. There have been no discussions between the Department and British Transport Police (BTP) on specific incidents. However, I understand from BTP that they and the Health and Safety Executive work together closely on them.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the proposed railway safety body will be established; what its remit is; what the role of *(a)* contractors and *(b)* sub-contractors will be within this body; and if he will make a statement. [59889]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The Office of the Rail Regulator (ORR) are consulting on a proposed licence modification which would enable the proposed railway industry safety body (RISB) to be established without primary legislation. The RISB would take the role of an industry safety body as recommended by Lord Cullen in his part 2 report on the Ladbroke Grove Rail Inquiry. The involvement of contractors and sub-contractors in the decision-making processes of RISB forms part of ORR's consultation. If there is agreement to proceed by way of a licence change modification, ORR expect RISB to be in place by the end of the year.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the proposed rail accident investigation body will be established; what its remit is; what the expected role of *(a)* contractors and *(b)* sub-contractors will be within this body; and if he will make a statement. [59888]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

We expect to consult this summer on proposals for the establishment of an independent rail accident investigation branch (RAIB) before publishing the necessary primary legislation. The remit of the RAIB will be subject to consultation but will reflect the recommendations made by Lord Cullen in his part 2 report on the Ladbroke Grove Rail Inquiry. The role of contractors or sub-contractors within RAIB would be as witnesses, when appropriate, during investigations.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many incidents of motor vehicles colliding with trains on railway lines at level crossings there have been in each year since 1997; in which locations; and if he will make a statement. [59885]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

Incidents of motor vehicles colliding with trains on railway lines at level crossings since 1997 is as follows:

Year	*Number*
1997–98	24
1998–99	27
1999–2000	24
2000–01	24
2001–02	16

The locations of these incidents are as follows:

	Location
1997–98	
12 April 1997	Greenland Mill
26 April 1997	Glanyrafon
25 June 1997	Oaks Occ
26 June 1997	Okeltor
22 July 1997	Dingwall Middle
28 July 1997	Moat Farm No. 1
9 August 1997	Saxondale
23 August 1997	Berthddu
12 September 1997	Holywell, Newsham
12 September 1997	Club Lane
29 September 1997	Holywell Aocl
12 October 1997	Blackhill UWGT
13 October 1997	Washwood Heath
18 October 1997	St. Mary's Road, Dymchurch
9 December 1997	Glanyrafon
29 December 1997	Star Crossing, Rye
10 January 1998	Lechryd
15 January 1998	Swineshead AHB
18 January 1998	Toddington
24 January 1998	Trafford
10 February 1998	York
11 March 1998	Swineshead AHB
11 March 1998	Shaws Crossing
29 March 1998	Holywell
1998–99	
15 April 1998	Miltonise
23 April 1998	Marchwood
12 May 1998	Ardrossan Princes AOCL
14 May 1998	Sutton Forest AHB
8 June 1998	Callerton Parkway Crossing
8 June 1998	Bye Farm Crossing
11 June 1998	Brora
26 June 1998	Dolfawr Farm
1 July 1998	Trout Farm
11 July 1998	Uttoxeter
18 July 1998	Millom
29 July 1998	Muir of Ord
29 August 1998	Three Gates
8 September 1998	Fron Goch
8 September 1998	Stoke Creek
14 September 1998	Crabtree Lane
20 September 1998	Marina
24 September 1998	Wainfleet AHB
7 November 1998	Hamsey
10 November 1998	Sands Lane
2 December 1998	Gypsey Lane
5 December 1998	Hibaldstow
8 December 1998	Llanwrda
22 December 1998	Coles Harbour
4 January 1999	Cwmbach Sidings
12 January 1999	Bertram Drive
21 March 1999	Hixon
1999–2000	
1 April 1999	British Cellophane
3 May 1999	Rose Lane
20 May 1999	Whitegate Farm
31 May 1999	Allanfearn
21 June 1999	Low Mill
28 June 1999	Trencreek
1 July 1999	Blackwood
15 July 1999	Snaith Station
25 July 1999	Marsh Lane
26 July 1999	East Guldeford
29 July 1999	Gorsey Lane
3 August 1999	Dingwall Middle
20 August 1999	Ynys Uchaf
22 August 1999	Dalfaber
28 August 1999	Black Dyke
2 September 1999	Bretts
2 September 1999	Battery Road, Dungeness
4 September 1999	Manorbier
29 October 1999	Llanbrynmair
26 December 1999	Qua[illegible] Farm
29 December 1999	[illegible]an Lane
2 March 2000	[illegible] Lea
19 March 2000	Seghill
20 March 2000	Howdon Road
2000–01	
3 April 2000	Sawbridgeworth Station
2 May 2000	Allanfearn
8 May 2000	Tregoss Moor
22 June 2000	Hixon
24 June 2000	Battery Road, Dungeness
12 July 2000	Beavers
4 August 2000	Borth Capel Soar
10 August 2000	Bragg Marsh
24 August 2000	Sweet Briar Lane
7 September 2000	Munllyn
24 September 2000	Weston Avenue
17 October 2000	Pooley Green
22 October 2000	Appenine Way
23 October 2000	Traethmawr
2 November 2000	Lairg
11 November 2000	Common Lane, Rankshill
12 November 2000	Bank Foot
15 November 2000	Coltishall Lane

	Location
19 November 2000	Callerton Parkway
25 November 2000	Northwood
28 November 2000	Waterbeach Station
14 December 2000	Meldreth Road
25 January 2001	Quintrell Downs
14 February 2001	Wadhams North Barn
2001–02	
19 April 2001	Forge Farm
5 May 2001	Moulinearn
14 June 2001	Shaws Crossing
26 July 2001	Swineshead
17 August 2001	Clattercote
21 August 2001	Allanfearn
23 August 2001	Ardorssan Harbour
25 August 2001	Shenley Hill Road Crossing
19 September 2001	Swan Lane
26 September 2001	Foxton
7 October 2001	Llwyn Cadwygan
29 October 2001	Rippins Main
17 November 2001	Cleghorn
1 January 2002	Norwood Road
7 February 2002	Tan Lane
15 February 2002	Carleton

Level crossing accidents in Great Britain are among the lowest in Europe. However, as about 33 per cent. of railway collisions occur on level crossings they still present a significant area of risk. Her Majesty's Railway Inspectorate (HMRI) are currently developing plans for a level crossing working party to critically look at all level crossing issues from first principles.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what changes are proposed to the remit of the HMRI in relation to railway *(a)* inspection, *(b)* safety cases and *(c)* accident investigation; what changes are proposed to the role of (i) contractors and (ii) sub-contractors within the HMRI; and if he will make a statement. [59890]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

No changes are planned to the remit of HMRI or to the role of contractors and sub-contractors within HMRI.

Subject to Parliament's approval of the necessary legislation, in future the Rail Accident Investigation Branch will have lead responsibility for rail accident investigation but HMRI will retain responsibility for breaches under the Health and Safety at Work Act.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what recent representations he has received in relation to the role of contractors in *(a)* inspection, *(b)* safety cases and *(c)* accident investigation; and if he will make a statement; [59956]

(2) what discussions he has had with *(a)* Railtrack, *(b)* the HSE, *(c)* the HSC and *(d)* other organisations in relation to the role of contractors in (i) inspection, (ii) safety cases and (iii) accident investigation; and if he will make a statement; [59959]

(3) if he will make a statement on the role of contractors in the railway industry in relation to *(a)* safety inspection, *(b)* safety cases and *(c)* accident investigation; and if he will make a statement. [59957]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

On 23 May, the then Secretary of State met with key players in the railway industry to discuss the issue of contractors in the railway industry. He also received a letter and report on this issue from the chair of the Health and Safety Commission on Friday 31 May, copies of which are available in the House Libraries.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the proposals for establishment of a railway industry safety body; and if he will place the consultation papers in the Library. [60596]

Mr. Jamieson: The Office of the Rail Regulator (ORR) are consulting on a licence modification which would enable the proposed railway industry safety body (RISB) to be established without primary legislation. If there is agreement to proceed by way of a licence change modification, ORR expects RISB to be in place by the end of the year. A copy of the consultation document was placed in the Library by the ORR in December 2001, it is also available on the ORR website www.rail-reg.gov.uk.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of the programme of safety tours that the chief executive officer of Railtrack undertakes. [60610]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department does not hold the information requested, although I understand that the chief executive officer and other senior staff undertake such safety-related activities on a continuing basis.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what meetings he has had with Railtrack officials since the Southwell rail accident. [60597]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers have regularly met Railtrack board members and officials since September 1997.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the primary legislation required to set up the Railway Accident Investigation Branch will be published. [60607]

Mr. Jamieson: Lord Cullen recommended the establishment of a Rail Accident Investigation Branch (RAIB), which will require primary legislation. We expect to consult this summer on our proposals for the establishment of RAIB before publishing the necessary primary legislation.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if his Department is represented on the Railtrack Safety Executive. [60611]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department is not represented on the board of Railway Safety.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the development group meetings of key stakeholders of the rail industry safety body will be open to the public. [60608]

Mr. Jamieson: The Rail Regulator has published a consultation document on the establishment of the rail industry safety body (RISB). Copies of the consultation document and the majority of responses are available on the Rail Regulator's website, together with other working papers discussed at the development group. The development group is intended to be a series of working meetings to develop the detailed proposals for establishing RISB. It is not therefore open to the public. The Rail Regulator has however held two conferences open to a wide audience including passenger representatives, freight users, and trade unions. A transcript of the last industry conference on 9 May 2002 will be made available shortly on the Rail Regulator's website.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what initiatives and management systems the rail industry use to ensure employee involvement in safety issues. [60609]

Mr. Jamieson: Health and safety law places a duty on all employers to consult employees and their representatives in good time about specified aspects of their health and safety at work.

In addition, the Railway Safety Case Regulations 2000 places an explicit duty on railway employers to establish adequate arrangements for the passing and receiving of information relevant to health and safety to and from employees and others affected by their operations.

The railway industry also has a Confidential Incident Reporting and Analysis System (CIRAS). CIRAS offers an independent and confidential way for staff to report safety concerns without fear of disciplinary procedures. CIRAS is not intended to replace the normal reporting channels already operated by railway companies. Rather it is intended to work alongside them.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the *(a)* timescale, *(b)* terms of reference and *(c)* costs are of the consultation exercise on the establishment of an independent rail accident investigation body; and if he will make a statement. [60595]

Mr. Jamieson: Lord Cullen's part 2 Ladbroke Grove report made a number of recommendations about an independent rail accident investigation branch (RAIB). We expect to consult this summer on proposals for the establishment of RAIB which are drawn from these recommendations. The consultation exercise will run for 12 weeks from the date of publication, as set out in the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultation. Responses to the consultation will be carefully analysed following this period, and in advance of primary legislation. The costs of consultations exercises are included in the Department's running costs.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many children were injured on railway lines in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [60393]

Mr. Jamieson: Information held by the British Transport police on fatal and major injuries to juveniles (under 16 years) in relation to trespass offences is contained in the following table:

Year	*Fatal*	*Major injuries*
1997–98	6	10
1998–99	5	9
1999–2000	5	13
2000–01	8	16
2001–02	3	7

Cullen Report

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if the results of the centralised training and development team formed by Railtrack, as reported in the Cullen report, will be made publicly available; [60612]

(2) what the terms of reference are for the local management teams that monitor the implementation of contracts for the rail industry as reported in the Cullen report on the Ladbroke Grove Rail Inquiry. [60604]

Mr. Jamieson: These are operational matters for Railtrack.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the shortcomings are in the scope of contract documentation reported in the Cullen report on the Ladbroke Grove Rail Inquiry. [60603]

Mr. Jamieson: Lord Cullen discussed the use of contracts in Chapter 4 of his part 2 Ladbroke Grove report including the process for awarding and controlling contracts and contractors. He did not make any specific recommendations about contract documentation. A copy of the report is in the Library.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what maintenance delivery and other improvements are being followed up by Railtrack as reported in the Cullen report on the Ladbroke Grove Rail Inquiry; [60602]

(2) if he will make a statement on the reasons for non-completion of recommendations 4, 6, 9 and 72 of the Cullen report into the Ladbroke Grove Rail Inquiry; and what timetable he has set for their completion; [60594]

(3) what steps are to be completed by Railtrack to comply with the recommendations of the Cullen report into the Ladbroke Grove Rail Inquiry; and what *(a)* timescales and *(b)* costs are involved. [60598]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Commission (HSC) has published progress reports on how the recommendations of the Cullen reports have been implemented: Part 1 on 14 March 2002 and Part 2 on 29 April 2002. These reports describe the original and revised timetables for all the recommendations and have been placed in the House Library.

On 1 May 2002, the Secretary of State asked the HSC for a further progress report on the reasons for the delay in implementing recommendations associated with the management of contractors. A copy of the HSC's reply has been placed in the House Library.

The cost of implementing those Cullen recommendations for which they have responsibility is a matter for Railtrack.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the 10 strategic maintenance principles developed by Railtrack that involve Railtrack directly managing inspection, appraisal and key work decisions as reported in the Cullen report on the Ladbroke Grove Rail Inquiry. [60601]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand that Railtrack have drawn up the following 10 key principles relating to maintenance and contractor management:

1. To take responsibility for material asset, engineering decisions.

2. To deliver clear asset engineering policies, standards, specifications and key work instructions.

3. To own asset information including asset condition data and monitoring.

4. To own examination of its network and, on a long-term basis, to aim to automate inspection as appropriate.

5. To own the work prioritisation decisions and the resulting work plans on planned and reactive maintenance.

6. To be accountable for developing the long-term view of people and the capability required and to work with the industry to ensure that people are developed as necessary.

7. To lead the industry research and development into plant, systems, process and materials.

8. To own all engineering access to the network and additionally to manage possessions based on assessed risk against a risk matrix, having fully consulted the passenger and freight train operating companies.

9. To be able to demonstrate cost effectiveness of maintenance and renewals, and to seek continual unit cost reductions to meet regulatory expectations of efficiency.

10. To continue to contract out maintenance and renewals in this control period but will consider the merits of bringing this work in-house for one or two "control areas".

Railtrack

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) what assessment he has made of the circumstances in which Railtrack has imported rail track components that are cheaper but require higher maintenance than those of established British suppliers; and if he will make a statement; [58147]

(2) in relation to Railtrack's decisions on which rail track components to purchase, what criteria are set by the *(a)* Rail Regulator and *(b)* HSE as to how Railtrack should trade off complexity of maintenance and capital outlay. [58146]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

None. These are procurement matters for the industry parties. However, the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 places specific duties on designers, manufacturers, suppliers and installers to ensure components are safe.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many posts in Railtrack Scotland are unfilled; and what impact these vacancies are having on Scotland's rail services; [58097]

(2) for what posts in the Scottish rail network Railtrack has recruited people from *(a)* Romania and *(b)* the Philippines; and how many have been recruited; [58098]

(3) what additional training is required for people recruited from Romania and the Philippines by Railtrack to work on the rail network. [58094]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

Recruitment and training are matters for the industry parties. Railtrack employs contractors to carry out its maintenance and renewal work on the network in Scotland. Signalling resources have been an issue for the industry and the contractors have looked at various options including the small-scale recruitment of qualified engineering staff from abroad. Their training additionally includes familiarisation with the operational methods and standards of the UK network.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the results of the enhanced basic questionnaire for prospective Railtrack contractors will be made available to the public. [60599]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a commercial matter for Railtrack.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the deferred timescales of Railtrack for the revised selection process for prospective contractors. [60600]

Mr. Jamieson: I understand that Railtrack's maintenance contracts are for fixed terms and will be re-let upon expiry. The next tranche is due to be renewed with effect from 1 April 2003.

Railway Lines

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions, pursuant to his answer of 22 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 349W, if he will *(a)* provide a breakdown of the table by (i) wild animals, (ii) cattle and (iii) domestic animals and *(b)* provide an explanation for the decline in 2001–02. [60031]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The Health and Safety Executive's Railway Inspectorate only records incidents of trains running into either cows or horses where the animals were subsequently killed, injured or retrieved from railway lines. Details are contained in the following table.

Year	*Cows*	*Horses*
1996–97	67	15
1997–98	56	14
1998–99	53	13
1999–2000	71	17
2000–01	68	14
2001–02[1]	46	5

[1] Provisional

Figures are also recorded for trains striking other animals if the strike causes damage to the train which necessitates immediate repair. However the type of animal is not recorded. All these figures are also available in HM Chief Inspector of Railways Annual Report on Railway Safety, copies of which are in both House Libraries.

It is not year clear whether the decline in 2001–02 has any statistical significance. However, factors may include the better provision of fencing and the outbreak of foot and mouth disease.

Rail Investment

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the allocation of the money under the 10-year transport plan for rail investment, broken down by region, including *(a)* total amount and *(b)* percentage allocated to each region. [60268]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) on 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, columns 53–54W.

Railway Inspectorate

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the *(a)* terms of reference, *(b)* timescales and *(c)* job description are for the successful candidate applying for the position of director in Her Majesty's Railway Inspectorate. [60605]

Mr. Jamieson: The creation within the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) of the new post of Director of Railway Safety is a direct result of Lord Cullen's recommendations following the Ladbroke Grove Rail Inquiry. This will be a permanent appointment on standard civil service terms. The post was advertised in the national and specialist press, interviews have taken place, and the recruitment process, overseen by the Civil Service Commission, will be completed shortly. An announcement will be made by the HSE in due course.

The job specification for the post includes requirements to lead and direct the Railway Inspectorate in ensuring that all relevant duty holders carry out their health and safety responsibilities to employees, passengers and others; contribute to the health and safety strategy for railways; ensure that all targets to improve health and safety on the railways are fully met; and to maintain strong links with stakeholders in driving forward the health and safety strategy and improving public confidence.

Railway Industry Advisory Committee

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the terms of reference are for the two additional members of the Railway Industry Advisory Committee; and from which areas nominations are accepted. [60606]

Mr. Jamieson: The published terms of reference for all Railway Industry Advisory Committee (RIAC) members, including the two new passenger interest representatives, are:

> to develop and advise the Health and Safety Commission (HSC) on a strategy for improving standards of health and safety in the rail industry and the protection of the public from related hazards;
>
> to advise HSC on the protection of people at work and others from hazards to health and safety arising within the rail industry;
>
> to provide advice and guidance to the rail industry in the context of HSC/E strategies;
>
> to encourage the participation of representative organisations in the protection of people from hazards to health and safety arising from the operation of the railway services; and
>
> in order to meet these goals to involve all those with an interest in health and safety on Britain's railways in the work of RIAC either through membership—particularly for representative organisations—or other forms of consultation.

The "person specification" set out in the advertisement states that applicants need to be able to:

> represent the broad interests of all passengers and the public generally in rail safety issues;
>
> take a strategic approach to issues;
>
> weigh up conflicting opinions and reach consensus;
>
> work constructively with a range of stakeholders across the rail industry; and
>
> prepare for and attend two to four meetings a year.

The new positions have been advertised in the national press and on the Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) website. Details of the vacancies have also been sent to consumer bodies and passenger interest organisations.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Millennium Stadium (Cardiff)

11. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will provide additional funding to pay for the policing of major national events at the Millennium stadium, Cardiff. [57057]

Mr. Denham: My right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary, approved a special grant of £300,000 for South Wales Police on 8 May as a contribution towards the additional cost of policing major football finals at the Millennium Stadium in 2002–03.

Asylum Seekers

12. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers are awaiting a final decision on their application; and what the average waiting time for a decision was over the last 12 months. [57058]

Beverley Hughes: There were 35,500 asylum applications, excluding dependants, awaiting an initial decision on 31 March 2002. This number relates to the number of cases, i.e. the number of principal applicants.

The average time between application and initial decision was 11 months for initial decisions made in 2001–02. It was 17 months in 1996.

17. **Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what changes he proposes on the criteria for admission to the UK of asylum seekers. [57063]

Beverley Hughes: As a signatory to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, the United Kingdom has an obligation to consider all applications for asylum made in this country.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if asylum seekers whose appeal against a refusal of support fails will be able to ask for a judicial review of this decision. [59998]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I have been asked to reply.

Asylum seekers who have been refused support by the National Asylum Support Service have a right of appeal to the Asylum Support Adjudicators. If their appeal is unsuccessful, they can apply for a judicial review of the adjudicator's decision.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what percentage of those seeking asylum were convicted of criminal offences in each of the past five years. [57263]

Beverley Hughes: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I provided to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Lynne Jones) on 20 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 74W.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the Government's criteria will be for the allocation of permanent addresses to those asylum seekers awarded leave to remain while residing in an asylum accommodation centre. [58343]

Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. Member to the answer the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle), gave to the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) on 9 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 329W.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers are estimated to have entered Britain from France on freight trains in the weeks of *(a)* 1 March 2001, *(b)* 11 November 2001, *(c)* 17 February 2002 and *(d)* 14 April 2002; and if he will re-enter the bilateral agreement with France on security arrangements near the entrance to the channel tunnel. [R] [58746]

Beverley Hughes: It is not possible to establish precisely how many asylum seekers have entered the United Kingdom after travelling through the channel tunnel on freight trains. Some illegal entrants do not claim asylum on arrival. Some illegal entrants are detected inland and cannot be attributed to a particular port of entry and some claim to use the channel tunnel but have in fact entered by a different route.

Information on the number of illegal entrants who have arrived in the United Kingdom after travelling on freight trains via the channel tunnel is not held centrally. However, local provisional management information is collated on a monthly basis although is not yet available for 2002. The locally collated figures for the two months in 2001 including these periods are as follows: 150 (March 2001), 288 (November 2001).

Security arrangements near the entrance to the channel tunnel have not been subject to any bilateral agreement with France. We have repeatedly stressed to SNCF and all levels of the French Government the need for rapid security improvements. We are monitoring the situation and we will take further concerted action until the overall policing and security levels are adequate. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) has made clear that addressing the problem of cross-channel asylum seekers in its totality will be a priority for discussions with the new French Government after their elections.

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the management of Landmark and Inn on the Park in Everton, Liverpool in housing asylum seekers. [58613]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* The National Asylum Support Service's (NASS) housing management team carry out regular inspections of the two properties to ensure that the accommodation provider is compliant in its contract with NASS. These inspections are to check on the provider's housing management policies, procedures and systems. In addition, residents are regularly interviewed to find out whether the standards of housing management are being maintained and if the complaints procedure is operating in accordance with the contract.

The NASS contract manager is in continuous monitoring contact with the accommodation provider to ensure overall compliance with all terms of the contract.

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the performance of NASS in relation to its monitoring of contracts for asylum seekers in Liverpool. [58614]

Beverley Hughes: Any assessment regarding the performance of the contractors used by the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) is overseen by the head of the Procurement Section, who reports to the director of NASS. NASS contract managers monitor the performance of accommodation providers against their contracts across the country. The work of NASS is subject to the normal management, audit and complaints procedures of that directorate.

As part of the Home Office, NASS is open to scrutiny by the National Audit Office and, through Ministers, by the Public Accounts Committee.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what circumstances asylum seekers applying for accommodation can exercise choice over the *(a)* type and *(b)* location of their accommodation. [59996]

Beverley Hughes: As a general rule the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) allocates accommodation on a no choice basis. Asylum seekers can, as part of their application for support, put forward reasons why they should not be dispersed or, if they are to be dispersed why they should be sent to a particular location. Any factors put forward will be taken into account. But no guarantees can be given that a request to be located in a particular area will be met. This will depend on a number of factors including availability of suitable accommodation.

Community Support Officers

13. **Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the proposed role of community support officers. [57059]

Mr. Blunkett: We are providing CSOs to support and work with the growing number of fully trained police officers with over 4,500 additional officers between March 2000 and January this year and 189 over the same period in Devon and Cornwall. The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has been at the forefront of arguing the case for CSOs, other forces and ACPO have also expressed their support. CSOs are a realistic and hard headed approach to providing a visible police presence in support of the police, freeing them up for other front line duties and tackling antisocial behaviour and increasing public safety.

Police (North-East)

14. **Mr. Kevan Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on police numbers in the north-east. [57060]

Mr. Denham: The north-east forces (Cleveland, Durham and Northumbria) had a total of 6,927 police officers on 31 January 2002. This is 386 more officers than in March 1997 and is a record number.

Antisocial Behaviour

15. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to prevent antisocial behaviour. [57061]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Our strategy to prevent antisocial behaviour includes the introduction of Neighbourhood and Street Wardens, the Closed Circuit Television initiative and a range of sentences for juvenile offenders to prevent further offending. Measures in the Police Reform Bill will improve the effectiveness of Anti-Social Behaviour-Orders and increase the extended police family to deter people from committing antisocial acts.

Tackling antisocial behaviour is a priority for the Government—it is blighting the lives of too many people.

Prisoner Rehabilitation

16. **Mr. Barker:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to assist the rehabilitation of prisoners. [57062]

Hilary Benn: The Government is investing an additional £31 million in 2001–02, £50 million in 2002–03 and £71 million in 2003–04 on basic skills, drug treatment, offending behaviour programmes and resettlement to help assist prisoner rehabilitation and reduce the rate of reconvictions.

Cannabis

18. **Mr. Laurence Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy towards prosecuting people for possession of cannabis. [57065]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is currently considering whether the classification of Cannabis should be changed from Class B to Class C, taking into account the advice he has received from the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, the reports relating to the Lambeth cannabis pilot warning scheme and the findings of the Home Affairs Select Committee.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) is responsible for prosecuting criminal offences. Each case received by the CPS is reviewed in accordance with the Code for Crown Prosecutors. A prosecution will only be pursued if there is sufficient evidence and it is in the public interest.

Drug Testing Pilot Schemes

19. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on recent drug testing pilot schemes. [57066]

24. **Mr. Bryant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on drug testing pilots. [57071]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The drug testing pilot programme began in three sites, Nottingham, Staffordshire and Hackney, between July and December 2001 under the relevant provisions of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000. It will run for two-years and is subject to a full independent evaluation.

The programme is being extended to an additional six sites to enhance the evaluation process.

An interim process evaluation report is to be published as Research Findings 176 on 30 May, with a further interim report in Spring 2003, on the emerging learning from the programme.

Domestic Violence

20. **David Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he intends to reduce domestic violence in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [57067]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office and the Women's Unit jointly published the policy document "Living without Fear: an integrated approach to tackling violence against women" in June 1999. The document set out the Government's goals for tackling violence against women which include:

to reduce crimes of violence against women and fear of violence as measured by the British Crime Survey;

to help today's children grow up in a society where violence is not part of family life and relationships are built on greater mutual respect; and

within five years to see effective multi-agency partnerships operating throughout England and Wales, drawing on good practice demonstrated in the mentioned publication.

Within the last two years we have also issued new multi-agency guidance on dealing with domestic violence, specific guidance to Health Service professionals and a new Home Office circular to the police which has been widely welcomed.

We have provided £120 million additional capital funding for a new Safer Communities Supported Housing Fund and increased funding for Victim Support. Over £10 million has been provided for a violence against women initiative within the Crime Reduction Programme to help us identify what interventions in what circumstances are the most effective and cost-effective.

In addition, my right hon. Friend, the Minister of State (Mr. Denham) chairs a Ministerial group on domestic violence involving representatives from seven key departments which is working closely together to consider the development and implementation of preventative strategies to address domestic violence. The group has highlighted five areas for priority action as follows:

Early intervention by Health Practitioners

Enhanced Criminal and Civil Jurisdiction Interface

Increasing safe accommodation choices for women and children

Education and awareness training

Ensuring an appropriate and consistent police and Crown Prosecution Service response.

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will review the one year concession in immigration rules in relation to domestic violence. [58596]

Beverley Hughes: We are currently in the process of reviewing the domestic violence concession.

Victims of Crime

21. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the support his Department is giving to the victims of crime. [57068]

Hilary Benn: I am committed to improving services and support to victims of crime. That is why we have more than doubled the annual grant to Victim Support since May 1997, increased the total amount awarded by the criminal injuries compensation scheme, and delivered new services such as witness support in magistrates courts, and a national telephone helpline.

A review of the 1996 Victim's Charter is well advanced. A Bill of Rights for victims and the establishment of a Victims' Ombudsman and Commissioner are under active consideration. I am also taking forward work on setting up a Victims Advisory Panel to enable me to hear, directly and regularly, of the concerns of victims of crime.

Asylum Accommodation Centres

22. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the proposed locations for the asylum accommodation centres. [57069]

Beverley Hughes: We have submitted a planning notification at two sites, near Bicester in Oxfordshire and at RAF Newton in Nottinghamshire. We intend to submit a planning notification with regards to Throckmorton Airfield, in the hon Member's Constituency, shortly. Further work is required on sites at AirWest Edinburgh, Sully Hospital (Glamorgan) and Hemswell Cliff (Lincolnshire) before a decision can be taken on whether to proceed to planning notifications.

Consultation with the relevant local authorities will continue, including public meetings.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many sites were considered for asylum accommodation centres before the shortlist of eight was agreed; and if he will list the other sites considered and the reasons for their exclusion. [57089]

Beverley Hughes: We have put into the public domain the location of all sites which were considered to merit detailed assessment for the purpose of siting an accommodation centre and will continue to do so in the future. We do not consider that it would be appropriate to put into the public domain details of sites which were not considered to merit detailed assessment.

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, (1) pursuant to his answer of 8 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 234W on asylum seekers, if he will define suitably qualified staff for the management of education provision in accommodation centres; [57712]

(2) what criteria will be used to assess the suitability of private contractors who will provide education in accommodation centres. [57624]

Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. Member to the reply of 20 March 2002, *Official Report,* column 412W which my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) gave to the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett). We are still in discussions with other Government Departments on the management of education provision in accommodation centres.

Those selected to operate the centres will be obliged to operate within strict Home Office guidelines.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will respond to the public petitions presented in the House on plans for an accommodation centre for asylum seekers near Bicester. [57966]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* A response will be submitted shortly.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long planning authorities will have to respond to notification from his Department about proposals to build an asylum accommodation centre in their area; and what timetable there will be for subsequent non-statutory planning inquiries. [59084]

Beverley Hughes: In general, local planning authorities will have eight weeks to respond to a planning notification from the Home Office in line with the ordinary provisions contained within Circular 18/84. However, where there is an environmental impact assessment required such as in the hon. Member's constituency, this timescale would be extended by a further eight weeks.

After a planning notification has been considered, depending upon the conclusion reached by the local planning authority, it would be a matter for the office of the Deputy Prime Minister whether there is an inquiry and what the format of any inquiry would be.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long Wychavon District Council will have to consider the planning notification for the proposed asylum accommodation centre at Throckmorton after its receipt. [60292]

Beverley Hughes: In general, local planning authorities will have eight weeks to respond to a planning notification from the Home Office in line with the ordinary provisions contained within Circular 18/84. However, where there is an environmental impact assessment required such as in the hon. Member's constituency, this timescale will be extended by a further eight weeks.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reach a conclusion on the suitability of RAF Turnhouse as a site for an asylum seeker accommodation centre; what factors have prevented a decision being reached; and for what reasons the Killingholme and Hooton Park sites are no longer under consideration for such centres. [57332]

Beverley Hughes: Those sites still under consideration, including the Royal Air Force (RAF) Turnhouse, are currently being evaluated under a wide range of criteria.

We will reach a decision as soon as possible on the suitability of RAF Turnhouse. However, immediate priority will be given to the three sites for which it has been decided to submit planning notifications.

All prospective sites were evaluated under a wide range of criteria including size, configuration, location, technical characteristics and planning considerations. The sites at Killingholme and Hooton Park were found to be unsuitable.

Trespass

23. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the law in relation to occupation of private land by travelling people. [57070]

Mr. Denham: The Home Office and Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions are currently considering their long term gypsy and traveller strategy, which includes a review of eviction powers.

Sentencing

25. **Vera Baird:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has for a guideline body to encourage consistency in sentencing; and how it will interact with the Sentencing Advisory Panel. [57072]

Hilary Benn: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary explained, in his address to the Justices' Clerks Society Conference in Cardiff on 7 May 2002, that it is the Government's intention to set up a sentencing guidelines body. This new body would seek to improve consistency in sentences for offences across the board in a way that is authoritative, comprehensive and that all the courts would be required to take account of.

The new body will be supported by the Sentencing Advisory Panel and will build on the work already done by the Court of Appeal (assisted by the Sentencing Advisory Panel) and the Magistrates' Courts Sentencing Guidelines.

We will set out our proposals on sentencing in a wider Criminal Justice White Paper due for publication later this year.

36. **Mr. Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent representations he has received from the police on sentencing policy. [57083]

Hilary Benn: The publication of the Halliday report on "Making Punishments Work" was subject to public consultation. Nine police forces responded and were generally supportive of the proposals. The consolidated response from the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) in particular supported the case for sentencing reform and considered that the proposals met in large measure the submissions that ACPO had made. Responses to the consultation were published. ACPO is quoted as saying:

> "The entire system including the courts must bear down on the recidivist".

27. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his action on guidance for magistrates on sentencing. [57074]

Hilary Benn: Following the recommendation of the review on the Sentencing Framework, we intend to set up a sentencing guidelines body. This new body would seek to improve consistency in sentences for offences across the board in a way that is authoritative, comprehensive and that all the courts would be required to take account of. Decisions in individual cases will of course continue to take account of individual circumstances.

The new body will be supported by the Sentencing Advisory Panel and will build on the work that has been done by those responsible for the Magistrates' Court sentencing guidelines.

We will set out our proposals on sentencing in a wider Criminal Justice White Paper due for publication later this year.

Drug Treatment and Testing Orders

26. **Ian Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the contribution of the NHS to the effectiveness of drug treatment and testing orders. [57073]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Research shows that there is a strong link between drugs and acquisitive crime, and that treatment can play a significant part in reducing both drugs misuse and associated crime. The National Drugs Treatment Monitoring System provides data on trends in the use of drug treatment services to assist planning on how best to provide services to meet the needs of drugs misusers. It is though, a matter for local decision between the Probation Service and other stakeholders within Joint Commissioning Groups whether the clinical treatment element of the Drug Treatment and Testing Order is delivered through the National Health Service or by another provider.

Prisoners' Health

28. **Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on funding for prisons to achieve the health targets set out in each prison's health improvement programme. [57075]

Hilary Benn: The Prison Service and the Department of Health, working in partnership, are committing significant new resources to support local improvements in health services for prisoners. This additional funding will amount to £62.9 million over the three years from April 2001 (£9.4 million 2001–02, £24 million 2002–03 and £29.5 million 2003–04).

Police (Sussex)

29. **Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on police numbers in Sussex. [57076]

Mr. Denham: On 31 January 2002 Sussex Police had 2,878. police officers. Police numbers increased by 56 between March 2000 and January 2002.

Over the three-year period to March 2003 Sussex has been allocated 206 recruits from the Crime Fighting Fund (CFF) over and above the force's previous recruitment plans for the period. Sussex Police took on 42 CFF recruits in 2000–01 and 71 CFF recruits in 2001–02. A further 93 CFF recruits are expected to be taken on by Sussex Police in 2002–03.

Street Crime

30. **Mr. Bill O'Brien:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of his safe street campaign in the Yorkshire region. [57077]

Mr. Denham: The street crime initiative represents a step-change in cross-Government action to tackle street crime with a focused programme of action in the 10 police force areas where the problem is most acute. In the Yorkshire region two forces are involved, South Yorkshire and West Yorkshire.

Both South and West Yorkshire have commenced targeted police operations in crime hotspots. Police activity is being supported by cross criminal justice agency with priority street crime courts established in Doncaster, Sheffield, Barnsley, Rotherham, Leeds and Bradford, and the Crown Prosecution Service providing a premium service for processing street crime cases. Bradford, Leeds and Sheffield are among 34 local education authorities across the 10 areas receiving additional funding to target truancy and bad behaviour. Both Yorkshire areas will also benefit from an increase in Summer Splash schemes, targeting children at risk of offending and providing a range of organised activities over the school holidays. Local partnerships are engaged in ensuring that street crime is a priority in local strategic planning.

To support the police further in these areas the Government have announced additional funding allocations. West Yorkshire will receive £1.8 million and South Yorkshire £1.6 million.

33. **Mr. Jenkins:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how he intends to tackle street robbery. [57080]

Mr. Denham: Tackling street crime is now a top priority for the Government. However, it is recognised that it cannot successfully be tackled by the police and criminal justice agencies alone. That is why the Government set up the Street Crime Action Group in March of this year. This group, chaired by the Prime Minister, has brought together all relevant Government Departments, criminal justice and other agencies to work together to identify and address weaknesses in the current systems. This includes preventative action as well as action designed to detect offenders and deal effectively with them through the courts.

The programme of action has been targeted and accelerated in 10 police force areas accounting for over 80 per cent. of street crime, since April 2002.

The Government have to date announced a number of measures to help tackle the issue of street crime. These include:

the funding of the roll-out of VIPER video identification equipment to enable video ID parades in the 10 areas;

the nomination of 67 specialist street crime courts in the 10 areas to fast-track street crime cases and provide separate facilities and support to victims and witnesses;

the launch of a CPS Premium Service for Street Crime offenders with experienced prosecutors working with police in a dedicated investigation and prosecution service;

the extension of bail powers through the greater use of electronic tagging, ISSP orders, new curfew conditions and the provision of more secure accommodation places for juvenile repeat offenders;

greater powers to remand into custody persistent young offenders aged 12 to 16;

a £66 million DfES package to tackle bad behaviour and truancy in schools, and to support summer activities;

the introduction of the Mobile Phone Re-programming Bill to outlaw the re-programming of mobile phones.

Further to support the policing operations in these areas the Government have announced the following additional funding allocations:

	£
Avon and Somerset	2,340,000
GMP	2,390,000
Lancashire	835,000
Merseyside	1,700,000
Met	13,130,000
Nottinghamshire	1,052,000
South Yorkshire	1,600,000
TVP	1,500,000
West Midlands	1,880,000
West Yorkshire	1,800,000

Language and Citizenship Education

31. **Mr. Rooney:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his plans to offer language and citizenship education to those settling long term in the UK. [57078]

Beverley Hughes: It is the Government's intention to ensure that people applying for nationality, and some others in categories leading to settlement, have ready access to language and citizenship education. The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill presently before Parliament makes provision for this. The Bill also provides for applicants to provide evidence of prior achievement, and for waiver of the requirement-to demonstrate competence in certain circumstances.

The purpose of these courses is partly to ensure that people entitled to work here should not be disadvantaged in the employment market by having an inadequate knowledge of English. Also, as part of a wider programme for integration with diversity and social cohesion, we want to encourage a greater sense of common citizenship by helping people gain a knowledge of parliamentary government, economic and social life.

A context-free course in English for Speakers of Other Languages was launched in February and the citizenship curriculum will be developed by a group of experts drawn from the fields of education and social cohesion.

Drug-Related Crime (North-East)

32. **Ms Dari Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his Department is doing to break the link between drugs and crime in the north-east. [57079]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The links between drugs and crime are complex and deep rooted, and require a combined effort of police enforcement, treatment, education and diversionary activity.

In the north-east, the Home Office funds a number of initiatives to tackle drug misuse such as:

drug treatment and testing orders, available across the three north-east probation areas;

arrest referral schemes covering the three north-east police forces.

Additionally a range of activities are funded under the Communities Against Drugs programme, aimed at stemming the supply of drugs, helping people into treatment and strengthening communities to resist drugs. In the year 2001–02 a total of £2.5 million was made available for the north-east under this initiative to be spent on local projects. This is in addition to mainstream funding for police, health and education and the range of work to help regenerate deprived areas and tackle social exclusion.

Racist Newspaper Articles

34. **Mr. Goodman:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received on the publication of racist articles in foreign language newspapers distributed in the United Kingdom. [57081]

Beverley Hughes: Home Office Ministers have received a number of representations from Members of Parliament (three), members of the public (two) and from the Board of Deputies of British Jews on this issue. The investigation of possible breaches of the law, in this case allegations that material incites racial hatred under part III of the Public Order Act 1986, are operational matters for the police. The police are investigating allegations that articles in the *al-Akhbar* newspaper, an Egyptian newspaper available in the United Kingdom, incited racial hatred. We would encourage anyone to report to the police any material they believe breaches the incitement to racial hatred laws.

Special Constables

35. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many special constables there are in England and Wales; and how many there were on 1 May 1997. [57082]

Mr. Denham: The number of serving special constables in England and Wales on 30 September 2001 was 12,068. In March 1997 there were 19,874 serving special constables.

The Government are committed to reversing this decline in numbers and achieving a stronger, increasingly professional special constabulary. Measures to achieve this include:

A new headline role focusing on intelligence led patrolling and crime reduction initiatives;

a new national foundation training package for special constables;

joint Home Office/Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) good practice guidance covering recruitment, management and deployment of specials;

new conditions of service and conduct regulations.

In January we ran a press campaign targeting specials as part of the national recruitment campaign for the regular Police Service. And as the Home Secretary also announced at the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) last week, we will also be working with employers to encourage them to support employees who are specials—in particular by giving them extra paid leave to carry out their police duties.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the number of special constables. [57050]

Mr. Denham: The Government is committed to increasing the size of the Special Constabulary. We are currently working with stakeholders on a number of measures to achieve this, through improvements to the recruitment, training, management and welfare of specials.

Child Disappearance

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children up to the age of 16 years have disappeared within the UK during each of the last five years and have not been found. [51647]

Mr. Denham: Missing persons are reported to the Police National Missing Persons Bureau (PNMPB) after they have been missing for 14 days or more. The PNMPB currently record missing children figures in the category of under 18 years. However, until the period 1999–2000 the age range of 'up to and including 18 years of age' was used. The following are the figures of those reported missing using the above mentioned categories, for the last five financial years:

	Total
1997–98	938
1998–99	1,184
1999–2000	1,467
2000–01	1,021
2001–02	1,037

Of those cases, the PNMPB database currently shows a total of 468 outstanding unresolved cases.

Terrorist Organisations

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Government have classified *(a)* Al-Amn al-Ri'asah, *(b)* the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, *(c)* the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, *(d)* the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and *(e)* Sa'iqa as terrorist organisations; what changes in classification have taken place since 1 August 2000; and if he will make a statement. [55994]

Mr. Blunkett: None of these organisations are on the proscribed list of organisations contained in schedule 2 to the Terrorism Act 2000. No new organisations have been added to schedule 2 since it came into force on 29 March 2001.

The list of organisations in schedule 2 are reviewed on a regular basis.

All information supplied on these organisations will be evaluated very carefully, and decisions to proscribe or deproscribe are taken after careful consideration of all relevant aspects.

Terrorist Attacks (Emergency Services)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much funding will be given to extra training of emergency services staff to deal with the possible threat from large scale terrorist attacks; and if he will make a statement. [56676]

Mr. Denham: The United Kingdom police forces have a wide range of skills and capabilities which are regularly tested and can be deployed during a terrorist incident. The ability of police forces to respond to a terrorist attack involving the use of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) materials is being strengthened through specialist police training.

Home Office funding is being made available in 2002–03 to meet the full running and equipment costs involved. It is not normal practice to disclose the level of funding allocated by the United Kingdom to specific counter-terrorist measures.

I understand from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Milburn) that the ambulance services have improved their preparedness to respond to chemical and biological incidents. New personal protective equipment and decontamination units are currently being provided. The full training implications and its funding are still being considered by the Department of Health.

I understand from my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Prescott) that fire service personnel already receive training for dealing with terrorist and major incidents. Details of specific training carried out by each fire authority are not held centrally.

His Department announced in February that it was providing £53 million funding for the fire service to give further protection to the public and emergency services in the event of a major chemical, biological or radiological attack. The funding provides for equipment, vehicles, training and revenue support. The Department is continuing to consider the case for additional resources.

Visas

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the mandate of the Committee on the introduction of a uniform format for visas is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [57471]

Beverley Hughes: The mandate for the Committee on uniform format visas is Article 6 of Council Regulation (EC) 1683/95 of 29 May 1995 laying down a uniform format for visas. This Regulation has since been amended by Council Regulation (EC) No 334/2002 of 18 February 2002 which introduced new technical requirements for the uniform format for visas and maintained the mandate of the Article 6 Committee.

The Committee has met four times during the last 12 months.

United Kingdom representation on the Committee usually comprises the Inspector and a Chief Immigration Officer from the Immigration Service National Forgery Section (the Immigration Service centre of expertise on travel document security and abuse) and a representative from the United Kingdom Visas (a joint Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Home Office unit responsible for visa related matters).

Precise figures for the annual cost of the Committee's work on public funds are not available. However, travel costs to meetings for one member of the United Kingdom delegation are reimbursed by the Commission.

Currently under consideration by the Committee is its standing mandate of a general review of security and standards of performance of the uniform format visa with a view to enhancement of security safeguards as considered appropriate and necessary. In particular at present, the Committee is considering technical specifications to implement Council Regulation (EC) No. 334/2002 which requires integration into the visa of a photograph produced according to high security standards. The Committee is also currently mandated by Council Regulation (EC) No 333/2002 for a uniform format for a form for affixing the visa issued by a member state to a person holding a travel document not recognised by that member state. The Regulation requires the Committee to set specification for the form that meet high technical standards, in particular as regards safeguards against counterfeiting and falsification.

Regulations covering the mandate of the Committee have been considered and cleared by parliamentary scrutiny.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what targets he sets for his Department to respond to a request for information from an overseas post in cases for applications for a settlement visa for spouses of UK nationals. [58049]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* The internal target for responding to requests for information from posts abroad is 90 per cent. within two weeks of receipt of the request. The earliest outstanding request was received on 14 February 2002.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time is for a response to a request for information from the Democratic Republic of Congo in cases for applications for a settlement visa for spouses of UK nationals. [58050]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* Performance information in this area of work is not collated on a country of origin basis.

Correspondence

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Guildford of *(a)* 14 December 2001, *(b)* 7 April and *(c)* 10 April. [57934]

Beverley Hughes: I replied to the hon. Member's letters on 7 June 2002.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letters of 11 February, 12 March and 21 April from a constituent, Ronald Glover of Minster. [57992]

Beverley Hughes: Mr. Glover's letter of 11 February 2002 was received in the Home Office on 7 March 2002. It was transferred to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) for response. The National Asylum Support Service, one of the directorates in IND, subsequently replied to him on 25 April 2002. I apologise for the delay in providing my hon. Friend's constituent with a substantive reply.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letter of 6 December 2001 from the hon. Member for Torbay regarding Mr. Ian Broom of Torquay. [58747]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to the hon. Member on 7 June 2002.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter of 25 April from the hon. Member for Woking concerning Morreale, ref M1098006. [58810]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* My officials wrote to the hon. Member on 22 May 2002.

Asylum Seekers (London)

Glenda Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what sums have been made available to London boroughs to cover the additional costs of asylum seekers returning to London. [57632]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) has not provided any funding to London boroughs to cover additional costs of asylum seekers returning to London from dispersal areas. NASS is responsible for meeting the direct costs of providing support to asylum seekers who are destitute. NASS is not responsible for providing funding for other services such as education and health. Asylum seekers returning to London can apply to NASS to change their support package from subsistence and accommodation to subsistence only. But asylum seekers could not, as a matter of routine, request that accommodation be provided in London. London is not a dispersal area. Accommodation will be provided in London only in exceptional circumstances.

European Security

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the nature of activities envisaged under paragraph 17 of the Laeken Conclusions, referring to the Specialist (Counter-Terrorist) Services. [57913]

Mr. Blunkett: Prior to the European Union (EU) Council Meeting in Laeken, excellent co-operation already existed between the specialist units of EU member states responsible for counter-terrorism. The events of 11 September emphasised the need for practical and effective international co-operation against terrorism, both within and outside the European Union. This need was reflected in the conclusions of the meeting. An example of such co-operation was the United Kingdom proposed conference on the possible terrorist use of chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear material held at Europol in January this year.

Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many people are held under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001; how long each has been held; how many face formal legal charges; how many have been convicted of a terrorist offence; and how many are being held in conditions where normal prisoners' rights do not apply; [57958]

(2) how many people have been detained under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 since its introduction. [57957]

Mr. Blunkett: 11 foreign nationals have so far been detained using powers in Part IV of the Anti-terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001. Eight were detained in December 2001, one in February 2002, and a further two in April 2002. Of those detained two have left the United Kingdom voluntarily. The other nine remain in detention. Normal Prison Service rules apply in respect of all aspects of the detentions. It is long-standing Government practice not to discuss individual cases or the immigration status of individuals. If, however, an individual chooses to publicise their case, we would be able to confirm their name and nationality. This is a matter for the individual and their legal representative in the first instance.

Plane-spotters (Greece)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the issue of the British plane-spotters tried in Greece was discussed by Ministers or officials with the Greek Justice Minister on his recent visit to London. [58132]

Mr. Blunkett: The Greek Justice Minister has not recently visited London to discuss this or any other matter with Home Office Ministers or with Ministers or officials of other Government Departments.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the backlog of cases is at IND; and what the estimated length of time is that IND takes to reply to a letter from hon. Members. [58001]

Beverley Hughes: At the end of March 2002, there were 35,500 asylum cases awaiting an initial decision, including work in progress.

Our latest estimate for appeals with the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) waiting to be sent to the Immigration Appellate Authority, provided to my hon. Friend previously on 14 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 604W, gives a figure of 48,000, the majority of which are asylum appeals, including work in progress.

Information on the number of asylum cases awaiting an initial decision is published quarterly on the Home Office website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Statistics on the number of cases awaiting an initial decision in all other divisions of the IND are not currently available.

Information on the average length of time it takes for officials in the IND to respond to hon. Members' correspondence is currently not collated centrally and is available only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many letters are unopened at his Department's Public Enquiry Office in Croydon. [58002]

Beverley Hughes: The Croydon Public Enquiry Office (PEO) provides a fast-track, same-day service to personal callers with regard to straightforward immigration applications/inquiries as well as operating an urgent return of documents section. The small amount of incoming mail that PEO receives is opened during the working day. Each item is linked to its relevant Home Office file and/or allocated to a caseworking unit within 24 hours.

Illegal Immigrants

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he is taking to secure a bilateral agreement with the French Government to permit the immediate return of cross-Channel illegal immigrants to France. [57601]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* A bilateral agreement for the return of illegal immigrants who do not claim asylum is already in place between the United Kingdom and France. Nearly 6,000 illegal immigrants are returned each year under this agreement.

Police Officers

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers in Greater London have less than two years' experience, broken down by borough; and if he will make a statement. [58560]

Mr. Denham: The information requested has been provided by the Commissioners of Police of the Metropolis (Sir John Stevens QPM) and for the City of London Police (Mr. Perry Nove QPM) and is given in the table.

In the Metropolitan police probationers formed 14 per cent. of borough strength. In the City of London police probationers formed 14.8 per cent. of the force's total strength.

Police force performance does not depend solely upon the number of experienced officers available. The proposals in the White Paper "Policing a New Century: A blueprint for Reform" set out a radical and ambitious programme of reform, with the overall aim of reducing crime and the fear of crime and to tackle antisocial behaviour. The test of success will be whether the measures being put in place will make a real difference to the quality of life of individuals and communities up and down the country.

The public have a right to expect the same high standards of service wherever they live and the Government propose to put a framework in place to ensure that all police forces come up to the standard of the best.

Officers with less than 2 years experience as at 30 April 2002

Metropolitan police, by borough	*Number*
Kensington and Chelsea	78
Westminster	225
Camden	107
Hammersmith and Fulham	79
Hackney	94
Tower Hamlets	100
Waltham Forest	62
Redbridge	61
Havering	52
Newham	91
Barking and Dagenham	30
Lambeth	117
Southwark	95
Islington	94
Lewisham	92
Bromley	58
Harrow	46
Brent	96
Greenwich	88
Bexley	51
Barnet	79
Richmond upon Thames	35
Hounslow	51
Kingston upon Thames	36
Merton	40
Wandsworth	104
Ealing	90
Hillingdon	46
Enfield	72
Haringey	85
Croydon	94
Sutton	36
Metropolitan police total	2,484
City of London police[1]	114

[1] As at 1 May 2002

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many trainee Metropolitan police officers are housed in non-police force accommodation; what accommodation is being used; and if he will make a statement. [58558]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner of the Metropolitan police informs me that all recruits currently undergoing training in the Metropolitan police recruit training school are housed in police accommodation.

Video Identification

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on video identification as a replacement for identification parades. [58637]

Mr. Denham: The new provisions in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) Codes of Practice, which came into force on 1 April 2002, will enable police forces to make more use of video technology to speed up the identification process. Video identification provides a fast and effective alternative to live identity parades. Problems in arranging "live" identification parades within a reasonable period of time have contributed significantly to delays in processing cases and such delays impact upon the quality of evidence and compromise the whole process of justice. Making better use of video identification technology will free up officer time to tackle crime and standardise police practices. It will also result in more positive identifications and benefit witnesses and victims, who will no longer have to re-live their ordeal by coming face-to-face with their attacker in a live identity parade.

Rollout of video identification technology, for which the Government have provided £7.6 million, has commenced in the 10 police force areas participating in the Government's Robbery Reduction Initiative.

Human Rights

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the impact of the decision to end the Special Voucher Scheme on the UK's obligations under the Fourth Protocol to the ECHR, with special reference to the duties of a signatory under the Vienna Convention on the law of treaties. [58372]

Beverley Hughes: The abolition of the Special Quota Voucher Scheme did not infringe any obligations of the United Kingdom. We have not ratified Protocol 4 and have no obligations under it. And, because abolition of the Scheme will not prevent compliance with Protocol 4 if we do ratify it, we have not infringed our obligations under the Vienna Convention.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to introduce legislation to enable the UK to ratify the Fourth Protocol to the ECHR. [58371]

Beverley Hughes: None at the present time.

Parliamentary Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of parliamentary advisers appointed to serve his Department. [56980]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* Ministers in this Department have made no such appointments.

Security Service

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the establishment figure for *(a)* linguists, *(b)* administrative assistants, *(c)* generalists and *(d)* technicians in the security service is; how many are in post at each level; and what steps his Department has taken to increase recruitment. [57523]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* It has been the policy of successive Governments not to break down Security Service employment figures in any way that indicates Service capabilities so as not to impair its effectiveness in undertaking its vital statutory functions.

The Security Service undertakes its own recruitment. In most cases it now advertises openly in the press.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to increase the salary of administrative assistants working in the Security Service. [57522]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* The setting of salary scales is a matter for the Security Service itself, in consultation with Her Majesty's Treasury, to decide.

Yarl's Wood

Mr. Patrick Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many detainees were present at Yarl's Wood Immigration Detention Centre on the evening of 14 February. [59253]

Beverley Hughes: 385 detainees were present at Yarl's Wood Immigration Detention Centre on the evening of 14 February 2002.

Mr. Patrick Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what basis detainees who were present at Yarl's Wood Immigration Detention Centre on the evening of 14 February were selected for questioning by the police as part of the criminal investigation into the disturbances at Yarl's Wood. [59251]

Beverley Hughes: The selection of detainees who were present at Yarl's Wood Immigration Detention Centre on the evening of 14 February 2002 for questioning by the police as part of the criminal investigation into the disturbances at Yarl's Wood is a matter for Bedfordshire police.

Mr. Patrick Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many detainees who were present at Yarl's Wood Immigration Detention Centre on the evening of 14 February have been *(a)* selected for questioning and *(b)* questioned by the police as part of the criminal investigation into the disturbances at Yarl's Wood. [59252]

Beverley Hughes: The criminal investigation being conducted by Bedfordshire police is wide ranging and has involved the questioning of witnesses from a variety of services, companies and agencies as well as detainees at Yarl's Wood. The selection of detainees who were present at Yarl's Wood Immigration Detention Centre on the evening of 14 February 2002 for questioning as part of the criminal investigation into the disturbances at Yarl's Wood is a matter for Bedfordshire police.

Volunteering

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the provision of free checks for volunteers wishing to work with young and vulnerable people in the voluntary sector. [57048]

Hilary Benn: We are firmly committed to supporting and promoting all types of volunteering. Therefore the highest levels of disclosures issued by the Criminal Records Bureau—standard and enhanced disclosures, which include those working with children and vulnerable people—are issued free of charge to volunteers in any sector.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he next plans to visit India and Pakistan. [60571]

Mr. Blunkett: I have no present plans to visit either India or Pakistan.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

City of London Corporation (Events)

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those functions, engagements and events which Ministers, his officials and advisers have attended which have been sponsored, funded, promoted and hosted by the City of London Corporation since 1997. [35705]

Peter Hain: The FCO does not keep central records of events, engagements or functions attended by its Ministers, officials and advisers. The cost of answering this question would be disproportionate.

UK Passport Holders

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will estimate how many UK passport holders are in permanent employment elsewhere in the EU. [57303]

Peter Hain: We do not hold information on the specific number of UK passport holders working in other EU countries. This is in keeping with the principle of freedom of movement within the EU, and the need to avoid arrangements which might interfere with individual workers' right to move to and work in other member states.

European Union Satellite Centre

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the role of the European Union Satellite Centre, with particular reference to co-operation with UK-based image analysis agencies. [57868]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The EU Satellite Centre supports decision-making under the Common Foreign and Security Policy, in particular the European Security and Defence Policy, by providing analysis of satellite imagery and collateral data. The UK-based image analysis agency, (Defence Geographical and Imagery Intelligence Agency (DGIA)) has no formal links with the Satellite Centre but the output of the two organisations is co-ordinated to provide the maximum benefit to the UK. As part of this co-ordination, the UK has placed some tasks on the Satellite Centre, including the update of hydrographic charts, evacuation planning and environmental projects.

Israel

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has recently raised the matter of the possession of nuclear weapons by Israel with the Israeli Government. [57979]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Nuclear issues were discussed in depth during the latest round of non-proliferation talks with Israeli officials, held in March. They have not recently been raised at ministerial level.

We continue to urge Israel to resolve international concerns about its nuclear status by acceding to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as a non-nuclear weapon state.

Departmental Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much was spent by his Department on paying pensions to retired employees of his Department in 2001–02; if he will estimate the corresponding amounts to be spent in *(a)* five years' time, *(b)* 10 years' time, *(c)* 20 years' time and *(d)* 30 years' time; if he will estimate in each case the proportion of such liabilities which will arise from (i) unfunded pension schemes and (ii) pre-funded pension schemes; and in the case of pre-funded schemes, if he will estimate the value of the corresponding pre-funded funds in each of these years. [57368]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 23 May 2002 by my hon. Friend the then Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr. Leslie), *Official Report,* column 561W.

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 62W, what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of unpaid advisers who have assisted the work of his Department since June 1997 but are not included in (i) the Cabinet Office's annual report 'Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews 2000–01' and (ii) his previous answer. [57036]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* I am aware of none.

Yasser Arafat

Mr. Clappison: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what Her Majesty's Government's policy is towards the title and status of Mr. Yasser Arafat. [58656]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Yasser Arafat is President of the Palestinian National Authority and Chairman of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation. The Arabic word for "Chairman" and "President" is the same. We use both.

International Labour Conference

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what issues will be given priority by the Government's representatives on the UK delegation to the International Labour Conference in Geneva in June. [58374]

Mr. MacShane: As in previous years, the Government delegation will participate fully in a wide range of discussions and will be fully represented in all the relevant Committees at the International Labour Conference. Among the items to which it will give particular attention are: discussions which will lead to new international instruments on co-operatives, and on occupational diseases; a general discussion on the informal economy; the special sitting to discuss Burma/Myanmar; and this year's Global Report on Child Labour. My hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the Member for Croydon, North (Malcolm Wicks), who will be attending part of the Conference, will address a plenary session.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the Government have taken to implement the resolution on Myanmar adopted at the 88th session of the International Labour Conference in 2000. [58375]

Mr. MacShane: HMG has over many years fully supported the ILO's efforts to permanently end forced labour in Burma. In 1997 the EC suspended Burma's GSP trading privileges in response to concerns about forced labour.

In response to the ILO's recommendations of their 88th session, the then Secretary of State for Education and Employment, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) wrote to employers and workers groups in the UK asking them to review their relations with Burma to ensure they were not assisting the continuance of forced labour in Burma. FCO Ministers also met with representatives of Trades Unions and the Director General of the ILO to discuss promoting the ILO's demands in Burma.

Along with EU colleagues, we have welcomed the appointment of an ILO Liaison Officer in Burma and the recognition that this is an interim step towards the required ILO permanent presence.

International Labour Organisation

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action the Government are taking to ensure that states sign the fundamental conventions of the International Labour Organisation. [58373]

Mr. MacShane: The UK promotes the widest possible ratification of the ILO core conventions and recognises the need for their practical implementation to achieve real change. We take every appropriate opportunity within the ILO itself, and bilaterally, to urge member states to sign up to the 1998 Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work as well as ratify the core conventions.

Middle East

Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the legal status will be within the EU of the 13 Palestinians who were brought out of Palestine following the end of the siege of the Church of the Nativity. [58654]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The 12 Palestinians accepted by Belgium, Greece, Spain, Ireland, Italy and Portugal are received on a temporary basis and exclusively on humanitarian grounds. In accordance with the Common Position concerning the temporary reception by member states of the European Union of certain Palestinians, the Palestinians will receive a national permit to enter and stay in the territory of the relevant member state for a period of up to 12 months.

India

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what action he is taking to bring to justice those who have murdered British citizens during the recent disturbances in the Indian state of Gujarat; [58384]

(2) if he will press the Indian Government to bring to justice those who have murdered British citizens during the recent disturbances in Gujarat; [58385]

(3) if he will publish the British High Commission report on the disturbances in the Indian state of Gujarat; [58380]

(4) what discussions he has had with the Indian Government about the conclusions of the British High Commission report on disturbances in Gujarat; [58386]

(5) what his estimate is of the *(a)* number of refugees living in camps in the Indian state of Gujarat and *(b)* number killed in the recent disturbances in Gujarat; [58381]

(6) what assistance the British Government have provided *(a)* to help bring peace to the Indian state of Gujarat and *(b)* to help those made homeless by the recent disturbances there. [58382]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We share my hon. Friend's concerns over the recent communal violence and deaths in Gujarat. We have regularly raised our concerns with the Indian Government, both through the Foreign Secretary and via our High Commission in Delhi. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary most recently discussed the situation on 16 April with Jaswant Singh, the Indian Foreign Minister. The Indian Government have given us their assurances that they will take action to investigate the violence and to bring to justice perpetrators of the killings, including those who have murdered British citizens. We welcome these assurances. We do not plan to publish any internal reporting from our High Commission in New Delhi on Gujarat.

An estimated 100,000 displaced people are currently living in refugee camps in Gujarat. According to official Indian Government figures, the number of deaths currently stands at over 900.

The British Government, through the Department for International Development, are currently assessing the situation with the Government of India, the State Government of Gujarat, select international agencies and local partners. Together, carefully targeted interventions will address the changing needs of those now choosing to return, and those likely to remain in the camps through the monsoon season.

Sierra Leone

Mr. Nigel Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the recent presidential and parliamentary elections in Sierra Leone. [58745]

Mr. MacShane: The peaceful conduct of presidential and parliamentary elections in Sierra Leone was a remarkable achievement for a country just emerging from a brutal civil war. The elections mark an historic milestone on Sierra Leone's return to peace and democracy. Britain can be proud of its part in their success. The people of Sierra Leone have given President Kabbah a clear mandate to eradicate corruption, deliver good governance and rebuild the country's shattered institutions and infrastructure. This is an enormous challenge, which will require efforts by the new

Government to foster a spirit of national unity, and the sustained commitment of the international community. Britain will continue to play a full part in helping the new Government of Sierra Leone to meet the aspirations of its people.

Visas

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on permitting police officers charged with human rights abuses who request visas to come to the UK for official training. [58530]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Each visa application is considered on its individual merits and in accordance with the requirements of the Immigration Rules.

EU Armaments Programme

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on his policy on Spanish proposals for an EU armaments programme. [58769]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: As agreed at the General Affairs Council in Brussels on 13 May 2002, any co-operation on armaments issues will be directly linked to filling the shortfalls in the ESDP Helsinki Headline Goal through the European Capabilities Action Plan (ECAP). Co-operation will respect the principles of voluntary compliance, transparency and avoiding duplication. These steps to enhance European capabilities will make a significant contribution towards the success of ESDP.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [58723]

Mr. Straw: Between 1 April 2001 and 31 March 2002, special advisers in my Department travelled abroad to the following places. The cost for each visit is included. All travel by special advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code, and the Civil Service Management Code.

Date	*Destination*	*Cost (£)*
Michael Williams		
4–5 April 2001	Belgrade and Skopje	182.06
24–25 April 2001	Montenegro	6.37
30 August 2001	Macedonia	[1]—
5–6 September 2001	Abuja	392.29
17–18 October 2001	Luxembourg and Turkey	33.74
9–14 November 2001	New York	3,615.50
2–23 November 2001	Iran and Pakistan	135.10
21–23 January 2002	Congo, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi	296.96
26–28 February 2002	India	3,425.17
Ed Owen		
11 June 2001	Luxembourg	12.43
9 July 2001	Paris	[1]—
11–12 July 2001	Washington	4,628.52
17 July 2001	Brussels	380.00
24–27 September 2001	Jordan, Iran, Israel, Palestinian Authority and Egypt	297.84
23–24 October 2001	Washington	3,276.87
19–20 November 2001	Brussels and Barcelona	126.19
6–7 December 2001	Gibraltar	872.40
31 January to 2 February 2002	Washington	4,537.36
12–16 February 2002	Turkey, Israel, Palestinian Authority and Afghanistan	462.36
21 February 2002	The Hague	[1]—

[1] No public cost

Detained Palestinians

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what restrictions there are concerning visitors to those Palestinians under the supervision of British wardens in Jericho; and if this is consistent with the conditions of detention as stipulated under the agreement which ended Mr. Yasser Arafat's confinement to his office in Ramallah; [58958]

(2) what access those Palestinians under the supervision of British wardens in Jericho have to *(a)* regular phones and *(b)* cellular phones; and if this is consistent with the conditions of detention as stipulated under the agreement which ended Mr. Yasser Arafat's confinement to his office in Ramallah. [58957]

Mr. Straw: Under the terms of the agreement, the six detainees should be held in continuous secluded custody. It is the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority to ensure the conditions of detention are met and to respond to any concerns raised about the detention arrangements.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the conditions of detention of those Palestinians under the supervision of British wardens in Jericho. [58956]

Mr. Straw: The conditions of detention are the responsibility of the Palestinian authorities and are in line with Palestinian law. Under the agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, the role of the supervisory warders is to verify that the six detainees remain in continuous secluded custody.

Seville Summit

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is on the stage they wish the enlargement process to have reached by the European Council's meeting at Seville; and if he will make a statement. [59103]

Peter Hain: The EU has now agreed its position on the Regional Policy, Institutions and Budget chapters allocated to the Spanish Presidency, while leaving aside a limited number of issues that need to be addressed later in the year. We expect a similar approach to enable EU agreement on the Agriculture chapter by Seville, in line with the road map for negotiations.

The EU remains on track to complete negotiations by the end of this year with those candidates who are ready, so that they can join the EU in 2004, in line with the objective first set by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in October 2000.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of ordinary written questions for his Department were answered within a week of tabling in each month since June 2001; and what proportion of questions for named day received a substantive answer on that day in each month since June 2001. [58977]

Mr. Straw: The proportions are as follows:

Per cent.

Month	*Named day*	*Ordinary written*
June 2001	99	—
July 2001	95	—
October 2001	96	80
November 2001	91	54
December 2001	94	55
January 2002	83	67
February 2002	87	61
March 2002	71	58
April 2002	79	58
May 2002	75	54
Average	88	60

Note:

The FCO only started recording the time taken to answer ordinary written questions in October 2001. The statistics for ordinary written questions are compiled on the basis of working days rather than questions answered within a calendar week. The figures above are based on answers provided by the fifth working day after tabling.

Yugoslav Federation

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he had at the recent EU General Affairs and Defence meeting in Brussels on 13 and 14 May concerning progress on implementing the accord reached by Serbia and Montenegro to dissolve the Yugoslav Federation and form a new union. [59089]

Mr. Straw: At the 13 May General Affairs Council, EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana briefed EU Foreign Ministers on the current situation concerning the implementation of Serbia and Montenergro agreement. EU Ministers

> "underlined the priority ... to quickly implement the 14 March agreement".

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent report he has received concerning the progress on implementing the accord reached by Serbia and Montenegro to dissolve the Yugoslav Federation and form a new union. [59087]

Mr. Straw: The UK supports the 14 March Agreement on Principles of Restructuring Relations between Serbia and Montenegro. We believe the Agreement will promote stability in the region, and Serbia and Montenegro's integration into European structures.

The Serbian Parliament and the Montenegrin Assembly ratified the Agreement on 9 April 2002, and the Yugoslav Parliament adopted the Agreement on 31 May 2002. We now look forward to the formation of a commission to draft a constitutional charter. We are fully supporting the efforts of the EU's High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, Mr. Solana, to encourage the parties to make rapid progress.

Departmental Sponsors

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the duties are of hon. Members appointed as sponsors to his Department; and what assistance is given by officials in his Department to them in carrying out these duties. [59983]

Mr. Straw: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) on 22 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 362W.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which hon. Members have been appointed as sponsors to his Department since 7 June 2001; and when each of them were appointed. [59970]

Mr. Straw: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), on 22 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 362W.

East Timor

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last raised the imprisonment of Ngawang Sangdrol with his Chinese counterpart. [60071]

Mr. MacShane: The imprisonment of Ngawang Sangdrol is one of the individual cases that we regularly raise with the Chinese in the context of the biannual UK/China Human Rights dialogue. We most recently raised her case during the dialogue which took place in Beijing on 15 May. In their response, the Chinese said that her sentence had been reduced by 18 months. Her new release date is 3 November 2011.

G8 Summit

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what preparations the Government have made in advance of the G8 Summit in June, with regard to *(a)* Zimbabwe and *(b)* Nepal. [60196]

Peter Hain: The Canadian chair of this year's G8 Summit wish to focus the agenda on the world economy, terrorism, and the G8's response to the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). There are no plans to discuss Zimbabwe as such, though it may be mentioned in the context of NEPAD. There are at present no plans to discuss Nepal.

Liberia

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he will take in relation to reports of Liberia's violations of the UN arms embargo on it. [60160]

Mr. MacShane: The involvement of President Taylor of Liberia in weapons trafficking and his support for armed groups continue to threaten regional peace and stability. We therefore fully support the decision of the United Nations Security Council of 6 May to extend sanctions against Liberia for a further 12 months through the adoption of resolution 1408(2002). The resolution was co-sponsored by the UK.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further proposals he has to apply pressure to the Zimbabwean Government to respect human rights and property rights. [60175]

Mr. MacShane: We are deeply concerned about violations of human rights and the continuing disregard for the rule of law in Zimbabwe.

We will continue to discuss with EU, African and other international partners ways to promote respect for human rights and the rule of law in Zimbabwe.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimates he has made of the number of persons *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured as a result of politically motivated violence in Zimbabwe in each month since January 2001. [60176]

Mr. MacShane: The Human Rights Forum, a Zimbabwean non-governmental organisation, has estimated the number of people killed or tortured as a result of politically motivated violence in Zimbabwe during the months in question is as follows:

January 2001: 2 killed, 22 tortured;

February 2001: 0 killed, 9 tortured;

March 2001: 0 killed, 9 tortured;

April 2001: 0 killed, 26 tortured;

May 2001: 0 killed, 47 tortured;

June 2001: 0 killed, 29 tortured;

July 2001: 11 killed, 288 tortured;

August 2001: 1 killed, 170 tortured;

September 2001: 6 killed, 112 tortured;

October 2001: 3 killed, 99 tortured;

November 2001: 6 killed, 91 tortured;

December 2001: 7 killed, 119 tortured;

January 2002: 12 killed, 112 tortured;

February 2002: 39 killed, 525 tortured;

March 2002: 50 killed, 374 tortured;

April 2002: 7 killed, 146 tortured;

1–14 May 2002: 2 killed, 8 tortured.

Back copies of the Forum's reports can be obtained from its website, www.hrforumzim.com.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimates he has made of the number of members in farm workers' families who have been evicted from their homes in Zimbabwe in each month since January 2001. [60173]

Mr. MacShane: There are no firm estimates available for the number of farm workers and their families who have been displaced in Zimbabwe since 2001. But from media, NGO and other reporting the number can be measured in tens of thousands.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the farms from which he is aware of farm workers' families being evicted in Zimbabwe since January 2001. [60174]

Mr. MacShane: Farm workers have been displaced from a large number of commercial farms since 2001. But we do not have a specific list. The hon. Member may wish to contact Zimbabwe's Commercial Farmers' Union or the Farm Community Trust of Zimbabwe, who may be able to provide him with details.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for each NDPB and agency sponsored by his Department *(a)* the maximum retirement age adopted for most employees and *(b)* their practice on not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age. [59453]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It is for individual NDPBs to determine their own policies on the age-limits of those applying for employment, in accordance with existing equal opportunities legislation and good practice guidelines.

Agencies are bound by the provisions of the Civil Service Management Code. Section 2.1 states:

> "Civil Service equal opportunities policy provides that all eligible people must have equality of opportunity for employment and advancement on the basis of their suitability for the work. There must be no unfair discrimination on the basis of age, disability, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, or (in Northern Ireland) community background."

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies have a policy of not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age. [59454]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office recruits people to both the Diplomatic service and the Home civil service.

Diplomatic servants must be between the ages of 21 and 52. This is to ensure that those joining the service can complete at least one home tour (usually 18 months) and one post abroad (usually three years), before they reach the normal retirement age of 60.

Home civil servants must be between the ages 16 and 58. This again is to ensure that those joining can complete at least one tour (usually two years) before reaching the retirement age.

FCO services based at Hanslope Park, Milton Keynes carry out their own recruitment. They recruit only staff for the Home civil service. Band A support staff must be aged between 16 and 63 and those within the Bands B and D must be aged between 16 and 61.

Gibraltar

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Gibraltar's legal status within the European Union; and what recourse Gibraltar has with regard to disputes with other member states. [59096]

Mr. Straw: Gibraltar is part of the EU by virtue of the UK's membership and Article 299(4) of the Treaty Establishing the European Community (TEC), which states that the treaty applies to 'European territories for whose external relations a Member State is responsible'. Certain provisions (including the Common Agricultural and Fisheries Policies and the VAT regime) do not apply, and Gibraltar is not part of the Common Customs Territory.

The Commission has primary responsibility for ensuring that member states comply with their EU obligations, and may bring infraction proceedings under Article 226 TEC. In addition Article 227 TEC allows a member state which considers that another member state has failed to fulfil an obligation under the treaty to bring the matter before the European Court of Justice.

Burma

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports his Department has received concerning the case of Dr. Salai Tun Than, a prisoner held in Insein Prison, Rangoon since 8 February. [59617]

Mr. Straw: Dr. Salai Tun Than was sentenced to seven years in prison for peacefully expressing his hopes for the swift arrival of democracy in Burma. On learning of his sentence, my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House, when Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the FCO issued a public statement condemning his sentence and calling for his immediate release.

I welcome the release from detention of over 250 political prisoners in Burma since January 2001. But we now need to see the end of politically inspired arrests and the release of all political prisoners.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on plans for international monitors to be sent to Burma to assess the human rights situation following the recent release from confinement of Aung San Suu Kyi. [59614]

Mr. Straw: The military authorities have long denied access to many parts of Burma. There is no indication of their policy changing at this point. We would welcome international access to all areas of Burma. The ethnic minorities who live in those areas kept closed to the international community suffer disproportionately from human rights abuses.

The United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross and international non-governmental organisations do have a presence in Burma. In addition, the UN special Rapporteur for Human Rights in Burma, Sergio Pinheiro, has made three visits to Burma in the last year.

There is a wealth of information to confirm that the human rights situation is very poor. This was set out in the FCO Human Rights Report of 2001 and the EU co-sponsored resolution at the UN Commission on Human Rights in Burma on the human rights situation in Burma that was passed by consensus in April 2002.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions his Department has had with representatives of the United States Administration concerning human rights in Burma. [59620]

Mr. Straw: Officials in London, Rangoon and Washington meet frequently with US colleagues to share information and co-operate on all aspects of Burma policy.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what reports his Department has received concerning the case of Paw U Tun, a prisoner held by the Burmese Government in Sittwe, Rakhine state, since 1993; [59611]

(2) what reports his Department has received on the case of Dr. Zaw Myint Maung, a prisoner held by the Burmese Government in Insein prison, Rangoon since November 1990; [59621]

(3) what reports his Department has received concerning the case of Ko Thet Win Aung, a prisoner held by the Burmese Government in Kale prison since October 1998; [59613]

(4) what reports his Department has received concerning the case of U Win Tin, a prisoner held by the Burmese Government in Insein prison, Rangoon since 1989. [59612]

Mr. Straw: Our latest information is that Dr. Zaw Myint Maung remains in detention. I welcome the release of over 250 political prisoners in Burma since January 2001. However, we have repeatedly called on the Burmese authorities to move quickly to release all political prisoners including Dr. Zaw Myint Maung.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports his Department has received concerning ASEM meetings Burma has *(a)* attended and *(b)* not attended in the past three years and the reason for Burma's non-attendance at that meeting. [59605]

Mr. Straw: Burma is not a member of ASEM and is therefore not entitled to attend its meetings.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of how many Burmese nationals attended university in Britain in 2000–01; and how many of these students received a scholarship. [59615]

Mr. Straw: Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) figures show that 90 Burmese nationals attended university in the UK in 2000–01. Seven of these received scholarships funded or part funded by the FCO. The British Council estimates that each year there are approximately 300 Burmese studying in the UK at all levels, including further education and schools.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department *(a)* has had and *(b)* plans to have with the Governments of (i) Malaysia, (ii) Thailand, (iii) Singapore, (iv) Japan, (v) India, (vi) China and (vii) the Philippines concerning human rights abuses by the Burmese Government. [59610]

Mr. Straw: We have regular discussions with international partners about human rights in Burma including all countries listed in the question. I raised the issue of Burma with the Government of India on 29 May.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action his Department is taking to encourage Burmese students to attend universities in Britain. [59616]

Mr. Straw: The British embassy in Rangoon runs a small scholarships programme in Burma. There is a British council office in Rangoon which promotes British education in Burma. It runs a successful programme of English language teaching and in March held a well attended education fair.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which members of the Burmese Government are on the European Union targeted sanctions list; and what reports his Department has received concerning those on that list who have been turned away from Britain since the sanctions regime was implemented. [59607]

Mr. Straw: The EU visa ban stops the entry into the EU by senior members of the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), the Burmese authorities in the tourism sector, senior members of the military and the Government or the security forces who formulate, implement or benefit from the policies that impede Burma's transition to democracy. The details were published in the Official Journal of the European Communities L122 of 24 May 2000, Annex II of Council Common Position 2000/346/CFSP.

A number of those on the visa ban have applied for a visa to visit the UK. All have been refused.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action his Department is taking to promote free and fair elections in Burma. [59622]

Mr. Straw: Our effort on Burma is focused on bringing about national reconciliation, respect for human rights and the return of democracy. Through the EU Common Position, associated domestic action to discourage trade, investment and tourism, and in the United Nations, we are maintaining concentrated international pressure to realise these goals. I raised the issue of Burma with the Government of India on my visit to New Delhi on 29 May.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs under what circumstances members of the Burmese Government on the European Union targeted sanctions list are allowed to enter Europe; and which international meetings they can attend. [59608]

Mr. Straw: There is an exemption in the EU Common Position whereby with the agreement of all member states the ban on the Burmese Foreign Minister may be waived where it is in the interests of the European Union. This was primarily intended to allow Burmese participation at EU/ASEAN Foreign Ministers meetings in Europe.

EU member states have an obligation under the Charter of the United Nations (UN) to grant certain privileges and immunities to the representatives of other UN member states for the purpose of attending UN meetings held on their territory. A clause allowing EU member states to fulfil their obligations to the UN with reference to people listed on the Burma visa ban was inserted in October 2001 on the recommendation of the European Commission Legal Service.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions his Department has had with representatives of the European Union concerning human rights in Burma; and if he will make a statement on the European Union's policy towards human rights in Burma. [59619]

Mr. Straw: We are in constant contact with EU partners on the human rights situation in Burma. The EU negotiated and co-sponsored a resolution on Burma at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in April 2002. The resolution was passed by consensus. The resolution noted continuing grave concern over the situation in Burma despite limited improvements in some areas such as the release of political prisoners and the lessening of the pressure on the National League for Democracy.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions his Department has had with representatives of the Burmese National League for Democracy following the release from confinement of Aung San Suu Kyi. [59623]

Mr. Straw: British embassy staff in Rangoon have had full and frequent meetings with representatives of the National League for Democracy. Embassy staff have also met with Aung San Suu Kyi. These meetings will continue.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will raise human rights abuses in Burma at the Foreign Affairs, Industry and Energy meeting on 6 and 7 June in Madrid. [59618]

Mr. Straw: We expect the Asia-Europe Foreign Ministers' meeting in Madrid on 6–7 June to be attended by representatives of all Asian partners in the ASEM process. These do not include Burma. We expect the discussions to cover a wide range of issues, including regional developments in Asia, and will raise the situation in Burma as appropriate during these discussions. Burma's neighbours have an important role to play in encouraging positive developments there.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports his Department has received concerning cases in which an ASEM meeting has been boycotted by a member nation as a result of Burma attending that meeting. [59606]

Mr. Straw: Burma is not a member of ASEM and is therefore not entitled to attend its meetings.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports his Department has received concerning human rights abuses by the Burmese Government against the *(a)* Karen, *(b)* Karenni, *(c)* Shan, *(d)* Chin and *(e)* Kachin people. [59609]

Mr. Straw: The ethnic minorities, including the Karen, Karenni, Shan, Chin and Kachin, have suffered persistent abuse at the hands of the military authorities. The EU co-sponsored resolution on Burma at the United Nations Commission on Human Rights in April 2002 catalogues these abuses and expressed the international community's grave concern.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Yemen) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58474]

(2) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EC-Albania) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58502]

(3) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Pakistan) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58481]

(4) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Macao) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58487]

(5) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Lithuania) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58512]

(6) what the mandate of the EC-Uzbekistan Co-operation Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58429]

(7) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EC-Central Kingdom of Cambodia) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58495]

(8) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Uruguay) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58476]

(9) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Latvia) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58510]

(10) what the mandate of the EEC-Ukraine Co-operation Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58423]

(11) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EC-Palestinian Authority) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58420]

(12) what the mandate of the EC-Kyrgyzstan Co-operation Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58430]

(13) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Chile) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list

the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58492]

(14) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-China) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58491]

(15) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EC-Laos) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58488]

(16) what the mandate of the Joint Co-operation Committee (EEC-ASEAN) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58499]

(17) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Estonia) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58505]

(18) what the mandate of the EC-Tunisia Association Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58422]

(19) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Vietnam) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58475]

(20) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EC-Japan) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58489]

(21) what the mandate of the EC-Morocco Association Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58421]

(22) what the mandate of the EC-Azerbaijan Co-operation Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58431]

(23) what the mandate of the EEC-Slovenia Co-operation Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58435]

(24) what the mandate of the EC-Moldova Co-operation Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58428]

(25) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Mexico) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58485]

(26) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Nepal) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58483]

(27) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EC-Romania) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58479]

(28) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-India) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58490]

(29) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Bulgaria) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58496]

(30) what the mandate of the EEC-Israel Association Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the

annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58418]

(31) what the mandate of the EC-Armenia Co-operation Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58433]

(32) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Argentina) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58503]

(33) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Paraguay) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58480]

(34) what the mandate of the Joint Council (EEC-Countries of the Gulf Co-operation Council) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58417]

(35) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EC-former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58427]

(36) what the mandate of the EC-San Marino Co-operation Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58424]

(37) what the mandate of the Association Committees with the countries of central and eastern Europe (EEC-Hungary/Romania/Czech Republic/Slovak Republic/Poland/Bulgaria) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58434]

(38) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Andean Pact) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58501]

(39) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Andorra) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58500]

(40) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Brazil) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58497]

(41) what the mandate of the EC-Egypt Association Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58419]

(42) what the mandate of the Joint Co-operation Committee (EEC-Canada) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58416]

(43) what the mandate of the EEC-Russia Co-operation Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58426]

(44) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Mongolia) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58484]

(45) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Sri Lanka) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58478]

(46) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Bangladesh) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58498]

(47) what the mandate of the EC-Georgia Co-operation Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58425]

(48) what the mandate of the EEC-Mercosur Joint Advisory Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58486]

(49) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Central America) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58493]

(50) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Turkey) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58477]

(51) what the mandate of the EC-Kazakhstan Co-operation Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58432]

(52) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EC-Greenland) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58461]

(53) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EC-Poland) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58469]

(54) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EC-Estonia) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58506]

(55) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Angola) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58457]

(56) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Senegal) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58473]

(57) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Guinea Bissau) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58463]

(58) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Sao Tomé and Principe) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58471]

(59) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EC-Latvia) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58509]

(60) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Cape Verde) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58459]

(61) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Morocco) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58467]

(62) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EC-Canada) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58494]

(63) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Guinea) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list

the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58462]

(64) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Russia) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58470]

(65) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Côte D'Ivoire) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58508]

(66) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Comoros) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58458]

(67) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Madagascar) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58466]

(68) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EC-New Zealand Joint Committee) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58482]

(69) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Equatorial Guinea) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58464]

(70) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Seychelles) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58472]

(71) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EC-Lithuania) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58511]

(72) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Argentina) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58504]

(73) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Gambia) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58460]

(74) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Mauritania) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58468]

(75) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Mauritius) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [58465]

(76) what the mandate of the EEC-Denmark-Faroe Islands Joint Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [59042]

Peter Hain: The EU has external agreements with a large number of third countries. These agreements include an article establishing an official level committee to oversee implementation of the agreement. This committee is known as a joint or association committee depending on the nature of the agreement (ie whether it is a Trade and Co-operation Agreement or an Association Agreement). The mandate of the committee is to ensure the effective implementation of the agreement. Specific provisions for the powers or provisions of the committees are set out in the individual agreements.

The range of work covered by such committees includes economic and trade issues, technical co-operation and, in the case of Association Agreements, political dialogue. The committees are required to meet at regular intervals, usually annually. The UK is represented at the committee at official level, normally by officials from the UK Permanent Representation in Brussels (when the meeting is in Brussels) or by British embassy or high commission officials (when meetings take place in the third country concerned). It is not possible to disaggregate the cost of the committees to public funds as they are part of the EU's wider relations with third countries. Parliament has the opportunity to scrutinise each third country agreement. Mixed competence agreements have to be ratified by all member states. Community-only agreements are considered by the parliamentary Scrutiny Committees prior to their conclusion.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for Protection Against the Effects of the Extra-territorial Application of Legislation Adopted by a Third Country and Actions Based Thereon or Resulting Therefrom (anti-boycott) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55391]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

It was intended that a Committee for Protection Against the Effects of the Extraterritorial Application of Legislation Adopted by a Third Country and Actions Based Thereon or Resulting Therefrom (anti-boycott) would be established in Brussels to assist EU companies affected by extraterritorial jurisdiction by third countries, and in particular those affected by the extraterritorial aspects of the US trade sanctions against Cuba, Iran and Libya.

Thus far, the Committee has not been convened. UK companies are obliged to inform Her Majesty's Government and the European Commission of any extraterritorial action taken against them, but while it is clear who would be responsible for representing the UK at any meeting of the Committee, in these times of improved electronic communication, it has not been necessary in practice for it to meet.

In addition, as part of the 1997 Understanding between the EU and the US, the US undertook to exempt European individuals and companies from the extraterritorial aspects of US legislation drastically reducing the number of cases occurring, thus further reducing the need for the Committee to meet.

Chemical Weapons

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the contributions that have been made to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons by the *(a)* UK and *(b)* US since it was formed. [57951]

Nigel Griffiths: I have been asked to reply.

Since the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons was formed the UK and the US have each made full payments in respect of their annual assessed contributions.

TREASURY

Council Tax

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if it is intended to publish the contents of the council tax lists on the internet. [60816]

Dawn Primarolo: I am pleased to announce that the Valuation Office Agency have today published council tax lists on the internet. Council taxpayers will be able to access council tax bandings and make appeals online. This follows the Valuation Office Agency's successful online provision of the non-domestic rating lists in 2000 and is an other important step in the process of improving public access to information by electronic means.

Financial Transactions

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will next publish details of United Kingdom financial transactions with European Community institutions. [60377]

Mr. Boateng: In order to bring details of all UK financial transactions with the EC into a single publication, information which has previously been included in the departmental report of the Chancellor of the Exchequer's Department will now be published in the Government's annual White Paper "European Community Finances". This change will take effect from the White Paper to be published in the summer. However, in advance of that, updated versions of tables 14a and 14b from the 2001 departmental report are set out in the tables.

Annexe A—cash payments and receipts

£ million

			Outturn			*Estimated outturn*
	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–200*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Gross payments[1]	9,278	8,603	10,507	9,207	10,640	9,213
Public sector receipts	–4,567	–4,472	–3,950	–3,676	–4,099	–3,293
UK abatement	–2,418	–1,563	–2,447	,2,206	–2,223	–4,427
Net contributions to EC budget[2]	2,293	2,567	4,111	3,325	4,318	1,493
Contributions to reserves and capital of the EIB	15	0	0	0	0	0
Grants received from European coal and steel community	–27	–6	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	–1
Payments to EC budget attributed to the aid programme[4]	–464	–408	–520	–519	–621	–717
Net payments to EC institutions (excluding overseas aid)[2]	1,817	2,153	3,590	2,807	3,697	776

[1] Gross payment figures include Traditional Own Resources payments at 90 per cent. (75 per cent. in March 2002). The remaining 10 per cent. (25 per cent. in March 2002) is retained by the UK to cover the costs of administering collection on behalf of the European Community.

[2] Due to rounding, totals may not exactly correspond to the sum of individual items.

[3] Signifies receipts of less than £0.5 million.

[4] For domestic/public expenditure planning purposes, part of the UK's contribution to the Community budget is attributed to the overseas aid programme. The aid programme also includes payments to the European Development Fund, not included here.

Annexe B—forecast of the trend in the UK's contributions

	Plans *2002–03*	[1]*£ million* *2003–04*
Trended net contributions to European Community budget	2,975	3,225
Contributions to reserves and capital of the EIB	0	0
Grants received from European coal and steel community	0	0
Payments to EC budget attributed to the aid programme[2]	–813	–861
Net payments to EC institutions (excluding overseas aid)	2,162	2,364

[1] An exchange rate of £1 = 1.59 euro has been assumed.

[2] For domestic/public expenditure planning purposes, part of the UK's contribution to the Community budget is attributed to the overseas aid programme. The aid programme also includes payments to the European Development Fund, not included here.

Juvenile Sex Abusers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures his Department takes to address the needs of children and young people who sexually abuse; and if he will make a statement. [57194]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given to him by the Minister of State, Department of Health on 22 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 420W.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was spent by his Department on paying pensions to retired employees of his Department in 2001–02; if he will estimate the corresponding amounts to be spent in *(a)* five years' time, *(b)* 10 years' time, *(c)* 20 years' time and *(d)* 30 years' time; if he will estimate in each case the proportion of such liabilities which will arise from (i) unfunded pension schemes and (ii) pre-funded pension schemes; and in the case of pre-funded schemes, if he will estimate the value of the corresponding pre-funded funds in each of these years. [57356]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* Pensions of retired civil servants are paid centrally by the Cabinet Office from an unfunded scheme, the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme. For information on the PCSPS I refer to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, on 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 561W.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many full-time equivalent staff of HM Customs and Excise were based in each county of the United Kingdom *(a)* in 1997 and *(b)* in 2001. [57540]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* Figures are not available in the form requested. Many Customs and Excise staff are not a static resource but highly mobile and deployed on a risk basis.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 20 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 90W, on customs officers, to what he attributes the rise in the proportion of complaints against HM Customs and Excise being upheld since 1997–98. [59098]

Mr. Boateng: Since 1996, Customs and Excise have increased their efforts to publicise their complaints system. The increase in the proportion of complaints upheld between 1997–98 and 1999–2000 followed accompanying measures taken internally to raise staff awareness of the value of complaints in improving customer service, and to improve training and guidance on handling them objectively.

The increase in the proportion of complaints upheld in 2000–01 reflects technical problems during the transition from regional advice centres to National Advice Service contract centres, resulting in some businesses facing delays in getting through to an adviser. Following the resolution of these problems, there has been a significant reduction in the number of recorded complaints.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the activities pursued by Her Majesty's Customs and Excise that have had a particular impact on the Isle of Wight since 7 June 2001. [58362]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* The full range of Customs and Excise controls and assurance activities, across the VAT, excise, customs and anti-smuggling regimes, apply equally to the Isle of Wight as to other parts of the UK.

National Insurance

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 17 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 806W, on national insurance contributions, if he will calculate for married women paying NICs at the reduced rate, *(a)* the value of the total employee contributions which would be paid by such women if they were subject to full rate class I contributions instead, *(b)* the actual value of employee class 1 contributions payable by such women and *(c)* the value of entitlement to contributory benefits attained by such women, on the same basis as these calculations are made for the self-employed. [58518]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* Estimates by the Government Actuary's Department, for married women paying at the reduced rate in 2001–02 are in the table.

	Amount: £ million
The amount of primary class 1 contributions reduced rate women would pay if liable to full class 1 rate	[1]75
Amount of primary contributions paid at the reduced class 1 rate	[1]25

[1] Includes £8 million allocated to the national health service.

Married women who opt to pay the reduced rate do not receive contributory benefits in their own right, but can receive some benefits based on their husbands' contributions. Contributory benefits are financed on a pay-as-you-go basis, so it is not appropriate to quote a value for the total benefits foregone by married women paying at the reduced rate. This comparison is possible for the self-employed because the main element of the difference between the benefits they receive and those to which employees are entitled is SERPS (now state second pension) and the value of this is represented by the contracted-out rebate. No equivalent valuation, consistent with the nature of the national insurance fund, is possible for the rights to basic retirement pension forgone by married women optants.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much he expects to raise from employers' national insurance contributions by nation and region of the UK for 2002–03. [59541]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government Actuary's Department estimate that around £38.5 billion will be received in 2002–03 in employer's national insurance contributions (including class 1A and 1B), this estimate is consistent with the April 2002 Budget.

A reliable estimate by nation and region is not available.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the total amount paid by Scotland's *(a)* health trusts and *(b)* local authorities in employers' national insurance contributions in (1) 2001–02, (2) 2002–03 and (3) 2003–04, assuming current levels of employment. [60068]

Dawn Primarolo: It is estimated that the changes to employer NICs announced in the Budget will add around 0.7 per cent. to pay costs on average next year. The changes will help to fund improvement to public services and a real terms increase in spending on health over the next five years of over 40 per cent.

I regret that it would be possible to provide more detailed reliable estimates only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reasons the number of records on the National Insurance Recording System is lower than the number of national insurance numbers in existence. [58827]

Dawn Primarolo: There are approximately 83 million national insurance numbers held on the Departmental Central Index (DCI), against approximately 70 million records held on the National Insurance Recording System (NIRS).

DCI holds Child Reference Numbers of children under age 16 as well as national insurance numbers allocated to customers who are over retirement pension age. These records are not notified to NIRS, as there is no contribution activity.

David Hamilton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much he expects to raise from national insurance contributions from employers for the years 2001 to 2004 in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Northern Ireland, *(c)* England and *(d)* Wales. [60310]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates for employers' national insurance contributions (including class 1A and 1B) are in the table. These estimates are consistent with the April 2002 Budget.

Employer NICs receipts (including class 1A and 1B)

Amount £ billion

	2001–02	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Great Britain	36.9	37.7	43.6
Northern Ireland	0.8	0.8	0.9
United Kingdom	37.6	38.5	44.5

Reliable estimates for Scotland and Wales are not available.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he has taking to ensure that there is parity of treatment between men and women in the application of the NIC rules. [60061]

Dawn Primarolo: Men and women pay national insurance contributions, on the same basis, on earnings from age 16 to pension age. Legislation has been introduced to fully equalise the pension age for men and women at age 65 from 2020.

David Hamilton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much he expects to raise from national insurance contributions from employees for the years 2001 to 2004 in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Northern Ireland and *(d)* Wales. [60311]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates for employees' national insurance contributions are in the table. These estimates are consistent with the April 2002 Budget.

Employee NICs receipts

Amount £ billion

	2001–02	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Great Britain	25.4	26.5	31.3
Northern Ireland	0.6	0.6	0.7
United Kingdom	26.0	27.1	32.0

Reliable estimates for Scotland and Wales are not available.

Euro

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of British overseas trade takes place using the euro. [59111]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* Customs and Excise conduct an annual survey of trade invoices used by British business for the import and export of goods between the UK and the rest of the world. The survey indicates the extent to which UK traders use the euro as a means of payment for international trade.

The most recent figures are for 2000 and show that 9 per cent. of EU trade was invoiced in euros, compared to 50 per cent. in sterling. For non-EU trade, 1 per cent. was invoiced in euros, compared to 54 per cent. in US dollars.

The results for 2001 will be released by end June.

Financial Services Authority

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the Financial Services Authority about changes in fees charged to WI markets under the Registrar of Friendly Societies. [59434]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The Treasury maintains a regular dialogue with the Financial Services Authority to help both institutions discharge their responsibilities effectively. This has included discussion of fees for which the FSA is responsible in relation to its registration of industrial and provident societies (formerly registered by the Registrar of Friendly Societies).

Public Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the public consultations undertaken by his Department since June 2001, stating in each case the *(a)* number of respondents and *(b)* percentage of those specifically consulted who responded. [60153]

Ruth Kelly: All public consultations undertaken by the Treasury are listed on the Treasury's website (http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk).

Data on consultations are not held centrally and could not be collected except at disproportionate cost.

Bee Diseases Insurance Ltd.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from Bee Diseases Insurance Ltd. regarding the impact of tax and regulatory costs. [60321]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government receive a number of representations from a variety of organisations regarding a range of different issues.

Population Statistics

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number of men and women in England who will be at each age from 18 to 30 years in 2010. [59714]

Ruth Kelly: The latest projections of the number of men and women aged 18 to 30 in England in the year 2010 are given in the following table:

Figures in thousands

Age	*Males*	*Females*
18	348	332
19	354	339
20	350	335
21	350	337
22	356	344
23	350	340
24	350	340
25	351	341
26	341	331
27	345	332
28	345	330
29	349	333
30	352	338

Source:

Government Actuary's Department, 2000-based national population projections

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his estimate is of the numbers of *(a)* men and *(b)* women in England at each age from 18 to 30 years. [59713]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Barry Sheerman, dated 10 June 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your question concerning the number of men and women in England at each age from 18 to 30 years. I am replying in his absence. (59713)

The estimates of the number of people of these ages are available for mid-2000 on the National Statistics website at www.statistics.gov.uk. The specific address for the mid-2000 population estimates is: http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_population/PENo3/PENo3_v3.pdf and from this page you should select Table 4 for the data you require.

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the percentages of 17 year olds in England who reside *(a)* with both their natural parents, *(b)* with one parent and a step-parent, *(c)* with a single parent, *(d)* with adoptive or foster parents, *(e)* in custody or in care and *(f)* independently. [59709]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Barry Sheerman, dated 10 June 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on the percentage of 17 year olds in England who reside (a) with both their natural parents, (b) with one parent and a step-parent, (c) with a single parent, (d) with adoptive or foster parents, (e) in custody or in care and (f) independently. I am replying in his absence. (59709)

Estimates of the percentages of 17 year olds living in private households in 2001 in England in the first four of these categories may be made using the Labour Force Survey, and are shown in the table below.

Percentages of 17 year olds living in private households in 2001

	Percentage
(a) with both natural parents	64
(b) with one parent and a step-parent	8
(c) with a lone parent	21
(d) with foster parents	0.2
(e) other family and non-family situation	7

Source:

Labour Force Survey

Some information for category (e) is available from the Department of Health and the Home Office. The total number of 17 year olds in care (including those in foster care) in 2001 in England was 4,000, representing about 0.7 per cent. of the total. In addition, there were 1,456 young offenders aged 17 in custody in England and Wales in 2000, about 0.2 per cent. of the total.

Small Businesses

Mr. Paice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the changes to the tax burden on unincorporated small businesses and of that on incorporated small businesses since 1997. [60319]

Dawn Primarolo: Since 1997 the Government have introduced numerous measures to help both incorporated and unincorporated business, including: making 40 per cent. first year capital allowances permanent, implementation of the Carter Review of payroll services, cutting the small companies rate of corporation tax from 23 per cent. to just 19 per cent., introducing a 10p starting rate of income tax and introducing measures to ease the impact of VAT on small business.

Tax Credits

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to publicise the increased children's tax credit for families in which a child has recently been born. [58764]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue has arranged for application forms for children's tax credit to be placed in "Bounty packs" which are given to mothers at around the time of the birth of their baby. Information is also including in the pack that Bounty provide for mothers during pregnancy and for when their baby is about three to five months old. Additionally, a parent may get an application form by ringing the Inland Revenue helpline on 0845 300 1036 or downloading it from the Inland Revenue's website at www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people he expects to start claiming *(a)* the child tax credit and *(b)* the working tax credit, in (i) April 2003, (ii) October 2003 and (iii) April 2004. [58753]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the "The Child and Working Tax Credits" in the series 'The Modernisation of Britain's Tax and Benefit System, Number 10, April 2002', which states that around 5¾ million families are expected to benefit from the child tax credit. Some of these families will also receive the working tax credit as will other low-income working households. Families with children receiving income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance will not need to make a separate claim for the new tax credits. During the transition period, they will continue to receive IS/JSA but with enhanced child premia rates.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect on double taxation treaties of disallowing the discounting of financial costs against the supplementary charge on oil and industry corporation tax. [58744]

Dawn Primarolo: The supplementary charge should be creditable under most of the UK's double taxation agreements, but this is ultimately a matter for our treaty partners.

Mr. Pollard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to extend the reduction in corporation tax to small companies that trade as unincorporated businesses; and if he will make a statement. [60245]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) on 20 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 2624W.

Gas Pipelines

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the various rates of taxation for gas pipelines within the United Kingdom and on the rationale for the differences. [58896]

Dawn Primarolo: Since the special taxation regime for UK oil and gas was introduced in the 1970s, oil and gas pipelines associated with particular fields have received the same tax treatment as the fields themselves. This reflects the fact that the pipelines are an integral part of the overall development of the fields concerned. Because the tax regime that applies to a field, and therefore its associated pipelines, depends on the date on which the filed was given development consent, pipelines associated with different fields can have different tax treatments.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue the Treasury has received from tax on gas pipeline tariffs in each year since 1997–98; and how much revenue the Treasury predicts it will receive from tax on gas pipeline tariffs in 2002–03. [58897]

Dawn Primarolo: Companies pay corporation tax on their overall profits, including those from the tariffing of oil and gas pipelines. From the data available reliable estimates of the tax attributable to gas pipeline tariffs cannot be made.

North Sea Oil and Gas

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how the Treasury adjusted its oil revenue predictions after the discovery in January of the Buzzard field. [59537]

Dawn Primarolo: Oil was first discovered in the Buzzard field in June 2001. Data for the Buzzard field were included in the forecasts of North sea revenues for both the 2001 pre-Budget report and the 2002 Financial Statement and Budget Report.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reason he did not formally consult the oil industry prior to announcing changes to the fiscal regime in the 2002 Budget. [59539]

Dawn Primarolo: In 1998 the Government started consulting on the reform of North sea taxation. Ever since then the options for reform have been subject to detailed analysis and discussion.

In last year's Budget the Chancellor said

> "as we consider the next steps for taxation in the North sea, our approach will be guided not by short-term factors but by the need for a regime that raises a fair share of revenue and promotes long term investment."

It has become clear that the option of reintroducing PRT now would have imposed substantial compliance and administrative costs on the industry.

The Government have therefore decided that the simpler approach of a supplementary charge buttressed by specific and generous investment incentives is the right one, and that to ensure certainty for the industry going forward it was right to announce this as a firm decision in the Budget.

The Government are consulting on the appropriate timing of the abolition of the royalty.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what incentives exist for oil companies to increase their exploration and appraisal drilling in the North sea. [59538]

Dawn Primarolo: Before the changes announced in the Budget, companies were already entitled to 100 per cent. first year relief for exploration and appraisal drilling. In future, companies will also have 100 per cent. first year allowances for the capital expenditure on subsequent development of discovered oil and gas fields. This will increase the overall post-tax rate of return on exploration and appraisal.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with which companies he has had discussions regarding planning to build new gas pipelines to Bacton. [58898]

Dawn Primarolo: Ministers and civil servants have meetings with a wide range of organisations and individuals as part of the process of policy development and analysis. As with previous Administrations it is not this Government's practice to provide details of all such meetings. All such contacts are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code and Guidance for Civil Servants: Contacts with Lobbyists.

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 21 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 28W, on oil and gas industry (taxation), if he will publish data that have been agreed by the industry as not commercially sensitive. [60010]

Dawn Primarolo: The Economic Secretary to the Treasury explained in full the methodology the Government used on 9 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 362–63. The analysis was based on commercially sensitive information.

Vehicle Excise Duty

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the vehicle excise duty on cars according to the carbon dioxide rating. [59373]

Mr. Boateng: All new cars purchased on or after 1 March 2001 are subject to the graduated system of vehicle excise duty (VED). Under this system, the amount of VED payable is related to carbon emissions, the lower the emission rate the lower the VED payable therefore providing an incentive to motorists to purchase cleaner, less polluting cars.

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what vehicle excise duty concessions are allowed to owners of cars with a cc rating of less than 1549; and if he will make a statement. [59372]

Mr. Boateng: Cars registered before 1 March 2001 with engines of 1549 cc or less qualify for the reduced rate of vehicle excise duty which currently stands at £105 per year, £55 less than the standard rate. Cars first registered after 1 March 2001 are liable for VED on the basis of their carbon dioxide emissions, and many of those with engines up to 1549 cc will qualify for the lower bands of VED.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 30 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 732W, on excise duties, what the level was of receipts associated with forestalling of road fuel duties in April 2002; and if he will make a statement. [60032]

Mr. Boateng: As stated in paragraph C50 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report, it is estimated that around £0.2 billion in receipts was associated with the forestalling of road fuel duties. However, there is no direct way of measuring forestalling.

Aggregates Levy

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much revenue the Treasury predicts it will raise from the aggregates levy by *(a)* nation and *(b)* region of the UK for 2002–03. [59540]

Mr. Boateng: Revenue forecasts for the aggregates levy were published in Table C.7 of the FSBR. These are not broken down by either national area or by region.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if a review date has been set when the effectiveness of the aggregates levy at increasing the use of recycled aggregate will be assessed. [59401]

Mr. Boateng: As with all taxes, the effect of the levy will be continually monitored as part of the Budget process. Its effect on recycled aggregates will be evaluated in due course as data become available.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many full time staff members at HM Customs and Excise have responsibility for ensuring that questions from quarry operators regarding the provisions of the aggregates levy are answered. [59388]

John Healey: Customs has the equivalent of around 230 full-time staff nationally dealing with written and telephone inquiries about all Customs and Excise taxes, including the aggregates levy. In addition, there are about 30 environmental taxes assurance staff, who will deal with questions raised on aggregates levy visits. Complex questions may be referred to six specialist aggregates levy support staff.

Scottish Devolution

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to transfer the administration of reserved powers and functions of the Treasury, its executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies within its remit from the Treasury to the Scotland Office. [59507]

Mr. Boateng: None.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how many representations the Scottish Executive has made to his Department since May 1999 broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive Department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date; [59508]

(2) how many times his office has made representations to the Scottish Executive since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* the Department approached, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [59509]

Mr. Boateng: Information is not available in the form requested. Both formal and informal contacts take place regularly between Government Departments, including the Treasury, and Departments of the Scottish Executive.

Regional Organisations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what regional organisation his Department has; and if he will list the counties and unitary authorities in each region in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002. [58940]

Mr. Boateng: The Treasury does not have a regional organisation.

Whisky Duty

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what is being done to bring whisky duty in to line with other alcohol tariffs by level of alcohol content. [59542]

Mr. Boateng: The duty on spirits has been frozen in the last five Budgets and a bottle of whisky is now 73p less expensive than it otherwise would have been. The freezes have narrowed the duty differential and the duty on spirits is now 34 per cent. lower (in real terms) than it was 20 years ago.

The Chancellor will continue to take decisions on a Budget by Budget basis, taking into account all relevant factors including the position of UK spirits producers and various duty differentials.

Government Borrowing

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the estimated effect would be on UK net borrowing for the current year if the UK GDP grows at *(a)* 1.75 per cent., *(b)* 1.5 per cent. and *(c)* 1 per cent. rather than the projected rate. [59587]

Mr. Boateng: Paragraph C18 of Budget 2002 gives estimates of the relationship between net borrowing and the output gap.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the Treasury classes as a prudent and acceptable level of *(a)* deficit spending for the UK Government and *(b)* total national debt as a percentage of GDP. [59389]

Mr. Boateng: The Government set fiscal policy to meet their fiscal policy objectives and their two strict fiscal rules:

the golden rule: that, over the economic cycle, the Government will borrow only to invest and not to fund current spending; and

the sustainable investment rule: that public sector net debt as a proportion of GDP will be held, over the economic cycle, at a stable and prudent level, currently defined as below 40 per cent. of GDP.

Further detail showing the Government are projected to meet their fiscal rules over the next five years can be found in Table 2.5 on page 31 of the April 2002 Economic and Fiscal Strategy Report.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what UK net borrowing was in each year since 1992; and what the predicted UK net borrowing in each year from the current year to 2008 is. [59390]

Mr. Boateng: The available estimates of public sector net borrowing for the UK, expressed in financial years and as a percentage of GDP, are set out in Tables C23 and C2 of Budget 2002.

2001 Census

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest assessment is of the results from the 2001 Census; and if he will make a statement. [60075]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Edward Davey, dated 10 June 2002:

The National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales has been asked to reply to your recent question concerning what the latest assessment is of the results from the 2001 Census. I am replying in his absence. [60075]

The first results from the 2001 Census in England and Wales, giving resident population counts for each local authority area, are planned to be published in later summer. The attached press release, issued on Thursday 30 May, gives further details. These counts will form the base for the Registrar General's mid-year estimates of the population for 2001. A summary of key statistics, covering a range of census topics, is planned for publication around the end of 2002. The full local area results will follow in several tranches throughout the first half of 2003.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will include a question on British Sign Language usage in the 2011 census, in the format of Question 9 in the 2001 census. [60115]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. James Gray, dated 10 June 2002:

The National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales has been asked to reply to your recent question regarding the inclusion of a question on British Sign Language usage in the 2011 Census, in the format of Question 9 in the 2001 Census. I am replying in his absence. [60115]

The questions to be included in any future Census, will be decided nearer the time. I would expect, as in previous censuses, that the final question content will reflect a widespread need for information not available from other sources and will be based on extensive consultation, including parliamentary debate.

Credit Card Debt

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the average credit card debt owed by an adult in the UK. [58871]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Tom Harris, dated 10 June 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on average credit card debt. I am replying in his absence. (58871)

Based on figures for amounts outstanding on credit cards of £43.2 billion at the end of March 2002, and a resident population of 46.7 million adults at mid 2002, credit card debt divided by adult population in the United Kingdom is about £900.

Office for National Statistics

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many businesses have been required to supply information on their returns to the Office for National Statistics in each of the past three years. [59187]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Brian Cotter, dated May 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking how many businesses have been required to supply information on their returns to the Office for National Statistics in each of the past three years. (59187)

The total number of enterprises receiving forms for the three years you require is as follows:

Year	*Number of enterprises*
1999	262,232
2000	274,324
2001	270,045

Source:
Office for National Statistics

Brian Cotter: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what information businesses are required to supply to the Office for National Statistics; and in which legislation this requirement lies. [59192]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Brian Cotter, dated May 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking what information businesses are required to supply to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and in what legislation this requirement lies. (59192)

The ONS requires businesses to supply information on their structure, level of employment and the earnings of its employees, and financial data such as their turnover, sales, prices, stocks and capital expenditure. This information is collected through a range of monthly, quarterly and annual business surveys, with the short term surveys asking for aggregate level data, while the annual surveys seek more detailed structural data. Each business survey is subject to regular review to reassess its continued need. The sample size for each survey is set at the minimum level consistent with the need to produce aggregate statistics for use by the Government in its economic monitoring and planning. Full details of all the business surveys carried out by the ONS are included in the ONS Compliance Plan for 2002 to 2004 which will be available on the ONS website www.statistics.gov.uk/other on the 29th of May.

The information sought from businesses by the ONS is collected under the provisions of the Statistics of Trade Act 1947. The Schedule to the 1947 Act allows for the collection of the following:

The nature of the undertaking (including its association with other undertakings) and the date of its acquisition; the persons employed or normally employed (including working proprietors), the nature of their employment, their remuneration and the hours worked; the output, sales, deliveries and other services provided; the articles acquired or used, orders, stocks and work in progress; the outgoings and costs (including work given out to contractors, depreciation, rent, rates and taxes, other than taxes on profits) and capital expenditure; the receipts of and debts owed to the undertaking; the power used or generated; the fixed capital assets, the plant, including the acquisition and disposal of those assets and that plant and the premised occupied.

The Statistics of Trade Act (Amendment of Schedule Order) 1963, allows for the collection of data relating to assets (other than fixed capital assets) and liabilities of the undertaking, including the acquisition and disposal of those assets and the incurring and discharge of those liabilities; prices of articles and services.

The Statistics of Trade Act (Amendment of Schedule Order) 1987 allows for cases where the undertaking is related to a body situated outside the United Kingdom: the nature and extent of the relationship; the nature and extent (and any changes therein) of the financial interest of the one body in the other; the country in which the related body is situated; particulars in respect of issued share capital, minority shareholders' interests, loans, reserves and provisions as recorded in the accounts of the undertaking or such particulars in respect of the related body where it is under the control of the undertaking; net gains or losses of the undertaking attributable to changes in exchange rates, being gains or losses arising out of the relationship; where the undertaking is not a company incorporated in the United Kingdom, its net value to the related body and where the related body is not a body corporate, its net value to the undertaking.

The Statistics of Trade Act (Amendment of Schedule) Order 1990 allows for the collection of data relating to income (including rents, interest and investment income) received or receivable by the undertaking; dividends and interest paid or payable; profits; losses; taxes paid or chargeable on income or gains; services acquired or used.

Still Births

Ian Lucas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to amend the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953 to allow the parents of children who die between 18 and 24 weeks gestation to register a still birth. [59689]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Ian Lucas, dated 10 June 2002:

The Registrar General and National Statistician has been asked to reply to your Parliamentary question concerning what plans there are to amend the Births and Deaths Registration Act to allow parents of children who die between 18 and 24 weeks gestation to register a still-birth. I am replying in his absence. (59689)

There are no plans to amend the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953 to redefine the gestational age at which a still-birth which must be registered.

Adoption Orders

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many adoption orders were made in each year since 1991. [60572]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Registrar General. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Keith Vaz, dated 10 June 2002:

The National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales has been asked to reply to your recent question, concerning the number of Adoption Orders made in each year since 1991. I am replying in his absence. (60572)

I refer you to Mr. Cook's letter of 22 May which answered PQ 57193 (Hansard vol. 386 no. 152), concerning the number of Adoptions since 1990. The granting of an Adoption order effectively means the same as an Adoption being registered in the Adopted Children Register, since the order is the legal basis for the registration.

Family Historians

Mr. Caton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to increase the availability of the Registrar General's information to family historians. [60577]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Martin Caton, dated 10 June 2002:

The National Statistician and Registrar General for England and Wales has been asked to reply to your recent question concerning what plans there are to increase the availability of the Registrar General's information to family historians. I am replying in his absence. (60577)

The Government's proposals for modernising civil registration in England and Wales are contained in the White Paper "Civil Registration: Vital Change" published on 22 January 2002, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House. The White Paper sets out a new framework for access to information about births, marriages and deaths held by the Registrar General.

Birth Statistics

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many *(a)* boys and *(b)* girls were born in England in each year from 1980 to 1992. [59712]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Barry Sheerman, dated 10 June 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on the number of (a) boys and (b) girls born in England in each year from 1980 to 1992. I am replying in his absence. (59712)

The figures are given in the table below.

Total number of live births by sex in England[1], 1980 to 1992

Year	*Male*	*Female*	*Total*
1980	316,441	301,930	618,371
1981	307,134	291,029	598,163
1982	302,764	286,947	589,711
1983	304,936	288,319	593,255
1984	307,436	293,137	600,573
1985	317,809	301,492	619,301
1986	319,585	304,024	623,609
1987	330,027	313,303	643,330
1988	334,898	319,465	654,363
1989	332,583	316,774	649,357
1990	341,353	325,567	666,920
1991	338,715	322,091	660,806
1992	334,365	317,419	651,784

[1] Births are to mothers who were resident in England at the time of the birth

Source:

Key population and vital statistics—Series VS.

Correspondence

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many letters were received by each Minister in his Department in each month since June 1997. [59306]

Mr. Boateng: The information in the detail requested is not kept or readily available.

Broadband

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Office of Government Commerce Broadband Feasibility Group's report on the aggregation of public sector demand will be published. [60067]

Mr. Boateng: Ministers will make an announcement on the key recommendations from the OGC broadband procurement feasibility study in the summer.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the number [illegible] additional households which will become eligible for the working families tax credit when the children element of the tax credit is increased by £2.50 in June. [59747]

Dawn Primarolo: It is not possible to provide such an estimate as the surveys on which such an estimate would be made are too small to provide a reliable estimate of the number of families newly eligible because of the increase of £2.50 in the basic element of the working families tax credit.

Ministerial Direction

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many times in each year since 2000 his Department has been notified of a ministerial direction as provided for in the procedures set out in paragraphs 12 to 15 of the Treasury document entitled, "The Responsibilities of an Accounting Officer"; and if he will make a statement. [60004]

Mr. Boateng: I refer to the answer given by my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), to the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) on 8 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 253W and to my own further answer of 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1037W.

Parliamentary Questions

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer for what reasons paragraph 42 of his Department's guidance notes on parliamentary questions dated March states that briefings should include supportive statements from members of the Opposition; and if he will make a statement. [59598]

Ruth Kelly: In order to present as complete a picture as possible of the issue concerned.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of draft parliamentary answers that his Department prepared in January were amended by special advisers prior to final approval by the Minister; and if he will make a statement. [59600]

Ruth Kelly: Ministers are responsible for the answers they give to parliamentary questions.

The Treasury does not maintain records relating to the number of occasions on which Special Advisers have contributed to the drafting of answers. It would, in any case, be inappropriate to disclose information concerning internal consultations on parliamentary questions, as provided for by Exemption 2 of the "Code of Practice on Access to Government Information".

Departmental Sponsors

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) which hon. Members have been appointed as sponsors to his Department since 7 June 2001; and when each of them was appointed; [59965]

(2) what the duties are of hon. Members appointed as sponsors to his Department; and what assistance is given by officials in his Department to them in carrying out these duties. [59980]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) on 22 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 372W.

LIBRA Project

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what basis the LIBRA project was described as completed in his Department's evidence to the Treasury Committee in January 2000; and if he will make a statement. [59690]

Mr. Boateng: The Lord Chancellor's Department's project LIBRA was a Treasury Taskforce Significant Project. The LIBRA contract was signed in December 1998. Annexe B of the Treasury's memorandum dated 1 November 1999 to the Treasury Committee, showed progress on Treasury Taskforce Significant Projects. Those projects where the contract had been signed, and thus the Treasury taskforce's involvement had been successfully completed, were noted as being "completed".

White Papers

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions in the past 12 months confidential final revise proof copies of White Papers have been made available under embargo to *(a)* the Lobby and Upper Gallery and *(b)* members of other organised groups of correspondents, before publication; and if he will make a statement. [59877]

Mr. Boateng: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 23 November 2001, *Official Report*, column 584W.

Public Services Productivity

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 13 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 1106W, on public services productivity, what seminars his Department plans on the paper; what research his Department plans to commission on the paper; and if he will make a statement. [60003]

Mr. Boateng: In preparing the paper, as with the public services agenda more widely, the Treasury is taking account of the wide range of expertise and research findings, including the advice of the Public Services Productivity Panel. The Treasury organises seminars on a variety of issues where such discussions can help guide policy.

Growth and Stability Pact

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with the French Government about the operation of the growth and stability pact. [60591]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the right hon. and learned Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 574W.

Greater London Economy

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with business representatives on the performance of the Greater London economy; and if he will make a statement. [60711]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor and other Treasury Ministers meet regularly with business representatives from all regions and countries of the UK, including Greater London. These discussions cover a wide range of issues, and the Government values the insights gained.

Poverty

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the role of international trade in the reduction of poverty in the poorest countries. [60559]

Ruth Kelly: In the last 40 years those developing countries which have managed to be more open and trade more in the world economy have seen faster growth rates than those which have remained closed. From the early 1970s to the early 1990s, developing countries that were able to pursue growth through trade grew at least twice as fast as those that kept their tariffs high and their doors closed to imports and competition.

Full trade liberalisation could lift at least 300 million people out of poverty by 2015. Even diminishing protection by 50 per cent. in agriculture and in industrial goods and services would increase the world's yearly income by nearly $400 billion: a boost to growth of 1.4 per cent. All countries and regions stand to benefit, with developing countries gaining an estimated $150 billion a year and higher than average increases in GDP growth.

The WTO's new trade round, referred to as the Doha Development Agenda, contains a package of commitments to progress in areas that will lead to major gains for developing countries and the poorest people in these countries.

We need an approach which ensures that Poverty and Social Impact Assessments are undertaken of key reforms, including trade, to ensure that policy options and trade-offs are discussed, and that reforms are properly designed. Where negative consequences exist, appropriate measures should be put in place to protect vulnerable countries and people from an overly rapid transition to a system of liberalised trade. The IMF and World bank have committed to undertake Poverty and Social Impact Assessments of reforms, and to promote the integration of trade into developing countries' poverty reduction strategies. We are working hard to support this process.

Capital Modernisation Fund

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what total funding allocation has been awarded to the Capital Modernisation Fund for the financial years *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02, *(c)* 2002–03 and *(d)* 2003–04; and what the breakdown of expenditure was in monetary terms and percentage terms per annum for (i) England, (ii) Scotland, (iii) Wales and (iv) Northern Ireland. [60635]

Mr. Boateng: Table 1.11 in the Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses 2002–03 (CM 5401) sets out the Capital Modernisation Fund allocations made to each Department and to the devolved Administrations. The allocations to the devolved Administrations relate to devolved matters only and are calculated according to the Barnett formula.

Performance Targets

Tony Wright: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the performance targets that his Department, its agencies and non-departmental public bodies are required to meet, apart from those set out in the public service agreements for 1999 to 2002 and 2001 to 2004; and if he will specify for each target *(a)* who sets it and *(b)* who monitors achievement against it. [60463]

Ruth Kelly: Performance targets are set out in each Department's Public Service Agreement and supported by detailed Service Delivery Agreements. Other targets devised by Departments, their agencies and non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) do not fall within the framework of "performance targets" as established by the Treasury. All the formal performance targets for HM Treasury and its agencies—the Debt Management Office, the National Investment and Loans Office and the Office of Government Commerce—are set out in HM Treasury's 2002 departmental report (Cm 5425), which is due to be published shortly. The NDPBs for which the Chancellor is responsible—the Public Services Productivity Panel, the Statistics Commission and the Royal Mint Advisory Committee on the Design of Coins, Medals, Seals and Decorations—publish information, following best practice, on their role and achievements in their annual reports, but do not have performance targets that are within the framework as defined above.

Invest to Save Budget

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what total funding allocation has been awarded to the Invest to Save Budget for the financial years *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02, *(c)* 2002–03 and *(d)* 2003–04; and what the breakdown was of expenditure in monetary terms and percentage terms per annum for (i) England, (ii) Scotland, (iii) Wales and (iv) Northern Ireland. [60636]

Mr. Boateng: In the years 2000–01, 2001–02, 2002–03 funding was allocated to projects in England, with funds allocated to the other regions in accordance with the Barnett consequentials calculations. The exceptions to this were projects whose scope encompassed the UK. It should be noted that projects led by the police in Wales are eligible for funding under the allocation for England as the Police Service for England and Wales is still a unitary body.

Allocations for England in 2003–04 are dependant on the successful bids from the fifth bidding round of ISB. With allocations to the other regions being decided in accordance with the Barnett consequentials calculations. The maximum budget for 2003–04 is £50 million for all regions.

Allocations in 2000–01, 2001–02 and 2002–03 were as follows (figures rounded up)[1]:

					Wales					
	England[2]		*Scotland*		*Barnett*		*Non-Barnett*[3]		*Northern Ireland*	
	(£000)	*(Percentage)*	*(£000)*	*(Percentage)*	*(£000)*	*(Percentage)*	*(£000)*	*(Percentage)*	*(£000)*	*(Percentage)*
2000–01	60,444	87.3	4,997	7.2	2,269	3.3	—	—	1,561	2.3
2001–02	61,073	81.8	8,802	11.8	4,189	5.6	325	0.4	318	0.4
2002–03	69,080	87.3	5,702	7.2	2,665	3.4	—	—	1,717	2.2

[1] This table give the total amount allocated to projects for their duration, this will not necessarily be the amount drawn down by Departments in that year.

[2] This includes ISB projects with a UK wide scope.

[3] Projects with only Welsh police as partners.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on the Community's own resources is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [58437]

Ruth Kelly: The roles and responsibilities of the Advisory Committee on the Communities' Own Resources are set out in Articles 20 and 21 of Council Regulation (EC, EURATOM) No. 1150/2000.

During the past 12 months, the committee has met on five occasions (two for Traditional Own Resources, one for VAT, one for Forecasting and one for Audit). In accordance with Article 20 of Regulation No. 1150/2000, each member state shall be represented on the committee by no more than five officials. The UK is usually represented by one or two officials from HM Customs and Excise except in the case of the Forecasting meeting which is usually attended by two officials from HM Treasury and one from HM Customs and Excise.

The information regarding the annual cost of the Committee's work to public funds can be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

The items currently under consideration by the Advisory Committee are questions concerning the application of the regulation especially in relation to financial statements and irregularity reports provided by member states, inspection from the Commission, and audit procedures.

Accountability and transparency to Parliament is ensured by the regular EU scrutiny process. After consulting the Advisory Committee the Commission produces a summary report for the previous financial year which is sent to the European Parliament and Council. The report is submitted to Parliament with an Explanatory Memorandum which is examined by the Scrutiny Committees.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the mandate of the Confidentiality of Statistics Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [58445]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Bercow, dated May 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the European Union Confidentiality of Statistics Committee. (58445)

The roles and responsibilities of the Confidentiality of Statistics Committee are set out in articles 7 and 8 of Council Regulation (EEC, Euratom) 1588/90 of 11 June 1990.

Since the start of May 2001, the Committee has met twice. The UK is represented by one senior official from the Office for National Statistics.

The information regarding the annual cost of the Committee's work to public funds can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

The Committee is purely advisory. It deals with general issues relating to ensuring that data provided in European releases to the public and researchers maintain the confidentiality of individual's information and advises the Commission accordingly.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the mandate of the Committee on monetary, financial and balance-of-payments statistics is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [58443]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Bercow, dated May 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the European Union Committee on Monetary, Financial and Balance of payments statistics (CMFB). (58443)

The role and responsibilities of the CMFB are set out in European Council Decision 91/115/EEC of 25 February 1991, amended by Council Decision 96/174/EC of 26 February 1996.

Since the start of May 2001, the Committee met twice. The UK is represented by one senior official from the Office for National Statistics and one representative from the Bank of England.

The information regarding the annual cost of the Committee's work to public funds can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

Items currently under consideration include statistical requirements for the conduct of monetary policy in the euroarea, financial services statistics, structural indicators, public finance statistics, quality indicators and developments in balance of payments statistical collection systems.

The Committee is purely advisory with its opinion published alongside relevant Eurostat Decisions.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the mandate of the Committee on the European Communities Statistics Programme is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [58439]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Bercow, dated May 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the European Union Statistical Policy Committee. (58439)

The role and responsibilities of the Statistical Policy Committee (SPC) are set out in Council Decision 89/382/EEC(Eurotom) of 19 June 1989.

Since the start of May 2001, the SPC met four times. As National Statistician I am the UK representative, with the Committee rules allowing an alternate.

The information regarding the annual cost of the Committee's work to public funds can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

The Committee is currently discussing a range of issues related to the requirements for European statistics. In addition, the SPC is the nominated comitology committee for a range of EU statistical legislation.

Proposals for significant statistical legislation are subject to co-decision. They are submitted to Parliament along with Explanatory Memoranda and are examined by the Scrutiny Committees. Minor changes are subject to comitology procedures.

Together with Member States, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the mandate of the European Advisory Committee on statistical information in the economic and social spheres (CEIES) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [58442]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Bercow, dated May 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the European Advisory Committee on Statistical Information in the Economic and Social Spheres (CEIES). (58442)

The role and responsibilities of the CEIES are set out in Decision 91/116/EEC of 25 February 1991. As National Statistician I am a member of CEIES. In addition, the Council may appoint 2 representatives from each member state. These members act in a personal and honorary capacity.

The information regarding the annual cost of the Committee's work to public funds can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

CEIES is purely advisory. It assists the Council and Commission to undertake statistical policy decided by the EU. They advise on the objectives, priorities, and nature of information require to support EU policy.

Since the start of May 2001, the committee met once in plenary and organised thematic seminars as follows:

Labour market statistics—towards enlargement 14–15 November 2002

Innovative solutions to providing micro-data 26–27 September 2002

Active aging 13–14 May 2002

The economy: Key measurement issues 4–5 March 2002

Agricultural statistics and consumer information—meeting new needs 19–20 November 2001

Inflation in Europe—different measures and their uses 4–5 October 2001

Measuring lifelong learning 25–26 June 2001

Health and safety at work EU statistics 10–11 March 2001

Attendance at thematic seminars organised by the Committee is by open invitation.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the mandate of the EEC-Latvia Customs Co-operation Subcommittee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59032]

(2) what the mandate of the Customs Co-operation Committee (EEC-Turkey) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59047]

(3) what the mandate of the Customs Section of the Joint Committee (EEC-Norway) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59053]

(4) what the mandate of the EEC-Slovak Republic Customs Co-operation Subcommittee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59026]

(5) what the mandate of the Customs section of the Joint Committee (EEC-Switzerland-Liechtenstein) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59051]

(6) what the mandate of the Customs Section of the Joint Committee (EEC-Iceland) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59052]

(7) what the mandate of the European Economic Area Joint Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59041]

(8) what the mandate of the EEC-Poland Customs Co-operation Subcommittee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59030]

(9) what the mandate of the EEC-San Marino Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59043]

(10) what the mandate of the EEC-Cyprus Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59045]

(11) what the mandate of the EEC-European Free Trade Association Joint Committee (and working parties) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59050]

(12) what the mandate of the EEC-Canada Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59049]

(13) what the mandate of the EEC-Malta Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59044]

(14) what the mandate of the EEC-Korea Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds;

if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59048]

(15) what the mandate of the EEC-Russia Customs Co-operation Subcommittee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59027]

(16) what the mandate of the EEC-Czech Republic Customs Co-operation Subcommittee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59029]

(17) what the mandate of the EEC-Estonia Customs Co-operation Subcommittee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59034]

(18) what the mandate of the EEC-Romania Customs Co-operation Subcommittee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59028]

(19) what the mandate of the EEC-Hungary Customs Co-operation Subcommittee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59033]

(20) what the mandate of the EEC-Andorra Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59046]

(21) what the mandate of the EEC-Bulgaria Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59035]

(22) what the mandate of the EEC-Albania Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59036]

(23) what the mandate of the EEC-Slovenia customs Co-operation Subcommittee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59025]

(24) what the mandate of the Joint Committee (EEC-Switzerland) on the simplification of inspections and formalities (and working party) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59037]

(25) what the mandate of the Joint Committees with the countries of the European Free Trade Association (Iceland, Norway and Switzerland) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement; [59040]

(26) what the mandate of the EEC-Lithuania Customs Co-operation Subcommittee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [59031]

Mr. Boateng: All of the committees listed have been set up by the council in accordance with obligations under agreements between the EC and the third country or economic grouping in question. They normally meet annually (one year Brussels, the following year in the subject country). Their aim is to maintain co-operation agreements in the customs field, particularly in exchanging information.

HM Customs attends preparatory council meetings (approximately six per year) which co-ordinate, as part of a wide ranging agenda, for the bilateral EC/third country committee meetings.

Travel expenses for two officials are reimbursed by the Commission. The usual cost of overnight accommodation and subsistence per day per official is 217.95 euro (£134.70). HM Customs officials do not normally attend the bilateral meetings.

In the Customs area, the EC has exclusive competence and leads in the bilateral meetings, normally accompanied by the member state holding the presidency. If, exceptionally, there is a point of direct interest to the UK, representatives from the permanent representation in Brussels would attend the meeting.

Accountability and transparency to Parliament are ensured by the regular EU scrutiny process. Prior to agreement at the various councils (ECOFIN, JHA, GAC), documents are submitted to Parliament along with explanatory memoranda and are examined by the European Scrutiny Committees.

EEC-Albania Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee (59036)

Customs Section of the Joint Committee (EEC-Iceland) (59052)

EEC-Romania Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee (59028)

EEC-Malta Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee (59044)

European Free Trade Association (Iceland, Norway and Switzerland) (59040)

EEC-Latvia Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee (59032)

EEC-Korea Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee (59048)

EEC-Poland Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee (59030)

EEC-Andora Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee (59046)

EEC-Slovak Republic Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee (59026)

EEC-Estonia Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee (59034)

EEC-European Free Trade Association Joint Committee (and working parties) (59050)

Joint Committee (EEC-Switzerland) on the simplification of inspections and formalities (and working party) (50937)

Customs Section of the Joint Committee (EEC-Norway) (59053)

EEC-Czech Republic Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee (59029)

EEC-Cyprus Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee (59045)

EEC-Slovenia Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee (59025)

European Economic Area Joint Committee (59041)

EEC-Hungary Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee (59033)

EEC-Canada Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee (59049)

EEC-Lithuania Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee (59031)

Customs Co-operation Committee (EEC-Turkey) (59047)

EEC-Russia Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee (59027)

EEC-San Marino Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee ([illegible]043)

EEC-Bulgaria Customs Co-operation Sub-Committee ([illegible]5)

Customs section of the Joint Committee (EEC-S[illegible]erland-Liechtenstein) (59051).

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the mandate of the Committee on the harmonisation of the compilation of gross national product at market prices is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [58444]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. John Bercow, dated May 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about the Harmonisation of the Compilation of Gross National Product at Market Prices Committee. (58444)

The role and responsibilities of the Harmonisation of the Compilation of Gross National Product at Market Prices Committee are set out in Council Directive 89/130 EEC (Euratom) of 13 February 1989.

The GNPmp committee has met twice since May 2001. The UK is represented by one senior official from the Office for National Statistics.

The information regarding the annual cost of the Committee's work to public funds can only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

The committee is currently discussing a range of issues relating to methodologies used in constructing the estimate of GNP and outstanding reservations under ESA79. It also ratified member countries' GNP returns prior to submission to the European Court of Auditors. In addition, the Committee is the nominated comitology committee for a range of EU National Accounts statistical legislation.

Proposals for significant statistical legislation are subject to co-decision. They are submitted to Parliament along with Explanatory Memoranda and are examined by the Scrutiny Committees. Minor changes are subject to comitology procedures.

Together with Member States, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final.

Suicides

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many suicides took place *(a)* on the Isle of Wight and *(b)* in (i) England, (ii) Scotland, (iii) Wales and (iv) Northern Ireland in each year since 1997. [60531]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Andrew Turner, dated 10 June 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question asking how many suicides took place (a) on the Isle of Wight, (b) in (i) England, (ii) Scotland, (iii) Wales and (iv) Northern Ireland in each year since 1997. I am replying in his absence. (60531)

The most recently available information is for deaths in 2000. Figures for each year from 1997 to 2000 are given in the table below.

Number of deaths from suicide and undetermined whether purposely inflicted or not[1] occurring (a) on the Isle of Wight and (b) in (i) England, (ii) Scotland, (iii) Wales and (iv) Northern Ireland, 1997 to 2000[2]

Calendar year	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
(a) Isle of Wight	9	20	22	15
(b)(i) England	4,685	4,830	4,857	4,618
(ii) Scotland	874	878	874	876
(iii) Wales	296	324	331	303
(iv) Northern Ireland	139	144	145	194

[1] Causes of death were defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) codes E950-E959 and E980-E989 excluding E988.8 in England and Wales, E950-E959 and E980-E989 in Northern Ireland, and E950-E959 and E980-E989 in Scotland for 1997 to 1999. For Scotland data for 2000 were defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes X60-X84 and Y10-Y34

[2] Figures for England and Wales are for deaths occurring in each calendar year. Figures for Scotland and Northern Ireland are for deaths registered in each calendar year.

Self-assessment

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many penalty notices for £0.00 have been issued by the Inland Revenue in respect of late submission of self-assessment forms in each year for which figures are available since the self-assessment regime was introduced. [59904]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue does not hold details of the number of nil penalty notices issued in respect of self assessment returns submitted late.

The Budget

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set out the amounts *(a)* in current prices, *(b)* in constant 2000–01 prices and *(c)* as percentages of personal income taken by (i) income taxes, (ii) national insurance contributions, (iii) value-added tax, (iv) other central Government indirect taxes, (v) the aggregate of (i) to (iv), (vi) average council tax payments and (vii) the aggregate of (i) to (iv) for (1) a single person, (2) a married couple without children, both working and (3) a married couple with two children, husband in work, wife not working, in each case as at (A) 50, (B) 75, (C) 100, (D) 150 and (E) 200 per cent. of average earnings for the financial year 2001–02, taking account of changes announced in his Budget statement and previously announced changes and for each of the years *(a)* 1996–97, *(b)* 1997–98, *(c)* 1998–99, *(d)* 1999–2000, *(e)* 2000–01 and *(f)* 2001–02. [51785]

Dawn Primarolo: The measures announced in the most recent Budget (including those measures announced just prior to the Budget) have no impact on the years from 1996–97 to 2001–02.

Income Tax

Mr. Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are expected to pay income tax in each of the next four years. [55413]

Dawn Primarolo: Available estimates of the number of income taxpayers are given in the table.

Year	*Number (thousands)*
1999–2000	27,000
2000–01[1]	27,900
2001–02[2]	27,800
2002–03[2]	28,300
2003–04[2]	29,700

[1] Provisional

[2] Projected

These estimates are based upon the Survey of Personal Incomes and are consistent with the April 2002 Budget.

Consultation

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many consultation documents and consultative drafts of legislation have been issued by his Department since January 2001; and what proportion of these have observed Criterion 5 of the Code of Practice on Written Consultation. [57010]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury has issued 37 consultation documents since January 2001. A list of consultations including their launch dates and closing dates is available on the Treasury's website at www.hm-treasury.gov.uk.

Royalty Tax

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what legislative arrangements are necessary for the abolition of royalty tax on UK oil and gas production. [58743]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

The Government intend, subject to consultation on the appropriate timing, to abolish North sea royalty. Royalty is paid as one of the considerations for petroleum production licences issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, but only in respect of production from oil and gas fields for which development consent was given before 1 April 1982. The Government propose that the abolition of North sea royalty from these fields will be achieved by an irrevocable renunciation of the right to take royalty from licensees from the date chosen for abolition. I expect to issue a consultation paper on this subject to industry in the near future.

Energy Efficiency

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total cost to the Treasury will be *(a)* at the outset of its introduction and *(b)* projected in the next three years of moneys redirected from the Climate Change Levy revenues to the Carbon Trust, broken down into (i) the Energy Efficiency Best Practice Programme, (ii) the Environment and Energy Helpline, (iii) Administration of the Enhanced Capital Allowance Scheme for investments in energy-saving technologies, (iv) the Low Carbon Innovation Programme and (v) other programmes or schemes. [53737]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

The Carbon Trust was set up in April 2001 by the UK Government to help UK business and public sectors to move towards a sustainable, low carbon economy while maintaining business competitiveness. The Carbon Trust has initial allocations of around £31 million per year of climate change levy (CCL) receipts for its first three years.

The allocation of expenditure by the Carbon Trust between its activities is a matter for the Carbon Trust, subject to ministerial approval of its overall programme. However, I understand that the Carbon Trust expects to allocate around £75 million to the Low Carbon Innovation Programme over three years, subject to annual approval.

In addition the trust expects to allocate approximately £1.5 million of CCL receipts this financial year to manage, develop and promote the Enhanced Capital Allowance scheme which the trust is soon to take over. The remainder of the Carbon Trust CCL receipts will be used to support the development and enhancement of its other programmes, including the Energy Efficiency Best Practice programme, for which it will receive separate funding from DEFRA.

The Carbon Trust will be regularly assessing the effectiveness of its programmes and expects to revisit the funding allocations between its activities under review.

Tax Concessions

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for

Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on 24 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 336W, on tax concessions, what the time scale is for the review; whether there will be a specific review team; whether there will be *(a)* external and *(b)* independent advisers; and whether external consultations will be carried out. [59864]

Dawn Primarolo: The Chancellor announced a review of the residence and domicile rules as they affect the tax liabilities of individuals in his Budget statement. The work of the review is being undertaken by the Inland Revenue and HM Treasury. They are facilitating consultation by writing directly to representative bodies and other interested parties, inviting their contributions. They would also be pleased to hear from other sources. The Government will report on this issue in time for the pre-Budget report.

Earnings and Income

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many non-domiciled residents of the UK are residents for tax purposes in the UK and have earnings and income in other tax jurisdictions. [60014]

Dawn Primarolo: I regret that this information is not available.

National Insurance Fund

Hywel Williams: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the surplus in the National Insurance Fund was in each of the last five years. [59813]

Dawn Primarolo: The available figures for Great Britain are provided in the table. These figures were provided by the Government Actuary's Department.

Year	*Surplus (£ million)*[1]
1997–98	1,871
1998–99	2,669
1999–2000	2,161
2000–2001	4,841
2001–02	4,793

[1] Excess of receipts over payments

Self-employment

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of self-employed likely to incorporate as a result of the corporation tax changes and changes to national insurance contributions for the self-employed announced in the Budget. [60588]

Dawn Primarolo: Possible behavioural responses to Budget measures, including increased levels of incorporations, informed the careful analysis of the Exchequer effects set out in the Financial Statement and Budget Report. It is not normal Government practice to give details of the underlying analysis.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the non-revenue benefits for *(a)* the self-employed and *(b)* the Treasury which derive from the trend of greater incorporation of self-employed businesses. [60589]

John Healey: Businesses themselves are best placed to assess the relative benefits of different legal structures, and to decide which is most appropriate for them. Incorporation, self-employment and partnership each offers a range of benefits to small businesses. The choice as to whether to incorporate or not is influenced by multiple factors, many of which are firm-specific, for example the personal circumstances of the owner(s).

Government policy is to raise UK productivity by creating an environment which stimulates enterprise. Our economy will benefit from successful, growing businesses whatever structure those businesses choose to use.

Industrial and Provident Societies

David Maclean: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the policy of the Government on changing the fees paid by industrial and provident societies; and if he will make a statement. [60760]

Ruth Kelly: The setting of fees is the responsibility of the Financial Services Authority in relation to the duties it performs under the relevant industrial and provident societies Acts. The Government are aware of concerns that have been expressed about the fee structure being developed by the FSA. However, the new level of fees has not yet been finalised and through consultation the FSA is seeking to ensure that the interests of the sector are fully considered.

Highly Indebted Poor Countries

Mr. Best: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much money is held in trust for highly indebted poor countries. [60287]

John Healey: As of the end of 2001, the UK has been holding in trust a total of £1,057,200 for six countries. We continue to use international and bilateral meetings to urge other creditors to follow our lead on this policy.

Projected Revenues

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 2 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 933W, on projected revenues, what proportion of the change in forecast capital receipts is due to the maturing of capital gains tax taper relief; and if he will make a statement. [60395]

Dawn Primarolo: Table C7 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report shows capital gains tax receipts are forecast to fall from £2.9 billion in 2001–02 to £1.8 billion in 2002–03. Around 20 per cent. of this forecast reduction in receipts is attributable to the maturing of capital gains tax taper relief.

Stamp Duty

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 1 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 886W, on stamp duty, how many properties in financial year 1999–2000 were sold in designated wards where the consideration did not exceed £150,000; and if he will make a statement. [60416]

John Healey: The stamp duty relief for disadvantaged areas came into force on 30 November 2001. Since that date we have exempted from stamp duty properties in qualifying areas where the consideration or premium for a lease does not exceed £150,000. We estimate the number of properties sold in 1999–20000 for a consideration of less than £150,000 in the subsequently qualifying wards to be in the region of 120,000 (of which about 40,000 are estimated to have a consideration of greater than £60,000).

Ms Shipley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the European Commission investigation into stamp duty relief for deprived areas; what steps are being taken to ensure a speedy resolution of the investigation; what impact the continuation of the investigation has on the implementation of his policy on stamp duty relief for deprived areas; and if he will use other forms of financial support for development in these areas. [59815]

John Healey: The extension of the stamp duty relief for disadvantaged areas for non-residential property above the £150,000 limit is currently subject to a state aid investigation by the Commission. Such investigations are normal for an innovative scheme such as this which does not conform precisely with any existing Commission guidelines. The investigation is necessary to establish whether the measure will adversely affect trading conditions to an extent contrary to the common interest and it gives interested parties, including other member states, a chance to comment. We are working closely with the European Commission to progress matters as quickly as possible. Those purchasing property for amounts up to £150,000 in the areas which qualify for the relief are already benefiting from the measure. In addition to the stamp duty relief, the Urban White Paper fiscal measures package provided a cut in VAT to 5 per cent. to encourage renovation and conversion of existing property; 100 per cent. capital allowances for creating flats over shops, 150 per cent. accelerated tax credits to help clean-up contaminated land; and the Government are now implementing the Community Development Venture Fund which will also support enterprise and regeneration in these areas.

Fuel Duty

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research his Department has carried out to ascertain whether fuel duty differential encourages people to buy more environmentally friendly cars. [59707]

John Healey: Fuel duty differentials have proved very successful in encouraging the introduction of cleaner fuels such as ultra-low sulphur petrol and diesel throughout the UK. In addition, favourable duty rates for liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) combined with purchase grants through the Government sponsored PowerShift programme have led to a substantial increase in the number of LPG vehicles from less than 6,000 in 1996 to around 65,000 now.

Labour-only Subcontractors

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many labour-only subcontractors are registered in the United Kingdom; and how many were registered in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 1999. [59651]

Dawn Primarolo: I regret that it would be possible to provide an answer only at disproportionate cost.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Barker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total revenues were he would have received during 2001–02 as a result of the climate change levy, had all those eligible paid the levy at the full amount. [60479]

John Healey: Projected revenue and revenue outturns from the climate change levy were published in the Financial Statement and Budget Report 2002 in Table C.7. Projected revenues from individual measures (including exemptions) are in Table A.1 and are discussed on page 167. There is no reliable estimate for the cost of the reduced rate for energy intensive users and horticultural producers.

WORK AND PENSIONS

"Open to Change"

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much the "Open to Change" advertisements have cost to run in national and local media; and if he will make a statement. [41340]

Mr. McCartney: The cost of the "Open to Change" campaign is £2.78 million.

"Open to Change" builds on two successful earlier campaigns to promote the DDA and the Disability Rights Commission. This campaign was designed to increase awareness and understanding of the DDA among specifically small and medium sized service providers. In particular, "Open to Change" publicises how these providers will have to make their services accessible to disabled people under the final phase of the Act, which comes into force in 2004.

The campaign encourages service providers to take action, seek advice on how their business could be adapted to meet legal requirements and improve the services they offer to disabled customers. It signposts SMEs to the Disability Rights Commission as a source of advice and support.

Rail Journeys (Staff)

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make it his policy that rail journeys undertaken by staff in his Department should ordinarily be on standard class tickets. [40449]

Mr. McCartney: DWP staff are advised to use the most efficient and economic means of travel having regard to the management benefit and the needs of disabled people. The guidance issued has regard to these principles outlined in section 8 of the Civil Service Management Code.

Within DWP the use of public transport is encouraged as part of our environmental programme and rail travel is ordinarily standard class. However, senior executive officer grades and above who are a minority of the total number of staff undertaking business journeys in DWP are entitled to travel first or executive class as one of their 'Terms and Conditions' of Employment. This is approved on the basis that the additional space and less crowding enables these people to work while they are travelling as well as affording greater privacy for the handling of sensitive papers. For long distance peak-time services the additional cost involved is more than offset by the work produced and time saved. All staff are expected to travel standard class when the length of the journey is insufficient to enable them to work productively.

Entertainment Costs

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much was spent by departmental special advisers on food, alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks for official entertainment purposes in each of the last five years. [46850]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 9 April 2002]:* Nothing. Special advisers are not permitted to authorise such expenditure.

New Deal

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what guidance he issues on the proportion of money allocated to training under the new deal to be spent on *(a)* administration and *(b)* training delivery. [53744]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: No guidance is issued on the proportion of money allocated to new deal training which may be spent on administration and delivery.

Contracting staff in Jobcentre Plus follow guidance on how to evaluate and approve bids from organisations interested in delivering new deal provision. The guidance contains criteria against which the quality of how a provider intends to deliver their services are measured. This guidance, the Approved Provider Procurement and Contracting Guidance, is commercial in confidence. However, organisations wishing to contract with Jobcentre Plus are provided with supporting information at both stage 1 and stage 2 of the contracting process. This includes a high level overview of both the evidence required to support the application to gain 'approved' status and the evaluation criteria used within the competitive bidding round.

The providers who win the contracts are monitored during the life of the contract to ensure that they deliver to the standards they proposed in their bids and to support continuous improvement in the quality of their delivery.

In addition, new deal provider guidance supplements the delivery, quality and administrative requirements which are set out in provider contracts by detailing the records providers need to retain to support audit trail requirements.

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Battersea constituency found permanent employment as a result of New Deal for *(a)* long-term unemployed 25 plus, *(b)* lone parents, *(c)* disabled people and *(d)* 50 plus in each of the years since they were introduced. [55802]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The available information is in the table.

Total number of people entering sustained employment[1] in Battersea, up to the end of January 2002

	New Deal 25 plus[2]	*New Deal for Lone Parents*[3]	*New Deal 50 plus*[3]
1998–99	37	8	[4]—
1999–2000	72	62	[4]—
2000–01	70	69	12
2001–02	54	49	22
Total	233	188	34

[1] Sustained employment is defined as employment lasting more than 13 weeks.

[2] In April 2001 New Deal 25 plus was extended and enhanced, to provide a flexible, more individually-tailored service to help more people get jobs and remain in them.

[3] Figures for sustained employment are not available for the New Deal for Lone Parents and the New Deal 50 plus. The figures given are therefore the total number of jobs gained.

[4] Figures not available as the New Deal 50 plus was only introduced nationally from April 2000.

Note:

Information on the New Deal for Disabled People is not available at constituency level.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Battersea constituency have benefited from the New Deal. [55801]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Our New Deal programmes have helped nearly 1,000 people into work in Battersea. Detailed information is in the table which follows. As well as those who have been helped to jobs, many more have benefited from the programmes in other ways. The New Deals give people the skills, experience and confidence to improve their prospects of getting a job in the future.

Programme	*Total number of participants up to the end of January 2002*	*Total number of people entering jobs up to the end of January 2002*
New Deal for Young People	[1]1,274	467
New Deal 25 plus	[1]1,243	284
New Deal for Lone Parents	508	188
New Deal 50 plus	34	34

[1] A number of these participants will have remained on the programmes beyond January, and of these many will enter jobs as a result of their participation.

Note:

Information on the New Deal for Disabled People and the New Deal for Partners is not available at constituency level.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

Benefit Administration Costs

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the *(a)* total cost and *(b)* cost per claimant of administering (i) retirement pension, (ii) winter fuel payments, (iii) free television licences for the over 75s, (iv) minimum income guarantee, (v) child benefit, (vi) family credit and (vii) housing benefit. [50989]

Mr. McCartney: Information is not held in the format requested. The Department accounts for its administrative, and programme, expenditure in accordance with its key objectives, which are published in the Department's Public Service Agreement (PSA), and the individual Requests for Resources (RfRs), which are published in the Department's Main Estimate.

Advisory Commission Mandate

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the mandate of the Audit Board of the Administrative Commission on social security for migrant workers is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55236]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Audit Board works under the authority of the Administrative Commission on Social Security for Migrant Workers, which has issued Decisions defining its composition and working methods as specified in Article 101 of Regulation (EEC) 574–72. The functions of the Audit Board are set out in Article 102 of that Regulation. Its duties in practice relate exclusively to health care costs. Specifically, it is tasked to collect the data and perform the calculations required by Title V of Regulation 574–72, to give the Administrative Commission details of the implementation of Regulations (EEC) 1408–71 and 574–72 particularly as they relate to health care finance, to submit to the Administrative Commission proposals on the calculation of annual average healthcare costs in respect of each member state, to lay before the Administrative Commission each year a statement of the healthcare costs claims position between the member states, and to carry out such other work as may be referred by the Administrative Commission.

The Audit Board normally meets twice a year in Brussels. It is chaired by the presidency of the day, and UK representation is normally two or three officials from the Department of Health. Costs to UK public funds are limited to expenses of approximately £550 per person for a one-day visit and £700 for a two-day visit, less any reimbursement provided by the European Commission.

The next meeting of the Audit Board will last one day and will consider the annual average cost papers submitted by seven member states together with work on the annual statement of claims. Any proposals made by the Audit Board to the Administrative Commission would, if subsequently adopted by the European Commission, then be subject to UK parliamentary scrutiny.

Domestic Violence

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans he has to amend regulations to provide benefits to survivors of domestic violence subject to the one year immigration rule; [58595]

(2) what plans he has to amend regulations to exempt survivors of domestic violence subject to the one year rule on immigration from the non-recourse to public funds rule. [58597]

Malcolm Wicks: Provisions already exist to allow victims of domestic violence to claim social security benefits. Provided that the Home Office is satisfied that a marriage has broken down due to domestic violence, it can apply a concession to the one year immigration rule, giving the victim indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom, and therefore access to the benefits system.

We have no plans to introduce regulations to give people who are subject to the one year immigration rule access to benefits before the Home Office has considered the particular circumstances of a case and has proof of domestic violence. To do so would undermine the general principle that those who are subject to immigration control have no access to the benefits system.

Verification Framework

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 23 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 202W, on the verification framework, if he will place a copy of 'The Cost of the Verification Framework', DSS Operational Research, Analytical Services Division 2A, published in April 2001, in the Library. [59320]

Malcolm Wicks: A copy of the survey report has been placed in the Library.

Automated Credit Transfer

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans his Department has in place to educate benefits claimants regarding the use of automated credit transfer when it is introduced for payments in 2003. [59191]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department is currently planning an information campaign to give customers the information they need about the move to paying directly into bank/building society accounts.

Child Poverty

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many families with children in Glasgow, Cathcart constituency have moved out of poverty since 1 May 1997. [58876]

Malcolm Wicks: Poverty is a complex multi-dimensional issue, affecting many aspects of children's lives—including income, health, housing, the quality of their environment and opportunities to learn. There is therefore no single measure of the number of families with children that have moved out of poverty in the Glasgow, Cathcart constituency.

Departmental Sponsors

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which hon. Members have been appointed as sponsors to his Department since 7 June 2001; and when each of them were appointed. [59971]

Mr. McCartney: Ministers in this Department have made no such appointments.

Parliamentary Questions

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will answer the questions regarding SchlumbergerSema and his plans to publish the Department's report on medical services' performance against quality targets tabled on 1 May. [59294]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave to him on 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 541W.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will reply to the question from the hon. member for Northavon, of 17 April, ref, 50989. [60519]

Mr. McCartney: I have answered the question today.

Public Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the public consultations undertaken by his Department since June 2001, stating in each case the *(a)* number of respondents and *(b)* percentage of those specifically consulted who responded. [60147]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department for Work and Pensions was formed in June 2001 from the former Department of Social Security and parts of the Department for Education and Employment. The data requested are included in the table. Consultation documents are issued directly to interested parties which the Department recognises have a special interest in the issue. In accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice they are also published on the departmental and UK online websites.

Title of consultation	*Number of respondents*	*Percentage of those specifically consulted who responded*
Amending the Vaccine Damage Payments Act 1979	13	15
Occupational Pension Scheme Winding up Notices and Reports (etc.) Regulations 2001	29	51.7
Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Disclosure of Information) Amendment Regulations 2001	17	30
Occupational and Personal Pension Schemes (Contracting-out)—draft miscellaneous amending regulations	75	47
Changes to Invalid Care Allowance	133	30
The Minimum Funding Requirement: The next stage of reform. Consultation on the draft Occupational Pension Schemes (Minimum Funding Requirement and Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2001	140	19
Private Pensions Simplification	119	53
Bulk transfer of accrued pensions rights without member consent	19	43
Revised code of practice for gathering of information as required in Social Security Fraud Act 2001	1	1
Consultation exercise on Pension Scheme Trustees, Independent Custodians and Encouraging Shareholder Activism	102	[1]20 [2]32 [3]1
Member nominated trustees and directors	22	30

[1] Overall

[2] GB

[3] Northern Ireland

Retirement Age

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list for each NDPB and agency sponsored by his Department *(a)* the maximum retirement age adopted for most employees and *(b)* their practice on not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age. [59297]

Mr. McCartney: The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) sponsors 10 Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs), as follows:

Non Departmental Public Bodies Sponsored By DWP

Executive Bodies
- Disability Rights Commission (DRC)
- Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (Opra)
- Pensions Compensation Board (PCB)
- Remploy Ltd

Advisory Bodies
- Disability Employment Advisory Committee (DEAC)
- Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board (DLAAB)
- Industrial Injury Advisory Council (IIAC)
- National Employment Panel (NEP)
- Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC)

Tribunal Bodies
- Pensions Ombudsman (PO).

Of these, only the Executive Bodies actually employ staff.

Disability Rights Commission (DRC)

DRC employ staff directly and have no restriction on the age at which employees retire. In addition they have no upper age limit for applicants.

Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (Opra)

Opra directly employ staff and also have a number of DWP staff (civil servants) on loan:

For those staff directly employed by Opra there is no maximum retirement age. However, these staff are part of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme and as such will be governed by the pension scheme rules. The rules for DWP staff on loan are the same as for the rest of the department, namely that they can choose when they retire between ages 60 and 65.

There is no maximum age restriction for new staff recruited by Opra (as DWP staff on loan to Opra leave, they are replaced by Opra employees).

Pensions Ombudsman (PO)

The staff employed by PO are actually civil servants and are therefore covered by the PCSPS rules, ie the normal retirement age being 60, but with staff having the option of staying on up to 65.

Remploy

Remploy directly employs staff and the maximum retirement age for most employees is 65. They have no restrictions on the age of people recruited.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether his Department enforces a maximum retirement age for most staff; and whether it has a policy of not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age. [59296]

Mr. McCartney: Civil Service equal opportunities policy provides that all eligible people must have equality of opportunity for employment and advancement on the basis of their suitability for the work. There must be no unfair discrimination on the basis of age, disability, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin, or (in Northern Ireland) community background.

All L/C in DWP, below the Senior Civil Service, are able to choose to remain in employment beyond the age of 60 for any period of time up to the age of 65. Staff over age 60 are subject to the same terms and conditions as staff under age 60. No special reviews of performance are applied.

The Department's flexible approach to age retirement allows staff to continue to work in their current grade and, subject to business need, to seek promotion to a higher grade or voluntarily to downgrade. Subject to business need staff may also choose to work full or part time.

In line with the Civil Service equal opportunities policy, applications for employment or reinstatement are considered from individuals up to the retirement age of 65.

British Sign Language

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to recognise British Sign Language as an official language; and if he will make a statement. [60117]

Maria Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given to the hon. Member for Coventry South, (Mr. Jim Cunningham), on 14 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 582W.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to have British Sign Language recognised as an official language. [60714]

Maria Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) on 14 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 582W.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will commission an independent study of the demography of the British Sign Language community. [60118]

Maria Eagle: The Department has undertaken some feasibility work into a research project on the incidence and demography of BSL use. This involved discussions with research organisations, academics, and a meeting with representatives of organisations of and for deaf people. The work identified concerns about the robustness of the data which such a project might produce, its acceptability to stakeholders including deaf people themselves and the length of time it would take. We are considering what other research might be undertaken which would add to our understanding of the extent of BSL use and demography.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many British Sign Language interpreters there are in the UK. [60116]

Maria Eagle: There is no central record of the number of people working as British Sign Language interpreters in the UK. The Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People, The Association of Sign Language Interpreters, and the Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters all maintain directories of BSL interpreters registered with their respective organisations. These do not, however, provide a comprehensive record of interpreters both active and available for assignment. The Department will shortly publish a research report that includes an examination of BSL interpreter provision in England, Scotland and Wales. The field work was undertaken in 1999 and 2000. Preliminary estimates are that 257 qualified and trainee interpreters were available for work in England and Wales and 27 in Scotland.

Benefit Payment Methods

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to pay state benefits weekly into bank or building society accounts; and if he will make a statement on his policy in this regard. [60177]

Malcolm Wicks: From 2003, customers will be able to receive payments into their bank/building society accounts on a weekly, fortnightly, four-weekly, 13-weekly or yearly basis. The precise frequency will depend on the payment rules which apply to the particular benefit they are receiving.

Housing Benefit

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what representations he has received to review the operation of housing benefit rules, with specific reference to the clawback threshold; [60059]

(2) what representations he has received on the amendment of the housing benefit rules in respect of accommodation for homeless people. [60060]

Malcolm Wicks: When a homeless person in temporary accommodation provided by a local authority claims housing benefit, the local authority must pay the full amount of benefit in respect of the rent for which the homeless person is liable. However, the amount of subsidy paid to reimburse local authorities for benefit paid in these circumstances is subject to a threshold above which only a proportion of benefit is reimbursed, and a cap, above which nothing is reimbursed. These limits are intended to ensure that the tax-payer does not subsidise unreasonably expensive accommodation. However, there are no circumstances in which we will "claw back" subsidy.

From April 2002, we introduced changes to the subsidy limits to encourage local authorities to use better quality accommodation in housing homeless people, and to ensure that even more families have the chance of a more permanent home. From that date, the subsidy rate for privately-leased accommodation was increased, while the rate for board and lodging accommodation remained the same.

There have been no formal representations about these changes.

New Direct Bank

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer of 20 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 48W, on the New Direct Bank, what the basis was for the statement by Baroness Hollis on 23 April, regarding benefits being paid via new direct banks. [60450]

Malcolm Wicks: This was a convenient turn of phrase used by my noble Friend the Minister for Children and the Family (Baroness Hollis), during the Second Reading of the Tax Credits Bill in another place. It was not intended to intimate an official name change for the universal banking services package currently being developed by the Post Office.

Pension Service

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) of 20 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 32W, on the Pension Service, if he will list the areas in which a direct local service has been introduced since 1 April. [60518]

Mr. McCartney: The local service is being introduced on a phased basis from 1 April 2002 and, on current planning assumptions, will be in place nationwide by October 2002. In the meantime we will continue to provide a full service to our customers as we do currently, for example home visits, caller services in DWP offices, local information/outreach work and the central claims lines. Our customers will continue to deal with their local social security office until the national service is in place.

At this early stage, we are undertaking preparatory work and are making good progress. Recruitment is well under way and a full training programme is also in place to ensure that our staff are equipped with the necessary tools to provide an improved and dedicated service to our customers.

Pensions

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the cost of the basic state pension in *(a)* 2010, *(b)* 2020, *(c)* 2030, *(d)* 2040 and *(e)* 2050 if increased in line with (i) prices and (ii) earnings. [41194]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is in the table.

Expenditure on basic state pension

£ billion

	Price up-rating	*Earnings up-rating*
2010	42.5	49
2020	46.5	63
2030	56.5	91
2040	61.5	118.5
2050	61	139

Notes:

1. Price up-rating column is consistent with Government policy of up-rating by 2.5 per cent. or inflation, whichever is the greater.
2. 2002–03 price terms.
3. Figures rounded to nearest £0.5 billion.
4. Based on figures supplied by Government Actuary's Department.
5. Real earnings growth from 2012–13 is assumed to be 1.75 per cent.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much was spent by his Department on paying pensions to retired employees of his Department in 2001–02; if he will estimate the corresponding amounts to be spent in *(a)* five years' time, *(b)* 10 years' time, *(c)* 20 years' time and *(d)* 30 years' time; if he will estimate in each case the proportion of such liabilities which will arise from (i) unfunded pension schemes and (ii) pre-funded pension schemes; and in the case of pre-funded schemes, if he will estimate the value of the corresponding pre-funded funds in each of these years. [57372]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office (Mr. Leslie) on 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 561–63W.

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the starting salary is for a decision maker within the Department. [58606]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* The function of decision making is delegated by the Secretary of State to people in the Department who are suitably trained and have the requisite skills and experience to do the job. The salary for people making decisions is not decided directly by their role but by the normal rules governing salary progression. The salaries of people undertaking decision making duties will therefore depend upon their level of seniority and length of service and could be at any point on the salary scale.

The following table gives the lower and upper limits of the appropriate salary scales.

£

	National pay range		*Outer London pay range*		*Inner London pay range*	
	Minimum	*Maximum*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*
Administrative assistant	9,120	11,940	10,940	13,880	11,750	14,700
Administrative officer	11,020	14,710	12,920	16,880	13,720	17,700
Executive officer	14,770	19,920	16,050	21,860	16,850	22,680

SCOTLAND

Mental Health Services

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans her Department has to regulate counselling, psychotherapy and clinical psychology services provided in Scotland. [59899]

Mrs. McGuire: There are no such plans at present. The Health Professions Council, established on 1 April 2002, can propose the extension of its remit to health professions which are not currently regulated. Under the Health Act 1999, any orders to implement such a proposal would have to be approved by the UK and Scottish Parliaments.

Scottish Criminal Review Commission

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will place in the Library a copy of the annual report of the Scottish Criminal Review Commission. [60388]

Mrs. Liddell: Copies of the first and second annual reports of the Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission, covering the periods 1 April 1999 to 31 March 2000 and 1 April 2000 to 31 March 2001, will be placed in the Library as soon as possible. I understand that the report for 2001–02 is due to be published shortly.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Petrol Retailers Association

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) when the Minister of State will write to the Director of the Petrol Retailers Association following the meeting held at Stormont on 24 September 2001; [39852]

(2) what the outcome of the meeting held between the Minister of State and the Petrol Retailers Association on 24 September 2001 was; and if he will make a statement. [39851]

Jane Kennedy: I met with the Petrol Retailers Association in September last year and subsequently looked into the issues raised with me about the illicit oils market in Northern Ireland. I wrote to the Petrol Retailers on 30 April responding to the points raised. My letter included the latest estimate of United Kingdom revenue loss from legitimate cross border shopping and from all types of fraud in the Northern Ireland fuels sector; the steps taken by Customs to address fraud in the Northern Ireland fuels sector, with an illustration of the results being achieved; and the measures included in this year's Budget to further address the problem.

Mr. Quentin Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the outcome was of the meeting between the Petrol Retailers Association and the Minister of State on 24 September 2001; and if he will make a statement. [50023]

Jane Kennedy: I met with the Petrol Retailers Association in September last year and subsequently looked into the issues raised with me about the illicit oils market in Northern Ireland. I wrote to the Petrol Retailers on 30 April responding to the points raised. My letter included the latest estimate of United Kingdom revenue loss from legitimate cross border shopping and from all types of fraud in the Northern Ireland fuels sector; the steps taken by Customs to address fraud in the Northern Ireland fuels sector, with an illustration of the results being achieved; and the measures included in this year's Budget to further address the problem.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (Claims)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in settling post-traumatic stress disorder and other psychiatric illness claims; what method he has adopted to process these claims; how many have been completed and at what cost; what target he has drawn up for maximum time to be taken in dealing with individual claims; and how many new claims have been submitted in the past 12 months. [41238]

Jane Kennedy: To date the PSNI has registered 2,512 post-traumatic stress disorder claims from serving or retired officers, 2,012 of the claims have been received within the last 12 months. None has yet been finalised. The majority of the cases are to be taken forward by way of a group action, rather than individually. It is not possible to indicate likely timescales for dealing either with the group action or individual claims as decisions on the cases will be taken after due consideration with legal advisers/counsel.

Accommodation Costs

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost was of hotel accommodation for departmental staff working away from home in each of the last four years. [41060]

Jane Kennedy: The Department does not separate hotel costs from other overnight subsistence. The following totals include other allowances payable for staying overnight while working away from home.

Details of the Department's[1] total expenditure on overnight subsistence in each of the last four financial years

	£
1998–99	392,086
1999–2000	394,997
2000–01	369,316
2001–02	[2]276,799

[1] Including its agencies, but excluding NDPBs as we do not have access to a breakdown of their expenditure.

[2] To date. Estimate for full year is £301,962.

Special Advisers

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many special advisers were employed by him *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive; and what the total amount spent on special advisers by the Department was in each of those years. [41254]

Jane Kennedy: The number of special advisers employed between May 1997 and 2001 are as follows:

	Number
May 1997 to September 1999	2
October 1999 to October 2000	0
November 2000 to January 2001	1
February 2001 to September 2001	1
October 2001 to December 2001	2

All special advisers have been paid a salary in accordance with the centrally agreed arrangements applying at the time. In addition the Department meets the travel and accommodation costs required on official business.

Television

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the number of subscriptions to *(a)* digital terrestrial, *(b)* digital satellite and *(c)* digital cable television held by his Department for services in any departmental building from which Ministers work, stating for each subscription its (i) cost and (ii) purpose. [48349]

Jane Kennedy: There is one subscription to digital satellite in a departmental building from which Ministers work. The cost of the subscription is £10.00 per month and it is used for operational purposes. There are no subscriptions to digital terrestrial or digital cable.

Project Sponsorship

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland which of his Department's projects have received sponsorship since 1997, including *(a)* details of the sponsor, *(b)* the nature of the project, *(c)* the date of the project, *(d)* the total cost of the project and *(e)* the amount of money involved in the sponsorship deal. [48397]

Jane Kennedy: Details of the Northern Ireland Office projects which have received sponsorship since 1997 are as follows:

1997–98

(a) Hughes and Co. Insurance Brokers

(b) Public Awareness campaign (reprint and distribution of free crime prevention booklet)

(c) In three phases throughout the year

(d) £39,063.16

(e) £8,000.

1998–99

None

1999–2000

None

2000–01

None

2001–02

None.

999 Calls

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 16 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 839W, on 999 calls, how many 999 calls for each emergency were received at Belfast regional control centre on each day of the Christmas week in 2001; what the standard target is for number of rings before a call is answered by each service; how many calls failed to reach this target on each day; and what targets are set by the PSNI in North Belfast to respond to emergency calls. [57156]

Jane Kennedy: The PSNI performance target in relation to 999 calls is to answer 98 per cent. of all 999 calls within 10 seconds.

In North Belfast, as with all areas in Northern Ireland, the PSNI respond to 999 calls as quickly as possible given the resource availability at any given time.

The following table shows the number of 999 calls received at Belfast Regional Control during the period 20–26 December 2001 and the answer rate.

Date	*Number of calls*	*% answered in 10 seconds or less*	*Average time to answer each call (seconds)*
20 December 2001	389	87.1	6
21 December 2001	451	81.6	7
22 December 2001	532	84.0	7
23 December 2001	391	90.8	6
24 December 2001	378	88.9	6
25 December 2001	338	88.8	6
26 December 2001	449	92.9	5

HM Inspectorate of Constabulary

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what basis Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary makes visits to Northern Ireland; how many visits inspectors have made in each of the past three years; what the terms of reference are for the visit of an inspector; on how many occasions in the past three years specific terms of reference have been drawn up for a visit; what the recommendations were of the inspector's report after each visit; how many of these recommendations were accepted by the RUC/PSNI; and what reasons were given for each rejected recommendation. [53866]

Jane Kennedy: Section 41(2) of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998 requires Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary to inspect and report on efficiency and effectiveness of the police in Northern Ireland at least once every year. To that end, HMIC has carried out an inspection in each of the past three years. Prior to each inspection, the Inspectorate have liaised with the police service, Police Authority and NIO to agree the terms of reference for the areas to be reviewed. The recommendations made after each inspection are contained in the published report, copies of which were laid in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament. All [illegible] recommendations made have been accepted by the RUC/PSNI.

Rosemary Nelson

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the duties are of Colin Port; how many officers and staff are assigned to assist him in each duty; how many arrests have been carried out by officers attached to the investigation of the murder of Rosemary Nelson; and how many charges have arisen. [53920]

Jane Kennedy: The Chief Constable has advised that, as the officer in command of the Rosemary Nelson murder inquiry, Colin Port, the Deputy Chief Constable of Norfolk Constabulary, determines the overall strategy for the investigation. The numbers of officers involved in the investigation has varied to accommodate the needs of particular lines of inquiry; staff work as a team and are not assigned to specific duties except where there are particularly sensitive lines of inquiry or specialist functions. As some persons have been arrested more than once it could be misleading to attempt to put an overall figure on arrests made by officers attached to the investigation of this murder. While there have been no charges in connection with Mrs. Nelson's murder, this investigation has led to charges against nine people.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost is to date of the investigation of the murder of Rosemary Nelson; to whom the written report of the investigation will be sent; and what considerations he has given to publication of the report. [53921]

Jane Kennedy: The Chief Constable has advised that the cost to date of the investigation into the murder of Rosemary Nelson is £5,817,104. Colin Port is carrying out his investigation at the request of the Chief Constable of the PSNI and any report will be to the Chief Constable, with appropriate reports to the Director of Public Prosecutions in relation to pending prosecutions. I have no plans to publish any police reports in this investigation.

Disclosure of Interests

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what rules apply to the disclosure of interests on the part of those serving on public bodies which are responsible to his Department. [56451]

Jane Kennedy: All advisory and executive non-departmental bodies are required to adopt a board members' code, based on guidance produced by the Cabinet Office, and they should have registers of interest. The definition of interests is ultimately for individual Departments since they are best placed to decide what might be thought to influence members of their NDPBs.

The following table lists the NDPBs sponsored by this Department and in each case indicates what the relevant Code of Practice is and where it is available.

NDPB	*Code of Practice*	*Availability*
Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland	Under development[1]	—
Equality Commission for Northern Ireland	Yes	On request from Equality Commission for NI, Equality House, 7–9 Shaftesbury Square, Belfast BT2 7DP
Juvenile Justice Board	No[2]	—
Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission	Yes	On request from Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Temple Court, 39 North Street, Belfast BT1 1NA
Northern Ireland Policing Board	Yes	On request from NI Policing Board, Waterside Tower, 31 Clarendon Road, Laganside, Belfast or on its website at www.nipolicingboard.org.uk
Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland	Under development	—
Probation Board for Northern Ireland	Yes	On request from Probation Board for Northern Ireland, 80–99 North Street, Belfast BT1 1LD
Criminal Injuries Compensation Appeal Panel for Northern Ireland	Under development[3]	—

[1] This body meets very infrequently, the last time was in 1994.

[2] This is a temporary body which will become an executive agency later this year.

[3] This is a new body whose members have yet to be appointed.

Departmental Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much was spent by his Department on paying pensions to retired employees of his Department in 2001–02; if he will estimate the corresponding amounts to be spent in *(a)* five years' time, *(b)* 10 years' time, *(c)* 20 years' time and *(d)* 30 years' time; if he will estimate in each case the proportion of such liabilities which will arise from (i) unfunded pension schemes and (ii) pre-funded pension schemes; and in the case of pre-funded schemes, if he will estimate the value of the corresponding pre-funded funds in each of these years. [57369]

Jane Kennedy: The Cabinet Office has responsibility for the Principal Civil Service Pensions Scheme (PCSPS)—the occupational pension arrangement for Home civil servants, and have replied to this question.

The Department of Finance and Personnel has responsibility for the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (PCSPS)—the occupational pension arrangement for Northern Ireland civil servants. The total amount on paying pensions in 2001–02 in respect of Northern Ireland civil servants in the Northern Ireland Office was £4,246,235.19. Answers to the remaining questions could only be obtained at disproportionate cost.

The PCSPS is an unfunded public service scheme made under the Superannuation Act 1972. All payments of pension and related benefits to former members of the PCSPS or their dependants are made from the Civil Superannuation Vote.

Forensic Science Agency

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the target staff complement is of the Forensic Science Agency; how many vacancies and at what levels are unfilled; and how many individuals have *(a)* left, *(b)* retired from and *(c)* joined the agency in each of the last three years. [59862]

Jane Kennedy: The Northern Ireland Office does not hold target staff complements. Staffing levels are dictated by administrative costs.

Staff vacancies

Grade	*Number*
Higher scientific officers	9
Scientific officers	4
Assistant scientific officers	5
Grade B1 accountant	1
Support Grade Band 1	1
Support Grade Band 2	2
Temporary staff	2
Total	24

Staff movements

	(a) Left	*(b) Retired*	*(c) Joined*
1999	10	1	12
2000	10	1	15
2001	14	0	25
Total	34	2	52

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Research and Development

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the impact of the merger of MAFF and DOE on her spending plans for research and development, as set out in Forward Look 2001. [58379]

Mr. Morley: The merger has brought together research, monitoring, surveillance and advisory programmes totalling in excess of £250 million annually. We are currently reviewing our science programmes and strategy following the recent appointment of a new chief scientific adviser and in the light of the aims and objectives of the new Department.

Capita Group

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the contracts that have been awarded to the Capita Group by the Department. [39347]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA came into being on 8 June 2001. From information held centrally the Department has one contract for the provision of recruitment services with Capita Business Services Ltd.

Mr. Boris Johnson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many contracts the Department has with Capita; and how much they are worth. [38377]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA came into being on 8 June 2001. From information held centrally the Department has one contract with Capita Business Services Ltd. with a value in the period 12 June 2001 to 26 March 2002 inclusive of £401,740.62.

Whales

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on Article VIII of the International Convention in the Regulation of Whaling. [57498]

Mr. Morley: The UK recognises that Article VIII of the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling provides for any contracting Government to grant any of its nationals a special permit authorising that national to kill, take or treat whales for purposes of scientific research.

We regret, however, Japan's continued use of this provision to carry out large scale, lethal "scientific" whaling. The UK believes that Japan's activities serve to undermine the International Whaling Commission's (IWC) moratorium and, at this year's IWC meeting which took place in Shimonoseki between 20–24 May, we called upon them to discontinue their lethal research programme.

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent activities have been undertaken by her Department to improve scientific knowledge about whale numbers. [57501]

Mr. Morley: The UK delegation participates fully in the IWC's Scientific Committee including work to provide in-depth assessments of whale stocks.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what preparations her Department made for the International Whaling Commission annual meeting in Japan; [58577]

(2) what action her Department took before the annual meeting of the International Whaling Commission to build support for the continuation of the ban on commercial whaling. [58578]

Mr. Morley: The UK Government is opposed to all whaling except by some subsistence whaling by indigenous people. We strongly support the current moratorium on commercial whaling.

Before the start of the 54th annual IWC meeting we held a meeting of the Consultative Forum on Whaling with non-government organisations to discuss the UK line to take and strategy on key issues. In conjunction with the FCO we also undertook extensive lobbying of all IWC member states to build support for the continuation of the moratorium.

Future of Farming and Food

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the Treasury about funding for the recommendations of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food; and if she will make a statement. [57515]

Mr. Morley: The Government intends to produce a Strategy for Sustainable Food and Farming in England in the autumn. Funding for the strategy forms part of this year's Spending Review discussions. The strategy will incorporate a definitive response to the Policy Commission's recommendations, although not all of these fall to, or involve expenditure by Government.

Home Energy Efficiency Scheme

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many households had benefited from the New Home Energy Efficiency Scheme by the end of 2001. [51974]

Mr. Meacher: Since the launch of the New Home Energy Efficiency Scheme in June 2000 to 31 December 2001, over 305,000 households had work completed under the Scheme.

Press Office

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total cost of running the Department's press office was in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available. [46799]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Retrospective information for 1996–97 can not be supplied as DEFRA did not exist prior to June 2001.

Our records show a total operational running cost for the DEFRA Press Office, for the financial year 2001–02 of £1.6 million.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many press releases were issued by her Department or its predecessor *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [40044]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA was created in June 2001. For the period ending the 31 Dec 2001 the Press Office issued 319 press releases.

Retrospective identification and enumeration of the press releases issued prior to June 2001 by the Home Office and the former DETR and MAFF Press Offices on policy subjects now covered by DEFRA would be disproportionately costly to produce.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many press officers there were in her Department on *(a)* 1 May 1997 and *(b)* the latest available date. [46891]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* DEFRA, as a Department, did not exist prior to June 2001. The DEFRA Press Office is responsible for providing media support to the Environmental Protection Directorate and the Wildlife and Countryside Directorate of the former DETR, the hunting and animal welfare policy issues transferred from the Home Office and the full range of former MAFF activities. To provide media liaison support for these policy and operational directorates of DEFRA, the Press Office has currently a staff of 21 press officers.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people were employed in a press or public relations function in her Department and its predecessor on 1 January in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000, *(e)* 2001 and *(f)* 2002. [39938]

Mr. Morley: When DEFRA was created on 8 June 2001 it brought together the Environmental Protection Directorate and the Wildlife and Countryside Directorate of the former DETR, together with the full range of former MAFF policies and operational activities and certain hunting and animal welfare interests of the Home Office.

Of the retrospective statistics that have been requested, such of those as could be obtained would not provide a valid comparison of these staff resources. Moreover, such information could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

In DEFRA at present the number of staff engaged in Press Office activities is 27. This comprises 21 press officers and six support staff.

LGC

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 584W, on LGC, if she will list *(a)* the dates of each contact and *(b)* the amount spent on each contract by her Department. [52245]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* Pursuant to the answer of 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 88–89W, on LGC, the dates of each contract are as follows:

	Contract	
Project title	*Start*	*End*
Speciation, bioavailability, biopotency and functional markers for D vitamers	1 June 1998	31 March 1999
Development of methods to detect protein standardisation of cows' drinking milk	1 September 1998	30 November 1999
Methods for the detection of rectified grape and apple juice in fruit juices	1 April 1999	30 September 1999
The immunological determination of meat content	1 May 1997	31 October 1998
Evaluation of a DNA Method for Meat Species Identification	1 April 1997	31 March 1998
A novel method for the detection of neuronal tissue from beef by the identification of tissue specific DNA modification	1 April 1997	30 September 1998
Differentiation of species of meat in particular cooked products by DNA methods	1 April 1998	30 September 1999
Evaluation of a suite of methods to distinguish cheese analogues from genuine cheese	1 April 1998	31 March 1999
Optimisation and validation of DNA assay for detect of select non-muscle tissues in meat products using tissue specific DNA modification	1 November 1998	30 November 1999
Vitamin B6 improvements in extraction and determination—Resolving inaccuracy and bias from its measurement	1 April 1997	31 March 1998
Development and validation of two analytical procedures for the quantitative determination of fatty acids	1 April 1997	31 March 1998
Further studies on the determination of heme and non-heme iron	1 April 1998	31 March 1999
Develop and validate a routine HPLC method for the determination of folates and folic acid in foods	1 April 1999	30 June 2000
Development and validation of rapid viable pathogen testing and enumeration by a simple and low cost new method	1 October 1997	23 August 1998
An improved analytical method for gellan gum	1 June 1998	31 March 1999
Development and validation of procedures to detect and quantify the use of dimethyl dicarbonate in non-alcoholic drinks	1 September 1998	31 August 1999
Biomarker assessment of benzoate consumption	1 May 1999	31 March 2000
A regiospecific immunoassay screening test for contaminants from food contact plastics	1 April 1997	31 March 1999

Project title	*Contract* *Start*	*End*
Develop a novel molecular typing method for comparison of food borne pathogens using VTEC as a model organism	1 May 1999	30 April 2001
Efficacy testing of disinfectants used in the food industry against a range of pathogens including E coli 0157	1 May 1998	31 October 1999
Processing LINK Offers of Grant	1 August 1999	31 July 2002
Organochlorine residues in poultry resulting from the use of hyperchlorinated water in poultry washes	28 October 1997	27 April 1998
Chain of custody audit at Institute of Animal Health	1 October 2001	31 March 2002
Development of a Sensitive and Specific Molecular Typing Method for the Epidemiological Study of Salmonella	1 January 2000	31 March 2002
Investigation of glufosinate residue analysis in potatoes, soya products, legume and maize	1 November 2000	31 August 2001
Development of methods for the determination of thyreostats in poultry and bovine livers	1 January 2001	31 March 2001
BSE Testing in Cattle	1 November 2001	31 October 2002
Analytical Work on Veterinary Residues in Foodstuffs of Animal Origin	1 January 1999	31 December 2003
National Scrapie Plan 'Blood Sampling'	8 October 2001	7 October 2004
Feasibility Study of the Determination of Oestrone, etc. in Drinking Waters	20 May 1998	20 June 1998
Analysis of Oestrone, Oestradiol and Ethynyl Oestradiol—Supervision of Performance Tests	16 October 1998	31 October 1999
Investigation of Solvent Contamination Incidents and Provision of Scientific Advice on Drinking Water. Quality and Health Issues	16 October 1998	31 August 2001
Leaching of Lead from Approved u-PVC Water Supply Pipes	21 January 1999	5 July 1999
Consolidate two GCMS methods for the determination of three oestrogen steroids in water and review of the potential for determining the same steroids using LCMSMS	6 March 2000	31 May 2000
Exposure to chloropropanol isomers via polyamines	15 October 2001	31 March 2002

The amount spent on each contract cannot be disclosed for reasons of commercial confidentiality. From information held centrally the total value of the contracts is £15,750,792. Inquiries on the values of individual contracts should be directed to the Chief Executive of the Laboratory of Government Chemist.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* cost per point of priority score, *(b)* average agreement cost and *(c)* average area for the Countryside Stewardship Scheme was in the last year for which figures are available. [55747]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* The score given to applications as part of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme assessment procedure ensures that agreements which are eventually funded achieve the maximum environmental value, based on their likely contribution to the scheme's objectives for wildlife, landscape, history and access. The application score is therefore related directly to the environmental benefits likely to be achieved and is not expressed in terms of cost of the eventual agreement.

The average 10-year cost of an agreement starting in 2000 was £52,707 and the average area was 32.29 hectares.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of priority score data for approved countryside stewardship agreements was not logged on the Countryside Stewardship Scheme database in each year since the scheme's introduction. [55746]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* All data relevant to approved Countryside Stewardship Scheme agreements are formally recorded, either on the Stewardship database or on file. These include a record of the score given to applications as part of the assessment procedure.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the administrative costs of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme as a proportion of its total expenditure have been in each year since its introduction. [55745]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* The proportion of the total Countryside Stewardship budget spent on administrative costs since its introduction is as follows:

Year	*Percentage* *Proportion of budget*
1991–96	[1]—
1997–98	31
1998–99	28
1999–2000	26
2000–01	32
2001–02	[2]15

[1] Figures for the period 1991–96, when the scheme was operated by the Countryside Commission are not available.

[2] 2001–02 figures are provisional and not strictly comparable with previous years, due to the creation of the Rural Development Service on 1 April 2001 and the diversion of staff to foot and mouth disease duties.

Swietenia Macrophylla

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she has received a copy of the memorandum dated 26 March from the European Commission concerning imports of swietenia macrophylla from Brazil; and if she will make a statement. [50457]

Margaret Beckett: We received a copy of the memorandum of 26 March from the European Commission. This advice will be fully taken into account should another cargo of Brazilian mahogany arrive for clearance into the Community via the UK. We have also asked the Timber Trade Federation to advise their members not to import Brazilian mahagony until the present situation is clarified.

Mahogany

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to publicise the opinion of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species Secretariat contained in a memorandum dated 13 March, regarding the import of mahogany from Brazil; and if she will make a statement. [50498]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 16 April 2002]:* We are aware of advice sent by the CITES Secretariat to the German management Authority on 13 March. This formed the basis of a subsequent note from the European Commission to all member states on 26 March. We have passed this on to the Timber Trade Federation and to other Government Departments with an interest in this issue. I attach a copy.

We are not aware of any shipments of mahogany from Brazil to the UK since the Commission's letter was issued. Consideration of any future shipment will take account of this or any subsequent view taken by the Commission and submitted to all Member States.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information she has received concerning action taken by Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands in relation to trade in Brazilian mahogany since 19 October 2001; and if she will make a statement. [50456]

Margaret Beckett: We understand from the German CITES Management Authority that, since the moratorium, three cargoes of Brazilian mahogany have been cleared by German customs and one has been detained at Hamburg. We understand from the Dutch CITES Management Authority that one cargo has been detained at Vlissingen. To date we have received no relevant information from the Belgian authorities.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if big leaf mahogany (swietenia macrophylla) is classified as an endangered species; and what measures she is taking to ensure that illegally logged mahogany is not used in the United Kingdom. [50459]

Margaret Beckett: Big leaf mahogany (Swietenia Macrophylla) is listed on Appendix III by certain range states. This means that it is not classified by CITES as endangered but is subject to regulation.

Our main line of defence against the use of illegally logged big leaf mahogany is the CITES and European Union controls on the import of such mahogany. All imports into the Community for the first time must be accompanied by appropriate CITES documentation. Mahogany requires a valid export permit or certificate of origin and a completed import notification. Failure to present such documentation could render any cargo liable to seizure, and illegal trading in CITES listed timber is subject to strict penalties. We are also exploring with our EU partners whether there are changes in EU regulations which would secure better regulation of this trade; and we have made clear to the Brazilians our concern to support their efforts to prevent illegal logging. The Government's Green Guide for Buyers, first issued in 1998 and updated last year, gives detailed guidance on implementing the Government's policy to purchase its timber and timber products from legal and sustainable sources.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she was notified of the Brazilian Environment Agency's ban on trade in swietenia macrophylla. [50460]

Margaret Beckett: My Department was made aware of the moratorium on 29 October 2001.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many reports of swietenia macrophylla there have been since 19 October 2001; and what the volume of imports was on each occasion since that date. [50461]

Margaret Beckett: We are aware of three cargoes of Brazilian mahogany which entered the European Community via the UK. These are as follows:

Date of import	*Metres*^{3}
26 January 2002	11.328
8 February 2002	874.7
5 March 2002	198.18
Total	1,084,208

There may be other shipments of mahogany which have entered the UK having been previously cleared into the Community via another member state. Neither my Department nor HM Customs and Excise would be aware of these as no clearance documentation would be required for such intra-Community movement.

Veterinary Medicines

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions there were for the illegal use of veterinary medicines by (i) type and (ii) purpose in each of the last five years; [58609]

(2) how many cases of the illegal use of veterinary medicines have been identified by *(a)* type and *(b)* the purpose for which they were used, in each of the last five years. [58608]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* The veterinary medicines directorate's unauthorised medicines section receives complaints about illegal use and improper advertising of veterinary medicinal products. Records are not kept in a format that would allow the specific numbers requested to be provided. However, on average 300 complaints were received in each of the last five years. Each of these is investigated and where there is sufficient evidence of a breach of legislation a prosecution is sought.

In the last five years there have been three prosecutions relating to offences of illegal administration (use) of veterinary medicines. All three cases resulted in successful convictions. Two cases related to illegal importation and administration of vaccines by dog breeders. The third related to the illegal importation and administration by a farmer of an anti-bacterial product for sheep.

There have also been a further 15 prosecutions resulting in 13 successful convictions for offences relating to the placing on the market of a veterinary medicinal product contrary to the Marketing Authorisation Regulations 1994.

A further eight prosecutions have begun and are still with the courts.

Veterinary Service

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many veterinary surgeons have *(a)* entered and *(b)* left the Department and its predecessor in the last 10 years; and if she will make a statement. [54225]

Mr. Morley: Details of numbers of permanent veterinary surgeons at Grade 6 level and below *(a)* entering and *(b)* leaving the state veterinary service and the reasons for their departure during the past 10 years, are set out in the table.

	Number of veterinary staff joining SVS	*Number of veterinary staff leaving SVS*	*Reasons for departure*
1992	15	9	Retirement (5) Resignation (3) Death in service (1)
1993	8	12	Retirement (4) Resignation (6) Death in service (1) Transfer to OGD (1)
1994	4	11	Retirement (4) Resignation (4) Death in service (2) Transfer to OGD (1)
1995	6	16	Retirement (10) Resignation (5) Death in service (1)
1996	15	12	Retirement (8) Resignation (4)
1997	24	8	Retirement (3) Resignation (3) Death in service (2)
1998	9	13	Retirement (8) Resignation (3) Death in service (1) Transfer to OGD (1)
1999	14	6	Retirement (3) Resignation (3)
2000	19	14	Retirement (4) Resignation (9) Transfer to OGD (1)
2001	10	11	Retirement (6) Resignation (4) Death in service (1)
2002 to date	21	6	Retirement (3) Resignation (3)

Imports of Exotic Animals

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many import licences she has authorised for the import of consignments of exotic animals, broken down by month, in each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [57669]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, more commonly known as CITES, aims to protect certain plants and animals by regulating and monitoring their international trade to prevent it reaching unsustainable levels.

We can confirm that import permits used for all CITES species in the following years were:

	Number
1997	4,612
1998	4,958
1999	4,235
2000	5,743
2001	5,237

It would involve a disproportionate cost to attempt to break these down into monthly totals for exotic animals imported. Recent statistical surveys indicate that about 16 per cent. of import applications concern non-indigenous animals, including birds, reptiles, fish, insects and mammals. However, that figure also includes privately owned pets.

Bali Pre-conference

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the criteria are for the *(a)* level and *(b)* cost of hotel accommodation for the Ministers and officials travelling to Bali. [57840]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The venue for the fourth preparatory meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development was chosen by the Indonesian Government. The hotels for delegations were recommended by the UN and the Indonesian Government. The hotel accommodation was chosen for its proximity to the conference centre, to provide easy access to the hotel after late night negotiating sessions, and for the business facilities to allow constant contact with the UK.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many hotel rooms have been booked for the WSD Conference in Bali by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the UK delegation; and at what cost to public funds. [57836]

Mr. Meacher: Thirteen hotel rooms have been booked for members of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. There are 27 hotel rooms booked for the total delegation to the fourth preparatory meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. This will include representatives from DEFRA, DFID, DTI, FCO and the Cabinet Office; the total cost for the hotel rooms will be approximately £48,000.

Flood Defences

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the annual investment plan for spending is *(a)* on maintenance of flood defences, *(b)* to meet the guideline defence standards and *(c)* to account for possible climate change following the 'National Appraisal of Assets at Risk from

Flooding and Coastal Erosion, including the Potential Impact of Climate Change'; and what further allocations the Government plans to make in each of the next three years. [54272]

Mr. Morley: With the benefit of Central Government funding, total expenditure by the Environment Agency, Local Authorities and Internal Drainage Boards on flood and coastal defence is forecast as follows:

£ million

	2002–03	*2003–04*
Capital	219	232
Maintenance	90	90
Other	105	112
Total	414	434

DEFRA has asked operating authorities to take the indicative results of the National Assessment of Assets at Risk from Flooding and Coastal Erosion into account insofar as it is practicable to do so in this timescale. The level of Central Government funding for the next three years will depend on the outcome of the Spending Review.

Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 11 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 598W, what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of unpaid advisers who have assisted the work of her Department since June 1997 but are not included in the Cabinet Office's annual report 'Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews 2000–01'. [57041]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* As my answer to you of 11 April made clear, Ministers in this Department have not appointed any unpaid advisers other than those accounted for in the list of task forces, reviews and other ad hoc advisory groups.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many special advisers were employed by her and her predecessor *(a)* between 1 May and 31 December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive; and what the total amount spent on special advisers by the Department was for each of those years. [41257]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA was created on 8 June 2001, and has two special advisers. The number of special advisers employed by the former Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food was also two.

For special adviser costs, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 11W.

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of parliamentary advisers appointed to serve her Department. [56986]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* Ministers in this Department have made no such appointments.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the number and expected cost to her Department of special advisers in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [43268]

Mr. Morley: There are currently two special advisers.

For special adviser costs, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 325W.

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many times special advisers have accompanied Ministers on overseas visits in each of the last five years; which countries were visited; and what the total cost of each individual visit was. [47146]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) on 10 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 270W.

Details of special adviser travel for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 will be published shortly.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Standing Committee on zootechnics is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [57482]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Standing Committee on Zootechnics is to carry out the duties delegated to it by provisions adopted by the Council in the zootechnical field. It may also consider any question arising in this field and referred to it by the Chairman either on his own initiative or at the request of a member state. It has met once over the last 12 months. The UK representation are the officials in DEFRA responsible for policy matters on Zootechnics. Annual cost to public funds in the last twelve months has been approximately £250.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final. As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Standing Committee on seeds and propagating material for agriculture, horticulture and forestry is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the

United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [57487]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Standing Committee on Seeds and Propagating Material for Agriculture, Horticulture and Forestry is to carry out the duties devolved to it by the Council Directives on the marketing of seeds and propagating material. The Committee has met 11 times during the past 12 months. UK representation at the Committee has varied but averages two officials per meeting and the cost of representation has been around £22,300.

The major item under discussion is the EU Commission's legislative proposals to introduce thresholds for the adventitious presence of genetically modified seeds in non-genetically modified seeds. The Committee is also considering measures that would implement exemptions and derogations contained within the Council Directives on the marketing of seeds.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission.

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Standing Veterinary Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [57483]

Mr. Morley: The Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health, formerly known as the Standing Veterinary Committee, is a regulatory committee established under Council Decision (1999/468/EC) of 28 June 1999.

Between May 2001 and April 2002 the Committee met twenty-seven times. The United Kingdom is usually represented by two delegates (a veterinarian and an administrator both from DEFRA). Other officials from DEFRA, FSA or the devolved administrations may also attend when necessary. The Commission pays the travel costs of one delegate: remaining costs are met from Department funds. The approximate cost to DEFRA between May 2001 and April 2002 was £16,500.

The Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health deals with a wide range of animal health and public health issues and the agenda for a typical two day meeting may cover as many as 50 items. Some items will be for discussion alone, others will be for a vote leading to the introduction of new Community legislation in accordance with powers provided for in existing Directives. For example, recent agenda items have covered such diverse subjects as: monitoring and categorisation of the status of BSE; European identification marking on fishery products originating from third countries; import of products of animal origin from China; falsification of health certificates from certain third countries; veterinary checks at Border Inspection Posts; review of the list of third countries from which the import of fishery products is authorised for human consumption; establishing a list of third countries fulfilling equivalence conditions for the production and placing on the market of bivulve molluscs, echinoderms, tunicates and marine gastropods.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission."

In the light of this decision on the working of committees, the first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com 2001) 783 Final.

As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Management Committee of the common organisation of agricultural markets for cereals is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55246]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Management Committee of the common organisation of agricultural markets for cereals is laid down in Article 23 of Council Regulation 1766–92. It normally meets on a weekly basis. Meetings are attended by officials from DEFRA and additionally as necessary by officials from the other UK Agriculture Departments or the Rural Payments Agency. The direct annual cost to UK public funds consists of the travel and subsistence allowances of the UK officials attending, which were approximately £45,000 over the last 12 month period. The items currently under consideration are the regular adjudications for the export of cereals to third countries and the implementing rules for the export of cereals to applicant countries with whom the EU has negotiated reciprocal trade arrangements.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line

with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agenda and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Management Committee of the common organisation of agricultural markets for poultrymeat and eggs is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55255]

Mr. Morley: The Management Committee for Poultrymeat and Eggs implements measures relating to the common organisation of the markets in eggs, poultry and albumins. The Committee also implements measures to improve the production and marketing of honey.

The Committee has met on 11 occasions over the past 12 months. The UK representation usually consists of the Head of Eggs and Poultry Branch and, if required, a supporting officer. A representative from Horticulture and Potatoes Division may also attend when honey issues are on the agenda. The annual cost amounts to approximately £6,745 and attendance takes approximately 50 staff days per annum.

In addition to routine market reports and trade mechanism items, the Committee is currently considering amendments to the Marketing Standards for Poultrymeat and a draft decision on measures to be funded under the national honey programmes for 2003.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agenda and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Management Committee of the common organisation of agricultural markets for milk and milk products is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55251]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Management Committee for Milk and Milk Products is to facilitate the implementation of measures relating to the common organisation of the market for these products.

The Committee has met 22 times over the last 12 months. The UK representation usually consists of the Head of Milk Branch or his deputy, and, if required, a supporting officer. Others attend as necessary. The annual cost amounts to some £16,000 in travel and subsistence expenses, and the meetings, including preparation time and activities following the meetings, take approximately 100 staff days per annum.

In addition to routine market reports and trade mechanism items, the Committee is currently considering the modification of the nomenclature for export refunds, amendments to the legislation on export licences and export refunds, and reports by member states on their methods for control of the composition of milk powders. Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Management Committee of the common organisation of agricultural markets for beef and veal is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55252]

Mr. Morley: Under Article 42 of Council Regulation 1254/1999 on the common organisation of the market in beef and veal, the Commission is mandated to establish a Management Committee to deal with market management of the sector and any matters arising for which the Commission has competence.

Within the previous 12 months the Management Committee has met on 24 occasions. The UK delegation for the Committee normally comprises two officials from DEFRA; on occasion officials from the Rural Payments Agency and the devolved administrations also attend.

The normal work of the Beef Management Committee involves consideration of the market situation (including production, consumption, imports and exports) and adjudication of intervention tenders.

Currently, the Beef Management Committee is also considering proposals for amendments to a number of Regulations relating to tariff quotas for imports of beef and live cattle from third countries.

The travel and subsistence costs over the previous 12 months relating to meetings of the beef management committee totalled some £25,000. Until February 2002 the Commission reimbursed the travel costs of two delegates per meeting; since February travel costs for only one delegate have been reimbursed.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Commission Document 5685/02).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Community Committee on the farm accountancy data network is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55242]

Mr. Morley: The Community Committee for the Farm Accountancy Data Network was set up to support the information needs of the Common Agricultural Policy, specifically for determining farm incomes, for analysing the state of farm businesses and to contribute to the annual report on the situation of agriculture in the Community.

The United Kingdom is allowed up to five representatives on the Committee but in practice is represented by one or two officials from my Department and from the devolved administrations. The Committee has met four times during the last 12 months. The direct cost incurred by the Department in the last 12 months, including staff time, was £3,600.

The following topics have been considered during the last twelve months:

1. Legislation to relax the lower size threshold for the UK and three other member states
2. Steps to be taken by candidate countries in setting up their own accountancy networks
3. Analysis of alternative dairy support mechanisms to contribute to the 2003 mid-term review
4. Study on phasing out milk quotas in Germany
5. Use of farm accountancy data for policy evaluations
6. New computer system for online transmission of farm accounts over the internet
7. Review of reimbursements to member states
8. Agreement to defer UK deadline for data delivery following the outbreak of foot and mouth disease
9. Agreement to launch a public version of the database on the Commission's website
10. Studies on milk and beef enterprise costs
11. Need to revise definition of farm types in the light of the shift from first to second pillar support
12. How to provide detailed low-level data to member states without disclosing details of individual farms
13. Contribution of accountancy data to agri-environment indicators.

The last three have not yet been concluded.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com(2001)783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agenda and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Management Committee of the common organisation of agricultural markets for sugar is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55248]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Management Committee of the common organisation of agricultural markets for sugar is laid down in Article 42 of Council Regulation 1260/2001. It normally meets on a weekly basis. Meetings are attended by officials from DEFRA and additionally as necessary by officials from the other UK Agriculture Departments or the Rural Payments Agency. The direct annual cost to UK public funds consists of the travel and subsistence allowances of the UK officials attending, which were approximately £23,000 over the last 12-month period. The items currently under consideration are the regular adjudications on sugar export refunds, sugar balance sheets for both current and future years, cane refining aid and imports from the western Balkans.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com(2001)783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agenda and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Management Committee of the common organisation of agricultural markets for sheep and goats is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55253]

Mr. Morley: Under Article 25 of Council Regulation 2529–2001 on the common organisation of the market in sheepmeat and goatmeat the Commission is mandated to establish a management committee to deal with market management of the sector and any matters arising for which the Commission has competence.

Within the previous 12 months the management committee has met on seven occasions. The UK delegation for the committee normally comprises two officials from DEFRA; on occasion officials from the Rural Payments Agency and the devolved Administrations also attend.

Since the significant reforms of the common organisation of markets for sheepmeat and goatmeat agreed in December 2001, the need for management committees has been much reduced. The sheepmeat management committee is due to meet in two months' time to review the market situation and the impact of the recent reforms.

The travel and subsistence costs over the previous 12 months relating to meeting of the sheepmeat management committee totalled some £7,000. Until February 2002 the Commission reimbursed the travel cost of two delegates per meeting; since February travel costs for only one delegate have been reimbursed.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Commission Document 5685–02).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Management Committee of the common organisation of agricultural markets for pigmeat is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55254]

Mr. Morley: The mandate for the Management Committee of the common organisation of agricultural markets for pigmeat was given under Regulation (EEC) 2759–75 of the Council, of 29 October 1975, on the common organisation of the market in pigmeat.

The committee has met on 11 occasions over the past 12 months. The UK representation usually consists of the Head of Pigs Branch and, if required, a supporting officer. The annual cost amounts to approximately £308 and attendance and preparation time takes approximately 30 staff days per annum.

In addition to routine market reports and trade mechanism items, the committee is currently considering outbreaks of classical swine fever (CSF) in Western Europe and carcass grading for the European Community.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final. As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agenda and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Joint Meetings of Management and/or Regulatory Committees in the promotion of agricultural products is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55664]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of this joint management committee is to run generic promotional schemes for European agricultural products to third countries and on the internal market, as an instrument to help member states face the challenges presented by the new world trading environment created by the WTO/GATT agreements.

It has met 10 times over the past 12 months and is represented by two departmental officials. The annual cost of this committee's work to public funds is £10,000.

Items currently under consideration by this committee are applications received under the current round from member states trade organisations for funds to promote specified products to third countries and on the internal market.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Management Committee of the common organisations of agricultural markets for wines is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55672]

Mr. Morley: The Wine Management Committee is mandated by Council Regulation 1493–1999 to maintain and improve the balance between the supply and demand for wine on the Community market and to enable the sector to become more competitive in the longer term. It considers draft Commission legislation and gives its formal opinion on Commission proposals.

For the period 1 May 2001 to 30 April 2002, it met thirty times, a reflection of the workload flowing from the introduction of the revised wine regime from 1 August 2000. For all but two of these meetings the UK was represented by two officials from the department (from 1 April this year only one person has been representing the UK at this Committee unless the agenda warrants additional attendance).

The estimated cost to public funds for this period is £29,000.

Besides its on-going management of the wine sector, the Committee is currently looking at amendments to regulations on market mechanisms and production potential, in light of market experience.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Implementation Committee on aromatised wine-based drinks is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55665]

Mr. Morley: The Aromatised Wine Implementation Committee is mandated by Council Regulation 1601–91 which lays down general rules for the definition, description and presentation of aromatised (flavoured) wines, aromatised wine-based drinks and aromatised wine-product cocktails.

The Committee meets very infrequently, with one person attending from the Department, and has not met at all in the last four years. Costs for any future meetings are unlikely to exceed £500 per annum.

There are currently no items under the Committee's consideration.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final)).

As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Implementation Committee for spirit drinks is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55666]

Mr. Morley: The Spirit Drinks Implementation Committee (SDIC) is mandated by Council Regulation 1576–89 and is responsible for the implementation of the general rules on the definition, description and presentation of spirit drinks as laid down in that Regulation. It considers draft Commission legislation and gives its formal opinion on Commission proposals.

The SDIC met twice during the last 12 months. UK representation consisted of two officials. The estimated annual costs to UK public funds for this period is £2,000.

Current issues being addressed by the SDIC concern EU enlargement, bilateral spirits agreements between the EU and third countries and consideration of the need for amendments to Regulation 1576–89.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001)) 783 Final.

As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the adaptation to scientific and technical progress and implementation of the Directive on waste is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56837]

Mr. Meacher: The Committee's mandate is determined by Articles 17 and 18 of the Waste Framework Directive, Article 9 of the Hazardous Waste Directive and Article 11 of the End-Of-Life Vehicles Directive. In summary, its mandate is to assist the European Commission to adapt aspects of those directives in the light of scientific and technical progress.

The Committee met on 6 July 2001, 30 January 2002 and 22 May 2002. The UK's representation is determined by the agenda for each meeting but the basic representation is usually two officials. The cost to public funds comprise travel and subsistence costs incurred in attending a one day meeting in Brussels (approximately £650 per meeting) and staff costs (around £700 per meeting). The Commission reimburses the travelling costs for one official's attendance at each meeting.

The agenda for the meeting on 22 May included several matters relating to the End-Of-Life Vehicles Directive and presentations and reports on a range of other waste issues.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the adaptation of technical and scientific progress and implementation of the directive on the deliberate release into the environment of genetically-modified organisms; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56821]

Mr. Meacher: The mandate of the Committee is to assist the Commission in functions to be undertaken in respect of Directive 90/220/EEC on the deliberate release of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) to the environment. Specifically, these functions are: the establishment of the format of summaries of information to be exchanged under the directive; the establishment of a list of Community legislation covering products to which the directive does not apply; the taking of decisions in respect of the placing on the market of GMOs; the provisional restriction or prohibition on the use or sale of certain products; and the adaption to technical progress of information required under the directive. UK representation on the Committee is by an official from my Department.

The Committee has not met over the last 12 months and has resulted in no costs to public funds during that period. The Committee has been superseded by a Committee constituted under Directive 2001/18/EC, which replaces Directive 90/220/EEC and will meet for the first time on 12 June 2002. The main item on the initial programme of work of the new Committee will be the agreement of guidance notes on risk assessment and monitoring under the directive.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the group of experts appointed by the Euratom Scientific and Technical Committee to address radioactive effluents (Article 37) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56827]

Mr. Meacher: The Group of Experts appointed under Article 31 of the Euratom treaty advises the European Commission, among other things, in preparing its opinion on each plan submitted by member states under Article 37 for the disposal of radioactive waste.

The group have not met during the past 12 months. The majority of their work is carried out by correspondence. Members of the group are independent scientists and are not representatives of their respective Governments. Four of the 43 members of the group are from the UK. Their expenses are met by the European Commission and therefore the work of the group makes no demands on public funds in the UK.

Within the past 12 months the Commission have received 14 submissions from EU member countries of general data under Article 37 on which it has requested the views of the group. Six of these submissions were from the UK. Copies of the Commission's opinions on UK Article 37 submissions are placed in the Library of the House. The Group of Experts' reports are attached as an annex to these opinions.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Standing Committee on Agricultural Statistics is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [58438]

Mr. Morley: The Standing Committee on Agricultural Statistics was set up by a Council Decision (72/279/EEC) on 31 July 1972. It makes detailed decisions on implementing EU legislation as set out in each case using the delegated authority provided by the EU "Comitology" process.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com(2001) 783 Final.

The Standing Committee on Agricultural Statistics includes representatives from all member states and is chaired by the Commission. Separate meetings are set up for each subject normally linked to the appropriate working group or meeting of officials. The appropriate statisticians from the UK Departments attend.

There have been two Standing Committee meetings this year. The forthcoming items for decision will include the definition and deadlines for statistics in the forthcoming

2005 EU Structure Survey; the development initiatives on the "Improving Community Agricultural Statistics Programme"; the 2003 survey of ground points across the EU and the rules of procedure of the Standing Committee.

The work on Agricultural Statistics is subject to the Direction of the European Parliament, Council, the Statistical Programme Committee meeting of heads of each National Statistical Services and the Agricultural Statistics Committee Meeting.

It is not possible to separately identify the specific annual cost of the Committee's work to public funds without incurring disproportionate costs.

New or significant changes to EU legislation are already subject to Parliamentary Scrutiny. We provide information on agricultural statistics work in National Statistics reports and plans, which are published on the internet.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Management Committee of the common organisation of agricultural markets for fresh fruit and vegetables is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55256]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Management Committee for fresh fruit and vegetables is to assist the Commission in the management of the common organisation of the market in fresh fruit and vegetables, as established by Article 46 of Council Regulation (EC) 2200/96. The Committee has met 15 times over the last 12 months, generally on the same day as the processed fruit and vegetables Management Committee. The meetings are normally attended by two officials at a total cost for the year of about £6,000 for each committee. A wide range of routine items are discussed, such as the setting of export refunds, as well as rules implementing the regulation, including arrangements for assisting producer organisations.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agenda and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Management Committee of the common organisation of agricultural markets for products processed from fruit and vegetables is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55257]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Management Committee for products processed from fruit and vegetables is to assist the Commission in the management of the common organisation of the market in products processed from fruit and vegetables, as established by Article 29 of Council Regulation (EC) 2201/96. The Committee has met 13 times over the last 12 months, generally on the same day as the fresh fruit and vegetables Management Committee. The meetings are normally attended by two officials at a total cost for the year of about £6,000 for each Committee. Items discussed include reductions in aid for products grown for processing and rules implementing the regulation.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agenda and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Management Committee of the common organisations of agriculture markets for raw tobacco is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55671]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Management Committee for raw tobacco is to assist the Commission in the management of the common organisation of the market for raw tobacco as established by Article 22 of Council Regulation (EEC) No 2075/92. The Committee has met four times over the last 12 months and one official attends; the cost of this attendance to public funds over the last year was £2000. The Committee considers matters relating to the management of the market for raw tobacco.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agenda and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Management Committee of the common organisations of agricultural markets for live plants and floriculture products is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55668]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Management Committee for live plants and floriculture products is to assist the Commission in the management of the common organisation of the market in live trees and other plants, bulbs, roots and the like, cut flowers and ornamental foliage, as established by Article 1 of Council Regulation (EEC) No. 234/68. The Committee has met once over the last 12 months, attended by two officials at a cost of about £1,000. Items discussed included market statistics and EU enlargement.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agenda and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Management Committee of the common organisations of agricultural markets for bananas is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55667]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Management Committee for bananas is to assist the Commission in the management of the common organisation of the market for bananas, as established by Article 27 of Council Regulation 404/93 as amended.

The Committee has met seven times over the last 12 months at a total cost of £4,200. Meetings are normally attended by one official. The items discussed include arrangements for licensing imports and other market management issues.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agenda and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what the mandate of the Management Committee for the Fisheries and Aquaculture sector is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement; [56744]

(2) what the mandate of the Management Committee for Fisheries products is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56742]

Mr. Morley: The Management Committees for Fisheries and Aquaculture and Fisheries Products have been established under the Common Fisheries Policy for the management of fishing activity and the common organisation of the market for fish and fish products respectively. Both committees meet on average once a month. The UK is normally represented by officials from DEFRA and the Scottish Executive. In keeping with standard practice for this type of meeting, the travel costs of those attending are reimbursed by the EU.

At the last meeting of the Management Committee for Fisheries and Aquaculture, on 30 April, the two agenda items were the extension of the fourth Multi-Annual Guidance Programme (MAGP IV) and the provision of information to the Commission under its new data collection arrangements.

At the last meeting of the Management Committee for Fisheries Products on 16 May, the three main agenda items were the provision of import price data by member states, the application of common market rules and the review of the operational programmes of producer organisations.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees like these into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of the committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee on evaluation and control of the risks of existing products is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56823]

Mr. Meacher: The Committee of the regulation concerning the evaluation and control of the risks of existing substances has met twice over the last 12 months. UK attendance is usually one representative from the Health and Safety Executive or my Department depending on the nature of the issue. The cost to public funds is approximately £1,000 per year for travel and subsistence, which is largely met by the European Commission. The Committee is not currently considering any issues.

The work of the Committee has been to agree the publication in the Official Journal of the results of risk assessments and risk reduction strategies carried out under Council Regulation 793/93/EEC and to agree the scope of additional testing requirements. Any such recommendations are the subject of new proposals from the European Commission for European Parliament and Council Directives as appropriate.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the adaptation to scientific and technical progress of the directive on water intended for human consumption is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56795]

Mr. Meacher: The Drinking Water Directive 1998, requires the Commission to review drinking water quality standards in Annex I to the directive "in the light of scientific and technical progress" and to make proposals for any necessary amendments. At least every five years, the Commission is to adapt Annexes II and III (monitoring and methods of analysis) to scientific and technical progress. A management committee was established under Article 12, to assist the Commission.

The Article 12 Committee has met three times: in June 1999, when the Committee adopted its rules of procedure, in November 2001 and in April 2002. It is too soon to carry out full reviews of the Annexes. However, the directive also stipulated that certain provisions, particularly on sampling methods for the lead, nickel and copper parameters, and some radioactivity provisions, remained to be added.

The additional work, carried out by the Committee, has included:

producing a guidance document on standardised methods of sampling and analysis for lead

advice on sampling for the copper and nickel parameters

advice on monitoring for radioactivity

advice on pesticides breakdown products [relevant metabolites].

The Committee's Rules of Procedure permit a delegation of three officials from each member state. At the meetings in November 2001 and April 2002, the UK's membership comprised a technical assessor from the Drinking Water Inspectorate, a DEFRA policy administrator, and a representative of the Scottish Executive.

The costs incurred by my Department in contributing to the Committee's work are largely travel and subsistence costs of approximately £1,000 per meeting. Officials consider a wide range of matters in connection with the directive. Therefore it is not possible, except at a disproportionate cost, to identify or apportion the costs arising out of the particular technical issues on which the Article 12 Committee assists and advises the Commission.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Committee for the adaptation to technical progress of the provisions on the removal of technical barriers to trade in the sector of dangerous substances and preparations is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56824]

Mr. Meacher: The Committee for the Adaptation to Technical Progress of Directive 76/769/EEC on the restrictions on the Marketing and Use of Dangerous Substances and Preparations has met twice in the last 12 months. UK attendance is usually one representative from either Health and Safety Executive, Department of Trade and Industry or my Department depending on the nature of the issue. The cost to public funds is approximately £1,000 per year for travel and subsistence, which is largely met by the European Commission.

The Committee is currently considering proposals to adapt to technical progress Council Directive 89/677/EEC, which amended for the eighth time Directive 76/769/EEC placing restrictions on arsenic and Commission Directive 1999–51 adapting to technical progress Directive 76/769/EEC placing restrictions on cadmium.

The work of the Committee is to bring forward amendments, in the light of the latest scientific information, to existing legislation where the main policy has already been agreed by Council and Parliament for protection of health and the environment.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Management Committee of the common organisations of agriculture markets for hops is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55670]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Management Committee for hops is to assist the Commission in the management of the common organisation of the market in hops, as established by Article 1 of Council Regulation (EEC) No. 1696–71. It has met twice over the last 12 months in the margins of other Management Committees, incurring no additional costs to public funds. Items discussed included fixing aid for the supply of hops to the Azores and Madeira, French Overseas Departments and the Canary Islands.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agenda and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Management Committee of the common organisation of agricultural markets for dehydrated fodder is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55247]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Management Committee for dehydrated fodder is to assist the Commission in the management of the common organisation of the market for dehydrated fodder as established by Article 17 of Council Regulation (EC) 603–95. The Committee has met once in the last 12 months and was attended by two officials at a cost of about £560. The meeting discussed the rate of aid for dehydrated fodder for 2000–01.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agenda and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on the transportation of radioactive waste (surveillance and control) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56722]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

I have not been able to identify this committee from the information supplied in the hon. Member's question.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Standing Committee on feedingstuffs is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [57484]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that as from 21 February 2002, in accordance with European Committee Regulation 178–2002, the EC Standing Committee for Feedingstuffs was replaced by the animal nutrition section of the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health. These Committees have met nine times in the year ending 30 April 2002.

The Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health is a regulatory committee composed of representatives of the member states and chaired by the Commission. The United Kingdom is normally represented at the animal feed meetings by officials of the Food Standards Agency and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate, which is an executive agency of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. The main annual cost of its work to UK public funds which can be quantified is made up of travel and subsistence costs totalling around £14,000, part of which was reimbursed by the Commission. The Committee is currently considering a number of legislative measures on animal feeds, including the authorisation of a number of feed additives.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

GM Crops

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of public attitudes towards the commercial growing of genetically modified crops; and if she will make a statement. [54348]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 7 May 2002]:* I asked the Agriculture and Environment Biotechnology Commission (AEBC) to advise on how best to take forward a public debate on GM issues including GM crops. They provided their advice on 26 April and we are now considering their proposals.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many GM crop trials are being carried out in each nation and region of the UK; [58131]

(2) which GM crops are being field-tested in each nation and region of the UK. [58130]

Mr. Meacher: The following tables set out the types of GM crops, and number of field trials currently being carried out, by nation and county. The first table includes the 100 UK sites in the 2001–02 round of the Farm Scale Evaluations (33 maize, 16 beet, 26 spring sown oilseed rape, 25 winter sown oilseed rape). The sites for the final round of winter sown oilseed rape will be announced later this year. The second table shows the small scale field trials carried out by companies developing GM crops.

Farm scale evaluation sites

Nation/county	*Crop*	*Number of sites*
England		
Cambridgeshire	Beet	1
Cheshire	Maize	1
	Winter oilseed rape	1
City of Sunderland	Spring oilseed rape	1
Cumbria	Beet	1
Dorset	Maize	8
	Spring oilseed rape	2
	Winter oilseed rape	2
Durham	Maize	1
	Spring oilseed rape	2
	Winter oilseed rape	3
East Riding of Yorkshire	Maize	1
	Spring oilseed rape	4
	Winter oilseed rape	2
Essex	Maize	2
Gloucestershire	Beet	2
	Maize	1
	Spring oilseed rape	2
	Winter oilseed rape	2
Herefordshire	Maize	2
	Winter oilseed rape	1
Hertfordshire	Spring oilseed rape	1
	Winter oilseed rape	1
Kent	Maize	1
	Winter oilseed rape	1
Leeds	Maize	1
Leicestershire	Spring oilseed rape	1
Lincolnshire	Beet	2
	Maize	4
	Spring oilseed rape	3
	Winter oilseed rape	5
Norfolk	Beet	6
	Maize	4
	Spring oilseed rape	2
	Winter oilseed rape	3
North Yorkshire	Beet	1
Nottinghamshire	Spring oilseed rape	1
Oxfordshire	Maize	1
	Winter oilseed rape	1
Telford and Wrekin	Maize	1
	Spring oilseed rape	1
Shropshire	Maize	2
	Spring oilseed rape	2
	Winter oilseed rape	2
South Gloucestershire	Beet	1
Suffolk	Beet	1
Warrington	Maize	1
Warwickshire	Spring oilseed rape	1
	Winter oilseed rape	1
Wokingham	Maize	1
Worcestershire	Beet	1
	Maize	1
Scotland		
Aberdeenshire	Spring oilseed rape	2
	Winter oilseed rape	3
Fife	Spring oilseed rape	1
Ross-shire	Winter oilseed rape	1

Small-scale research field trials

Nation/county	*Crop*	*Number of sites*
England		
Berkshire	Wheat	1
Cambridgeshire	Beet	1
	Potato	1
	Winter oilseed rape	4
Essex	Winter oilseed rape	1
Gloucestershire	Winter oilseed rape	1
Hertfordshire	Wheat	2
	Winter oilseed rape	2
Lincolnshire	Winter oilseed rape	1
Norfolk	Barley	1
	Beet	1
	Winter oilseed rape	1
Nottinghamshire	Winter oilseed rape	1
Suffolk	Beet	2
	Winter oilseed rape	1
Scotland		
Aberdeenshire	Winter oilseed rape	3
Dundee	Potato	1

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent meetings she has had with the Scottish Executive Department of Rural Affairs on the subject of GM crops; and if she will make a statement. [58129]

Mr. Meacher: Neither the Secretary of State nor I have had any recent meetings with the Scottish Executive on this subject. However, our officials meet frequently to discuss these issues.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive regarding plans to change the procedure for approval of GM foods and seeds. [58545]

Mr. Meacher: Neither my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, nor I have had any recent meetings with the Scottish Executive on this subject. However, our officials meet periodically to discuss changes proposed by the European Commission to the legislation governing the approval of GM food and seeds.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if live samples of the foot and mouth virus have been legally imported into the United Kingdom in the last four years. [202]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 25 June 2001]:* As the OIE/FAO World Reference Laboratory for foot and mouth disease the Institute for Animal Health at Pirbright receives many imported samples for testing for foot and mouth disease each year, some of which will contain live foot and mouth disease virus. Testing is carried out only under licence in strictly controlled conditions in high containment facilities. Pirbright Laboratory is the only laboratory to have imported material containing foot and mouth disease virus in the last four years.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letters sent to her on 12 and 21 March written on behalf of Devon County Council regarding the reinstatement of the Ash Moor mass burial site, the Ascott Farm pyre and holding site and the intended holding site at Westlake Farm. [58326]

Mr. Morley: We have no record of receipt of these letters and have therefore been unable to trace them. If copies of the letters could be sent to the Department, we will of course respond to the hon. Member as soon as possible.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 8 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 727W, with reference to the note to table iv, from which counties *(a)* the 100 dangerous contact cases, *(b)* the 120 contiguous premises cases and *(c)* the 54 slaughter on suspicion cases originated. [57144]

Margaret Beckett: DEFRA's exercise to cleanse and fully complete the data on the Disease Control System (DCS) database means that the original figures of 100 dangerous contact cases and 120 contiguous premises cases now stand at 158 dangerous contact cases and 115 contiguous premises. The figure of 54 slaughter on suspicion cases returning positive laboratory results and converting to infected premises remains the same. I will place a breakdown, by county, of the figures in the Library of the House.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what quantity of ash resulting from foot and mouth pyres was buried on farms in *(a)* England, *(b)* Devon and *(c)* Cornwall; what quantity has since been dug up; on which farms; and what has happened to this ash. [58066]

Mr. Morley: Figures for the tonnage of ash buried on-farm are not available since in most cases the pyre ash was buried on-site by further excavating the pyre trench and scraping the ash into the hole and no assessment of the tonnage was made. The Environment Agency risk assessments and Groundwater Authorisations issued to DEFRA are based on the number of animals burnt and not the tonnage of ash buried.

The following is a listing by county of the number of sites from which ash has been removed. The list is by county, since the Department is constrained by the provisions of the Data Protection Act from providing full addresses of all the sites.

Devon—16

Cornwall—3.

To date, approximately 150,000 tonnes of pyre ash and soil have been removed and disposed of in licensed landfill sites in the UK. A further 1,205 tonnes has been removed and re-incinerated.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what advice her Department has received on the desirability of re-incinerating ash from foot and mouth pyres before disposal. [58067]

Mr. Morley: Advice was obtained from the Environment Agency (EA), other Government Departments and a risk assessment was commissioned from DNV Consulting Ltd. Advice was also sought from a specially convened Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC) Working Group on 24 May 2001, attended by experts from the Department of Health, Food Standards Agency, Environment Agency, Health and Safety Executive and MAFF.

The working group recommended that the choice of disposal option should be made on a site-by-site basis. Leaving the ash unburied in-situ was likely to be associated with a higher risk than alternative routes such as incineration, on-site burial or burial in landfill. Disposing of ash from pyres by on-farm burial was regarded as a preferred low risk option. Where on-site burial was not possible, SEAC's preferred disposal option was re-incineration. The working group noted however that landfilling also represented a low-risk option and that the limited availability of high temperature incineration capacity in the UK meant that incineration of pyre ash might not be practical. Given that leaving the material unburied in-situ or in storage prior to incineration was not a risk-free option, the working group's advice indicated that landfill also represented an appropriate risk minimisation option.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much meat and bonemeal was generated as a result of the foot and mouth disposal process; how much of this is stored; and at what *(a)* locations and *(b)* cost. [58068]

Mr. Morley: 42,289 tonnes of meat and bonemeal was produced from animals killed and rendered under the FMD and associated Welfare Disposal Scheme culls. This material is currently stored at two sites (one in Lincolnshire the other in Devon) pending incineration capacity becoming available later this year. Storage costs are approximately £17,500 per week (excluding VAT).

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what quantity of animal hides was disposed of as a result of foot and mouth; by what means; and at what cost. [58061]

Mr. Morley: Records indicate that during the recent foot and mouth disease outbreak approximately 430 tonnes of sheepskins and hides were disposed of for disease control purposes. A range of disposal routes were utilised including burning at a mass burn site, rendering, incineration and burial at licensed landfill sites. The total cost of disposal (including VAT and landfill tax where appropriate) is estimated to be £90,000. A number of other hides from animals entering the livestock welfare disposal scheme were recovered for leather production.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total value is of goods and materials recovered by her Department's value recovery team in the wake of foot and mouth; what has happened to these goods and materials; and what the total cost of this operation was. [58064]

Mr. Morley: Approximately £3,400,000 has been recovered to date by the value recovery team. Contracts have been terminated in the case of hirings and the goods returned to the suppliers. Items have been sold through the Government's Disposal Services Agency, by auction or by locally arranged sale according to Government guidelines. Other goods have been redeployed for official use within the Department.

The total cost of the operation is currently being calculated.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much coal and timber was recovered unused from foot and mouth operations and how much *(a)* was resold, *(b)* was landfilled and *(c)* is still stored. [58065]

Mr. Morley: 11,500 tonnes of coal have been recovered unused from foot and mouth operations by the Government's Disposal Services Agency. This has been resold. Approximately 51,500 railway sleepers and 2,650 tonnes of wood have been resold. 616 tonnes of sleepers and wood have been sent to landfill.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received on her Department's interim contingency plan for foot and mouth; and if she will place them in the Library. [57445]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The Interim Contingency Plan has been circulated to other Government Departments and key stakeholders for their comments. Two meetings have been held to provide them stakeholders with an opportunity to discuss their views. The plan has also been publicised by a news release and has been placed on the DEFRA website with a mailbox.

Comments received have centred on issues of communication, allocation of personnel and resources, involvement of local authorities, enforcement, disposal capacity, and accountability and audit trails.

I will place a list of the comments, without attribution, that we have received in the Library of the House.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what *(a)* number and *(b)* value of claims for foot and mouth disease compensation are outstanding in respect of animals subject to (i) confirmed infection and (ii) 3 km cull. [57566]

Mr. Morley: As at 21 May there were five claims outstanding in respect of animals subject to confirmed infection. These claims amount to £2,826,177. All claims relating to the 3 km cull have been paid.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 2 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 938W, on foot and mouth, if she will list the road haulage contractors, apart from Snowie, involved in the foot and mouth contract; by what tendering and procurement means the Snowie contract was awarded; whether she considered *(a)* the corporate structure, *(b)* the directors and *(c)* the shareholding pattern of Snowie before awarding the contract; if her Department is satisfied with Snowie's performance under its contract; how many other contractors bid for the £38 million contracts available to Snowie; and if she will make a statement. [55727]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 13 May 2002] [pursuant to the answer, 2 May 2002, Official Report, c. 938]* the road haulage contractors involved in the foot and mouth contract were Banks; Yuill and Dodds; NDMR; Whitkirks; Beverley Ridley; and Blakeys Haulage. The Snowie contract was awarded through the use of the negotiated procurement procedure without the prior publication of an *Official Journal* (OJEU) notice and by competitive tendering. The eligibility, economic and financial standing of Snowie were considered before awarding the contract. The Department is satisfied with Snowie's performance under its contract. From information held centrally, over 35 contractors bid for the £38 million of contracts available to Snowie.

Snowie were one of the main contractors used by DEFRA during the FMD outbreak. Their contractual performance was subject to ongoing review and management by quantity surveyors, forensic accountants and other technical specialists retained by DEFRA.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department will make a decision regarding the future use and full restoration of *(a)* the Ash Moor site, *(b)* the Arscott Farm pyre and holding site and *(c)* the intended holding site at Westlake Farm. [58321]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* My officials have had a series of meetings with officers of Devon county council to discuss the restoration and future use of the Ash Moor site. A Notice of Proposed Development seeking approval for its restoration will be submitted to the council shortly. The restoration of both South Arscott Farm and Westlake Farm cannot proceed until agreement has been reached with the respective land owners. Proposals have been submitted to them and we await their responses.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if a Minister from her Department will meet Devon county council to discuss the future use and full restoration of *(a)* the Ash Moor site, *(b)* the Arscott Farm pyre and holding site and *(c)* the intended holding site at Westlake farm. [58272]

Mr. Morley: I wrote to Mr. Jackson of Devon county council on 4 April 2002 offering to meet representatives from the council to discuss issues relating to the Ash Moor site and am awaiting his reply.

My officials have had a series of meetings with officers of Devon county council to discuss the restoration and future use of the Ash Moor site. A Notice of Proposed Development seeking approval for its restoration will be submitted to the council shortly. The restoration of both South Arscott Farm and Westlake Farm cannot proceed until agreement has been reached with the respective land owners. Proposals have been submitted to them and we await their responses.

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Congleton dated 29 January on behalf of Anthea McIntyre of Shrewsbury, concerning foot and mouth disease. [54983]

Mr. Morley: I am sorry for the delay in replying to the hon. Member's letter. A reply was sent on 2 May.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what has been the cost of storing and disposing of meat and bonemeal since the over 30 months scheme began; and when the backlog will be disposed of. [58069]

Mr. Morley: By mid-May some 428,000 tonnes of MBM from the Over Thirty Month Slaughter Scheme (OTMS) had been incinerated at a cost of £41.2 million (£49 million including transport). MBM storage costs since the commencement of the scheme are estimated at £60 million.

RPA achieved its target to have incinerated 60 per cent. of OTMS MBM produced by 31 March 2002. RPA continues to operate a disposal programme which should ensure that stocks are reduced to low levels by 31 March 2004.

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to *(a)* amend and *(b)* lift the 20 day standstill requirement that was introduced following the foot and mouth disease outbreak. [59280]

Mr. Morley: The 20 day standstill is at the centre of the interim livestock movement restrictions currently in force to guard against a future outbreak. Scientific and veterinary advice is that it aids detection of disease and slows disease spread. A number of exemptions from the standstill have been introduced, on veterinary advice, in order to help livestock farmers without causing an unacceptable increase in disease risk. These interim arrangements are currently under review, but whatever changes may be made to the interim rules this summer the Government intend to take full account of any relevant findings from the FMD inquiries before it reaches a final view on the role that a 20 day standstill might play in the long-term controls over livestock movements.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her most recent estimate is of the total cost of establishing, operating, managing and monitoring the foot and mouth disease burial site at Throckmorton; and if she will make a statement. [59272]

Mr. Morley: Latest cost estimates for the period ending 31 March 2002 indicate that the site has cost £15.3 million to acquire and establish the mass burial facility. Budgeted future costs for leachate removal, site remediation, landscaping and other essential works such as capping and re-profiling are £3.3 million. On-going management and monitoring of the site for a further 10 to 15 years are estimated to be a further £4 million.

Total estimated costs for the site are therefore approximately £22.6 million.

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will respond to the letters from the hon. Member for Croydon, South of 16 August 2001, November 2001 and January 2002 concerning points raised by Mr. G. W. Thynne, a constituent, about inquiries into foot and mouth. [54615]

Mr. Morley: I am sorry for the delay in replying to the hon. Member's letters. A reply was sent on 29 May.

Meat Imports

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what powers enforcement officers have been given to stop suspected illegal meat importers. [53704]

Mr. Morley: We amended legislation on May 2001 to make it easier for local authorities to take action where meat, which could have been imported illegally, is found. With effect from 22 May 2002, enforcement officers' search powers have been extended to include all commercial consignments and personal baggage.

This is one of many measures set out in the action plan published on the 28 March to tackle the problem of illegal imports. The action plan is available in the House Libraries.

Beef Ban

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the French ban of British beef; and what action her Department is taking to encourage the French Government to lift the ban. [57821]

Mr. Morley: The Secretary of State has made it clear that we expect France to lift its ban as soon as possible. It is for the Commission to take action to enforce EU law and it has asked France for an explanation of its failure to comply with the ruling of the European Court of Justice (ECJ). This is the first stage in a process which may lead to a further ECJ case against France and the imposition of penalties for failure to comply with the court's judgment in December 2001 that the French ban on imports of UK beef exported under the data based export scheme is illegal.

Press Subscriptions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the newspapers subscribed to *(a)* Monday to Saturday and *(b)* on Sunday by her Department, stating for each subscription (i) the number of copies taken, and (ii) the annual cost. [52821]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 26 April 2002]:* Centrally managed newspaper subscriptions for the HQ divisions of DEFRA cost £25,212.94 for the financial year 2001–02. The newspaper titles are shown in the table.

DEFRA regional service centres and agencies undertake local purchasing of newspapers. The information relating to this expenditure is not held centrally and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Newspaper title	*Daily*[1]	*Sunday*
The Business	2	—
Derby Evening Telegraph	5	—
The Express (Monday-Friday)	30	—
The Express (Saturday)	3	—
Daily Mail (Monday-Friday)	50	—
Daily Mail (Saturday)	4	—
Daily Mirror (Monday-Friday)	40	—
Daily Mirror (Saturday)	3	—
Daily Star (Monday-Friday)	15	—
Daily Star (Saturday)	2	—
Daily Telegraph (Monday-Friday)	80	—
Daily Telegraph (Saturday)	3	—

Newspaper title	*Daily*[1]	*Sunday*
Evening Standard[2]	45	—
Financial Times (Monday-Friday)	240	—
Financial Times (Saturday)	10	—
Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung	5	—
Glasgow Herald	5	—
Guardian (Monday-Friday)	110	—
Guardian (Saturday)	5	—
Independent (Monday-Friday)	90	—
Independent (Saturday)	4	—
Independent (Sunday)	—	3
International Herald Tribune	5	—
Jewish Chronicle (Friday)	1	—
Farmers Weekly	7	—
Le Figaro (Monday-Friday)	5	—
Le Figaro (Saturday)	1	—
Le Monde (Monday-Friday)	10	—
Mail on Sunday	—	2
Morning Star (Monday-Saturday)	8	—
News of the World	—	2
Observer	—	3
Police Review (Friday)	4	—
Sun (Monday-Friday)	30	—
Sun (Saturday)	3	—
Sunday Express	—	2
Sunday Mirror	—	2
Sunday People	—	2
Sunday Telegraph	—	2
Sunday Times	—	3
Times (Monday-Friday)	173	—
Times (Saturday)	6	—
Wall Street Journal	5	—
Western Mail (Monday-Friday)	10	—
Western Morning News	10	—

[1] Monday-Saturday

[2] Three editions per day News Extra, Late Prices, Final

Sellafield

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidelines have been provided to the Chief Nuclear Inspector in respect of the information the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate is permitted to give MEPs in respect of safety at Sellafield. [57985]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

No specific guidelines have been provided to the Chief Nuclear Inspector in respect of the information the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate is permitted to give MEP's in respect of safety at Sellafield.

All Health and Safety Executive (HSE) staff, including the Chief Inspector, follow the HSE's own published Policy on Openness and the Government's Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. Internal guidance to staff on how to comply with these commitments and with any legal restrictions on disclosure is provided in HSE's General Administrative Procedures 1—Disclosure of Information to the Public (GAP 1). This guidance is publicly available.

Agriculture Policy (Scotland)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what formal procedures are in place for consulting the Scottish Executive's Environment and Rural Affairs Department on matters of agricultural policy. [57567]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA and SEERAD are mutually committed to work together on the application of agricultural policy within their respective responsibilities. This commitment is given expression in a significant two-way flow of information and related discussions between the Departments, which take place within the framework of the "Memorandum of Understanding and supplementary agreements between the United Kingdom Government, Scottish Ministers and the Cabinet of the National Assembly for Wales" (Cm 4444) and a bilateral concordat. In order to ensure effective co-ordination and help resolution of differences, Agriculture Ministers of the devolved Administrations meet regularly, normally in advance of EU Agriculture Councils, under the chairmanship of the DEFRA Secretary of State. In addition, there are regular (monthly or more frequent) meetings at senior official level on matters relating to agricultural policy.

Forest Enterprise

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the depreciation policies used in respect of Forest Enterprise capital equipment and vehicles. [58152]

Mr. Morley: The depreciation policy for Forest Enterprise's fixed assets is published each year in the Notes to the Forest Enterprise Accounts within the Forestry Commission's annual reports for Great Britain and England, Scotland, and Wales. Copies of the reports are held in the Library of the House.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether vehicles owned by Forest Enterprise, exempt from vehicle excise duty under section 183 of the Road Traffic Act 1988, are used to service or deliver capital equipment sold to third parties. [58150]

Mr. Morley: Forest Enterprise does not use vehicles which are exempt from vehicle excise duty to deliver capital equipment after it has been sold. These vehicles may, however, be used on service jobs, including instances where Forest Enterprise has agreed to service capital equipment it has sold.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total value of capital equipment owned by Forest Enterprise disposed of by *(a)* public auction, *(b)* open tender and *(c)* other means was in each of the last five years. [58151]

Mr. Morley: The table shows the value of capital equipment disposed of by Forest Enterprise in Great Britain in the last five years, all of which was sold following public auction or open tender. (In a very few instances the expected price was not reached at the auction or tender. In these cases, Forest Enterprise negotiated with bidders to obtain an increased offer.)

£

Financial year	*Capital equipment sold*
1997–98	1,027,000
1998–99	1,296,000
1999–2000	1,447,000
2000–01	1,155,000
2001–02	1,003,000

In year 2001–02, the amount raised by open tender was £602,000 (60 per cent.) while the amount raised from public auction was £401,000 (40 per cent.). The amounts raised from each type of sale in the previous four years are not readily available but it is estimated that the percentage ratio would be similar to year 2001–02.

EU Enlargement

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assistance is available to farmers to facilitate development of potential new markets to be opened by EU enlargement. [57305]

Mr. Morley: The Department offers various forms of assistance to farmers wishing to develop export markets, both in the EU candidate countries and more widely. These include mounting a UK agriculture presence at overseas trade fairs, leading trade missions overseas and organising inward missions of foreign buyers and opinion formers. Events have been organised in two EU candidate countries over the last year, and future events are planned at world fairs to which buyers from the candidate countries are known to go. We are currently considering further options of promoting the UK agriculture industry in these markets.

Pollution (River Ribble)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on pollution in the River Ribble. [56690]

Mr. Meacher: The most up-to-date water quality classification for the River Ribble is based on chemical monitoring of the river between 1998 and 2000. From this chemical monitoring, the upper reaches of the River Ribble from High Bridge to Settle Wastewater Treatment Works (WwTW), a distance of 26.7 km, are classified as very good quality—General Quality Assessment (GQA) class A. Downstream of Settle WwTW to the freshwater limit at Samlesbury, a distance of 70.7 km, the River Ribble is classified as good quality—GQA class B.

Biological monitoring in 2000 indicated that the quality of the upper and middle reaches of the River Ribble between High Bridge and Clitheroe WwTW, a distance of 66 km, is very good (class A). Between Clitheroe WwTW and the River Calder, a distance of 4.0 km, the biological quality is good (class B). Below the confluence with the River Calder to the freshwater limit, a distance of 27.4 km, the biological quality is fairly good (class C).

Farm Income

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what income was received by farms in each of the past three years *(a)* before deductions of wages paid to farmers and their families and *(b)* net of those deductions. [57264]

Mr. Morley: Most farmers are either self-employed or partners and therefore their income is the return from the farming business rather than wages. Total Income from Farming represents the income to farmers, partners, directors, their spouses and most other family workers. The distribution of that income between those parties is an individual matter for each farm business.

Total Income from Farming in each of the last three years is given in the table.

Total Income from Farming (TIFF)

	£ million
1999	2,252
2000	1,513
2001	1,710

Curry Report (Costs)

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average cost per annum per average family would be if the cost of the proposals in the Curry report were added to the average cost and subsidies and compensation paid to the farming industry in the past three years. [57260]

Mr. Morley: The Policy Commission estimated that implementing its recommendations would cost approximately £500 million over three years. However, the cost of many of the recommendations will depend upon the precise way in which they are implemented. The Government intend to produce a strategy for sustainable food and farming in England in the autumn, following a wide-ranging process of stakeholder engagement. This strategy will incorporate a definitive response to each of the Policy Commission's recommendations.

Sewage Plant (Foreness Point)

Mr. Gale: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many times during the past 12 months for which details are available raw sewage has been released into the sea from the Foreness Point sewage plant; and what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the telemetry used to monitor overflows at the Foreness Point sewage plant. [58604]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* Discharge is recorded by use of a pump run meter. This meter has shown that the storm pumps have operated once in the past 12 months for approximately eight minutes.

The discharge consent for the Foreness outfall, issued in February 1985, has no conditions requiring monitoring or telemetry to record storm overflow events. The water utility is therefore under no legal obligation to record these events. This situation will be reviewed in the proposed combined scheme for collection of waste water from Margate and Broadstairs.

Throckmorton Airfield

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will make a statement on changes in land ownership since 1992 at and adjacent to Throckmorton airfield with reference to the Crichel Down rules. [57338]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Defence (Mr. Ingram), on 21 May 2002, *Official Report,* columns 172–173.

Land Sales

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the land that her Department is *(a)* offering for sale and *(b)* plans to offer in the next 12 months, giving its (i) location and (ii) size. [59058]

Mr. Morley: This Department is currently negotiating the sale of, or offering for sale, the following areas of land:

95 acres of land at Barnhall near Wickford, Essex.

10 acres of land (three plots) near the A259 Rustington By-Pass, Littlehampton, West Sussex.

In the next 12 months, but subject to planning investigations still to be completed, the Department plans to offer for sale approximately 5 acres of land at Whitley Road, Long Benton, Newcastle upon Tyne.

Disclosure of Interests

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what rules apply to the disclosure of interests on the part of those serving on public bodies which are responsible to her Department. [56457]

Mr. Morley: All advisory and executive non-departmental public bodies are required to adopt a board members' code, based on guidance produced by the Cabinet Office, and they should have registers of interests. The definition of interests is ultimately for individual Departments since they are best placed to decide what might be thought to influence members of their non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs).

The following table lists the NDPBs sponsored by this Department and indicates whether or not a Code of Practice currently exists and where it may be obtained.

Public body	*Code of practice*
Executive bodies	
Agricultural Wages Board for England and Wales	Available from the board
Agricultural Wages Committee	Available from the committee
Apple and Pear Research Council	Available from the council
British Potato Council	Available from the council
Countryside Agency	Available from the agency
English Nature	Available from the body
Environment Agency	Available from the agency
Food from Britain Council	Available from the council
Home Grown Cereals Authority	Available from the authority
Horticulture Development Council	Available from the council
Horticulture Research International	Available from the body
Joint Nature Conservation Committee	Available from the committee
Meat and Livestock Commission	Available from the commission
Milk Development Council	Available from the council
National Forest Company	Available from the company
Regional Flood Defence Committee	Committees of the Environment Agency (EA) and adhere to the EA Code of Practice
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew	Available from the body
Sea Fish Industry Authority	Available from the authority
UK Register of Organic Food Standards	Available from the body
Wine Standards Board of the Vintners Company	Available from the board
Advisory	
Advisory Committee on Business and the Environment	Available from the committee
Advisory Committee on Consumer Products and the Environment	Available from the committee
Advisory Committee on Hazardous Substances	Available from the committee
Advisory Committee on Packaging	Committee recently stood down. Code of practice will be drawn up when a new committee is convened
Advisory Committee on Pesticides	Available from the committee
Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment	Available from the committee
Agricultural Dwelling House Advisory Committee	Available from the committee
Air Quality Expert Group	Currently being set up—code of practice will be set up when the group is convened
Committee of Investigation for Great Britain	Committee is dormant
Committee on Agricultural Valuation	Available from the committee
Committee on Products and Processes for use in Public Water Supply	Available from the committee
Consumers Committee for Great Britain	Committee is dormant
Darwin Advisory Committee (the Darwin Initiative)	Available from the committee
Expert Group on Cryptosporidium in Water Supplies	Available from the group
Expert Panel on Air Quality Standards	Available from the panel
Farm Animal Welfare Council	Available from the council
Government Industry Forum on non-food uses of crops	Available from the forum
Hill Farming Advisory Committee	Committee under review at present—code of practice will be drawn up if and when they know what form the new committee will take
Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB	Available from the group
Inland Waterways Amenity Advisory Council	Available from the council
National Expert Group on Transboundary Air Pollution	Available from the group
Pesticides Residues Committee	Available from the committee
Radioactive Waste Management Advisory Committee	Available from the committee
Royal Commission on Environment Pollution	Use the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA) code of practice as their guide and declare their interests accordingly
Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee	Available from the committee
Sustainable Development Commission	Use the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA) code of practice as their guide and declare their interests accordingly

Public body	*Code of practice*
Sustainable Development Education Panel	Available from the panel
Veterinary Products Committee	Available from the committee
Veterinary Residues Committee	Available from the committee
Water Regulation Advisory Committee	Available from the committee
Zoos Forum	Available from the forum

Ancient Forests

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action the Government are taking to protect ancient forests. [56441]

Mr. Morley: A number of measures are in place to protect all forests in the UK, including ancient semi-natural woodlands, where the biodiversity and cultural heritage values are the highest. In particular, the felling of any type of woodland is controlled through felling regulations. Additionally, many woodlands are subject to further controls because they are within designated areas such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or Special Areas of Conservation.

Animal Welfare

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what priority she accords to high standards of animal welfare in her Department's strategy for the future of farming. [58823]

Mr. Morley: Encouraging high animal welfare standards on farm is already at the heart of Government policy and will certainly play a role in the Department's new strategy for sustainable food and farming.

Beef (Argentina)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what basis she proposes increasing the importation of beef from Argentina under the European Community's import tariff quota; and what checks are carried out to ensure that the beef is *(a)* high quality and *(b)* disease-free. [57516]

Mr. Morley: Argentina may send beef to the Community under a number of concessionary import schemes. A recent Commission proposal will, if agreed, provide Argentina with a further 10,000 tonne quota through the High Quality (commonly known as the 'Hilton') Beef import scheme under which they are currently allocated 28,000 tonnes. This additional 10,000 tonne quota will be for one year only.

The detailed rules for the Hilton import scheme are set out in Commission Regulation 936–97. This regulation sets out the definition of High Quality beef and ensures the arrangements under which conditions are met.

Agrimonetary Compensation

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the next deadline is for applications for agrimonetary compensation; how much she plans to claim; how that will be distributed; and if she will make a statement. [58363]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* No further agrimonetary compensation will be available.

Sustainable Development

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Commission Communication, "A European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development", with particular reference to *(a)* social dialogue, *(b)* priority to market-based approaches to provide price incentives and *(c)* support for coal-fired power stations. [57894]

Mr. Meacher: The European Commission adopted its Communication, "A Sustainable Europe for a Better World: A European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development", on 15 May 2001. My Department submitted an explanatory memorandum on this document to Parliament on 20 June 2001. The European Council agreed a Strategy for Sustainable Development in Göteborg on 16 June, drawing to a large extent on the material in the Commission's proposal and highlighting the importance both of stakeholder consultation and of getting prices right so that they reflect external costs.

The Commission's Communication included a proposal to phase out subsidies to fossil fuel production and consumption by 2010, but this does not feature in the Göteborg Conclusions. The Government do not give any direct support to coal-fired power stations. However the DTI-supported Cleaner Coal Technology Programme encourages collaboration between UK industry and universities in the development of technology and expertise which delivers environmental benefits, in a manner entirely consistent with the spirit of the Commission's Communication.

Biological Diversity

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how the Government have responded to the recommendation of the Conference of Parties (5) to the convention on biological diversity to investigate the potential risks and impacts of genetic restriction use technologies. [29500]

Mr. Meacher: The Department for International Development has also commissioned a study for the benefit of developing countries on "the costs and benefits to the livelihoods of the rural and urban poor arising from the application of so-called 'terminator genes' and similar technologies in developing countries." The results of this study have been published in two books: Swanson, T(ed), 2002, "Biotechnology, Agriculture and the Developing World: The Distributional Implications of Technological Change", Edward Elgar, Cheltenham and Swanson, T(ed), 2002, "The Economics of Managing Biotechnologies", Kluwer Academic Press, Dordrecht.

Enriched Laying Cages

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she proposes to allow the use of enriched laying cages beyond 2012. [58145]

Mr. Morley: Draft Regulations to implement Council Directive 99/74/EC were laid before the House on 1 May 2002 and the use of "enriched" cages is permitted by these Regulations. If any changes to the Regulations are proposed, there will be full public consultation.

Farming Advisory Service

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps the Government are taking to deliver a national, integrated advisory service to provide support and training for farmers. [59703]

Mr. Morley: Advice services are an important element of support to farmers and other land managers. As part of the development of the Government's strategy for sustainable food and farming, we are considering the relevant recommendations of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food. We published our document "Sustainable Food and Farming: Working Together" on 26 March which invites views on the content of the strategy.

We announced two measures, also on 26 March, that are directly relevant. First, a review of the effectiveness of education and training provision for land managers, about which we will make a detailed announcement as soon as possible. Second, as an important contribution to effective knowledge transfer and dissemination, a pilot demonstration farm scheme to be operational by the end of 2002.

European Union Directives

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the European Union directives and regulations relating to her Department that have been implemented in each of the last four years, specifying *(a)* the title and purpose of each, *(b)* the cost to public funds of each and *(c)* the cost to businesses of each. [39126]

Mr. Morley: In answer to part *(a)* two tables are available in the Library of the House. The first table shows all directives agreed in the UK in the years 1998–2001, for which DEFRA and its predecessors took the lead, and which have since been implemented. The second table shows council regulations agreed in the years 1998–2001 for which DEFRA and its predecessors took the lead. A number of regulations agreed during this time have since expired—these are not included. The list has been trawled from a variety of sources and it is possible that a small number of regulations may have fallen through the net. Regulations have a direct effect in the laws of member states and do not usually require Governments to take action to implement them. The table does not show commission regulations. Details of all regulations and directives agreed can be found on the Eur-Lex database available on the European Union's website.

The Department does not hold information in the form requested in part (b). This information could be assembled only at disproportionate cost.

For part (c), Departments are required to produce regulatory impact assessments (RIAs) for proposals, including those originating in European legislation, likely to impose significant costs on business, charities or voluntary organisations. Copies of these are placed in the Library of the House.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proposals she has put forward to the EU Agricultural Council regarding reform of the CAP. [57820]

Mr. Morley: The latest stage in the ongoing reform of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) will begin with publication of the European Commission's proposals on the mid-term review of Agenda 2000 this summer.

We are urging the Commission to publish radical proposals based around a shift from production linked support (pillar 1 of the CAP) to support for agri-environment and rural development measures (pillar 2 of the CAP). We will continue to argue this during negotiations which are expected to continue through 2002 with a final agreement in the first half of 2003.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what reforms have been made to the Common Agricultural Policy since 1997. [57819]

Mr. Morley: Reform of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) was agreed at the Berlin Council in March 1999. This reform, known as the Agenda 2000 agreement, represented a significant shift from price support to direct payments; reduced the economic distortions of the CAP; helped agriculture meet the challenges of further trade liberalisation; and enabled the formulation of an integrated EU rural development policy, shifting the emphasis from production support to environmental and rural economy measures in the future. It also went some way towards helping our ambitions for EU enlargement and the WTO round.

A further reform of the sheepmeat regime was agreed by the Agriculture Council in December 2001, simplifying the regime and making it more flexible. The ewe premium will in future be paid on a flat rate basis, and the introduction of national envelopes provides a valuable mechanism for targeting extra support for the sheep sector and for encouraging environmentally beneficial farming practices.

At the Berlin Council in 1999, it was agreed that elements of the Agenda 2000 package would be subject to mid-term review. We await the Commission's mid-term review proposals, which are expected this summer. In the mid-term review we will be looking to build on the Agenda 2000 reform, which we do not believe went far enough, and arguing for a further shift away from production linked support (pillar 1 of the CAP) to agri-environment and rural development measures (pillar 2 of the CAP).

Castle Award

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if her Department has applied for a Castle award. [57605]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* DEFRA has not applied for a Castle Award this year. However, we take the issues of pay equality very seriously and have already completed some very thorough Equal Pay Audits in preparation for modernising our pay system. We are also planning to carry out an Equal Pay Review later this year.

Carbon Trading

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the rules are for carbon trading for companies participating in climate change agreements; and what the timetable is for their application. [53794]

Mr. Meacher: In August 2001, the Government published the "Framework for the UK Emissions Trading Scheme" which sets out how companies participating in climate change agreements will be able to trade carbon dioxide emission allowances. In April 2002, the Government issued guidance on how companies and sector associations in climate change agreements might wish to manage their interface with the UK emissions trading scheme. The Government intend to consult on legal rules to supplement these guidance documents in June 2002.

Since 2 April 2002, companies in climate change agreements have been able to buy allowances in the UK emissions trading scheme. Once the rules are finalised, they will be able to use these allowances to meet the target in their climate change agreement. However, the Government will not allocate any allowances to companies that have overachieved their target until companies' emissions have been independently verified at the end of the current 'target period'. Depending on the industrial sector, the current 'target period' will end between 30 September and 31 December 2002.

Departmental Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was spent by her Department on paying pensions to retired employees of her Department in 2001–02; if she will estimate the corresponding amounts to be spent in *(a)* five years' time, *(b)* 10 years' time, *(c)* 20 years' time and *(d)* 30 years' time; if she will estimate in each case the proportion of such liabilities which will arise from (i) unfunded pension schemes and (ii) pre-funded pension schemes; and in the case of pre-funded schemes, if she will estimate the value of the corresponding pre-funded funds in each of these years. [57361]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* Staff of this Department and its Executive Agencies are eligible for membership of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (PCSPS)—the occupational pension scheme for civil servants. The Cabinet Office is responsible for this scheme and pays the pensions of retired members centrally. They will answer in respect of civil servants who are PCSPS members. This will include DEFRA and its Agencies.

Departmental Sponsors

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) which hon. Members have been appointed as sponsors to her Department since 7 June 2001; and when each of them were appointed; [59960]

(2) what the duties are of hon. Members appointed as sponsors to her Department; and what assistance is given by officials in her Department to them in carrying out these duties. [59984]

Mr. Morley: Ministers in this Department have made no such appointments.

Common Fisheries Policy

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the Minister of Rural Affairs in the Scottish Executive regarding the Common Fisheries Policy; and if she will make a statement. [56879]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* I frequently meet the Minister of Rural Affairs in the Scottish Executive to discuss fisheries matters, and last did so on 17 April.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she estimates that the European Commission will publish its proposals on the future of the European Common Fisheries Policy; and if she will make a statement. [57506]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The Commission has said that it intends to make a presentation on its proposals to the Council of Fisheries Ministers on 11 June. This implies that the proposals should be published in advance of that. I and my right hon. friend the Secretary of State have made clear to the Commission that we consider progress in reviewing the Common Fisheries Policy to be a vital step in securing a sustainable future for fishing, and that we wish to see the proposals as soon as possible.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with *(a)* the European Commission and *(b)* each other EU member state regarding the Common Fisheries Policy; and if she will make a statement. [56878]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* Both I and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State have recently had discussions with the Commissioner for Fisheries and with the fisheries ministers of various member states.

Twelve-mile Limit

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the status of negotiations to extend the lifespan of the 12 mile limit derogation; which countries have indicated an aversion to so doing; and if delegations have made linkage between extension and UK agreement in different fields. [57875]

Mr. Morley: This issue falls to be negotiated as part of the forthcoming review of the Common Fisheries Policy. The negotiations have yet to start: the Commission has not yet issued its proposals, but says that they are imminent. It is to be expected in a negotiation on a matter such as this that delegations will seek to link issues in pursuit of their objectives. But on the matter of 6 and 12 mile limits it is plain from views already declared that a clear majority of member states favours retention of the present arrangements.

Coral Reefs

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent steps her Department has taken to protect coral reefs. [57977]

Mr. Meacher: Under the Jakarta Mandate of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Government is working internationally to protect coral reefs, notably to tackle coral bleaching and activities that can result in their physical degradation and destruction. The UK was a founding member of the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI).

Our Darwin Initiative plays an important part in our contribution to implementing the Convention on Biological Diversity in developing countries, including marine biodiversity and coral reefs. The UK has committed substantial funding to support the development of improved understanding and better management of tropical coral reef ecosystems, recognising the importance of the resource to the livelihoods of many vulnerable coastal communities in developing countries.

Furthermore, the cold water corals off the north west coast of Scotland, the Darwin Mounds, are expected to be the first habitat to be afforded Special Area of Conservation status once regulations to extend the Habitats Directive out to the limit of jurisdiction of UK waters are in place.

Broiler Chickens

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the quantity and type of therapeutic and non-therapeutic drugs given to broiler chickens. [57933]

Mr. Morley: There are 85 veterinary medicines currently authorised in the UK for use in chickens. 37 of these are for therapeutic use and the remaining 48 are for prophylactic use. A list of these has been placed in the Library of the House.

We do not collect details of the quantities of these drugs that are used in the UK. However details of the quantities of antimicrobial products sold for use in chickens can be found in the report "Sales of Antimicrobial Products used as Veterinary Medicines, Growth Promoters and Coccidiostats in the UK in 2000." This report is available from the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD), Woodham Lane, Addlestone, Surrey KT15 3LS. It is also available on the VMD's website (www.vmd.gov.uk). Copies have also been placed in the Library of the House.

Regional Foods

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average *(a)* time and *(b)* cost has been for registering a regional food in the last 12 months; and what assistance including advertising, her Department provides to organisations wishing to register a regional food. [56842]

Mr. Morley: Regional foods can be registered as EU protected food names under a system set up under Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2081–92. The application process for registering such products involves a number of steps including checks by both this Department, the agriculture Departments of the devolved Administrations and the Commission to ensure that the applications meet the necessary criteria for registration. Participation in the scheme is voluntary. No fee is charged on producers wishing to register a product.

In the last 12 months no UK regional food has been registered as a protected food name although a number have been lodged with the European Commission who are currently considering whether they meet the criteria for registration. Officials from this Department work closely with colleagues from the agriculture Departments in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland as well as the applicant themselves in handling applications. The work involves advising applicants, both in writing and face-to-face, on the application process, the consideration of application and liaising with the European Commission. It is estimated that the staff costs to the Department for this work in the last 12 months is £15,106.10.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many regional foods are registered in *(a)* Angus, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* the UK. [56846]

Mr. Morley: No regional foods have been registered as protected food names in Angus. Five regional foods have been registered in Scotland, (and including these) 31 in the UK.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what advice is given by her Department to organisations wishing to register a regional food. [56845]

Mr. Morley: The Department provides written advice to organisations wishing to register a regional food. This advice covers the eligibility criteria, the information needed to support an application and details of the application process. In addition, officials from this Department, or if appropriate, officials from one of the agriculture Departments in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland will visit potential applicants to advise them about completion of the required application form.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many regional foods are registered in each other EU member state. [56847]

Mr. Morley: The number of regional foods registered as protected food names by other EU member states is set out in the table:

Member state	*No. of registered protected food names*
Austria	11
Belgium	4
Denmark	12
Finland	2
France	127
Germany	62
Greece	88
Ireland	3
Italy	117
Luxembourg	4
Netherlands	5
Portugal	72
Spain	71
Sweden	2

Source:

European Commission (April 2002)

Animal Transportation Directive

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment she has made of the effect of the proposed EU directive on animal transportation to the UK livestock industry; [59670]

(2) what discussions she has had with her counterparts in the *(a)* Scottish Executive, *(b)* National Assembly for Wales and *(c)* Northern Ireland Assembly on the implications for the UK livestock industry of the proposed EU directive on animal transportation; [59679]

(3) what representations she has received from farming organisations in Scotland on the impact of the proposed EU directive on animal transport to the livestock industry in Scotland. [59666]

Mr. Morley: There are as yet no proposals from the Commission to amend the EU transport directive.

Agriculture Industry

Mrs. Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she next intends to meet representatives of *(a)* the Royal Agricultural Society and *(b)* the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society to discuss the future viability of the agriculture industry. [51446]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, has no plans to meet the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society to discuss the future viability of the agriculture industry. The Royal Agriculture Society will be my right hon. Friend's hosts at the Royal Show on 1 July.

EU Agriculture Council

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she last represented the United Kingdom at the European Union Agriculture Council; and what was discussed. [57818]

Mr. Morley: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 26 April 2002 to the hon. Member for Clydesdale (Jimmy Hood), *Official Report,* column 510W.

Seed Regulations

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to amend the Seed (National List of Varieties) Regulations 2001; and if she will make a statement. [58738]

Margaret Beckett: Changes to the Seeds (National Lists of Varieties) Regulations 2001 will be needed in the near future to amend references to EC seeds marketing directives which are currently being codified by the Council of the European Union, and other minor matters.

In addition, the Government said on 28 November 2000, in reply to a Parliamentary Question about changes to the arrangements for requesting a hearing on proposed National List decisions, that it would wish to consider, in the light of the proposed addition of a genetically modified plant variety, Chardon LL, to the National List, whether the current arrangements are satisfactory for all parties. The Chardon LL Hearing will finish around mid June this year and it remains the Government's intention to review how those arrangements have worked. If changes are proposed, all interested parties will be consulted.

BSE

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to tighten controls on imports of beef and beef products from the EU relating to the risks posed by BSE. [57811]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* Controls in relation to BSE, on trade in beef and beef products from other member states and imports from non-EU countries, are in force on an EU wide basis. In addition the UK applies national measures to prohibit the sale of meat from cattle aged over thirty months, whether home produced or imported, subject to certain specified exceptions. There are no current plans to change these rules but we and the European Commission keep the situation under regular review.

Agricultural Shows

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the veterinary assessment of the risk to bio-security posed by cow-pats at agricultural shows; and if she will make a statement. [54340]

Margaret Beckett: Veterinary and scientific advice is that livestock shows pose a risk of the transmission of Foot and Mouth or other notifiable diseases because large numbers of animals, vehicles and people are brought together from a number of different farms. Hence strict biosecurity is needed. Animal faeces may contain Foot and Mouth virus and other animal pathogens, which may survive in faeces for a period of time. Show organisers are required to draw up a biosecurity operating plan and appoint a biosecurity officer to ensure that the show licence conditions are followed. These conditions include that if animals cross a public area, any faeces is removed as far as possible and the spot covered, for example with sawdust, as is normal hygienic practice.

Animal Gatherings

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason no regulatory impact assessments were carried out by her Department before publication of the *(a)* Animal Gatherings (Interim Measures) (England) Order 2002 and *(b)* Animal Gatherings (Interim Measures) (England) (Amendment) Order 2002; and if she will make a statement. [59237]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The Animal Gatherings (Interim Measures) (England) 2002 and the Animal Gatherings (Interim Measures) (England) (Amendment) Order 2002 are part of the legislation implementing the interim rules on animal movements put in place after last year's outbreak. These Orders were developed in a short timescale in consultation with the Association of Show and Agricultural Organisations and other industry representatives. They represent a gradual and proportionate easing of restrictions that applied in last year's outbreak, and are based on veterinary advice. They will be reviewed in the light of the findings of the independent inquiries into the foot and mouth outbreak.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has to provide financial support for biosecurity measures under the Animal Gatherings (Interim Measures) (England) Amendment Order 2002; and if she will make a statement. [59238]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* I have no such plans. It is the responsibility of market operators and show organisers to take the required biosecurity precautions.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with interested individuals and organisations regarding the Animal Gatherings (Interim Measures) (England) (Amendment) Order 2002; and if she will make a statement. [59236]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* The Association of Show and Agricultural Organisations and other show organisers made representations to the Department that the 28 days restriction on the use of land both before and after shows for FMD susceptible livestock would cause many small livestock shows to be cancelled or only go ahead without livestock.

Following further veterinary advice, we introduced the Animal Gatherings (Interim Measures) (England) Amendment Order 2002 so as to lift the 28 day restriction after shows. The measure therefore eases the rules on livestock shows.

Carcase Disposal

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will apply for a derogation from the EU Animal By-Products Regulations (off-farm carcase disposal) in respect of remote areas. [57563]

Mr. Morley: We propose to derogate from the regulation to permit the burial or burning of fallen stock in defined remote areas. These will be the Highlands and Islands of Scotland.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the cost to the farming industry of complying with the EU Animal By-Products Regulations for off-farm carcase disposal. [57562]

Mr. Morley: Regulatory impact assessments on the Animal By-Products Regulation were placed in the Library of the House on 27 November 2000, 26 February 2001 and 4 February 2002, along with explanatory memoranda on the regulation (reference 12646/00 and 12648/00, 15438/01 and 15541/01).

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the proportion of farm businesses which have no facilities for arranging off-farm carcase disposal. [57565]

Mr. Morley: No such estimate has been made. However, we are in discussion with the livestock and disposal industries over future arrangements for the disposal of fallen stock. We hope that those arrangements will enable all farm businesses, with the possible exception of those in the defined remote areas, to have access to facilities for the off-farm disposal of fallen stock.

Recycling and Waste Recovery

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what targets she has set her Department for *(a)* business packaging waste recovery and *(b)* business packaging recycling; and if she will make a statement. [58664]

Mr. Meacher: The Department has been working towards cross-Government targets for general waste management. These are:

To recover a minimum of 40 per cent. total office waste, with at least 25 per cent. of that recovery coming from recycling or composting by March 2001.

To have paper recycling schemes in place in all offices with more than 50 staff by April 2002.

New targets for waste management are due to be set later this year as part of the new Framework for Sustainable Development on the Government Estate.

No separate targets are set in respect of business packaging waste.

Refrigerators

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what conclusions of relevance to the future implementation of the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive her Department has drawn from the United Kingdom experience with end of life refrigerators. [58104]

Mr. Meacher: The Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive has not yet been finalised. It is expected to be adopted later this year. However, UK officials are currently consulting all stakeholders on the best means of implementation and will take full account of previous experience of EU legislation. As a directive, the draft WEEE legislation allows a degree of flexibility in its implementation which contrasts with the Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS) legislation which is a directly applicable regulation.

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she plans to publish a domestic energy efficiency strategy. [58540]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are developing a domestic energy efficiency strategy to 2010. Energy efficiency, including domestic energy efficiency, will be addressed in the Energy White Paper, which will be published towards the end of the year.

Waste Incinerators

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what *(a)* gases and *(b)* emission levels have breached legal limits in each of the last five years from the Edmonton Incinerator; what impact this had on local air quality; and if she will make a statement; [57710]

(2) on which dates in each of the last five years London Waste has been found in breach of legal limits on emissions at its Edmonton incinerator; what penalties were imposed by the Environment Agency in response to each of those breaches; and if she will make a statement. [57708]

Mr. Meacher: The table lists the dates within the last three and a half years on which the Environment Agency has recorded emissions breaching a limit set in the authorisation for the Edmonton incinerator.

The information presented gives the averaged emission over the period of a breach, which may last up to a few hours.

The Environment Agency informs me that files relating to the remainder of the last five years have been lost. However, the remaining files indicate that there were additionally reported breaches on 24 November 1997, 2 December 1997 and 14 April 1998 but no data on the types or levels of emission are available.

In response to the increased number of breaches of the hydrogen chloride limit in 1999, the Agency wrote a strongly worded letter to the operator of the incinerator. In response to this letter the operator instituted a series of actions that has virtually eliminated these breaches.

In response to the increased number of breaches of the carbon monoxide limit in 2001 the Agency issued an enforcement notice requiring the operator to analyse the causes of the breaches and report the results of the analysis to the Agency. The reports show that if there is a loss of waste feed to the incinerator the resulting excess air cools the flame resulting in increased carbon monoxide emissions. The most common causes of a loss of waste feed are failure of the waste feed ram, bulky items blocking the waste feed chute and blockages of the ash removal mechanism. The enforcement notice and the operator's responses are on the Public Register maintained by the Agency which can be viewed at the following address:

North East Area Office (Thames Region)
Apollo Court
2 Bishops Square Business Park
St. Albans Road West
Hatfield
AL10 9EX.

With regard to the impact of such breaches on local air quality, both the operator and the Agency have carried out dispersion modelling of emissions from the plant. The Agency has modelled emissions from the plant under worst case breach conditions in comparison with current standards. It was concluded that at the highest recorded level of emissions there would not be a breach of an air quality standard.

mg/Nm^3

Date	*Emission*	*Value—average emission*	*Emission limit*
22 September 1998	Hydrogen chloride	103	30
22 September 1998	Hydrogen chloride	90	30
22 September 1999	Sulphur dioxide	217	300
22 September 1998	Sulphur dioxide	242	300
21 December 1998	Hydrogen chloride	55	30
17 February 1999	Carbon monoxide	331	100
17 February 1999	Sulphur dioxide	454	300
17 February 1999	Sulphur dioxide	512	300
6 April 1999	Carbon monoxide	167	100
6 April 1999	Carbon monoxide	180	100
22 July 1999	Hydrogen chloride	140	30
22 July 1999	Hydrogen chloride	48	30
27 July 1999	Hydrogen chloride	518	30
4 October 1999	Hydrogen chloride	62	30
4 November 1999	Hydrogen chloride	83	30
23 November 1999	Hydrogen chloride	152	30
23 November 1999	Hydrogen chloride	69	30
22 May 2000	Carbon monoxide	132	100
21 June 2000	Carbon monoxide	302	100
28 July 2000	Carbon monoxide	308	100
10 August 2000	Carbon monoxide	311	100
21 November 2000	Carbon monoxide	145	100
22 November 2000	Carbon monoxide	179	100
18 October 2000	Carbon monoxide	269	100
18 October 2000	Carbon monoxide	450	100
19 January 2001	Carbon monoxide	106	100
30 January 2001	Carbon monoxide	101	100
9 February 2001	Carbon monoxide	132	100
19 February 2001	Carbon monoxide	138	100
20 February 2001	Carbon monoxide	178	100
26 February 2001	Hydrogen chloride	54	30
26 February 2001	Hydrogen chloride	34	30
26 February 2001	Carbon monoxide	163	100
5 March 2001	Carbon monoxide	212	100
9 March 2001	Carbon monoxide	165	100
22 March 2001	Carbon monoxide	267	100
4 May 2001	Particulate	30	30
18 May 2001	Carbon monoxide	138	100
21 May 2001	Carbon monoxide	150	100
31 May 2001	Carbon monoxide	156	100
30 May 2001	Carbon monoxide	172	100
21 June 2001	Carbon monoxide	136	100
5 July 2001	Carbon monoxide	174	100
3 July 2001	Carbon monoxide	131	100
2 July 2001	Carbon monoxide	237	100
17 July 2001	Carbon monoxide	151	100
3 July 2001	Carbon monoxide	308	100
11 July 2001	Oxides of nitrogen	443	350
11 July 2001	Oxides of nitrogen	352	350
19 July 2001	Oxides of nitrogen	355	350
12 July 2001	Carbon monoxide	231	100
23 July 2001	Carbon monoxide	295	100
22 August 2001	Carbon monoxide	279	100
3 August 2001	Carbon monoxide	185	100
3 August 2001	Carbon monoxide	242	100
7 August 2001	Oxides of nitrogen	355	350
7 August 2001	Oxides of nitrogen	359	350
7 August 2001	Oxides of nitrogen	354	350
10 August 2001	Oxides of nitrogen	355	350
17 October 2001	Carbon monoxide	297	100
25 October 2001	Carbon monoxide	272	100
12 November 2001	Carbon monoxide	340	100
28 November 2001	Carbon monoxide	201	100
31 December 2001	Carbon monoxide	288	100
5 February 2002	Carbon monoxide	145	100
25 February 2002	Carbon monoxide	208	100

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she will take to improve the regulatory framework in which energy from waste incinerators operate in order to ensure breaches in emissions are minimised; and if she will make a statement. [57709]

Mr. Meacher: 'Energy from Waste' incinerators are already tightly regulated through authorisations issued under the Integrated Pollution Control (IPC) regime. This regulatory regime is being subsumed into the even more exacting Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC). Existing energy from waste incinerators will have to apply for IPPC permits by 31 August 2005.

Additionally, we are currently transposing the new Waste Incineration Directive (WID), which will further tighten emissions standards. This will apply to all new incinerators within its scope by 28 December 2002, and to existing plant by 28 December 2005.

The Environment Agency has also recently varied the authorisations for existing municipal solid waste incinerators to reduce the dioxin emission limit to that required by the WID.

In all cases, authorisations and permits specify stringent emission limits and other operating conditions with which the operator must comply. The Environment Agency assesses compliance through its monitoring and inspection programmes.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action is being taken by the Environment Agency to reduce emissions of gases from energy from waste incinerators; what improvements have been registered in each of the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [57711]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency has implemented the EU Municipal Waste Incineration Directives through the Integrated Pollution Control regime by imposing emission limits which are as strict as, or stricter than, those required by these directives. In addition, the agency has imposed limits for nitrogen oxides and dioxins although they were not required by the directives, and, in general, tighter limits for heavy metals.

The agency has also issued variation notices which have:

reduced dioxin and metals emission limits for those plants where emissions are significantly below the current limits;

increased or maintained the extractive sampling frequency for the sector;

for those incinerators without continuous emission monitoring systems for volatile organic compounds, required them to be installed; and

required the operators to review the techniques for continuous dioxin monitoring.

The table summarises improvements made during the last five years at the 11 operational municipal waste incinerators, regulated by the Environment Agency, which recover energy from waste.

Operator	*Location*	*Improvements*
London Waste Ltd.	Edmonton, London	Plant upgraded and recommissioned 1997
SELCHP	Deptford, London	Installed oxides of nitrogen abatement (SNCR) August 1998
Coventry and Solihull Waste Disposal Co. Ltd.	Coventry	Plant abatement upgraded 1996–97
MES Environmental Ltd.	Dudley, West Midlands	New plant commissioned 1998
MES Environmental Ltd.	Wolverhampton	New plant commissioned 1998
MES Environmental Ltd.	Stoke-on-Trent	New plant commissioned 1998
Tyseley Waste Disposal Ltd.	Tyseley, Birmingham	New plant commissioned 1998
Waste Recycling Group plc	Nottingham	Plant upgraded and recommissioned 1997
GM Waste Ltd.	Bolton, Lancashire	New plant commissioned 2000
Sheffield city council	Sheffield	Plant upgraded and recommissioned 1997–98. Application for new plant currently being determined.
Cleveland Waste Management	Billingham, Cleveland	New plant commissioned 1–99

Waste Management

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many and what type of composting facilities are in operation in each local authority; and if she will make a statement; [54598]

(2) which local authorities have offered home compost bins to their residents. [54585]

Mr. Meacher: This information is not collected centrally; however indications are that an increasing number of local authorities see composting in all its forms as an integral part of their waste management strategy.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if catering waste as defined in the Animal By-Products Order 1999 includes waste from domestic kitchens; and if she will make a statement. [56036]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 13 May 2002]:* Catering waste as defined in the Animal By-Products Order 1999 includes domestic kitchen waste. Following the outbreak of foot and mouth disease, the order was amended in May 2001 to make it an offence to allow livestock and poultry to have access to any catering waste which contains meat or most other products of animal origin, or which originates from premises which handle such products. The aim was to prevent livestock and poultry from having access to material which might introduce or spread animal diseases.

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what advice and funds her Department is making available to local authorities to *(a)* devise and *(b)* implement zero waste strategies. [54159]

Mr. Meacher: "Zero waste" is a term that is used in different ways in different countries. Some use it to mean no waste to landfill; others use it to mean that no waste is sent to any form of final disposal. Some claim that in nature there is no such thing as waste; that what is waste for one species is a resource for another. They believe humans should emulate nature and build a society in which all "wastes" can be reused as resources.

This Government have not adopted a goal of zero waste, but many of the policies and actions necessary to achieve zero waste are outlined in 'Waste Strategy 20'. The challenge is to develop policies that reduce the waste we generate, while at the same time ensuring the safe disposal of wastes for which efficient re-use, recycling or recovery solutions have not yet been found.

Under the Best Value regime local authorities should set targets for waste reduction and produce Municipal Waste Management Strategies, in line with the national waste strategy, which prioritise waste minimisation wherever practicable. Each Municipal Waste Management Strategy should clearly set out the local authority's proposals for collection, treatment and disposal of waste, its plans for achieving the statutory recycling and composting targets and its proposals to meet waste reduction targets.

In March last year DETR issued guidance to local authorities on the development of Municipal Waste Management Strategies. This guidance contained a section on implementing the Waste Minimisation Act 1998 and included a case study on a waste reduction project.

The principal means for funding local authority waste management functions, including waste reduction, is through general grant. This is distributed through Standard Spending Assessments (SSAs). Waste management is within the Environmental Protection and Cultural Services (EPCS) SSA. The EPCS SSA increases over the three years of the Spending Review from 2001–02 to 2003–04 by £1.1 billion. Consistent with the general local authority financial framework, it is for individual local authorities to decide the proportion of their budget that should be directed to waste management work.

Local councils in England also have access to a £140 million household waste minimisation and recycling fund to help them meet their recycling and composting statutory targets. The Government hope the money will help move local authorities away from traditional landfill dumping in favour of recycling/recovery and as a result minimise the amount of waste generated.

Future funding for local authority waste management will be determined by the outcomes of the 2002 spending review.

Farm Animals

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will give farmers in England an option to apply the 20 day standstill only to animals brought onto the farm and to animals to be moved off, and not to the rest of the animals on the farm, on condition that they are kept separate and that laid down biosecurity measures are observed. [59279]

Mr. Morley: This and other possible variations to the 20-day standstill provisions which currently apply in England and Wales under the interim livestock movement rules are being reviewed from a veterinary and economic standpoint. No decisions have yet been taken. Whatever changes may be made to the interim rules this summer, the Government intend to take full account of any relevant findings from the FMD inquiries before they reach a final view on the role that a 20day standstill might play in the longer term.

EU Habitats Directive

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the letter signed by the hon. Member for Scunthorpe of 7 April 2002, what progress is being made in the drafting of regulations that will apply the EU Habitats Directive beyond 12 nautical miles, with particular reference to the situation of the Darwin Mounds and coral reef off Rockall. [57132]

Mr. Meacher: Preparation of legislation is continuing with the intention of public consultation this summer. The Joint Nature Conservation Committee has just reported to my Department on possible selection criteria for sites to be identified for protection under these regulations once they are made. The proposed selection criteria address reef habitats as well as sandbanks, submerged sea-caves and gaseous vents, plus numerous species. A copy of the report is being placed in the House Library.

Scottish Executive

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many representations the Scottish Executive has made to her Department since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive Department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [59523]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by the Prime Minister on 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 601W.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many times her Office has made representations to the Scottish Executive since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* department approached, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [59524]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 601W. DEFRA was formed only in June 2001. Since then DEFRA Ministers have had regular meetings with their counterparts in the Scottish Executive. There has also been frequent contact at Private Office level by telephone and in writing.

Scotland Office

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to transfer the administration of reserved powers and functions of her Department, its executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies within its remit from her Department to the Scotland Office. [59522]

Mr. Morley: None.

Ministerial Accommodation

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what publicly owned accommodation is made available to her in her official role; how many nights she has been in residence at each of these properties in the last 12 months; and what the total cost was of maintaining each of these properties in the last 12 months. [55095]

Mr. Morley: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker), on 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1443W and by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins), on 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 599 and on 28 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 91W.

Departmental Policies (Wycombe)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the activities pursued by her Department that have had a particular impact on the Wycombe constituency since 7 June 2001. [58625]

Mr. Morley: FMD Signposts to Recovery conference, held in Berkshire end of June 2001, which covered the Wycombe District. This was one of two seminars held in the region. This was to assist businesses in the recovery process from foot and mouth disease and any precautionary measures. The conference was targeted at advisers and advisory organisations in public and private sectors that regularly provide support, advice or information to rural businesses, e.g. SEEDA, CA, SE Tourist Board, NFU and Farm Crisis Network. Information was provided from a variety of Government sponsored agencies and partner organisations, Rural Business Recovery Fund, Farm Business Advisory Service, Countryside Agency Grants.

A planning seminar was held in January 2002 to cover the three counties of Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire. Wycombe District Council as the planning authority was invited to attend. There were four seminars held in total across the region, in a series resulting from the Government's Action Plan for Farming. The seminar focused on farm diversification and rural business development issues and brought together relevant partners at the regional and local level, to take account of regional needs and variations.

Wycombe district is currently making changes to its deposit draft of its local plan to be adopted and run until 2011. The policies within this deposit draft have been assessed with regard to PPG7, by DEFRA representatives in the Government Office for the South East, which sets out how the Government's objectives for rural areas should be reflected in land use planning. Specific policies have been commented on and suggestions for appropriate wording given.

Wycombe District Council has held a Rural Affairs Seminar, which was attended by DEFRA regional representation, on 23 November 2001 at which James Ellis MEP gave a presentation on the Reform of the CAP. Representatives from the parishes within the Wycombe constituency were present as well as interest groups and local farmers, which provided an opportunity for networking between rural partners.

The South East Rural Affairs Forum has been successfully set up, by DEFRA in the GOSE following recommendations in the Rural White Paper. The first meeting of the group was on 15 April in Guildford. This forum gives the opportunity for rural stakeholders across the south east to give their views on how rural policy is being delivered in the region. Councillor Bill Lidgate is representative on the forum covering Buckinghamshire's area. He is a member of the county council, and South Buckinghamshire district council with extensive knowledge of issues facing rural communities. He is a farmer who runs diversified rural enterprises including pedigree herd and retail farm shop. Chair of the Royal South Bucks Agricultural Association.

The Countryside Agency, English Nature and Forestry Commission have been actively working with the Chilterns AONB which covers a major area of the constituency, and other partners to develop sustainable approaches to ensuring the long-term prospects for the chalk grasslands and beech woodlands that contribute to the unique characteristic of the Chiltern landscape. This involves developing support mechanisms and incentives for the farming and forestry practices that will perpetuate these features, working with producers through to the marketing of end products.

Applications for the England rural development programme have been received from within Wycombe constituency. There has been one successful rural enterprise scheme project to date and there are currently two Countryside Stewardship Scheme agreements covering collectively approximately 8ha. In addition 97ha are currently being managed under the Farm Woodland Premium Scheme.

In addition to the ERDP there are continuing CAP payments for most farms in the constituency.

Heat Generation

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps are being taken to promote schemes which would encourage heat generation from renewable or coppiced wood crops. [58904]

Mr. Morley: In April the Government launched the bioenergy capital grant scheme which includes funding for the development of the heat market utilising purpose grown energy crops or forestry wood fuel. Further funding will be available from a community and household capital grant scheme which will be launched later this year. In England, the energy crops scheme, part of the rural development programme, has allocated £29 million to solid biomass and this can support feedstocks for heat generation. Officials are also working closely with the local support teams set up by the Countryside Agency, through the community renewables initiative, to develop markets for renewables.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps are being taken to promote ethanol production from renewable or coppiced wood crops. [58905]

Mr. Morley: The Government-Industry Forum on the Non-Food Uses of Crops is studying the potential for bioethanol production. This includes an assessment of the new production technologies which utilise lignocellulosic feedstocks, including purpose grown crops and forest material, and which are likely to give a better environmental return. The Government have also launched a second round of the green fuel challenge inviting bids for pilot projects for biofuels, including bioethanol, which would qualify for duty reductions. In England, the energy crops scheme, part of the rural development programme, has allocated £29 million to solid biomass and this can support feedstocks for bioethanol production. Finally, the Government are considering carefully the recommendation of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food that duty on biofuels should be reduced to the rates applied to other clean fuels.

Abandoned Cars

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the companies and their location contracted to take abandoned cars collected by local authorities in *(a)* London and *(b)* West Sussex. [47381]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* This information is not held centrally.

Noise

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proportion of the population was exposed to noise levels of *(a)* 55–65 dBLAeq over 24 hours and *(b)* over 65 dBLAeq over 24 hours in the last 12 months. [60658]

Mr. Meacher: The Government do not assess the number of people, across the whole country, exposed to noise every year and so there are no data relating specifically to the last 12 months. Such an exercise is, however, carried out periodically and levels outside dwellings were last measured, in 2000 for England and Wales and 2001 for Scotland and Northern Ireland, at over 1,000 sites in total, for a 24 hour period. The results of this National Noise Incidence Survey, which I announced on 20 May 2002, established that 24 per cent. of the population was exposed to noise levels between 55–65 dBL$_{Aeq}$ over 24 hours and 2 per cent. of the population was exposed to noise levels greater than 65 dBL$_{Aeq}$ over 24 hours. It should be noted that these dBL$_{Aeq}$ levels represent the "free field" values outside dwellings. Such levels outside dwellings (i.e. ignoring sound reflected back from the façade of the dwelling) are, of course, greater than the actual levels experienced from external sources inside the home. I have arranged for copies of the report to be placed in the Libraries of both houses.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many domestic noise complaints were received by local authorities in each of the last three years. [60662]

Mr. Meacher: Figures for 2000–01, published by the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH), were announced by myself on 20 December 2001. These show a fall in the 2000–01 figures to 5,001 domestic noise complaints received by local authorities per million population, from 5,149 per million population in 1999–2000. In 1998–99 the figure was 4,330 domestic noise complaints per million population.

These figures are compiled using questionnaires returned by local authorities in England and Wales on an annual basis. This information has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses, and is also available on the DEFRA and CIEH websites.

Category of noise nuisance	*Complaints per million population*
2000–01	
Industrial	346
Commercial/leisure	1,038
Domestic	5,001
Construction/demolition sites	325
Vehicles	162
Equipment in the street	209
1999–2000	
Industrial	421
Commercial/leisure	960
Domestic	5,149
Construction/demolition sites	292
Vehicles	156
Equipment in the street	113
1998–99	
Industrial	444
Commercial/leisure	836
Domestic	4,330
Construction/demolition sites	248
Vehicles	146
Equipment in the street	107

Bee Disease

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what support she offers the bee keeping industry in relation to bee disease; and if she will make a statement. [60320]

Mr. Morley: The Department takes very seriously the threat to honeybees from pests and diseases and is funding a range of measures to protect bee health, at a cost of around £1.4 million in 2002–03. Under these measures, the National Bee Unit (NBU), part of the Central Science Laboratory, provides a free diagnostic and inspection service to the beekeeping sector in England as well as training and education to help beekeepers become more self-reliant through improved bee husbandry.

Correspondence

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter of 2 July 2001 from the hon. Member for Torbay concerning the welfare of pigs in indoor intensive units. [58749]

Mr. Morley: I am sorry there was a long delay in replying to the hon. Member's letter. A reply was sent on 16 March 2002.

WEEE Directive

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what new arrangements will be necessary to meet the recovery monitoring requirements outlined in the EU WEEE Directive; and if she will make a statement; [54557]

(2) if she will make a statement on the adequacy of recovery and recycling infrastructure in the UK in respect of EU Directives shortly to be introduced with specific reference to those dealing with *(a)* end of life vehicles, *(b)* waste electrical and electronic goods and *(c)* packaging waste; [54561]

(3) what assessment she has made of whether the new recovery and recycling facilities made necessary by the EU WEEE Directive will be in place by the time the legislation becomes UK national law. [54552]

Mr. Meacher: The Directive is still the subject of negotiation and, therefore the precise requirements in terms of collection, recovery and recycling are not yet known. The UK will have 18 months from the date the Directive is adopted to transpose the Directive into national law.

A substantial quantity of WEEE is currently recovered in the UK, particularly the larger items—white goods—such as fridges, cookers and dishwashers. There are adequate facilities for processing the existing disposals of WEEE through a wide range of re-use facilities, treatment sites and shredder operations licensed or registered exempt through the Environment Agency. These include community based refurbishment initiatives for household electrical items, scrap metal processors who take in white goods and shredders which take a range of WEEE in addition to white goods. Smaller items of WEEE, which generally have a high ratio of plastics to metal, are likely to prove the most challenging fraction of WEEE to collect and recycle.

We believe the existing recovery and recycling infrastructure will be adequate to meet the targets which are set in the End-of-Life Vehicles Directive. The UK has a long-established and extensive infrastructure for the dismantling, recovery and recycling of ELVs. The Environment Agency currently regulates around 3,500 sites that deal with ELVs. There may, however, need to be an expansion in the market for recycled material from ELVs; we therefore welcome the fact that the Directive encourages the use of such material in vehicle manufacture.

The European Commission has proposed a new Directive setting revised recovery and recycling targets for packaging waste for 2006. This is currently being considered by member states.

Departmental Logo

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was spent on designing and producing a new logo for her Department; for what reason a new logo was needed; and if she will make a statement. [51421]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 22 April 2002]:* The cost of designing and producing the interim DEFRA logo required at immediate notice when the department was set up in June 2001 and still currently in use was £18,998.00.

Canoeing

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the Environment Agency has published research into the impact of canoeing on *(a)* fish and *(b)* the environment; and if she will make a statement. [58368]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency published an R&D report in 2000 on 'The Effects of Canoeing on Fish Stock and Angling'. The research was commissioned to assess the extent to which canoeing affects fish populations and the extent to which canoeing can conflict with angling.

The general conclusion from this study was that canoeing is not harmful to fish populations. The main area of conflict between anglers and canoeists centres around the actual or perceived disturbance of angling. Neither this research, nor any other Agency funded research, have addressed the issue of the impact of canoeing on the wider environment.

Fishing Industry

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has of the *(a)* value and *(b)* destination of EU grants for (i) new fishing vessels and (ii) decommissioning of fishing vessels in each year since 1997. [60156]

Mr. Morley: No EU grants have been awarded in the UK since 1997 for the construction of new fishing vessels.

There have been decommissioning schemes in 1997 and 2001–02. The 1997 scheme was a UK-wide programme. 104 vessels were decommissioned at a cost of £13.9 million. For 2001–02 separate schemes are in place in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The English scheme is complete but approvals continue in the other schemes. Estimates of the results of the schemes are as follows:

	Number of vessels	*Cost £ million*
England	32	6.1
Scotland	97	24.8
N. Ireland	30	4.5
Total	159	35.4

Supermarkets

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations she has received on anti-competitive practices in the purchasing of horticultural produce by supermarkets. [60108]

Mr. Morley: We have not received any representations about anti-competitive practices in the purchasing of horticultural produce by supermarkets.

Responsibility for competition issues rests with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the investigation of competition cases is a matter for the Director General of Fair Trading.

CABINET OFFICE

Age Discrimination

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Cabinet Office if *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies have a policy of not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age. [59460]

Mr. Alexander: No. The policy of the Cabinet Office and its agencies is to consider all applications regardless of age.

Public Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Cabinet Office if he will list the public consultations undertaken by his officials since June 2001, stating in each case the *(a)* number of respondents and *(b)* percentage of those specifically consulted who responded. [60139]

Mr. Alexander: The following formal national public consultations, which are subject to the Code of Practice on Written Consultation, have been undertaken by the Cabinet Office since June 2001:

(a) Raising the Educational Attainment of Children in Care (July 2001);

(b) Transport and Social Exclusion (July 2001);

(c) The Future of Emergency Planning in England and Wales (August 2001);

(d) Licensing of Crown Copyright (HMSO) (October 2001).

The number of respondents for each was as follows:

(a) Raising the Educational Attainment of Children in Care: 200 responses to the consultation document and 2,000 responses to questionnaires distributed through the "Who Cares?" magazine;

(b) Transport and Social Exclusion: 788;

(c) The Future of Emergency Planning in England and Wales: 267;

(d) Licensing of Crown Copyright: 39.

The Government's Code of Practice on Written Consultation places an emphasis on making formal national public consultation documents widely available and not restricting them to specific groups or individuals. Consequently there is no requirement in the code to measure the percentage of those specifically consulted who responded. In the case of the HMSO consultation on Licensing of Crown Copyright, for which records were kept on the number specifically consulted, the figure was 17.9 per cent.

The Cabinet Office's Performance and Innovation Unit published 'Privacy and Data-Sharing: the Way Forward for Public Services' on 11 April 2002. The report included three recommendations that were raised for consultation. The consultation exercise is being managed by the Lord Chancellor's Department. As the consultation period ends on 12 July no figures are currently held on total numbers of responses.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department on how many occasions between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [58728]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002, the expert adviser for the Lord Chancellor's Department has accompanied a Minister overseas once. On that occasion the Lord Chancellor, a senior departmental official, the expert adviser, and a private secretary went to Brussels on official business. The total cost of the visit for the whole party was £1,670.00. All travel by special advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code, and the Civil Service Management Code.

Public Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the public consultations undertaken by her Department since June 2001, stating in each case the *(a)* number of respondents and *(b)* percentage of those specifically consulted who responded. [60152]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The following are the public consultations that have been conducted by the Lord Chancellor's Department (and its agencies):

Title	*Month*	*Number of respondents*
Report of the Review Group on the Royal Peculiars	July 2001	47
Administrative Court—Proposed Changes To Primary Legislation Following Sir Jeffrey Bowman's Review Of The Crown Office List	July 2001	37
Towards Effective Enforcement—a single piece of bailiff law and a regulatory structure	July 2001	84
Payments into Court in Satisfaction of a Claim	August 2001	48
Report of the Review of Tribunals by Sir Andrew Leggatt	August 2001	360
General Pre-action Protocol	November 2001	107

Note:

Information on the percentage of those specifically consulted who responded is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Other consultations are still in progress.

Public Record Office

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement about Government policy on the acquisition of additional Public Record Office storage space to facilitate the transfer of the *(a)* 1921, *(b)* 1951, *(c)* 1961 and *(d)* 1971 census records from the Registrar-General's Department to the Public Record Office. [59065]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 10 June 2002 [59066]. There is no Government policy to acquire additional storage space for the PRO to facilitate the transfer of these records from the Office for National Statistics. The PRO's storage capacity will be reviewed before the transfer of such records as the year of their availability to the public approaches.

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the provisional timetable is for the transfer of the *(a)* 1921, *(b)* 1951, *(c)* 1961 and *(d)* 1971 decennial population census records for England and Wales to the Public Record Office. [59066]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Records of the decennial population census are closed for 100 years under Lord Chancellor's Instrument number 12. The records of the population census of *(a)* 1921, *(b)* 1951, *(c)* 1961 and *(d)* 1971 are currently retained by the Office of National Statistics with the approval of the Lord Chancellor under section 3(4) of the Public Records Act 1958 (as amended). A timetable for their transfer to the PRO will be agreed as the end of their closure period approaches.

1901 Census

Mr. Gray: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the technical enhancements on the 1901 Census Online site will be completed. [60124]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Under the terms of the Public Private Partnership between the PRO and QinetiQ Ltd., the latter are responsible for the technical aspects of the 1901 census website. QinetiQ have carried out technical enhancements to the site, which are being subjected to a rigorous testing programme, to verify that the site is sufficiently robust to permit general internet access.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the average *(a)* cost for legal aid for and *(b)* number of briefings in contested private law contact or residence proceedings regarding children for cases of domestic violence was in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000, (iii) 2001 and (iv) 2002. [60396]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The average cost of legal aid and the number of hearings, to the level specified in the question, can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. We can, however, provide the numbers and average cost of claims paid in the relevant case categories during calendar years 1999–2001 and for the first four months of 2002.

These are as follows.

Year	Number of claims	Average cost of claim (£)
Residence and care proceedings		
1999	61,023	2,014
2000	55,889	2,011
2001	49,078	2,294
2002[3]	15,697	2,268
Domestic violence proceedings[1]		
1999	26,206	1,629
2000	25,369	1,698
2001	23,465	1,885
2002[3]	7,774	1,875
Combined family proceedings[2]		
1999	377	2,365
2000	429	2,827
2001	419	3,284
2002[3]	124	3,569

[1] These may or may not involve children

[2] These include two or more claims for ancillary relief, residence and/or contact, injunction

[3] Includes only January to April 2002

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Services

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much funding was provided for Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Services supporting the provision of *(a)* supervised contact and *(b)* contact centres offering supported contact in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000, (iii) 2001 and (iv) 2002. [60399]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) was launched in April 2001. CAFCASS estimates (subject to audit) that in the financial year 2001–02, it granted £268,000 to contact centres of which £57,000 was spent on supervised contact. In addition, it granted £211,000 to contact centres offering supported contact: some of this sum may also have been spent on supervised contact which was not separately differentiated in regional returns.

Departmental Sponsors

Mr. Weir: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) which hon. Members have been appointed as sponsors to her Department since 7 June 2001; and when each of them were appointed; [59966]

(2) what the duties are of hon. Members appointed as sponsors to her Department; and what assistance is given by officials in her Department to them in carrying out these duties. [59989]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Ministers in this Department have made no such appointments.

Regulatory Impact Unit

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many people her Department employs in its Regulatory Impact Unit; and if she will make a statement. [59875]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor's Department's departmental responsibility for regulatory impacts is located in the Policy Group Secretariat Unit which employs two people to co-ordinate the work on regulatory impacts across the Department, alongside other duties.

It is the job of Departmental Regulatory Impact Units to establish and promote the principles of good regulation in their Departments. The staff in each unit work closely with the officials responsible for developing policies within their Department and the Regulatory Impact Unit within the Cabinet Office. They focus on those regulations that impact on business, charities and the voluntary sector.

Regional Organisation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) which of the agencies and NDPBs sponsored by her Department have a regional organisation; and if she will list the counties and unitary authorities in each region in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002; [58949]

(2) what regional organisation her Department has; and if she will list the counties and unitary authorities in each region in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002. [58948]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The headquarters offices of the Lord Chancellor's Department and its associated offices are not organised on a regional basis. They are located at sites in central London and elsewhere.

LCD's sister Department, the Northern Ireland Court Service, has its administrative headquarters in Belfast with courts and tribunals located across the Province in county court divisions aligned to local government areas.

I have today placed the information sought on the regional organisation of the agencies and NDPBs sponsored by the Lord Chancellor's Department in the Libraries of both Houses.

Golden Jubilee

Lady Hermon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether the Union flag will be flown at the new Laganside Court complex on 1, 3 and 4 June for the official celebration of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth's Golden Jubilee. [59112]

Ms Rosie Winterton: It is the policy of the Lord Chancellor that the Union flag should be flown at courthouses in Northern Ireland on the same basis as on Government buildings under the Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000.

Coronation Day (2 June) is a designated flag flying day in Northern Ireland, and accordingly the Union flag will be flown at all courthouses (including the Laganside courts complex) from 8am to sunset on that day.

The draft Flags Regulations (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) 2002, which are currently being considered by Parliament, propose that 1, 3 and 4 June 2002 should also be designated days for the purposes of flag flying at Government buildings in Northern Ireland. Subject to these Amendment Regulations being approved by Parliament, the Union flag will be flown at all courthouses (including the Laganside courts complex) on these days.

Legal Aid

Tim Loughton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether those who seek class actions in the courts are entitled to legal aid. [59421]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Public funding (formerly legal aid) is available for individual members of any group or multi-party action within the scope of the Community Legal Service (CLS) scheme. Applicants must demonstrate their financial eligibility, and applications are subject to a funding assessment of the merits of the case by the Legal Services Commission.

Certified Timber

Ms Walley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the refurbishment projects that *(a)* are in progress and *(b)* will start within the next six months; and what action is being taken to ensure that these will procure certified timber. [59761]

Ms Rosie Winterton: There are no refurbishment projects currently in progress, but the following are planned to start within the next six months:

Clive House, London

GKN House, London

Steel House, London.

The Department's Environmental Policy for Building Requirements applies to major construction projects. This requires that only timber originating from sources which are managed in a sustainable and renewable manner is to be specified and directs architects towards the Forest Stewardship Council and other certification schemes.

"Married Life"

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if the Lord Chancellor will place a copy of the most recent "Married Life" magazine in the Library. [58761]

Ms Rosie Winterton: A copy of "Married Life" will be placed in the House of Commons Library. "Married Life" is published by Lifecycle Marketing with an editorial board that includes One Plus One and other relationship support organisations. The magazine contains information about the marriage ceremony, relationship and legal issues. In 1999–2000 the Lord Chancellor's Department gave a one-year grant of £8,500, with the Home Office giving £10,000, to pay jointly for the publication of the magazine. Although the grant was partly funded between this Department and the Home Office, the magazine is not a Government document.

Withheld Records

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many and what percentage of records relating to the Royal Family eligible for release under the 30 year rule in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001 were withheld. [57664]

Ms Rosie Winterton: It is estimated that the approximate number and percentage of records, which relate to the Royal Family and were subject to extended closure, was as follows for each of the years concerned.

(a) 2 (2 per cent.)

(b) 4 (5 per cent.)

(c) 3 (4 per cent.)

(d) 4 (5 per cent.)

(e) 4 (6 per cent.)

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how much was spent by her Department on paying pensions to retired employees of her Department in 2001–02; if she will estimate the corresponding amounts to be spent in *(a)* five years' time, *(b)* 10 years' time, *(c)* 20 years' time and *(d)* 30 years' time; if she will estimate in each case the proportion of such liabilities which will arise from (i) unfunded pension schemes and (ii) pre-funded pension schemes; and in the case of pre-funded schemes, if she will estimate the value of the corresponding pre-funded funds in each of these years. [57358]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Civil servants are eligible for membership of an occupational pension scheme—the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme (PCSPS). Pensions of retired members of the scheme are paid centrally by the Cabinet Office, who have responded to this question, and I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by the hon. Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie) on 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 561W.

Jury Intimidation

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, pursuant to her answer of 12 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 158W, on jury intimidation, when she intends to publish policy on the prevention of intimidation of jurors in Northern Ireland. [57161]

Ms Rosie Winterton: It is intended to publish the policy on countering intimidation of jurors, witnesses, victims and other members of the public on court premises in Northern Ireland by September 2002.

Green Travel Plans

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what green travel plans are in place for the *(a)* Public Record Office and *(b)* the Northern Ireland Court Service. [33721]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I apologise for the delay in responding which was due to an administrative oversight.

(a) The Public Record Office does not have a formal green travel plan. However, in its publicity the PRO sets out the options for travelling to Kew and the Family Records Centre in Islington by public transport. The rapid development of online services means that the public are able to obtain much more information about PRO records via the internet, using computers at home or the nearest public library. A single rate motor mileage rate is paid to discourage the use of large engine vehicles, interest free loans are available for staff to purchase public transport season tickets and bicycles, and the PRO also provides facilities for its staff at Kew who wish to cycle to work, and these are currently being extended.

(b) The Northern Ireland Court Service does not have a green travel plan in place, but its motor mileage rates discourage the use of large engine vehicles and Northern Ireland Court Service policy encourages officers to travel together when at all possible.

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what green travel plans are in place for *(a)* the Official Solicitor's Office, *(b)* the Council on Tribunals, *(c)* the Statutory Publications Office, *(d)* the Judge Advocate-General's Office, *(e)* the staff employed on Domestic Legal Services in her Department and *(f)* the Legal Services Commission. [33665]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I apologise for the delay in responding which was due to an administrative oversight.

The Lord Chancellor's Department introduced a central green travel plan in March 1999 in respect of its main headquarters sites. There are a number of ways in which we promote greener transport, such as making interest free loans available for staff to purchase public transport season tickets and bicycles, making changes to our motor mileage rates to discourage the use of large engine vehicles, and incorporating a requirement to demonstrate vehicle journey planning and a well-maintained fleet within delivery contracts. These policies cover staff working in the Official Solicitor's Office; the Council on Tribunals; the Statutory Publications Office; and the Judge Advocate General's Office.

(e) It is not clear which organisation is envisaged in the term "Domestic Legal Services".

(f) The Legal Services Commission adopted an environmental strategy and policy statement in June 2001. The Commission is committed to reducing any harmful impact it may have on the environment, and in all its policy making and operational activities it has regard to sound environmental practices. It has in place a bicycle loan scheme, which provides a salary advance to full-time permanent staff in order to purchase cycle equipment and a bicycle to travel to work and/or use for business travel. Staff using a bicycle for company business may claim 20 pence per mile. The Commission also has a season ticket loan scheme to encourage staff to make use of public transport.

King Edward VIII

Kevin Brennan: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what recent representations she has received about the release of official papers relating to the abdication of King Edward VIII; and if she will make a statement. [57217]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Apart from questions put by hon. Members, no representations on this subject have been received recently, either by the Lord Chancellor's Department or the Public Record Office.

Medical Examinations

Mrs. Betty Williams: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what discussions she has had with the Appeals Service in North Wales about contractual arrangements for the provision of a medical assistant as chaperone for medical examinations. [52941]

Maria Eagle: I have been asked to reply.

There have been no discussions between my right hon. Friend and the Appeals Service in North Wales. However, this is a matter for Neil Ward, Chief Executive of the Appeals Service. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Neil Ward to Mrs. Betty Williams, dated 24 May 2002:

The Secretary of State has asked me to respond to your question concerning contractual arrangements for the provision of a medical assistant as chaperone for medical examinations in North Wales.

The Appeals Service awarded a national contract to British Nursing Co-operations Ltd. to supply medical assistants at appeal hearings where a medical examination is required. This contract, which is for an initial 2 year period, commenced on 1 November 2000.

I hope this is helpful.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Civil Service

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Minister for Women what the Government are doing to decrease the pay differential between men and women in the Civil Service. [59082]

Ms Hewitt: The Government have committed itself to two key actions to address the difference in male and female earnings in the civil service. First, the Government have committed all Departments and agencies to undertake an equal pay review by April 2003 and to prepare action plans to close any equal pay gaps. Second, it has asked Departments and agencies to set targets to improve representation of women at all levels, including the senior civil service.

Gender Pay Gap

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Minister for Women what steps the Government have taken to decrease the pay differentials between men and women. [59078]

Ms Hewitt: The pay gap between men and women currently stands at 18 per cent., down from 20 per cent. in 1997. The Government are taking a number of steps to reduce the pay gap. As well as the introduction of the national minimum wage and the provisions in the Employment Bill, the fair pay champions and castle awards, are helping to spread good practice on equal pay. All Government Departments are committed to carrying out a pay review by April 2003 and we are also taking forward recommendations from the Kingsmill report.

Gender Sharing

Harry Cohen: To ask the Minister for Women what assessment she has made of the rehousing criteria of housing authorities with respect to gender sharing and the effect this has upon young women and their mothers; and if she will make a statement. [58751]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

Housing authorities must ensure that their allocation scheme is framed so as to give reasonable preference to certain categories of people. The categories are as set out in s167 (2) of the Housing Act 1996 and include people occupying overcrowded housing. Statutory overcrowding is defined in terms of the room standard and the space standard, which are set out in Part X of the Housing Act

1985. The room standard is contravened when two persons of opposite sexes (over the age of 10), who are not living together as husband and wife, are required to sleep in the same room.

Female Councillors

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Minister for Women what estimate she has made of the number of female councillors. [59080]

Mrs. Roche: I have been asked to reply.

Based on their census of councillors in England and Wales, the Improvement and Development Agency and the Employers' Organisation for Local Government estimate that, as at May 2001, there were approximately 5,900 female councillors in England and Wales.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Minister for Women what sources are employed by her Department for the statistics on domestic violence. [58105]

Ms Hewitt: The main sources of statistics on domestic violence used to inform policy come from the British Crime Survey, police records and a range of national and international research.

The Government are committed to furthering our understanding of the scope, dimension and impact of domestic violence. This is why my hon. Friend, the Deputy Minister for Women is launching national research into the economic costs of domestic violence.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Sellafield

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps have been taken by BNFL since October 1993 to remediate the leakage from the B241 storage tanks at Sellafield; and what her estimate is of the cost incurred to date to rectify the problem. [57984]

Mr. Wilson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) on 13 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 423W, concerning work undertaken in respect of B241. This work forms part of BNFL's management of nuclear liabilities, details of which are set out in their annual report and accounts. I am told by BNFL that, to date, the company has spent in the region of £100 million in respect of B241.

Accident (Sellafield)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry at what time she was informed of the accident at the Sellafield nuclear reprocessing plant on 8 February; at what time and how she alerted the Irish Government to potential risk; what steps she took in the first 24 hours to deal with the accident; what her assessment is of the discharge involved; how many employees were exposed to danger; what the cause of the accident was; and what steps she has taken to prevent a repetition. [40896]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 18 March 2002]:* BNFL reported an event during the recommissioning of defuelling plant at Calder Hall power station to my officials at 19.55 on Friday, 8 February. Calder Hall nuclear power station is situated on the Sellafield site but is not part of the nuclear reprocessing plant. My office received a short written brief on the circumstances at 15.15 on Monday, 11 February. I refer my hon. Friend to the *Official Report*, columns 356–57W for a statement on the event given on 6 March 2002. No discharges of any kind resulted and there was no danger at any time to any member of the work force, the public or to the environment.

The circumstances rated well below the International Nuclear Event Scale (INES) which defines categories of incidents and accidents, and they fell outside the criteria for passing information to the Irish Government on reportable incidents.

Defuelling at Calder Hall has been suspended until BNFL reports the outcome of its internal investigation and completes any requirements for remedial action to the satisfaction of the Health and Safety Executive's Nuclear Installations Inspectorate.

Nuclear Reprocessing Plants

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if her Department was represented at the hearings on the report published by the European Parliament's STOA programme on possible toxic effects from the nuclear reprocessing plants at Sellafield and La Hague held in the European Parliament on 17 and 18 April. [54857]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 15 May 2002]:* The Department was not represented at the hearing. However, the Chief Inspector of Nuclear Installations gave a presentation explaining the systems for environmental and health and safety regulation of the UK civil nuclear industry.

BNFL

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made in monitoring BNFL's performance as a liabilities manager. [60030]

Mr. Wilson: My officials are working with their advisers and the company to develop performance measures to cover the range of BNFL's businesses, including liabilities management.

Nuclear Reactors

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her Department is doing to support the development of low cost, low waste nuclear reactors. [59730]

Mr. Wilson: The UK is involved in international nuclear systems work including the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) Innovative Nuclear Reactors and Fuel Cycles (INPRO) project and the Generation IV International Forum (GIF). 10 countries participate in GIF, which was started by the United States Department of Energy (USDOE), including Argentina, Brazil, Canada, France, Korea, Japan, South Africa, Switzerland, US and UK. Both initiatives promote the development of longer-term nuclear reactor designs that offer improved safety performance, proliferation resistance, waste minimalisation and competitively priced electricity.

MOX Fuel Shipments

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if the faulty MOX fuel due to be returned from Japan to Sellafield will be categorised as radioactive waste; and if she will make a statement. [55839]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* BNFL have reconfirmed that they foresee a range of possible future uses for the MOX fuel due to be returned to the UK from Japan and that they have no intention of declaring the fuel as waste.

Nuclear Power

Mr. [illegible]iddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what meetings she has had with environmental groups on nuclear power since 1 January 2001. [59299]

Mr. Wilson: The Government attaches a high priority to establishing a good dialogue with our stakeholders. Ministers have had discussions with representatives of environmental groups in various fora on a range of issues including nuclear power. I hope that they will continue to contribute their views in particular in the context of the current energy policy consultation.

Nuclear Waste Management

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she intends to take on the Royal Society's recommendation that there should be an urgent safety review of nuclear waste management to take into account the possibility of extreme terrorist intervention. [58899]

Mr. Wilson: The Government take the safe and secure management of radioactive waste very seriously and is considering the responses made to the consultation document "Managing Radioactive Waste Safely", published by the UK Government and the devolved Administrations on 12 September 2001.

As I have previously explained to the House, all relevant safety and security precautions at nuclear sites, including those applying to the management of nuclear waste, have been reviewed in the light of the events of 11 September. They will continue to be kept under regular review in the future. It is not Government policy to disclose details of security measures taken at civil nuclear sites.

Electricity

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of the UK's electricity in the last 12 months has come from *(a)* wind power, *(b)* wave power, *(c)* solar power, *(d)* coal-fired power stations, *(e)* gas-fired power stations and *(f)* nuclear power stations; what those percentages were in each of the previous 10 years; and what she estimates the likely percentage will be in each of the next 10 years. [59729]

Mr. Wilson: Generation from onshore and offshore wind in 2000 (the last full year for which data is available) was 946 GWh (0.25 per cent. of total generation) having risen steadily from a low base of 9 GWh in 1990. Wave power output in 2000 was from shoreline devices only and was less than 1 MWh. Solar photovoltaics produced 2 GWh of electricity in 2000, which was less than 0.01 per cent. of total generation.

Generation from coal accounted for 70 per cent. of the UK's electricity in 1990, falling to 29 per cent. in 1999, but rising to 32 per cent. in 2000. Gas fired stations accounted for less than 1 per cent. of UK generation in 1990, but rose to 15 per cent. by 19[illegible]5 and 39 per cent. in 2000. Nuclear power stations accounted for 20 per cent. of UK generation in 1990 and peaked at 28 per cent. in 1998 before falling back to 26 per cent. in 1999 and 23 per cent. in 2000.

Projections for the shares of different types of generating station over the next 20 years can be found in Annex D of Energy paper 68, published by DTI in November 2000. The paper can be viewed on the web at www2.dti.gov.uk/energy/energy_projections.htm

Given that the Renewables Obligation is a market-based approach, the deployment levels for individual renewable technologies are for the industry rather than the Government, and we do not have forward estimates for those technologies individually. We would, however, expect a significant contribution to the 10 per cent. target for renewable energy from onshore and offshore wind energy. Wave and solar technology need further development for them to become commercially viable.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much money her Department spent on research and development *(a)* of wind power, *(b)* into sources of renewable energy and *(c)* of wave power in each year since 1995. [59728]

Mr. Wilson: The Department of Trade and Industry has spent the following amounts on research and development through its Sustainable Energy Programme:

£ million

	Wind power	*Wave power*	*All sources of renewable energy (including wind and wave power)*
1995–96	4.2	0.1	19.2
1996–97	3.0	0.1	14.4
1997–98	1.7	0.0	13.0
1998–99	1.4	0.2	11.3
1999–2000	1.2	0.0	12.5
2000–01	1.3	0.5	13.1
2001–02	1.7	1.0	13.54

The DTI also supports research and development on sustainable energy technologies through the Research Councils and their work would be additional to the figures in the table.

Provision for research and development through the Sustainable Energy Programme increases to £19 million for 2002–03, and through the Research Councils to

£5.6 million. Additionally, the DTI has been assigned a further £5 million over three years for wave and tidal demonstration projects.

Including R+D and capital grants, the Government have set up programmes totalling £260 million to bring forward new renewable energy technologies. In addition the Renewables Obligation will create a new market of around £1 billion per year by 2010.

Energy Consumption and Production

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of energy consumed in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland was provided by (i) nuclear power, (ii) coal, (iii) gas, (iv) oil and (v) renewables. [60285]

Mr. Wilson: The percentages of energy consumed in the UK as a whole during 2000 by each fuel source are shown below. Separate figures for Scotland, England and Wales are not available. Figures for 2001 are currently being compiled and will be available at the end of July.

	Percentage
Nuclear	31.5
Coal	35.1
Gas	25.2
Oil	8.0
Renewables	0.2

Source:

Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics, 2001 (The Stationery Office)

Energy Costs

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent research her Department has undertaken into the comparative costs of alternative methods of electricity generation; and what reports have been published setting out the detailed assumptions on which the calculations have been made. [60186]

Mr. Wilson: The costs of generating electricity are a commercial matter for generators.

However, the Department takes an interest in estimates by broad type as may be seen, for example, in the February 2002 report of the Inter-departmental Analysts Group, "Long-Term Reductions in Greenhouse Gas Emissions in the UK" (http://www2.dti.gov.uk/energy/greenhousegas/greenhouse.pdf).

Wave Power Station (Outer Hebrides)

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much her Department plans to spend to support the proposed Outer Hebrides wave power station. [59811]

Mr. Wilson: Up to £2.3 million.

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much energy the proposed Outer Hebrides wave power station is expected to produce; and which areas its energy will serve. [59812]

Mr. Wilson: The target specification for each device is between 0.5 and 1.0 MW. The amount of energy actually produced will depend on the energy in the sea and the effectiveness of the wave power generators in converting that energy to electricity.

It is intended to connect the generators to the electricity supply system in the Western Isles.

Employment Law

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what procedures her Department has in place to monitor companies accused of ignoring Government guidelines regarding employment law; and what action she is taking to review the effectiveness of such procedures. [55904]

Alan Johnson: The Government do not monitor companies who are accused of ignoring Government guidelines or good practice regarding employment law. However, the Inland Revenue enforces the national minimum wage on behalf of the Department. This process is kept under regular review.

Individuals who believe that their employment rights have been infringed may take their case to an employment tribunal. The Employment Tribunals Service publishes data on tribunal cases annually.

Office of Fair Trading

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will bring forward measures to allow companies which are complained about to the OFT to see the nature of the complaint made against them when the OFT decide not to pursue the case; and if she will make a statement. [54662]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 8 May 2002]:* The Government believe that encouraging complainants to come forward is vital to OFT's enforcement efforts and normally, where the OFT proposed to find an infringement, it would notify the parties to the agreement of the party engaged in the abusive conduct and they would then have a reasonable opportunity to inspect documents held by the OFT. However, where a case has not developed to the point where the OFT was proposing to find an infringement, there is no such provision.

Consignia

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if Consignia has ended first collections in Epsom. [55573]

Mr. Timms: The universal postal service is enshrined in the Postal Services Act 2000. The obligation consists of a service provided at an affordable price determined by a public tariff uniform throughout the UK and includes the delivery each working day to the home or premises of every individual in the UK and a collection each working day from access points.

Currently Postcomm requires Consignia plc, in the licence, to provide a universal postal service. Subject to Consignia's universal service obligations, the number and timing of deliveries and collections is an operational issue for Consignia. As this is therefore a matter that falls within the day-to-day responsibility of Consignia I have asked the Consignia chief executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Consignia Chief Executive

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has made to Consignia about the future of the current chief executive; and if she will make a statement. [58712]

Mr. Timms: It would not be appropriate for Government to speculate on the future of individual members of the Consignia board. Government have already indicated that the time is right for change in Consignia's top-level management to meet the challenge of the changing market. This is why we have appointed Allan Leighton. It is his decision initially on how the board should be strengthened and to make his recommendations to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Economic Development

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether she has made a response to the Scottish Executive's discussion paper on Scottish economic development in the light of its cohesion report. [56133]

Alan Johnson: If the hon. Member will provide me with further information on the Scottish Executive paper and report to which he refers, I will write to him with the information requested.

Maladministration

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many findings there have been of maladministration by ombudsmen with responsibility for agencies under the remit of her Department since 1997. [56315]

Ms Hewitt: Information on the handling of complaints is set out in tabular form by the parliamentary ombudsman each year as an attachment to his annual report. For those complaints where there was evidence of maladministration that warranted a full investigation, the table sets out how many complaints were upheld as being fully or partially justified. Copies of the parliamentary ombudsman's annual reports for the period 1997–98 to 2000–01 inclusive can be viewed in the Libraries of the House, or on the parliamentary ombudsman's website at www.ombudsman.org.uk/publications.

Eastern England Development Agency

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether county councils are required to adopt planning targets laid down by the Eastern England Development Agency. [56545]

Alan Johnson: Regional development agencies do not have any power to set planning targets binding upon local authorities.

Regional Development Agencies

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what monitoring her Department has in place to ensure regional development agencies meet their statutory commitments to sustainability. [59823]

Alan Johnson: Each RDA is monitored on its performance against the national level Tier 2 targets and regional Tier 3 core and supplementary milestones, as set out in their individual corporate plans. The performance monitoring framework, which came into effect alongside the Single Programme on 1 April 2002, requires the RDAs to report to Government on the achievement of Tier 3 milestones on a quarterly basis and on contribution towards the achievement of Tier 2 targets annually. This includes targets relating to sustainability.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what investment regional development agencies are making in *(a)* 2002, *(b)*, 2003 and *(c)* 2004 to meet their environmental commitments. [59830]

Alan Johnson: The RDAs are required to carry out sustainability appraisals of their regional economic strategies. All of the agency's schemes and projects from 2002 onwards will be subject to a formal sustainable development assessment. This assessment covers environmental, social and economic impacts. The RDAs carry out a broad spectrum of activities in pursuit of their regional economic development role and many of their activities have an environmental component, for example in relation to land and property development, in supporting the environmental technologies sector, or in regeneration activities. The Government do not require the RDAs to provide a disaggregated figure for expenditure on environmental projects or initiatives or on the environmental aspects of sustainable development assessments.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the *(a)* powers and *(b)* responsibilities are of regional development agencies with regard to (i) land use planning, (ii) transport issues and (iii) social inclusion. [60423]

Alan Johnson: The regional development agencies have no powers or responsibilities in relation to land use planning and transport. RDAs are however important stakeholders in the preparation of regional planning guidance, including regional transport strategy.

Under the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998, the RDAs have five statutory purposes which are:

(a) to further the economic development and the regeneration of its area,

(b) to promote business efficiency, investment and competitiveness in its area,

(c) to promote employment in its area,

(d) to enhance the development and application of skills relevant to employment in its area, and

(e) to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom where it is relevant to its area to do so.

All of these areas have the potential to include work on or with an impact on social inclusion.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* guidelines are given to and *(b)* requirements are placed on regional development agencies, with regard to their allocation of Government money to their different areas of responsibility; and if she will place copies in the Library. [60424]

Alan Johnson: The regional development agencies have been given a large degree of flexibility to spend their resources subject to delivery of the remaining commitments under the Single Regeneration Budget and other inherited programmes. Their corporate plans and targets have been approved by Ministers. The Department will be issuing revised guidance to the agencies on corporate planning for 2003–06 during the summer and copies of that will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Oil and Gas Directorate

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many times her Department's personnel in the Oil and Gas Directorate have travelled from London to Aberdeen to meet representatives of the oil and gas industry in each year since 1994; and how much the travel costs were for these meetings. [56331]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* The Department does not keep records in a form that will enable it to provide an answer to this question without incurring a disproportionate cost.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many of her Department's Oil and Gas Directorate posts have been relocated from Aberdeen to London since 1997, broken down by grade. [56328]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* There have been changes in organisation and responsibilities at various times between 1997 and the present. No Oil and Gas Directorate posts have been relocated from Aberdeen to London.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the oil and gas fields in the UK Continental Shelf which are overseen from *(a)* the London office of the Oil and Gas Directorate and *(b)* the Aberdeen office of the Oil and Gas Directorate; and if she will list the transfer of responsibilities between Aberdeen and London for overseeing quadrants and blocks of the North sea that have taken place since 1994. [56330]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* It is not possible to quantify the transfer of responsibilities between London and Aberdeen since 1994, but broadly the Aberdeen team has continued to handle fields where operators have their production offices based in Aberdeen. Since 1994, with more companies relocating to Aberdeen from the south-east, there has been an incremental increase in the number of fields transferred to Aberdeen team.

Written Consultation

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many consultation documents and consultative drafts of legislation have been issued by her Department since January 2001; and what proportion of these have observed Criterion 5 of the Code of Practice on Written Consultation. [57009]

Ms Hewitt: Since the introduction of the Consultation Code on 1 January 2001, the Department has issued 72 consultation documents.

Records relating to consultations' compliance with Criterion 5 of the Consultation Code are held not centrally but by the management unit responsible for the policy area concerned. I will write to the hon. Member with the requested information as soon as possible and place a copy in the Libraries of the House.

Consultation Exercises

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many consultation exercises the Department has launched in each year since 1997. [59376]

Ms Hewitt: Since the introduction of the Consultation Code on 1 January 2001, consultation documents have been issued as follows:

1 January to 31 December 2001: 65

1 January 2002 to date: 7.

Records relating to consultations issued before the introduction of the Consultation Code on 1 January 2001 are not held centrally.

Express Newspapers

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will ask the Office of Fair Trading to publish, in accordance with current practice, the advice given to the Secretary of State on the acquisition of the Express Newspaper business by the Northern and Shell Group. [57626]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The OFT published its report of the advice given on this acquisition on its website on Monday 27 May. Advice given by this government departments was published on the same date.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much was spent by her Department on paying pensions to retired employees of her Department in 2001–02; if she will estimate the corresponding amounts to be spent in *(a)* five years' time, *(b)* 10 years' time, *(c)* 20 years' time and *(d)* 30 years' time; if she will estimate in each case the proportion of such liabilities which will arise from (i) unfunded pension schemes and (ii) pre-funded pension schemes; and in the case of pre-funded schemes, if she will estimate the value of the corresponding pre-funded funds in each of these years. [57364]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* For the answer to the first part of the question, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given him by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 22 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 335–336W.

The costs for pre-funded scheme administered by the Department of Trade and Industry for 2001–02 amount to £249,246.54.

To estimate the costs for future years would entail disproportionate cost.

Automated Credit Transfer System

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact on the incomes of sub-postmasters of the switch to the payment of pensions and allowances through the automated credit transfer system. [58274]

Mr. Timms: The current value to Consignia of business from the Department of Work and Pensions is some £400 million a year. The migration of benefit payments to ACT is scheduled to begin in 2003. How that migration affects the revenue of subpostmasters will depend on a number of factors, not least how benefit recipients and other post office customers respond to change.

Banking will be a central part of post offices' strategy to move forward. Universal banking services, together with Post Office Limited's plans for an expansion of network banking—the provision of counter services for ordinary current accounts—should lead to a substantial increase in the range and volume of banking at post offices, tapping into a very much larger customer base than benefit recipients alone. This should benefit subpostmasters both directly and through increased footfall, providing a major income stream offsetting the loss over time of the benefit book related revenue.

Universal banking services are due to be introduced in 2003 when migration of benefit payments by ACT is scheduled to begin. When that happens and whatever account people chose to have their benefits paid into, the Government is committed to ensuring that those who wish to do so will be able to continue to get their benefits in cash at post offices, in full and without charge.

European Investment Bank

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much venture capital the European Investment Bank has made available to small businesses since the European Council's meeting at Lisbon; how much of this capital has been made available to British businesses; and if she will make a statement. [57556]

Nigel Griffiths: The European Investment Bank (EIB) does not have direct responsibility for venture capital. Since June 2000 the European Investment Fund (EIF) has carried out all of EIB venture capital activity as the EIB's specialist risk capital arm.

During 2001 the EIF has invested EUR 800 million in 57 funds across Europe, primarily in the SME and start-up segments. As at the end of April 2002, EIF had a total of EUR 2115 million in venture capital operations signed.

EIF has invested EUR 504 million in UK funds including those that primarily invest in the UK and those based in the UK that have a multi-country investment strategy. This includes the single largest operation the EIF has approved with its commitment to invest EUR 86 million (£53.5 million) in the Regional Venture Capital Fund programme. Overall more than 400 companies based in Britain are benefiting from support through EIF venture capital activities.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list items exported to Zimbabwe from the UK since June 2001 of military use, with particular reference to Hawk parts. [57873]

Nigel Griffiths: Between 1 June 2001 and 3 May 2002 no Standard Individual Export Licences or Open Individual Export Licences have been issued where the end user is Zimbabwe for items on the Military List. I refer the hon. Member to the reply from my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston to my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley East and Mexborough of 12 May 2000, *Official Report*, columns 493–4W.

Export Finance

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the net cost or profit was of the fixed rate export finance scheme in each of the last three years excluding *(a)* transactions that were supported by SDR-based interest rates, *(b)* aerospace business under the Large Aircraft Sector Understanding and *(c)* the cost of ECGD's hedging operations. [58027]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD does not maintain its records in a way which enables it readily to report the net cost or profit of the FREF scheme on the basis you have asked.

However I can advise you that for each of the last three years for which audited figures are available the cost of FREF on all supported loans, not including the cost of ECGD's hedging operations, amounted to the following:

Year	*£ million*
1998–99	56.4
1999–2000	21.8
2000–01	65.1

Export Credits

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which coal-powered plants British businesses have been involved in for which they have received ECGD support; and what was *(a)* the name and location of, *(b)* the company involved, *(c)* the nature of the involvement of the British company, *(d)* the capacity in MW, *(e)* the estimated annual carbon dioxide emissions and *(f)* the amount of financial assistance provided by the ECGD in each case. [60617]

Ms Hewitt: The table lists the project name, country location, UK company involved, the nature of the involvement of that company, the capacity in MW, estimated carbon dioxide emissions and the value of the loan guaranteed by ECGD for each of the coal-fired power stations ECGD has supported since 1997.

In addition, ECGD has provided Overseas Investment Insurance and other insurances for seven other coal-fired power-stations with a total capacity of 4,960 MW and annual CO_2 emissions of approximately 17.9 million tonnes per year. Details of these projects are not disclosed, since such cases are treated as commercial in confidence.

It has been assumed that, upon completion, the plants listed below will operate for 60 per cent. of the time. CO_2 emissions have been calculated using the conversion factor of 0.687 tonnes of CO_2 per MW per hour. This is taken from The Greenhouse Gas Protocol website ("www.ghgprotocol.org") and is the 1999 average values for power plants in "Economies In Transition". These are the markets where ECGD most commonly provide guarantees.

Project	*Country*	*Company*	*Involvement*	*Capacity (MW)*	*CO_2 (Tonnes per year)*	*Loan Value £ million*
Shandong	China	Mitsui Babcock Energy Ltd.	Supply of boilers	3,000	10.8 million	213.5
Bulawayo	Zimbabwe	Mitsui Babcock Energy Ltd.	Refurbishment	120	0.4 million	5.6
Manjung	Malaysia	Alstom Power Ltd.	Engineering and construction	2,100	7.6 million	522.3
Alfin-Elbistan	Turkey	Corus UK Ltd.	Steel structures	1,080	3.9 million	8.4

It should be noted that for most large power projects ECGD is only one of several finance providers. Scaling the carbon emissions by the proportion of finance guaranteed by ECGD would give a figure of less than 14 million tonnes per year of carbon that is directly attributable to ECGD's participation.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much financial assistance was provided by the ECGD for British companies involved in the Sual power plant in the Philippines while it was being built; and how much of this money was *(a)* used by the companies involved and *(b)* returned to the ECGD. [60619]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD does not provide financial assistance for companies. It provides guarantees and insurance. In 1995 ECGD provided a guarantee to the value of £432 million in support of GEC Alstom's contract relating to the construction of the Saul Power Project.

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which UK companies the Export Credits Guarantee Department *(a)* has and *(b)* is supporting regarding their involvement in the Sual plant since it began operations; and how much financial assistance each company has received. [60618]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD does not provide financial assistance for companies. It provides guarantees and insurance. In 1995 ECGD provided a guarantee to the value of £432 million in support of GEC Alstom's contract relating to the construction of Sual Power Project.

Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action the Government have taken in relation to breaches of OPCW financial regulations by other member states. [57680]

Nigel Griffiths: The UK takes every opportunity in the OPCW Executive Council and also in private contacts to draw to the attention of states parties the need to pay their assessments in full and on time.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 9 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 304W, what Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons regulation permits the delay of payments by the US, Germany and Japan beyond the first day of the financial period to which they relate. [57679]

Nigel Griffiths: Financial Regulation 5.4 requires payment of contributions to the OPCW budget within 30 days of receipt of the notice of assessment or the first day of the financial period (1 January), whichever is the later. It has, however, been the practice of some member states to make staged payments or their entire payment at different times of the year to fit in with budgetary cycles or for other reasons.

40 of the 145 states parties, including the UK, paid their 2002 assessment by early January. At 15 May this had risen to 69 (including the USA). Germany has made a partial payment and is expected to pay in full by mid-year. Japan is expected to pay in full by mid-year.

Work-related Illness

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many days of sick leave were taken by employees in her Department in the last year for which records are available; what proportion of those were due to work-related illness or injury; and what the cost was to the Department. [56099]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The average number of staff days lost per staff year through sickness absence in the DTI Group in 2000 (the most recent figure available) was 7.5. The figure is taken from the annual report on public sector sick absence commissioned by the Cabinet Office each year. The DTI Group, in addition to DTI HQ, consists of: ACAS, Companies House, Patent Office, Insolvency Service, National Weights and Measures Laboratory, Employment Tribunals Service, and The Radiocommunications Agency.

The additional information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The DTI is committed to reducing the number of working days lost due to sickness absence including time lost due to work-related injuries and illness.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims for work-related illness were settled by her Department in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was in compensation. [56097]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* None in the financial year ended 31 March 2002.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many employees of her Department retired through work-related ill-health in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was to the Department. [56098]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* Records are not maintained by Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) which enable ill-health retirements to be separately identified as work-related. For DTI the number of staff retired with a medical retirement certificate issued by the civil service pension scheme medical adviser for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 was 17. Benefits provided on medical retirement are as set out in the rules of the Principal Civil Service Pension Scheme and laid before Parliament, and provide for an immediate payment of an enhanced pension and lump sum. Ill-health retirement expenditure is met centrally from the Civil Superannuation Vote. For the year ending March 2002, provisional expenditure met from the Vote was £310 million in respect of all civil service cases for which an ill-health pension has been awarded. These cases number approximately 67,000 and include those who have formerly been ill-health retired but who have now reached and exceeded the normal retirement age.

North Sea States Conference

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the recent conference of the North Sea states in Norway; which members of her Department attended it; what discussions took place; and what conclusions were reached. [58537]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 16 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 882W to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaenau Gwent (Mr. Llew Smith).

Air Pollutants Limits

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what EU air pollutants limits the UK has not transposed into national law. [58541]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

We are in the process of transposing the following Directives which either limit emissions of air pollutants or set limit values for concentrations of pollutants in ambient air: Directive 1999/13/EC on the limitation of emissions of volatile organic compounds due to the use of organic solvents in certain activities and installations, which sets limits on the use of certain solvents; Directive 2000/69/EC relating to limit values for benzene and carbon monoxide in ambient air; Directive 2000/76/EC on the incineration of waste, which sets limits for a range of emissions from incinerators to air; Directive 2001/80/EC on the limitations of emission of certain pollutants into the air from large combustion plants, which sets limits on the emissions of sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and dust; Directive 2001/81/EC on national emission ceilings for certain atmospheric pollutants, which sets national emission ceilings for sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, volatile organic compounds and ammonia; and Directive 2002/3/EC relating to ozone in ambient air which sets target values and long-term objectives for ozone.

Funding (Luton, South)

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what moneys have been provided *(a)* directly and *(b)* via agencies for which the Department has responsibility to the Luton South constituency since 1997. [58585]

Alan Johnson: In the period January 1997 to May 2002, the Department offered £179,000 under the Regional Selective Assistance and Regional Enterprise Grant schemes to companies in Luton South.

The Department has managed central Government funding to the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) since June 2001. However, DTI do not hold detailed information about EEDA's spend at constituency level.

The Small Business Service, an executive agency of the Department of Trade and Industry, funds Bedfordshire and Luton Chamber Business Enterprise but the Department does not hold detailed information about the SBS's spend at constituency level.

European Space Agency

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much the UK has contributed to the European Space Agency budget in each of the last five years. [58535]

Ms Hewitt: Figures for space expenditure contributed to the European Space Agency and co-ordinated through the British National Space Centre (BNSC) for each of the last five years, and for total civil space expenditure through BNSC, are as follows.

£ million

	ESA expenditure	*Total BNSC expenditure*
1997–98	133.25	183.18
1998–99	129.82	184.99
1999–2000	107.08	172.62
2000–01	98.00	177.38
2001–02	97.13	169.18

Transparency Review

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she intends to publish the Transparency Review. [58378]

Ms Hewitt: The Transparency Review was initiated in 1999 following the Comprehensive Spending Review. Its goal was to improve the accountability within the higher education sector for its use of public funds. The approach taken was to ensure that UK universities adopted a robust costing system to enable them to calculate the full economic costs of their main activities of teaching and research. An activity based costing methodology for this purpose was subsequently developed, and had been adopted by all UK HEIs by the end of 2001.

No separate report on the outcome of the review has been compiled. However, the data is being used by HEIs to inform their management processes.

Foresight Round

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if industrial participation in the new Foresight Round will be greater than in the previous round. [58376]

Ms Hewitt: Throughout its life, the Foresight programme has aimed to create new networks linking industry and academia to help the UK make best use of science and technology. Industrial participation remains central to the programme.

Of the 13 Foresight panels that were managed from within the Office of Science and Technology over the period 1999–2002, eight were chaired by industrialists, and about 50 per cent. of panel members were from business. During this period, Foresight established a regional network of coordinators. On-going regional initiatives, led by RDAs and others, working with trade associations and businesses to look ahead and identify opportunities and threats, have now gained a great deal of momentum. We expect this level of industrial engagement in Foresight to continue, and be enhanced by the next phase of projects.

Two pilot projects have just been announced, and a full programme will be agreed following wide consultation later this year. Each project will involve first hand input from industry, and will generate information and ideas, many of which will be important for businesses—to guide their current and future strategic thinking about commercial opportunities and threats.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how the main themes for the new Foresight Round were chosen. [58377]

Ms Hewitt: The next phase of the Foresight programme will be composed of a series of discrete projects, forming a rolling programme. A formal process is being instituted to identify suitable projects. The Government's chief scientific adviser (CSA) will be hosting a meeting of leading innovators from industry and academia in July 2002 to generate about a dozen ideas. This will be followed by a wide consultation with stakeholders from business, academia and Government before a formal programme of projects is agreed upon.

In order to maintain the momentum of the programme, and to refine the process for taking forward work, two pilot topics have been initiated. These are flood and coastal defence and cognitive systems. These were chosen by the chief scientific adviser, and endorsed by Ministers, after a consultation involving the Foresight Steering Group, the Foresight panels that were in place from 1999–2002, and Government Departments.

Miners' Compensation

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of full and final offers her Department aims to make to former miners seeking compensation in 2002 in the Cynon Valley. [58554]

Mr. Wilson: With regard to the respiratory disease scheme, we are committed to making 50,000 full and final offers GB-wide by the end of 2002—of which 15,000 will be in Wales. We remain on track to meet both these commitments.

On VWF, we remain on track to have medically assessed all validated claims by spring this year.

The Department does not set constituency specific targets.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what range of post-medical assessments procedure offers on vibration white finger and respiratory disease have been made in the Cynon valley. [58553]

Mr. Wilson: Claims for both respiratory disease and vibration white finger are settled under the tariffs detailed in the Claims Handling Agreements agreed between the Department and the claimants' solicitors. Claims are assessed on an individual basis, there are no minimum or maximum levels. In Cynon valley the range of offers is broken down as follows:

£

	Minimum	*Maximum*
Respiratory disease	Nil	157,941
Vibration white finger	Nil	27,410

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of miners' compensation claims registered in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* the Cynon valley have been settled with regard to (i) respiratory disease and (ii) vibration white finger. [58555]

Mr. Wilson: Detailed below is a breakdown of the percentage of claims which have received full and final settlement, broken down by scheme and location.

	GB-wide	*England*	*Wales*	*Cynon valley*
Respiratory disease				
Total number of claims	186,874	138,313	35,468	3,469
Total claims settled	26,337	19,816	4,923	431
Percentage of claims settled	14.1	14.3	13.9	12
Vibration white finger				
Total number of claims	141,487	115,505	17,554	1,952
Total claims settled	40,250	30,623	6,533	647
Percentage of claims settled	28.4	26.5	37.2	33

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures have been taken in South Wales to speed up the compensation process for former miners. [58557]

Mr. Wilson: The Department continues to work with the claimants' solicitors and other parties, through the Welsh Ministerial Monitoring Sub-Group, chaired by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Wales, to ensure that any backlogs and delays are dealt with as expeditiously as possible. Our claims handlers, IRISC, set up an office in Cardiff last year to speed up the handling of Welsh claims. Staff there work closely with the local solicitors.

The system is being constantly refined and improved. I have set clear targets which are on course to be met, and which will see 15,000 full and final respiratory disease offers made by the end of year. In Wales alone we have already seen over £152 million paid out under the coal health schemes.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage and what number of live claimants have undergone the full medical assessment process in the Cynon valley. [58556]

Mr. Wilson: In Cynon valley, 966 live respiratory disease claimants have been medical assessed, this forms 57 per cent. of the total number of live claimants.

In relation to vibration white finger, 1,196 live claimants have been medical assessed, this forms 64 per cent. of the total number of live claimants in Cynon valley.

Coal Health Claims

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will express the full and final offers of compensation for respiratory disease and vibration white finger as a percentage of live and deceased receipts for each constituency on the damages paid, broken down by constituency, page of her Department's Coal Health Claims website. [58839]

Mr. Wilson: The Department's claims handlers, IRISC, are unable to provide a breakdown of offers made by constituency in the time available. However, IRISC have been requested to provide a breakdown of offers made as part of the monthly constituency breakdown posted on the Department's Coal Health Claims website—www.dti.gov.uk/coalhealth. It is anticipated that these will be available in the next few months.

Coal Industry

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many miners were employed in the coal industry in each year since 1990 in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England and *(c)* Wales. [60309]

Mr. Wilson: Separate figures for Scotland, England and Wales are not available prior to 1996. Figures listed below for the period 1990–95 are taken from British Coal Colliery books.

	Total	*Scotland*	*England*	*Wales*
1990	49,000	—	—	—
1991	38,000	—	—	—
1992	28,000	—	—	—
1993	10,000	—	—	—
1994	7,000	—	—	—
1995	12,000	—	—	—
1996	14,776	1,923	11,146	1,707
1997	17,300	2,370	13,505	1,425
1998	17,182	2,476	13,171	1,535
1999	14,215	2,103	10,898	1,214
2000	11,228	1,895	8,364	969
2001[1]	11,430	2,038	8,384	1,008

[1] Provisional

Notes:

1. Figures up to 1994 record underground wage earners on British Coal Colliery books.
2. Figures from 1995 record the total number of persons employed during the year, and records deep mines only, including contractors.

Source:

1. Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics 1981.
2. The Coal Authority.

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much coal was imported into England in each year since 1997. [60282]

Mr. Wilson: Total imports of coal into the UK since 1997, in millions of tonnes, were as follows:

	Million tonnes
1997	19.7
1998	21.2
1999	20.3
2000	23.4
2001[1]	35.5

[1] Provisional

Source:

Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics, 2001 (The Stationery Office); Energy Trends, March 2002 (DTI publication).

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much anthracite has been produced in Wales in each year since 1997. [60307]

Mr. Wilson: Figures which are provided by coal producers to the Coal Authority are restricted to preserve individual company confidentiality. Publicly available total production figures for Wales since 1987, in millions of tonnes, are shown below. The majority of coal produced in Wales is anthracite.

	Million tonnes
1997	3.2
1998	2.5
1999	2.2
2000	2.1
2001[1]	2.1

[1] Provisional

Source:

Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics (The Stationery Office)

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much deep-mined coal has been produced in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England and *(c)* Wales in each year since 1997. [60279]

Mr. Wilson: The information available on the amount of deep-mined coal produced in Scotland, England and Wales relates to financial years and, in millions of tonnes, is as follows:

Output of deep-mined coal[1]

	Scotland	*England*	*Wales*
1996–97	1.4	29.8	0.9
1997–98	1.9	25.4	0.8
1998–99	1.6	21.4	0.7
1999–2000	1.0	17.9	0.6
2000–01	0.7	15.9	0.7
2001–02	0.8	16.7	0.7

[1] Output is the tonnage declared by operators to the Coal Authority, including estimated tonnages.

Source:

Coal Authority data as published in the Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics, 2001 (The Stationery Office).

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people were employed in opencast production in each year since 1997 in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* Wales and *(c)* England. [60286]

Mr. Wilson: The number of people employed in opencast coal production in Scotland, Wales and England since 1997 was as follows:

	Scotland	*Wales*	*England*
1997	1,169	632	1,918
1998	1,600	694	2,265
1999	1,301	550	1,882
2000	1,252	433	1,300
2001	1,267	456	1,068
2002	1,688	433	1,211

Source:

Coal Authority data as published in the Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics, 2001 (The Stationery Office).

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much opencast coal has been produced in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England and *(c)* Wales in each year since 1997. [60280]

Mr. Wilson: The information available on the total amount of opencast coal produced in Scotland, England and Wales relates to financial years and was, in millions of tonnes, as follows:

Output of opencast coal[1]

	Scotland	*England*	*Wales*
1996–97	5.4	8.4	2.3
1997–98	6.3	8.1	1.8
1998–99	6.4	7.0	1.5
1999–2000	7.2	6.2	1.5
2000–01	7.1	4.8	1.4
2001–02	8.2	4.9	1.2

[1] Output is the tonnage declared by operators to the Coal Authority, including estimated tonnages.

Source:

Coal Authority data as published in the Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics, 2001 (The Stationery Office).

Meeting (Detroit)

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the G8 nations meeting in Detroit; which members of her Department attended; what discussions took place; and what conclusions were reached. [58539]

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Construction, represented the UK at the G8 meeting of energy ministers, Detroit, 3 May 2002. He was supported by the Director General for Energy and four other officials.

Ministers highlighted the role of market forces, diversification of supplies, and energy efficiency in enhancing security of supply. Closer dialogue, and sharing of data and expertise were also needed, along with the physical protection of energy facilities and more flexible energy transport networks.

Ministers also highlighted the importance of improved energy security to economic growth, environmental protection and therefore sustainable development. In the associated open event for industry and non-government organisations, Brian Wilson emphasised the role of clean, reliable energy sources in addressing world poverty, and supported the recommendations of the G8 Renewable Energy Task Force. G8 Ministers reaffirmed the importance of renewable sources, as recognised by the Genoa G8 Economic Summit. They committed to encourage the development and introduction of clean energy technologies, including renewables, as well as energy efficiency, at the World Summit on Sustainable Development and elsewhere. They agreed also to strengthen co-operation on energy science and technology, particularly in the areas of emerging renewable sources, energy efficiency, and cleaner energy technologies.

There were no formal conclusions but the co-Chairs, Spencer Abraham, US Energy Secretary and Herb Dhaliwal, Canadian minister for Natural Resources issued a statement, the text of which has today been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Arms Trade

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further measures she plans to take to tackle corruption in the arms trade involving UK individuals and companies; and if she will make a statement. [58750]

Nigel Griffiths: We view corruption in the arms trade as seriously, as corruption in any other field of commerce.

The UK signed up to the OECD Convention On Combating Bribery Of Foreign Public Officials In International Business Transactions in December 1997. The UK will continue to work with OECD countries and others to extend and deepen international commitments designed to stamp out bribery.

The Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act (2001), which came into effect on 14 February 2002, allows the UK authorities to prosecute UK citizens and companies for bribery even when the act takes place abroad, and made explicit that the legislation covered foreign public officials.

Correspondence

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many letters were received by each Minister in her Department in each month since June 1997. [59308]

Ms Hewitt: The Cabinet Office, on an annual basis, publishes a report to Parliament on the volume of Members' correspondence received by departments. The Report for 2001 was on Friday 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 674–76W. Copies of previous reports are available in the Libraries of the House.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps her Department is taking to comply with Government policy on age discrimination. [59213]

Ms Hewitt: As an equal opportunities employer, my Department regularly monitors its personnel procedures, including by age, to identify any potential discrimination. The Department aims to be fair to everyone and ensure that no eligible job applicant or employee receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of age. For example internal job applicants are not required to give details of their age nor does age appear on staff appraisal reports.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies have a policy of not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age. [59450]

Ms Hewitt: The normal age of retirement for staff in my Department is either 60 or 65, depending on the grade held by the individual.

All applications for employment in my Department are considered on their merits, against the criteria and competences required for particular opportunities. New entrants are expected to complete a minimum of between one and three years' service, before they reach their normal age of retirement, to complete a probationary period and to justify the expense of recruitment and initial training.

Launch Aid

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to review the future of Launch Aid. [59406]

Alan Johnson: The aerospace industry obtains a broad range of support from the Department of Trade and Industry, including Launch Investment and support for research and technology. The support mechanisms are constantly kept under review to ensure they deliver value for tax payers' money while underpinning the industry's efforts to raise productivity and competitiveness.

The Aerospace Innovation and Growth Team (IGT), which was launched on 16 May 2002, will wish to consider the support available to the aerospace sector as part of their remit of looking at medium and long-term strategic issues affecting the aerospace sector. The Government and the industry partnership through the IGT is aimed at improving innovation and competitiveness in the aerospace industry.

General Agreement on Trade in Services

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement specifying Government commitments made under current negotiations for the WTO's General Agreement on Trade in Services. [58203]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* There have been none. Any proposed commitments would first be tabled as conditional offers, in response to requests received. The Doha WTO Ministerial Declaration set June 2002 as the date for the submission of requests and March 2003 for the tabling of initial offers. We intend to consult widely between these dates.

Pipeline Capacity

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how much free capacity there is in each pipeline in St. Fergus; [58893]

(2) what the Government are doing to ensure that existing pipeline capacity is fully utilised; [59383]

(3) what steps the Government are taking to ensure that existing pipeline capacity is fully utilised; [58894]

(4) how much free capacity exists in each pipeline that goes to St. Fergus. [59382]

Mr. Wilson: Determining the available capacity in gas pipelines is technically very complex and dependent on a number of factors including gas specification, entry location, existing gas flows and relative demand. Pipeline owners therefore undertake calculations on a case by case basis for each new prospective entrant and the results are commercially sensitive. On a broad level, certain pipelines currently have a reasonably constant level of spare capacity while others may have some spare capacity on a seasonal basis only. Additional annual spare capacity in the pipelines to St. Fergus is expected to begin to develop from about 2003–04.

Through PILOT, the Government and industry are pursuing a programme of activities aimed at maximising production of offshore oil and gas and encouraging commercial discussions between UK pipeline owners and Norwegian licensees. These activities, measures in hand to revise the industry's Code of Practice on access to offshore infrastructure, and the development of new guidance on the regulation of third party access to upstream pipelines will help to bring forward new developments which may be expected to utilise existing offshore infrastructure, including the pipelines to St. Fergus.

North Sea Fiscal Regime

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions regarding the change in the North sea fiscal regime were conducted with PILOT prior to the announcement of the 2002 Budget. [59385]

Mr. Wilson: Tax policy is a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The reforms of the North sea fiscal regime announced in Budget 2002 were not discussed in advance in PILOT.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how the Government have assessed the likely effects of reduced industry cash flow due to North sea taxation changes on exploration and appraisal drilling in the North sea. [59375]

Mr. Wilson: Last year, after investing nearly £4 billion, the North sea oil and gas industry generated cash flow of close to £10 billion after all taxes. The impact on industry cash flow of the changes to North sea taxation announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of Exchequer in Budget 2002 will depend, among other things such as the level of oil and gas prices, on the level of industry investment. The carefully designed package of measures combines two key elements—a 10 per cent. supplementary charge and a 100 per cent. investment allowance. The third element, abolition of North sea royalty, will of course increase rather than reduce industry cash flow.

Reserved Powers

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to transfer the administration of reserved powers and functions of its executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies within its remit from her Department to the Scotland Office. [59516]

Alan Johnson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to her by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 24 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 600W.

Scottish Executive

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many representations the Scottish Executive has made to her Department since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date; [59517]

(2) how many times her office has made representations to the Scottish Executive since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* department approached, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [59518]

Alan Johnson: Information is not available in the form requested. Both formal and informal contacts take place regularly between Government Departments, including DTI, and departments of the Scottish Executive.

Light Source CASIM Project

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what location is being considered for the Fourth Generation Light Source CASIM project; and if she will make a statement. [58612]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* The proposal for a Fourth Generation Light Source forms one element of the CASIM project. Having passed a scientific peer review organised by the Engineering and Physical Science Research Council on behalf of the Research Councils it will now proceed to the next stage of the Gateway Process, with the development of a business case. This will be followed by further discussions on how the project might be taken forward.

Credit Support

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to what extent export credit support is conditional upon a percentage of sourcing of UK content; how that content is measured, assessed and monitored; and whether the percentage of UK content varies between categories and sectors of exports. [59194]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD's main purpose is to facilitate the export of UK goods and services and therefore, the existence of UK content is a pre-requisite of ECGD cover. Each case is considered on its merits but ECGD will consider supporting whatever amount of UK content is contained in a contract.

The UK exporter informs ECGD of the amount of UK content contained in the export contract and ECGD's guarantee documentation will reflect the level of support. Compliance may be monitored by the bank financing the transaction or by ECGD's own auditors.

Dimethyl Ether

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the potential use of dimethyl ether as a fuel in vehicles. [59680]

Mr. Wilson: None. I am advised that dimethyl ether is still in the very early stages of development.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research her Department has commissioned into the use of dimethyl ether. [59671]

Mr. Wilson: None.

Bio-diesel

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many forecourts in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland sell bio-diesel. [59734]

Mr. Wilson: To our knowledge there are no forecourts in the UK marketing bio-diesel or blended bio-diesel, although there is a growing number of commercial fleets using blended bio-diesel.

Better Public Buildings Initiative

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what guidelines her Department has issued to the regional development agencies on delivering the commitments set out in the Prime Minister's Better Public Buildings Initiative. [59824]

Alan Johnson: DTI is working with all its property centres, including RDAs, to develop its response to the Prime Minister's Better Public Buildings Initiative. An action plan will be published in due course.

Departmental Staff

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many staff in her Department and what proportion of the total workforce are aged *(a)* over 50 and *(b)* over 60. [59445]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The table shows the total number of staff in DTI HQ with the number of staff aged over 50 and over 60 shown as a number and as a percentage of the total. Staff aged 60 have been included in the lower age band.

	51–60	*61 and over*	*Grand total*
Total	1,085	83	4,584
Per cent. of total	23.67	1.81	—

Departmental Employment Opportunities

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what procedures she has put in place to ensure employment opportunities in her own Department. [59444]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* All external recruitment into my Department is conducted under the principle of selection on merit, on the basis of fair and open competition.

Awareness of opportunities for employment is achieved by advertising openly in the press and on the Department's dedicated recruitment website, as well as at careers events.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many employers in Scotland have failed to pay the national minimum wage to the 18 to 21 age group since its introduction. [59646]

Alan Johnson: The Inland Revenue enforce the minimum wage on behalf of the Department. They completed almost 1,700 investigations in Scotland between April 1999 and 31 March 2002, with non-compliance being discovered in 27 per cent. of cases. During this period wages arrears of £600,000 were identified in Scotland. There are no separate figures for the 18 to 21 age group.

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will abolish the lower rate of the minimum wage. [59644]

Alan Johnson: The national minimum wage rates are set by Government following recommendations from the independent Low Pay Commission. The Commission recommended the establishment of a lower rate in their first report (June 1998). The Government were happy to accept that recommendation and we have no plans to abolish the separate rate for those aged 18 to 21 inclusive. We expect shortly to issue the Commission with new terms of reference and will carefully consider any recommendations that they subsequently submit to us.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people aged *(a)* between 18 and 21 and *(b)* over 21 years are receiving the national minimum wage in Scotland, broken down by parliamentary constituency or nearest available area. [60271]

Alan Johnson: Estimates for beneficiaries of the national minimum wage by parliamentary constituency or nearest area are not available.

Around 110,000 people in Scotland stood to benefit from the October 2001 increase in the national minimum wage.

About one in 15 of the people who stood to benefit from the October 2001 increase in the national minimum wage in the UK as a whole were aged 18 to 21.

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many people in Strathkelvin and Bearsden are receiving the minimum wage. [60534]

Alan Johnson: Estimates for beneficiaries of the National Minimum Wage by parliamentary constituency are not available.

Around 110,000 people in Scotland stood to benefit from the October 2001 increase in the National Minimum Wage.

Liabilities Management Authority

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who has been appointed as a partner contractor for the Liabilities Management Unit; and if she will make a statement. [60029]

Mr. Wilson: A partner contractor for the Liabilities Management Unit has yet to be appointed. My officials are in discussion with the preferred bidder over contract arrangements. I will make an announcement when a contract has been agreed.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when she will publish the Bill to establish the Liabilities Management Authority; and if she will make a statement; [60027]

(2) when she expects the Liabilities Management Authority to be operational. [60026]

Mr. Wilson: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry made clear in her statement to the House on 28 November 2001, the establishment of the Liabilities Management Authority will require primary legislation. A Bill will be introduced at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many staff, by grade, are *(a)* planned for and *(b)* appointed to her Liabilities Management Unit; and what its budget will be *(a)* this year and *(b)* in the next two years. [60028]

Mr. Wilson: The Liabilities Management Unit (LMU) comprises a mix of private and public sector employees, the majority of whom are secondees from BNFL and UKAEA. The Director is on loan from the private sector and is a Senior Civil Service equivalent. The remaining staff are mostly Band C or equivalent. There are currently 19 staff in the LMU. The make up of the team will be kept under review but it is not expected to increase significantly. The LMU's administrative budget for 2002–03 is around £1.5 million and similar amounts are likely to be needed in the following two years.

Small Businesses

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent measures she has taken to ensure that new regulations do not place an unnecessary burden on small business. [59010]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* Regulatory Impact Assessments (RIAs) have to be produced for all new regulations, setting out clearly the costs and benefits with full recognition of small business concerns. The Department's policy is to "think small first": the Small Business Service has to be consulted on all RIAs to ensure that the impact on small firms is not disproportionate.

Subcontractors

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps are being taken to amend the regulations governing labour-only subcontractors. [59641]

Mr. Wilson: It is not clear precisely from the question which regulations governing labour-only subcontractors are being referred to.

If my hon. Friend cares to write to me with more details, I will consider the points raised.

Start-up Companies

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to improve access to finance for start-up companies. [59009]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The Government recognises that the creation of new businesses is important for the health of the economy. The Small Business Service (SBS) is encouraging more people to start their own businesses. Through the network of Business Link operators, it operates a number of programmes aimed at helping small businesses, including start-up businesses, gain access to finance. The latest of this is the Regional Venture Capital Funds launched in January 2002.

Trade Subsidies

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how the Export Credits Guarantee Department's financial support for British industry complies with the Government's policy of world trade negotiation for the elimination of subsidies; and if she will make a statement. [60322]

Ms Hewitt: The basis on which ECGD provides support is consistent with multilateral trade agreements such as the OECD Arrangement on Guidelines for Officially Supported Export Credits. The arrangement, which has been adopted into EU law by means of a Council Decision, provides a framework regulating, inter alia, credit terms, risk premium, officially supported interest rates and tied aid. Such support is consistent with the Government's policy in WTO negotiations of seeking to eliminate trade distorting subsidies on a multilateral basis.

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how she proposes to achieve the phasing out of subsidies by the Export Credits Guarantee Department. [60514]

Ms Hewitt: A study is currently being carried out by National Economic Research Associates (NERA) to assess the overall contribution that ECGD makes to the UK economy. This work will look at both the potential resource cost to the Government of the use of its balance sheet in providing export credit support and the economic benefits to the UK that accrue through the public provision of export credits to UK industry. The results of the NERA report will be used to develop the policies needed to maximize the benefits to the UK economy of ECGD's activities.

Fireworks

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans the Government have to introduce legislation to restrict the sale of fireworks. [60480]

Mr. Wilson: The Fireworks (Safety) Regulations 1997 introduced comprehensive controls on the types and sizes of fireworks which can be sold to the public. I have no plans to introduce further legislation.

Tyres (Disposal)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what incentives she has given to encourage *(a)* recycling and *(b)* cascade use of scrapped tyres. [60641]

Mr. Wilson: Over the years the Government have provided financial support to a number of tyre recycling projects, across a broad spectrum of activity, at various stages of development. R & D has received support through schemes such as SMART, Partners in Innovation and those run by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council. Companies have also received grants where they have chosen to establish themselves in particular areas of the country eligible for support under schemes such as regional selective assistance.

The Government have been working with the tyre industry since 1995 through the Used Tyre Working Group, which includes the four major tyre associations and representatives from the DTI and the Environment Agency. This group produces an annual report which identifies the main destinations for scrapped tyres, and presents statistics which quantify tyre recovery rates. This information is made widely available.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she has put in place to ensure that whole tyres will be properly disposed of once they are banned from landfill sites. [60639]

Mr. Wilson: We are working closely with the industry and regulatory authorities such as the Environment Agency on tyre disposal and recovery issues. The proper disposal of tyres forms an important element of this work. The agency is committed to a long term programme, leading up to the landfill tyre ban, aimed at improving industry's awareness of its disposal responsibilities, backed up by effective enforcement action. We wholeheartedly endorse this programme and have provided additional funding to strengthen the agency's enforcement capabilities in this area.

It will be necessary to ensure that the framework underpinning the tyre landfill ban promotes responsible tyre disposal and recovery. In April, DTI issued a discussion document on used tyre issues which included a possible statutory producer responsibility model. Comments on that discussion paper have been requested by 12 July 2002. We will consider next steps in light of the responses received.

Aerospace Industry

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proposals she has to assist aerospace businesses and their employees made redundant since 11 September 2001. [60179]

Alan Johnson: The DTI is supporting the aerospace industry by investing nearly £1 billion in product development by Rolls-Royce and Airbus, by providing funding for a long-term research effort in aerospace and by supporting competitiveness improvement activities throughout the supply chain.

Substantial funds have been made available by the DFES for use by the jobcentre plus rapid response service job focused training to assist those made redundant to take up retraining opportunities and thus remain skilled and able to re-enter the labour market.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many jobs have been lost in aerospace since 11 September 2001, broken down by constituency; and when she plans to visit those constituencies. [60180]

Alan Johnson: The latest estimate is that there have been approximately 14,000 direct job losses in the aerospace industry since 11 September 2001. A breakdown of this figure is given in the table by company and as far as possible by location but not by constituency as these data are not available.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has been in contact with the industry's representatives but is not planning any constituency visits dealing solely with job losses.

UK aerospace job losses since 11 September 2002

Company	*Job losses*	*Anticipated job losses*	*Location*
Airbus UK	0	—	(Early retirements made cuts unnecessary)
Alenia Marconi Systems	98	—	Cwmbran, Wales
Augusta Westland formerly GKN Westland Helicopters	650	—	Cowes, Isle of Wight
	70	—	Yeovil
	350	—	Weston-super-Mare

UK aerospace job losses since 11 September 2002

Company	*Job losses*	*Anticipated job losses*	*Location*
BAE Systems	800	—	Brough, Humberside
	993	—	Woodford, Cheshire
	—	454	(At risk)
	—	220	(Voluntary redundancy)
Centrax	250	—	Newton Abbot, SW England
DPS Composites Aerospace	50	—	Pembroke Dock, Wales
FLS Aerospace	620	—	Manchester
GE Aero Engines	170	—	Natgarw, South Wales
GE Caledonian	350	—	Prestwick
Hamble Aerostructures	95	—	Southampton, SE England
Rolls Royce	1,900	—	Derby
	450	—	Glasgow
	450	—	Bristol
	1,000	—	Other
	1,000	—	Temporary staff
Shorts/Bombardier	2,000	—	Belfast, Northern Ireland
Smiths	1,200	—	Not Known
Thales Defence Ltd.	470	—	Bracknell
Trefn	123	—	Llay, Wales
TRW Aeronautical Systems	370	—	Not Known
Total losses	13,459	674	

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether she will seek the co-operation of other European Ministers to establish a co-ordinated programme of assistance for areas suffering the aerospace downturn. [60181]

Alan Johnson: The DTI is co-operating with our European partners on a wide number of aerospace issues designed to ensure the long term prosperity of the industry. However, we consider that the areas affected by the recent downturn are best helped by continuing a sound macro-economic policy and by assisting those made redundant to re-skill themselves.

New Direct Bank

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to her answer of 20 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 48W, on the new direct bank, for what reason she was unable to provide information on whether all benefit claimants will have access to the new direct bank; when she expects the new direct bank to be established; which *(a)* banks and *(b)* building societies have agreed to deliver the new direct bank services; and with which company a contract has been signed for the benefit payment card account. [60451]

Mr. Timms: My hon. Friend, the former Minister for Competitiveness and E-Commerce, was unable to provide information on "the new direct bank" because there was and is no such entity on which to provide information.

Universal banking services consist of two elements, post office access to the banks' own basic bank accounts and a simple card account at Post Office for benefit and tax credit recipients. These are scheduled for delivery in advance of the migration of benefit payment to ACT which begins in April 2003.

Barclays, Lloyds TSB, Royal Bank of Scotland/Nat West, HSBC, Abbey National, HBOS, Alliance and Leicester, NAG, the Co-operative bank and the Nationwide building society have agreed to make their own basic bank accounts accessible at post offices and to support setting up a simple card account accessible only at post offices.

Post Office Ltd. has contracted with EDS for the outsourced services for the card account.

The Government are developing a detailed migration and marketing strategy for the transition to ACT. The emphasis of the ACT migration and marketing strategy will be to ensure that each customer has the best bank account for his or her circumstances. Conventional and basic bank accounts offer more services and do not have the limitations of the card account and so are likely to be the best option for the vast majority of people. There will, however, be no eligibility criteria or cap on card account numbers. And whatever type of account is used, we remain fully committed to meeting the Prime Minister's pledge that those who wish to do so will be able to continue to get their benefits in cash at post offices, in full and without charge.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee on statistics relating to the trading of goods between member states is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [58440]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

The legal basis for the Committee on statistics relating to the trading of goods between member states is at Article 29 of Council Regulation (EEC) No. 3330/91. The mandate of the committee is to examine any question relating to the implementation of this regulation.

The committee has met three times over the last 12 months.

The UK is normally represented by two officials from HM Customs and Excise.

Travel expenses for one official are reimbursed by the Commission. The usual cost of overnight accommodation and subsistence per day per official is 224 euro (£146.40).

Items considered by the committee all relate to the implementation, interpretation and application of EC legislation dealing with the collection of intra EC trade statistics.

Accountability and transparency to Parliament is ensured by the regular EU process. EU documents which fall within the Scrutiny Terms of Reference are deposited with Parliament along with an Explanatory Memorandum for examination by the Scrutiny Committees.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee on statistics relating to the trading of goods with non-member countries is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [58441]

Mr. Boateng: I have been asked to reply.

The legal basis for the Committee on statistics relating to the trading of goods with non-member countries is at Article 20 of Council Regulation (EEC) No. 1172/95. The mandate of the committee is to examine any question relating to the implementation of this regulation.

The committee has met three times over the last 12 months.

The UK is normally represented by two officials from HM Customs and Excise.

Travel expenses for one official are reimbursed by the Commission. The usual cost of overnight accommodation and subsistence per day per official is 224 euro (£146.40).

Items considered by the committee all relate to the implementation, interpretation and application of EC legislation dealing with the collection of intra EC trade statistics.

Accountability and transparency to Parliament is ensured by the regular EU process. EU documents which fall within the Scrutiny Terms of Reference are deposited with Parliament along with an Explanatory Memorandum for examination by the Scrutiny Committees.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Contact Committee on combating money laundering is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56749]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The role and responsibilities of the Contact Committee on Money Laundering are set out in Article 13 of Council Directive 91/308/EEC of 10 June 1991 on prevention of the use of the financial system for the purpose of money laundering (*Official Journal* L166, 28/06/1991 P. 0077–0083).

The committee meets either at the request of the chair or of the delegation of a member state. Since May 2001, it has met three times. The UK is represented by officials from HM Treasury and the Home Office.

The information regarding the annual cost of the committee's work to public funds can be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

At its most recent meeting, the committee considered implementation of the Second EU Money Laundering Directive, the anti-money laundering systems in accession candidate countries, protecting employees making Suspicious Transaction Reports and implementation of the Financial Action Task Force Special Recommendations on terrorist financing.

The Contact Committee on Money Laundering is primarily intended to facilitate consultation between officials from member states and to allow for exchange of views and experiences on money laundering issues. The committee does not take any decisions.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the Adaptation to Technical Progress of the Directive on the Removal of Technical Barriers to Trade in Construction Plant and Equipment is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55214]

Ms Hewitt: It is my understanding that the hon. Member is referring to the Committee on the Adaptation to Technical Progress set up under Article 4 of Directive 79/113/EEC on the approximation of laws of the member states relating to the determination of the noise emission of construction plant and equipment. This committee has not met for several years because Directive 79/113/EEC was being superseded by Directive 2000/14/EC and was repealed on 3 January 2002 when Directive 2000/14/EC came fully into force. There is therefore no cost to public funds.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on Restrictive Practices and Dominant Positions is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55218]

Ms Hewitt: I have nothing further to add to the answer I gave to the hon. Member's questions numbers 55219, 55220, and 55221 on 22 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 343–44W.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the Adaptation to Technical Progress of Directives on the Removal of Technical Barriers to Trade in the Lifting and Mechanical Handling of Appliances is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55373]

Ms Hewitt: Directive 84/528/EEC, on the approximation of the laws of the member states relating to common provisions for lifting and mechanical handling appliances, was repealed on 1 July 1999 by the Lifts Directive 95/16/EC. The work of the above committee has been incorporated into the Standing Committee for the Lifts Directive. I therefore refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 21 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 235W.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Advisory Committee on concentrations between undertakings is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55222]

Ms Hewitt: The Advisory Committee on concentrations between undertakings is the body through which the European Commission carries out its duty to consult the competent authorities of the member states before making certain decisions on cases being considered under the EC Merger Regulation (Regulation (EEC) 4064/89 as amended). These decisions concern declaring whether a concentration is compatible with the common market following a detailed 'Phase 2' investigation, and decisions on the imposition of fines and penalty payments. The Advisory Committee may also be convened to discuss policy issues relating to the implementation of the EC Merger regulation.

The DTI, the OFT and the Competition Commission are all competent authorities for the purposes of the ECMR. In practice, however, the UK is almost always represented at the Advisory Committee by the OFT.

The committee meets as required, dependant upon the number of cases reaching the relevant stages of the ECMR process. The committee has met 16 times in the last 12 months. Cases that are currently subject to a phase 2 investigation under the ECMR and, as such, may come before the Advisory Committee include 'Haniel/ Cementbouw/JV (CVK), Carnival Corporation/P&O Princess' and 'Promatech/Sulzer'.

The opinions of the Advisory Committee on merger cases are published in the *Official Journal* of the European Communities, as are final Commission decisions. In its response to the Commission's recent Green Paper on the Review of the ECMR, the UK suggested a number of ways in which the transparency of the Advisory Committee's work could be further enhanced.

It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the Harmonisation of National Legislation Relating to Recreational Craft is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55361]

Ms Hewitt: It is my understanding that the hon. Member is referring to the Standing Committee set up under Article 6 of the Directive 94/25/EC on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions of the member states relating to recreational craft. The mandate of the committee is contained in Article 6 of that directive. This committee has not met for several years and there are no meetings planned in near future. There is therefore no cost to public funds.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Advisory Committee for the implementation of the general framework for Community activities in favour of consumers is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [57492]

Ms Hewitt: The Advisory Committee for the implementation of the general framework for Community activities in favour of consumers was established by Decision No. 283/1999/EC. It has the remit of advising the European Commission on the provision of financial support for the activities of European consumer organisations and for specific projects to promote the interests of consumers in member states.

The committee currently considers the criteria for the two annual calls for the submission of bids for financial support and advises the European Commission on the selection of successful activities and projects.

The committee has met twice over the last 12 months and is attended by one UK official. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

> "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of the House on 26 February, COM(2001)783Final.

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Co-ordinating Committee on Fusion Energy EC-USA is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [58398]

Ms Hewitt: This committee, which meets once a year co-ordinates and supervises the EU-USA collaboration agreement on fusion energy research. There is one UK representative on the committee and the annual cost is low as this meeting is generally held at the same time and venue place as other fusion meetings, there are therefore no extra travel costs.

The agreement covers joint research on European and US facilities, particularly exchanges of staff and loans of equipment. Europe's Joint European Torus (JET) fusion facilities and the UK's domestic experiment, the Mega Amp Spherical Tokamak (MAST), at Culham, benefit from these. The records of these meetings are available on request from my Department.

Saltwood Post Office

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the closure of Saltwood post office is consistent with her policy on rural post offices. [57798]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* I understand from Post Office Ltd. that Saltwood post office is classified as an urban outlet. As a result of representations received by the company this has been reviewed recently and the classification reconfirmed.

The Government's formal requirement placed on Consignia in November 2000 to maintain the rural network and to prevent avoidable closures remains in place.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the classification by Consignia of Saltwood post office as an urban post office is in accordance with her policy. [57789]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The Government's formal requirement placed on Consignia in November 2000 to maintain the rural network and to prevent avoidable closures remains in place. A rural post office is one defined as serving up to 10,000 inhabitants and it is the responsibility of Post Office Ltd. to classify outlets accordingly.

Post Office Closures

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when information relating to post office closures ceased to be made available on a constituency basis; and for what reason this was done. [55024]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 9 May 2002]:* I am informed by Post Office Ltd. that information on the total number of post offices and a breakdown of urban and rural outlets for each Government office region is provided to Postcomm and Postwatch on a quarterly basis.

Information has not been maintained on the basis of parliamentary constituencies as the company does not require these data for operational reasons. The latest information available remains a special exercise undertaken by the Post Office in 1999 to determine the numbers of post offices in each parliamentary constituency and how many of them derive more than 40 per cent. of their income from benefits work. That information is set out in the reply given to the then hon. Member for Birmingham on 29 November 1999, *Official Report*, column 22W.

However, I understand from Post Office Ltd. that it is now conducting additional work on a further exercise to identify the number of post offices in each parliamentary constituency as at the end of the financial year 2001–02.

Post Offices

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices there were in each constituency in each year since 1995; and how many in each constituency in each year covered a population of 10,000 or less. [58212]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* I am advised by Post Office Ltd. that information on post office numbers has not been maintained on the basis of parliamentary constituencies as the company does not require these data for operational reasons. However, I understand from the company that it is now conducting additional work on an exercise to identify the number of post offices in each parliamentary constituency as at the end of the financial year 2001–02.

The latest constituency-based information available remains a special exercise undertaken by the Post Office in 1999 to determine the numbers of post offices in each parliamentary constituency and how many of them derive more than 40 per cent. of their income from benefits work. That information is set out in the reply given to the then hon. Member for Birmingham on 29 November 1999, *Official Report*, column 22W.

Postcodes

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received regarding requests from communities to change their postcode; and if she will make a statement. [59591]

Mr. Timms: This is a matter that falls within the day to day responsibility of Consignia and I have therefore asked the chief executive to reply direct to my hon. Friend.

Disclosure of Interests

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what rules apply to the disclosure of interests on the part of those serving on public bodies which are responsible to her Department. [56461]

Ms Hewitt: All advisory and executive non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) are required to adopt a board members' code, based on guidance produced by the Cabinet Office, and this includes maintaining a register of interests. The definition of interests is for individual Departments to decide since they are best placed to judge what might be thought to influence members of their NDPBs.

The table which lists the NDPBs sponsored by this Department and in each case indicates where the relevant Code of Practice is available has been placed in the Library.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Golden Jubilee

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with Southwark council on flying the Union Flag to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and if she will make a statement. [57788]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* I have had no discussions with Southwark council about the flying of the Union Flag to celebrate the Queen's Golden Jubilee.

I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer I gave on 14 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 589W, to the hon. Member for North Thanet (Mr. Gale), which outlines flag arrangement including those for the Golden Jubilee weekend.

Playing Fields

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will provide a breakdown by site owner type/category of planning consultations received by Sport England in relation to change of use on playing fields received in the years *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02; and how many had planning permission granted. [57629]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The breakdown by site owner type/category of planning applications affecting playing fields received by Sport England in their capacity as statutory consultee are listed in the table. Data for the year 2001–02, and that relating to whether planning permission was granted to applications from particular types of site ownership or categories are not available.

Site owner type/category	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Private sports club	117	148
Local authority	112	180
Local education authority/ community school	294	404
Foundation school	20	24
Higher education/college	36	43
Health authority	3	4
Ministry of Defence	3	3
Other	67	90
Not known	5	6

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many consultations were received by Sport England in *(a)* 1999–2000, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 2001–02 in relation to change of use of playing fields; on how many in each year Sport England raised no objections; and how many had planning permission granted. [57630]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* Sport England in their role as statutory consultee for planning applications affecting playing fields received 657 such applications for the year 1999–2000, and of those, 625 applications fell under their remit as a statutory consultee. Of this number, Sport England raised no objection to 492 applications, all of which contained proposals which had no detrimental effect on the stock or quality of playing pitches on playing fields, or to sport as a whole. 431 of these applications received planning permission.

Sport England in their role as statutory consultee for planning applications affecting playing fields received 902 such applications for the year 2001–02, and of those, 875 applications fell under their remit as a statutory consultee. Of this number, Sport England raised no objection to 743 applications, all of which contained proposals which had no detrimental effect on the stock or quality of playing pitches on playing fields, or to sport as a whole. 611 of these applications received planning permission. Figures for the year 2001–02 are not available.

Planning applications affecting playing fields can often involve a change of use that benefits sport rather than resulting in the outright sale of playing fields or their development. It should also be noted that where planning permission is granted this does not necessarily mean that the proposed development or change of use went ahead. Data are not collected centrally on whether planning applications are actually implemented.

National Stadium

Kate Hoey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what payment was made to CITEX/ Sport Concepts for their report to Sport England on athletics' provision at the English National Stadium, Wembley. [57503]

Tessa Jowell: I understand that Sport England have paid £50,723 plus VAT to CITEX/Sports Concepts for the athletics report.

Internet Services

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what criteria she uses to ensure fair competition in the provision of internet services by broadcasters. [57936]

Dr. Howells: The provision of internet services by UK undertakings, including those of UK broadcasters, are subject to competition legislation.

Broadcasters (Fair Trading)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what criteria she uses to ensure the observance of the fair trading commitment by broadcasters. [57937]

Dr. Howells: The provision of broadcasting services potentially falls within the ambit of the Competition Act 1998 and Fair Trading Acts. Responsibility for considering complaints, and for enforcing the law if necessary, rests with the Office of Fair Trading. In addition, the BBC's commercial activities are subject to its own fair trading commitment, which reflects and in some respects goes beyond the statutory requirements. This is set out in the BBC's published commercial policy guidelines and is monitored by the Board of Governors. An independent review by Professor Richard Whish, published in May 2001, concluded that the fair trading commitment and the guidelines are appropriate to ensure that the BBC does not distort competition in commercial markets and recommended no changes.

Delegations (Scottish Representation)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether a Scottish Executive Minister will be a member of the United Kingdom's delegation to the Culture/Audiovisual European Union Council of Ministers meeting on 23 May; and what information is being provided by her Department to assist pre-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [58304]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* No Minister from the Scottish Executive was present at the EU Council of Ministers meeting on cultural and audiovisual matters on 23 May 2002. Ministers from the devolved Administrations have attended Council meetings in the past and are welcome to do so in future. My officials have consulted their counterparts in the devolved Administrations on a number of agenda items and have provided copies of relevant papers.

Tourism

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has made to the Department of Trade and Industry about the support regional development agencies should give to capital infrastructure projects which benefit tourism. [58580]

Dr. Howells: The announcement on 13 May about the structural reform of English tourism represents a radical change and made clear that regional development agencies will in future play a stronger part in the strategic leadership of tourism. We have been in close discussion with the Department of Trade and Industry about these proposals.

The Government will continue to encourage RDAs to take account of the huge importance of tourism to their regions, both its direct and indirect impacts, when they take decisions about allocating the funds over which they have direct and indirect control.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to her answer of 10 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 385W, what her latest assessment is of the wage costs of the tourism industry. [58663]

Dr. Howells: It is not possible to estimate the current wage costs of the tourism industry since the sector is formed of parts of a diverse set of industries whose businesses serve both tourists and non-tourists.

The Office for National Statistics publishes estimates of the cost of compensation for employees by standard industry sub-sectors (eg hotels and restaurants) in its publication UK Input-Output Analyses 2001 edition, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to strengthen the role of local authorities in tourism development. [58533]

Dr. Howells: Local authorities spend over £90 million a year promoting and developing tourism in their areas and are key partners in ensuring the success of the Government's modernisation and reform agenda.

The announcement on 13 May about the structural reform of English tourism represents a radical change and I am involving local government representatives closely in preparing to implement that change.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what bilateral discussions she has had with Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions on the importance of improving transport links between London and the regions of England to help make London the gateway to the regions for tourism. [58531]

Dr. Howells: Although my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not had a meeting specifically with the then Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions dedicated to this issue prior to 29 May 2002, we covered tourism transport issues on 5 March 2002 at the third annual tourism summit of pan-Government Ministers and key players in the tourism industry.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to assist organisations investing in tourism infrastructure projects to secure funding from the European Union. [58532]

Dr. Howells: My Department will continue to champion the importance of tourism for regeneration so that the tourism industry continues to benefit from EU funding. In 1999, the British Tourist Authority published guidance on support for tourism in the current structural funding period 'Making the Most of Tourism's Contribution to Regional Economic Development'. The English Tourism Council gives updated information on EU funding opportunities through its profunding website www. fundinginformation.org/tourism. Government offices have been supportive of projects meeting the objectives of regional development strategies.

Regional Airports

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Transport about the expansion of regional airports. [58534]

Dr. Howells: I work closely with my colleagues and have been involved in the development of this area of transport policy as well as others.

Digital Broadcasting

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to ensure choice of access for digital broadcasting services in Scotland. [58548]

Dr. Howells: The draft Communications Bill and associated documents (Cm 5508, published on 7 May) set out a proposed framework for the regulation of communications, which is intended to broaden choice of and access to modern communications technologies, and to make markets work better, in Scotland a well as in the rest of the United Kingdom.

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what key tasks she has set for her Department for improving access to digital television; and if she will make a statement. [58549]

Dr. Howells: The Digital Television Action Plan, posted on www.digitaltelevision.gov.uk and agreed by stakeholders, sets out a framework of actions to be taken by Government and industry, in partnership, to enable the take-up of digital television and achieve the tests of accessibility, availability and affordability, first announced in September 1999.

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many new digital television installations there were in 2001; and if she will make a statement. [58550]

Dr. Howells: We estimate that 2,378,962 new digital television installations were carried out in 2001. This estimate is based on information on subscriber figures from platform operators.

	31 December 2000	*31 December 2001*
Sky Digital	4,669,000	5,716,000
ITV Digital	1,000,000	1,263,000
Digital Cable	908,364	1,977,326
NTL	530,700	1,253,500
Telewest	377,664	723,826

Architecture

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the contribution made by the Commission for Architecture in the Built Environment to *(a)* reducing school truancy, *(b)* reducing traffic congestion and *(c)* improving patient dignity. [58788]

Dr. Howells: The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) helps promote better design for the cultural, social and economic benefits this brings to society. CABE is working closely with the Department for Education and Skills on the design of new education buildings; achieving a high-quality learning environment is key to reducing truancy rates. CABE is working with central and local government and with developers to promote the provision of public transport in all new developments, and thereby reduce traffic congestion. CABE is also working with NHS Estates and individual NHS trusts to ensure that health care services are delivered in well-designed environments.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proportion of projects *(a)* approved and *(b)* rejected by the Commission for Architecture in the Built Environment involved the external use of vernacular materials. [58787]

Dr. Howells: Of the projects that CABE sees, most are likely to contain a degree of vernacular or locally available materials. Using local materials supports CABE's aim to promote a sustainable use of resources and is a contributory factor in CABE's assessment of any building project.

Funding (Luton, South)

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what moneys have been provided *(a)* directly and *(b)* via agencies for which her Department has responsibility to the Luton, South constituency since 1997. [58583]

Dr. Howells: My Department and our sponsored bodies are responsible for supporting an enormous range of cultural and leisure activity and funding is available from a variety of sources.

(a) Moneys provided direct from the Department

Luton borough council have received the following awards from the DCMS Wolfson Public Libraries Challenge Fund:

	£
1997–98	264,248
1998–99	120,000
Total	384,248

(b) Moneys provided via sponsored bodies

According to the information supplied to us by the distributing bodies for the National Lottery awards database, there have been 85 National Lottery awards to Luton, South totalling £5,238,596 to 23 May 2002.

30 Millennium Award Winners have been identified from Luton, South and between them they have received grants totalling £49,987.

2 of three Luton Space for Sport and Arts (SSA) projects are in Luton, South:

(i) Farley Junior, grant of £250,000 towards a £260,000 scheme to construct a floodlight two court multi-use games area.

(ii) Foxdell Junior, grant of £500,000 towards a £1.1 million scheme to construct a multi-purpose hall and classroom for art.

English Heritage have awarded two grants to the Luton, South constituency since 1997:

(i) 1999–2000: Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme grant for Plaiter's Lea and High Town—£100,000.

(ii) 2000–01: Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme grant for Plaiter's Lea and High Town—£100,000.

National Lottery

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the administrative costs as a percentage of National Lottery income for each of the National Lottery distributing bodies in the most recent year for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement. [59304]

Mr. Caborn: The following table shows estimated administration costs for each of the lottery distributing bodies for the year ended 31 March 2002 as a percentage of their total income from the National Lottery Distribution Fund. The figures have not been audited and may be subject to material adjustments prior to inclusion in the respective lottery distributor's final accounts.

Distributing body	*Total income 2001–02 (£)*	*Estimated administration costs (£)*	*Percentage of total income*
New Opportunities Fund	479,770,400	27,000,000	5.62
Community Fund	296,124,518	24,000,000	8.10
Sports Council (England)	228,025,901	21,750,000	9.53

Distributing body	*Total income 2001–02 (£)*	*Estimated administration costs (£)*	*Percentage of total income*
Arts Council of England	207,764,720	20,500,000	9.86
Heritage Lottery Fund	320,101,846	17,824,000	5.56
Millennium Commission	123,760,548	10,800,000	8.72
Film Council[1]	36,272,469	5,600,000	15.43
Scottish Arts Council	23,451,472	2,487,605	10.60
Scottish Sports Council	25,739,278	1,805,202	7.01
Arts Council of Wales	15,153,184	1,476,000	9.74
UK Sports Council	25,614,740	1,406,073	5.48
Sports Council for Wales	14,171,443	928,000	6.54
Sports Council for Northern Ireland	8,004,237	558,346	6.97
Arts Council of Northern Ireland	9,208,707	512,530	5.56
Scottish Screen	3,368,609	236,000	7.00

[1] The Film Council recouped some £4.7 million in 2001–02 giving it a total lottery income of some £41 million, meaning that administration costs were 13.66 per cent. of total income.

Land Sales

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the land that her Department is *(a)* offering for sale and *(b)* plans to offer in the next 12 months, giving its (i) location and (ii) size. [59055]

Dr. Howells: The Department for Culture, Median and Sport has no land available for sale at present nor in the next 12 months.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what proportion of ordinary written questions for her Department were answered within a week of tabling in each month since June 2001; and what proportion of questions for named day received a substantive answer on that day in each month since June 2001. [58990]

Dr. Howells: The information requested is shown in the table.

Percentage

Month tabled	*Ordinary written questions answered within a week of being tabled*	*Named day questions answered on the day specified*
June 2001	72	23
July 2001	44	48
August 2001	n/a	n/a
September 2001	0	50
October 2001	56	46
November 2001	78	59
December 2001	39	35
January 2002	53	43
February 2002	43	41
March 2002	40	55
April 2002	65	36

Correspondence

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many letters were received by each Minister in her Department in each month since June 1997. [59317]

Dr. Howells: This information cannot be provided in the requested format without incurring disproportionate cost. However, the total number of letters received by DCMS Ministers in each month since June 1991 is:

Month	*Letters received*
June 1997	3,232
July 1997	2,227
August 1997	2,757
September 1997	2,592
October 1997	2,780
November 1997	3,396
December 1997	2,843
January 1998	3,265
February 1998	2,957
March 1998	3,097
April 1998	2,955
May 1998	1,884
June 1998	3,040
July 1998	2,696
August 1998	1,678
September 1998	2,078
October 1998	2,751
November 1998	1,850
December 1998	1,539
January 1999	1,840
February 1999	2,562
March 1999	2,742
April 1999	2,039
May 1999	1,567
June 1999	2,107
July 1999	2,228
August 1999	2,023
September 1999	1,808
October 1999	2,031
November 1999	2,320
December 1999	1,639
January 2000	1,575
February 2000	2,271
March 2000	2,004
April 2000	1,306
May 2000	1,584
June 2000	1,590
July 2000	1,481
August 2000	1,417
September 2000	1,366
October 2000	1,742
November 2000	1,549
December 2000	977
January 2001	1,749
February 2001	1,624
March 2001	2,072
April 2001	2,031
May 2001	1,850

Month	*Letters received*
June 2001	1,246
July 2001	1,551
August 2001	1,543
September 2001	1,604
October 2001	1,946
November 2001	1,848
December 2001	1,284
January 2002	1,731
February 2002	1,459
March 2002	1,313
April 2002	1,426

Gambling

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what research her Department undertook into the risk of an increase in problem gambling before it published "A Safe Bet for Success". [59809]

Mr. Caborn: The available research evidence was set out in the report of the Gambling Review Body (Cm 5256).

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many meetings her Department held with groups working with problem gamblers before the publication of "A Safe Bet for Success". [59810]

Mr. Caborn: We held one meeting on problem gambling issues which was attended by 11 people who either represented bodies working with or researching problem gamblers or were themselves expert practitioners. We held a further meeting with GamCare.

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what consultation her Department had with groups working with problem gamblers before the publication of "A Safe Bet for Success". [59722]

Mr. Caborn: We received and considered submissions on the report of the Gambling Review Body from 12 bodies working with or expressing concerns on behalf of problem gamblers, including GamCare, the Centre for Research into the social impact of gambling, the Methodist church and the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures her Department have taken to ensure that gambling deregulation does not lead to an increase in *(a)* problem gambling and *(b)* organised criminal activity. [59865]

Mr. Caborn: I refer my hon. Friend to the measures set out in paragraphs 10.22 and 10.23–10.27 of "A Safe Bet for Success" (Cm 5397), which deal respectively with crime and problem gambling. The proposed Gambling Commission will have greater powers than are currently available to the Gaming Board to vet the suitability of applicants for personal and operating licences; and it will also regulate bookmaking and other sectors of gambling which are currently outside the board's remit. We have emphasised to the gambling industry the importance of supporting the new charitable trust which will fund work to prevent and treat problem gambling; and the trust is this week inviting tenders for work to develop effective strategies for the delivery of research, education and support services.

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Barnsley West and Penistone, of 13 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 411W, on gaming machines, when she will introduce legislation to implement the Government's decisions on the recommendations in the Budd report. [59755]

Mr. Caborn: We shall bring forward a Bill when parliamentary time allows. So far as decisions which do not require primary legislation are concerned, I refer the honourable Member to the reply I gave to the honourable Member for South Suffolk on 10 April 2002 [*Official Report, Col 326–327W]*.

Reports and Documents

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her Department's policy is on releasing reports and documents that *(a)* it and *(b)* its agencies, have commissioned; how long after receiving reports and documents that her Department has commissioned her Department publishes them; what her Department's policy is on announcing the publication of reports and documents it commissions; and if she will make a statement. [59602]

Dr. Howells: My Department will consider the general publication of commissioned reports and documents where there is a recognised interest in the subject and where there are no bars to a wider publication on grounds of confidentiality or sensitivity.

In general my Department aims to publish material we commission and all such publications are available through the Department's website, www.culture.gov.uk and, where appropriate, HMSO.

The time between receipt of a document and its wider publication will depend upon the nature of the document but the intention would be to avoid any unnecessary delays.

Documents may be accompanied by a press release or will be flagged up on the Department's website. The website is currently being redeveloped and the new site will make publications even easier to find.

This is an area which my Department is currently reviewing as part of our commitment to Freedom of Information and a statement of our policy will accompany the issue of my Department's publication scheme in the autumn.

Capital Projects

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many PFI capital projects fall under the responsibility of her Department; what the capital value and nature of each project is; and what stage they are at in the PFI procurement process. [59835]

Dr. Howells: My Department has not itself entered into any PFI or PPP contracts. The Royal Parks Agency, which is an executive agency, has entered into one PFI contracts, Pembroke Lodge, Richmond, relating to the restoration of building and operation of catering facilities. Its capital value is £1 million. This contract has been operational since 1997. The British Library, which is an executive

NDPB, has entered into one PFI contract, to provide a full catering and events facility. Its capital value is £0.9 million, and has been operational since 1997.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many non-PFI capital projects fall under the responsibility of her Department and related NDPBs; and what the capital value and nature is of each project. [59816]

Dr. Howells: The Department undertakes directly only a small number of low value non-PFI capital projects each year to improve the working environment for staff, to enable it to meet its electronic service delivery commitments, and to improve communications with its NDPBs.

The Royal Parks Agency has one non-PFI capital project planned in the current year involving the replacement of catering facilities at St. James' park. The capital value is £3.2 million.

The Department provides support to its NDPBs through grant-in-aid finance capital expenditure. In addition to this source of funding NDPBs supplement their funding with donations and sponsorship from individuals and corporate bodies, funding from the National Lottery and other sources. The Department does not hold centrally information on all the non-PFI capital projects undertaken by its NDPBs. However, the Departmental Investment Strategy (DIS), published and printed separately as an outcome of the 2000 spending review, describes the Department's strategic plans for both new investment and for the use of existing assets. The DIS can be viewed on the website: www.culture.gov.uk.

Certified Timber

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the refurbishment projects that *(a)* are in progress and *(b)* will start within the next six months; and what action is being taken to ensure that these will procure certified timber. [59765]

Dr. Howells: There are no plans for any refurbishments for at least the next 12 months. In all procurement of timber and timber products the Department will, where possible, specify timber supplies which are FSC certified or WWF 95+ approved.

Religious Broadcasters

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she informed the BBC of the Government's proposal to lift the ban on ownership of a digital audio broadcasting programme licence by religious broadcasters while applying such a ban on ownership of a multiplex licence. [59110]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The BBC would have been informed of the Government's intentions for religious broadcasting at the same time as everyone else, with the publication of the White Paper "A New Future for Communications" in December 1999. I should clarify that our proposals published recently with the draft Communications Bill propose the lifting of the restrictions on religious bodies owning local digital broadcast licences, and not national digital broadcast licences.

International Sports Federations

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the international sports federations and organisations on which United Kingdom nationals hold senior positions, stating for each *(a)* the name of the United Kingdom national, *(b)* the date on which the position was attained, *(c)* the length of the term of office and *(d)* the nature of the office. [59878]

Mr. Caborn: Part of UK Sport's responsibilities is to encourage and maintain UK influence within international sports federations. To support this objective they operate an International Representatives Grant Aid Programme. This programme offers financial support to elected British postholders and in addition supports governing body delegates attending formal meetings to international sports bodies. I am arranging for copies of the list of UK nationals supported by UK Sport who hold senior positions in international sports organisations to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The definition used for 'senior position' is Chair or President, Vice-Chair or Vice-President, Secretary or Treasurer.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on progress made towards the method used to determine the Government's target number of United Kingdom nationals holding senior positions on international sports federations and organisations. [60001]

Mr. Caborn: It is one of UK Sport's responsibilities to maintain and encourage UK influence within international sports administration. My Department has agreed with UK Sport that it is not appropriate to set a numerical target for the number of UK nationals holding senior positions. Instead, performance is measured based on a qualitative assessment of the work of selected UK nationals holding senior positions in international sports federations and organisations from the annual reports these postholders are required to submit to UK Sport. The definition used for 'senior position' is Chair or President, Vice-Chair or Vice-President, Secretary or Treasurer.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies have a policy of not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age. [59461]

Dr. Howells: Neither my Department nor its agency—the Royal Parks Agency—has a policy of refusing applications for employment by persons of any age up to its current normal age of retirement of 60.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Fire Service

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* part-time employees were at the Fire Service College in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2002. [58736]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is set out in the table.

Fire Service College staff, 2001, 2002

	1 April 2001	*1 April 2002*
UK Fire Service Secondees	37	37
Other Full-Time Employees	181	179
Part-Time Employees	19	19

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many people applied to the Fire Service in each year since 1997, broken down by *(a)* age, *(b)* gender and *(c)* ethnic origin. [58902]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

The number of applicants to fire services are set out in the tables, broken down by ethnicity and gender. Information on the age of applicants is not held centrally.

	Total number of applicants	*Men*	*Women*	*White*	*Black*	*Asian*	*Other*
Wholetime							
From 1 April 1997–31 March 1998	42,573	40,657	1,916	41,065	699	274	535
From 1 April 1998–31 March 1999	34,400	32,731	1,669	33,339	525	255	281
From 1 April 1999–31 March 2000	30,206	28,345	1,861	29,107	518	335	246
From 1 April 2000–31 March 2001[1]	29,749	27,505	2,244	28,052	750	309	400
Retained							
From 1 April 1997–31 March 1998[2]	4,013	3,759	254	3,963	13	5	32
From 1 April 1998–31 March 1999	3,067	2,899	168	2,999	5	9	54
From 1 April 1999–31 March 2000	3,658	3,373	285	3,598	27	14	19
From 1 April 2000–31 March 2001[3]	3,844	3,498	346	3,783	16	16	14

[1] 238 applicants were of undetermined ethnic origin. Figures not included in the table. Data were not available for three fire services.

[2] One fire service was unable to monitor the ethnic origin of applications made. Figures have not been included.

[3] Data were not available for one fire service. 15 applicants were of undetermined ethnic origin. Figures not included in the table.

Notes:

The 1997–98 figures are for England, Wales and Scotland.

The 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 figures are for England and Wales only.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the proposals for consultation on the SSA for the Fire Service, announced in his oral answer of 23 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 131, will be made available; and if he will make a statement. [60562]

Mr. Leslie: As announced in the Local Government White Paper Implementation Plan, published on 10 April, we will consult over the summer on options for the new system of revenue grant distribution to local authorities. The Government will then implement decisions in time for the 2003–04 local government finance settlement.

Housing

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what subsidies have been provided in the financial year 2001–02 to public sector key workers for housing; and if he will make a statement. [58653]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

£250 million is being provided for the Starter Home Initiative (SHI) over the three years 2001–02 to 2003–04 to help key workers to buy homes in areas where they would otherwise be priced out of the housing market. This includes SHI expenditure of £2.173 million to help key workers in 2001–02.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment he has made of where the cost of providing affordable housing in sites suitable for market-price housing is borne. [59175]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

The provision of affordable housing on a site can affect both developer profit and land value. The research "Delivering Affordable Housing through Planning Policy", published by the Department in February 2002, advised that the effect will vary depending on the type of affordable housing sought and the level of payment it generates to the developer.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many affordable empty homes there were in each London borough in each of the last 10 years. [59999]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

The number of local authority (LA) and registered social landlord (RSL) empty homes in London by borough in each of the last 10 years are set out in table 1:

Table 1: Total number of LA and RSL empty homes in London by borough in each of the last 10 years

Local authority	*1 April: 2001*	*2000*	*1999*	*1998*	*1997*	*1996*	*1995*	*1994*	*1993*[1]	*1992*
Barking and Dagenham	581	784	704	852	713	629	439	378	285	292
Barnet	274	248	227	259	209	255	216	215	283	185
Bexley	163	168	163	243	186	162	196	192	192	101
Brent	526	728	1,059	1,081	1,150	912	636	599	837	1,027
Bromley	448	471	499	515	416	351	334	431	382	257
Camden	582	531	680	672	686	711	731	734	795	818

Table 1: Total number of LA and RSL empty homes in London by borough in each of the last 10 years

Local authority	*1 April: 2001*	*2000*	*1999*	*1998*	*1997*	*1996*	*1995*	*1994*	*1993*[1]	*1992*
City of London	6	5	2	8	10	5	5	0	0	1
Croydon	334	368	371	385	449	620	430	673	563	543
Ealing	455	370	395	450	412	348	292	373	446	509
Enfield	508	422	338	333	283	296	385	374	377	339
Greenwich	800	887	821	956	1,047	939	990	1,179	1,227	755
Hackney	2,265	2,538	2,769	2,133	3,287	3,606	4,300	4,828	4,524	3,152
Hammersmith and Fulham	618	585	551	696	747	594	671	705	654	772
Haringey	405	456	691	544	665	748	760	619	962	645
Harrow	112	92	139	124	123	161	133	140	180	143
Havering	348	241	259	263	269	217	235	220	256	233
Hillingdon	174	219	178	204	219	160	224	174	303	281
Hounslow	350	340	259	232	358	383	482	557	595	371
Islington	840	1,104	1,432	1,505	1,729	2,752	1,819	1,432	1,211	1,008
Kensington and Chelsea	327	409	355	467	632	535	613	550	490	552
Kingston upon Thames	113	102	93	108	179	146	122	103	111	114
Lambeth	1,494	1,680	1,758	1,743	2,300	2,527	2,725	2,390	2,139	1,996
Lewisham	1,190	1,051	959	1,097	1,218	1,674	1,435	1,542	1,204	939
Merton	139	203	169	139	195	456	199	255	261	125
Newham	514	516	680	951	958	1,069	1,148	1,174	1,110	1,183
Redbridge	231	421	367	324	264	349	585	500	521	388
Richmond upon Thames	146	204	221	221	240	172	267	127	181	170
Southwark	2,154	1,791	1,700	1,623	1,923	2,415	1,531	1,771	1,981	2,077
Sutton	133	270	209	158	193	192	104	123	132	130
Tower Hamlets	1,063	1,302	1,470	1,503	1,811	1,723	1,773	1,706	2,123	1,934
Waltham Forest	313	389	646	791	659	642	609	538	741	551
Wandsworth	541	582	647	640	640	720	883	951	837	739
Westminster	579	650	762	824	859	764	903	883	1,106	800
London total	18,726	20,127	21,573	22,044	25,029	27,233	26,175	26,436	27,009	23,130

[1] Figures for 1993 are unusually high due to many dwellings bought by RSLs towards the end of the financial year (1992–93) under the Housing Market Package.

Sources:

DTLR's annual Housing Investment Programme (HIP) returns and the Housing Corporation's annual HAR 10 and Regulatory and Statistical Return (RSR)

Brian Cotter: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much of the Budget allocated for housing in 2003–04 will be allocated to *(a)* the south-west region and *(b)* North Somerset county council. [60492]

Mr. McNulty: Allocations of housing resources for 2003–04 have not yet been decided. They will depend on a combination of measures of relative housing need, strategic regional housing priorities and authorities' performance on housing.

Funding (Luton, South)

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what moneys have been provided *(a)* directly and *(b)* via agencies for which the Department has responsibility to the Luton, South constituency since 1997. [58589]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

The principal funding that this Department has provided to Luton from 1997–98 to date is shown in the table. These figures include grants and borrowing approvals for revenue and capital expenditure.

It is not possible to determine how much of this money has been directly spent on Luton, South. It is for the local authority to decide where within its boundary these resources are applied.

The transport allocations shown are for the Luton/Dunstable conurbation which includes part of South Bedfordshire district.

The information shown is not fully comprehensive—such information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

£ million

Nature of Funding	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Revenue support grant	75.478	81.382	82.804	82.516	89.229	90.999
Income from national non-domestic rates	41.033	42.769	46.379	52.786	51.567	56.327
Local government reorganisation supplementary credit approval	3.575	2.160	0.186	—	—	—
Single capital pot	—	—	—	—	—	0.560
Housing investment programme	3.337	2.978	3.274	6.205	2.952	3.015
Housing revenue account subsidy	6.939	6.262	5.889	5.597	10.838	—
Capital receipts initiative	0.481	1.664	1.843	'—	'—	'—
Cash incentive scheme	0.250	0.106	—	—	—	—
New deal for communities funding[1]	—	—	—	—	0.721	7.55
Neighbourhood renewal funding	—	—	—	—	0.754	1.132
ERDF funding[2]	—	—	—	0.470	0.944	2.531
Transport policies and programme/local transport plan allocation	3.152	1.985	3.730	2.387	4.919	4.862

[1] The NDC funding is for the Marsh Farm estate, a project in the Luton, North constituency.

[2] ERDF is by calendar year

Regional Organisations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which of the agencies and NDPBs sponsored by his Department have a regional organisation; and if he will list the counties and unitary authorities in each region in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002. [58962]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

The Rent Service is organised into the three regions of: north (England); south and midlands; and London and east. These regions correspond to the regional boundaries of the Government offices for, respectively, the north-east, north-west, and Yorkshire and the Humber; the west midlands, east midlands, and the south-west; and London, east of England, and south-east.

The Marine and Coastguard Agency is organised into three regions: Scotland and Northern Ireland; eastern; and Wales and west. As these relate to England, these also incorporate complete Government office regions in almost every respect.

The Housing Corporation has four field offices in the regions of London, south, central and north, with local offices beneath these. These regions correspond to the regional boundaries of the Government offices for, respectively, London; the south-east and south-west; the west midlands, east midlands, and east of England; and the north-west, north-east, and Yorkshire and the Humber.

The Health and Safety Executive has a field operations headquarters in Bootle, with regional offices in divisions defined as Scotland, the north-west, Yorkshire and the north-east, midlands, Wales and west, the home counties, and London and the south-east.

The numbers of county and unitary local authorities in each of the Government office regions referred to have been placed in the House Library.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what regional organisation his Department has; and if he will list the counties and unitary authorities in each region in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002. [58961]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

The nine Government offices for the regions carry out work for my Department in a number of areas including housing, planning, transport, neighbourhood renewal, local government and the administration of European structural funds.

The county and unitary authorities in each of the nine English regions are set out in a table which I have placed in the Library.

The information about local authorities in the east of England given in annexe A of the White Paper "Your Region, Your Choice" was incorrect. It should have shown that there are four unitary authorities—as set out in this table—and 44 shire districts.

Regional Government

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his policy is on the imposition of a regional assembly upon a shire county if a majority of its population rejected it in a referendum. [60236]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

Whether an elected regional assembly is established in any region will depend on the vote of the region as a whole.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make it his policy that the people of Hertfordshire will be able to choose the region they wish to be a part of in his plans for regional governance. [60235]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

No. As set out in chapter 6 of the White Paper "Your Region, Your Choice", we do not propose to depart from the existing boundaries used by the Government offices for the regions, regional development agencies and other bodies.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate his Department has made of the impact on employment in the East of England region should an existing tier be abolished as outlined in his plans for regional governance. [60234]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

It is not possible to make accurate estimates of the impact on employment of any future local government reorganisation in the east of England region, as this will depend on the unitary structure recommended by the Boundary Committee for England. More generally, we expect that an elected regional assembly would help to increase employment in the region by enhancing regional economic competitiveness and performance.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what minimum participation level will be required in referenda to determine the establishment of a regional assembly. [60233]

Mr. Raynsford: Our proposals for referendums are set out in chapter 9 of the White Paper, "Your Region, Your Choice."

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister on what basis his Department estimates the cost of running a regional assembly. [60237]

Mr. Raynsford: Cost estimates have been based on a number of factors, including the number of staff working on relevant policy functions in the regions at present, the expected number of assembly members and support staff, and comparable costs for other tiers of Government, adjusted to take account of the specific features of regional assemblies.

Neighbourhood Wardens

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in what areas neighbourhood wardens operate; and what access other areas have to opportunities to develop such schemes. [59173]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

Neighbourhood wardens operate throughout England and Wales. A list showing the schemes funded by my Department follows. Continued Government funding will be dependent upon the outcome of the spending review, although any area may develop a scheme if they can secure the necessary support.

Neighbourhood warden schemes

Town/area	*Wardens*
Aldershot	1
Avon and Somerset parishes	2
Balsall Heath	20
Barnet	4
Barnsley	5
Benchill	7
Birmingham	3
Bolton	2
Bolton	2
Boston	9
Burnley	6
Bury	2
Caernarfon	1
Caerphilly	3
Canterbury	6
Cardiff	1
Coventry	1
Dacorum	1
Darlington	3
Derby	3
Doncaster	2
Everton	12
Exeter	4
Gateshead	4
Gorton	5
Gosport	1
Guildford	2
Hackney	4
Hastings	4
Havering	4
Hillingdon	6
Horsham	2
Hounslow	6
Hull	6
Huntingdon	3
Islington	6
Kidderminster	2
Kirklees	6
Knowsley	8
Leeds	10
Leicestershire (north west)	1
Lewisham	7
Liverpool	1
Longridge and Shaw Heath Estate	4
Manchester	12
Manchester (north)	12
Merthyr Tydfil	2
Merton	3
Middlesbrough	3.5
Milton Keynes	1
Mullion	1
North Tyneside	7
Norwich	2
Nottingham	2
Oldham	2
Pontefract	5
Portsmouth	8
Rotherham	6
Sale West	6
Salford	3
Sedgefield	1
Sheffield	3
Sheffield	4
Skelmersdale	12
Slough	5
South Tyneside	6
Southwark	9
Stevenage	9
Stockton on Tees	8
Stoke on Trent	6
Sunderland	3
Sutton	4
Swansea council	3
Tower Hamlets	4
Trafford	5
Trafford	5
Vale of White Horse	2
Walsall	10
Wansbeck	20
Wigan	4
Wilmslow	1
Wirral	4
Wolverhampton	3
Workington	4
Wyre	4

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he expects to announce the next round of bidding for neighbourhood warden schemes; and if he will make a statement on the eligibility for entitlement to neighbourhood warden schemes for urban areas outside inner cities. [59958]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

This year we are introducing 123 Street Warden Schemes throughout the country. A £5 million extension of the existing 84 Neighbourhood Warden Schemes to the year 2003–04 has already been announced. Decisions on future funds will be dependent upon the outcome of the spending review. Warden schemes are found in all parts of the country from small rural places through to towns and large cities.

Local Government

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which local authorities have debt-free status and have retained their housing stock. [58996]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

The following local authorities with council housing as at 30 September 2001 were debt-free in 2001–02:

Barking and Dagenham
Bracknell Forest
Bromsgrove
Broxbourne
City of London
Corby
Crawley
Dacorum
Dartford
Daventry
East Devon
Forest Heath
Harlow
Mid Bedfordshire

Mole Valley
Redditch
Runnymede
Salisbury
Slough
South Cambridgeshire
South Northamptonshire
St. Edmundsbury
Stevenage
Tandridge
Three Rivers
Uttlesford
Watford
Waverley
Welwyn Hatfield
Wycombe

Source:

Capital Payments and Receipts (CPR2) 2001–02

Definition: An authority was debt-free on 30 September 2001 if *(a)* at 31 March 2001, the authority's credit ceiling was nil or a negative amount and *(b)* at 30 September 2001, the authority had no money outstanding by way of external borrowing other than short-term borrowing or hard to redeem debt, as defined in Regulation 154 of the Local Authorities (Capital Finance) Regulations 1997

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) whether the announcement of proposals for the reform of local government funding will include indicative figures on the impact of local authorities grant positions of the proposals; [59163]

(2) if the review of local government funding will be followed by a period of consultation with local authorities before final decisions on changes to the funding formulas for local authority grants are implemented;

(3) if he will make a statement on the timetable for the announcement of the review of local government funding and the implementation of the conclusions from that review. [59164]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

The Government will consult over the summer on options for the new system of revenue grant distribution to local authorities. We will make an announcement on the precise form of that consultation in due course. We intend our conclusions on the way forward to be announced in late November or early December, when we set out the proposed grant distribution to local authorities for 2003–04.

Fires

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) how many domestic fires were recorded by each fire authority in each of the past 10 years; [59202]

(2) how many *(a)* deaths and *(b)* serious injuries caused by domestic fires were recorded by fire authorities broken down by age range (i) 0–5, (ii) 6–10, (iii) 11–20 and (iv) 21 plus in the last 10 years; [59204]

(3) how many fires in multiple occupation homes were recorded by fire authorities in each of the past 10 years; [59205]

Mr. Moss: (4) how many *(a)* deaths and *(b)* serious injuries caused by domestic fires were recorded by each fire authority in each of the past 10 years. [59203]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is contained in the tables which have been placed in the House Library.

Mrs. May: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many house fires there were in which people were *(a)* killed, *(b)* injured and *(c)* both, broken down by (i) deliberate and (ii) accidental fires, in the last three years. [60436]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

The following table shows the number of accidental and malicious (ie deliberate) dwelling fires attended by local authority fire brigades in the United Kingdom that resulted in deaths and injuries for the years 1998, 1999 and 2000.

	Number of dwelling[1] fires		
	1998	*1999*	*2000[2]*
Accidental			
Total fires	57,718	58,366	56,655
Fires with deaths only	309	293	268
Fires with injuries only	8,829	8,756	8,315
Fires with deaths and injuries	106	78	89
Malicious			
Total fires	13,359	13,862	14,242
Fires with deaths only	34	31	30
Fires with injuries only	1,177	1,195	1,296
Fires with deaths and injuries	14	18	17

[1] Dwellings are defined as buildings occupied by households, excluding hotels, hostels and residential institutions. They also include caravans, houseboats and other non-building structures used solely as a permanent dwelling

[2] Data for 2000 are provisional. Death figures have not been estimated to take account of revisions likely to occur once further information from inquests and death certificates confirming cause of death is received.

Data Matching

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions in relation to data matching exercises undertaken by the Audit Commission and local authorities, how many individuals' personal data have been processed in data matching exercises in connection with fraud; how many cases have been identified as part of that data matching exercise as being possible cases of fraud requiring further investigation; how many cases, after investigation, were deemed likely to be fraudulent; how many cases were prosecuted; what the total cost were of data matching exercises, including staff and computer costs; and what the estimated total savings to the public purse are and what multiplier was used in this calculation. [59209]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

The following information is taken from the Audit Commission's National Fraud Initiative (NFI) 2000. All data collection and matching is undertaken in accordance with the Code of Data Matching, agreed between the Audit Commission and the Information Commissioner. Because data for matching is drawn from a wide range of data sources, with individuals' details potentially appearing on a number of data submissions, it is not possible to identify the number of individuals for whom data has been collected. However, in its report on the 2000 NFI, the Commission reported that over 14 million records were matched. The Commission's role is to identify matches and report these back to the relevant authorities for further investigation. It is for individual authorities to identify potentially fraudulent matches and to investigate these further, and, if appropriate, prosecute. The Commission does not have details of how many cases fall into these categories. The cost of the Audit Commission's role in NFI 2000 was some £600,000, including staff costs and computer costs. The Commission does not have information on the costs incurred by individual authorities in investigating potentially fraudulent matches. The Commission does not seek to estimate the potential savings arising from NFI. However, in its report on the 2000 NFI, the Commission reported that the value of detected fraud and overpayment, up to the date of publication, was £50 million, an increase of 19 per cent. over the previous NFI undertaken in 1998.

South-west Regional Assembly

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many civil servants and public officials carry out activities on behalf of Government departments in the South West Region; and how many would be transferred to an elected South West Regional Assembly. [60023]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

The number of permanent civil service staff in each English region is listed in the table in Box 2.6 of the White Paper "Your Region, Your Choice" (Cm 5511). The number of other public officials in the regions is not held centrally.

The number of posts to transfer to an elected assembly for the South West will depend on the number of posts devoted to the relevant function at the time of transfer but might be in the region of 50 to 100 posts, the majority of which would come from the Government Office for the South West. The assembly would also become responsible for the South West Regional Development Agency, which currently employs around 200 staff.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list those agencies and public bodies *(a)* for which an elected south west regional assembly would have responsibility and accountability and *(b)* over which it would have influence. [60017]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

The responsibilities of elected regional assemblies are set out in Chapter 4 of the White Paper "Your Region, Your Choice" (Cm 5511), published on 9 May.

Domestic Violence

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many women have been classified as having a priority need for accommodation as victims of domestic violence under sections 175 and 177 of the Housing Act 1996. [59845]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

Data are not collected centrally in the precise form requested. Available information on households accommodated under statutory homelessness provisions in England is published in a quarterly Statistical Release, "Statutory Homelessness: England".

Table 3 presents a summary of those households accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need under the Housing Act 1996, identifying which category was most crucial in determining priority need. Cases where domestic violence was the exclusive reason are identified separately, but further cases may also exist where, for example, the presence of dependent children was regarded by the local authority as the crucial determining factor. Table 4 further summarises acceptances by reason for loss of the household's last settled home, and identifies all cases involving a "violent breakdown of relationship".

Copies of the statistical release are held in the Library and are also available on the Department's website. The latest edition, published on 14 March 2002, presents statistics up to and including the fourth quarter of 2001.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions he has had with the ministerial group on domestic violence regarding local government policy on housing allocation for victims of domestic violence. [59843]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

This is one of a number of housing issues which are the subject of on-going discussion with the ministerial group on domestic violence, and on which the Department has provided briefing for this group, in order to meet the key objective, shared by both the ministerial group and the Department, to increase safe accommodation choices for women and children.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the advice issued to local government regarding housing allocation for victims of domestic violence. [59844]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

On 31 May 2002 the Department will be issuing for consultation a draft code of guidance for local housing authorities on the allocation of housing, which has been revised to take account of the changes to Part 6 of the Housing Act contained in the Homelessness Act 2002. The issue of domestic violence is referred to in Chapters 4 and 5 of the Code.

The period for consultation ends on 28 August 2002.

A copy of the draft Code will be placed in the Library of the House of Commons.

Regeneration

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much investment is committed to neighbourhood renewal programme in the next five years; and how that budget is divided between revenue and capital spending. [59856]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has a 10-year commitment to New Deal for Communities partnerships of £2,152 billion, of which £753 million is expected to be capital and £1,399 million revenue.

The total budget provision for neighbourhood renewal programmes, including NDC and NRF, in the current year is £727 million. Of this, £165 million is in DTLR's Capital Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL) and £562 million is in the DTLR and Local Government Resource DELs.

Detailed annual budgets for 2003–04 to 2005–06 for NDC and other neighbourhood renewal programmes are currently being reviewed in the context of the Spending Review.

Current best estimates of the split between revenue and capital spending on the established Partnership plans for New Deal in Communities funding, show this to be: 2002–03: £120 million revenue and £66 million capital and 2003–04: £172 million revenue and £93 million capital.

Development of all other neighbourhood renewal programmes commenced last year and detailed information on the split between revenue and capital of community plans flowing from these still has to be established.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of Government's spending on urban regeneration over the next five years; and what levels are committed to capital and revenue spending. [59840]

Ms Keeble: I have been asked to reply.

The ODPM's urban regeneration budgets for the remaining years of SR2000 are as follows:

£ million

	2002–04	*2003–04*
Resource	769	532
Capital	889	1,266
Total	1,658	1,798

Detailed annual budgets for 2003–04 to 2005–06 for urban regeneration programmes are currently being reviewed in the context of the Spending Review.

Mobile Phone Masts

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether he has made an estimate of how many extra mobile phone masts operators will require to complete their networks in the next five years. [59632]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

This is a matter for the individual telecommunications operators. However, the operators are fully aware of the importance we attach to keeping the number of masts to the minimum practicable, for example, through mast sharing, and to ensuring that those which are needed are designed and sited with sensitivity and care.

When rolling out their future network needs, and in addition to the statutory consultation requirements, the five mobile phone operators have made a series of commitments to deliver improved communication and consultation with local authorities and local communities. This includes providing local planning authorities with annual rollout plans for each authority's area. We strongly encourage operators and local planning authorities to carry out annual discussions based upon these plans. These will provide an early opportunity to discuss technical and environmental constraints and to explore possible alternative approaches, particularly the opportunities for mast and site sharing and also in terms of the location and design of the apparatus.

The Department is currently drawing up, in partnership with representatives of the mobile phone operators and local government, a revised Code of Best Practice, which will include advice and best practice on the delivery of mobile phone mast development.

Parish Councils

Mr. Moss: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what requirement there is for parish councillors to sign the Code of Conduct as individuals in cases where their parish council as a whole has not adopted the Code of Conduct. [59697]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

The Local Government Act 2000 and The Parish Councils (Model Code of Conduct) Order 2001 place a duty on parish councils to adopt a code of conduct by 5 May 2002. If a code is not adopted by a parish council, parish councillors are not under a duty to give a written undertaking to observe a code. However, if a parish council fails to adopt a code, the provisions of the model code apply to all members of that council. Newly-elected members must give an undertaking on accepting office that they will observe the provisions of the model code.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what information he collects on the application of grants paid through the single regeneration budget, their efficacy and effectiveness. [60155]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

The regional development agencies are responsible for administering the single regeneration budget at regional level. The RDAs collect information on grant expenditure and performance data from the regeneration partnerships that manage the individual SRB schemes. The partnerships are required to appraise all projects before grant can be approved. Also, at the end of a scheme, the partnership is required to submit to the RDA a report on the overall achievement of the scheme against the strategic objectives and the end scheme position against the baseline position at the start of the scheme. The RDAs account to the Government for their expenditure, including grant paid to regeneration partnerships under SRB rules, in accordance with detailed reporting requirements and procedures set out in corporate planning and other guidance issued to the RDAs. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister also collects data from the RDAs on selected outputs generated by SRB schemes.

In addition, the Department has commissioned the Department of Land Economy at the University of Cambridge to undertake an eight-year evaluation of the SRB programme. A mid-term report of the evaluation, based on 10 case study SRB partnerships whose activities have completed, was published in January. The findings of this report and earlier reports are published on the Department's website.

Homelessness

Brian Cotter: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress the Homelessness Directorate has made with regard to tackling homelessness. [60493]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

The Homelessness Directorate brings together the Rough Sleepers Unit, the Bed and Breakfast Unit and a new team to advise local authorities on tackling homelessness. The Directorate aims to:

sustain the success of meeting the Prime Minister's target of reducing rough sleeping by two thirds by 2002;

ensure that by March 2004 no homeless families with children are living in bed and breakfast hotels except in an emergency and, even then, for no more than six weeks;

promote new and more strategic approaches to tackle more effectively the growing problem of homelessness.

Since its establishment in March this year, the Homelessness Directorate has:

published the report "More than a roof" which, together with the Secretary of State's response, sets out a new approach to tackling homelessness;

reviewed local rough sleeping strategies in order to sustain the two thirds reduction in the number of rough sleepers in England;

published a good practice handbook to help local authorities to conduct homelessness reviews and develop effective homelessness strategies;

invited local authorities to apply for £10 million funding for homelessness strategies, to commence in July 2002;

held a number of regional good practice conferences on reducing the use of B&B hotels;

required high using B&B authorities to produce B&B reduction action plans, backed up by £35 million of new resources;

participated in seven seminars organised by the Chartered Institute of Housing to promote awareness of the requirements of the Homelessness Act among housing and homelessness professionals;

issued new advice to housing authorities on arrangements to ensure that all babies and children placed in temporary accommodation receive their health and developmental tests;

improved the collection of information from local authorities to monitor the number of homeless families with children living in B&B hotels and to record the length of time they stay there.

Additionally, the Government have:

taken through the Homelessness Act 2002 which will strengthen the statutory safety net for homeless people and ensure that all housing authorities have a homelessness strategy for their districts;

confirmed its intention to bring the main homelessness provisions of that Act into force in July, together with an extension by order of the groups who are in priority need for housing;

confirmed that £10 million will be allocated to local authorities in 2002–03 to help them deliver the proposed new priority needs order;

amended housing benefit rules to provide additional incentives for private leasing as an alternative to the use of B&B hotels for homeless people;

announced that tackling homelessness is a new theme for the Beacon Councils scheme.

Mrs. May: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the administration costs for the *(a)* National Homelessness Directorate, *(b)* Bed and Breakfast Unit and *(c)* Rough Sleepers Unit were in the last 12 months. [60664]

Mr. McNulty: The Bed and Breakfast Unit, the Rough Sleepers Unit and the homelessness responsibilities which had resided in the former DTLR's Housing Directorate were merged from 1 April 2002 to form a new Homelessness Directorate. The administration costs for the Rough Sleepers Unit in 2001–02 were £1.33 million and those for the Bed and Breakfast Unit were £132,000.

Mrs. May: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of the money allocated to the *(a)* Bed and Breakfast Unit and *(b)* Rough Sleepers Unit by him for the current financial year is expected to be spent on administration costs. [60666]

Mr. McNulty: The Bed and Breakfast Unit, the Rough Sleepers Unit and the homelessness responsibilities which had resided in the former DTLR's; Housing Directorate were merged from 1 April to form a new Homelessness Directorate. The Homelessness Directorate has an overall budget for programme expenditure of £125 million for the current financial year. In addition to this the directorate has a separate budget to cover administration costs, which for the current financial year amounts to £1.6 million.

Sound Insulation

Mrs. May: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent estimate he has made of the number of households affected by poor sound insulation. [60660]

Mr. Raynsford: The best estimate my Department has of the number of people affected by poor sound insulation comes from the regulatory impact assessment prepared for the revision of Part E of the Building Regulations—which deals with sound insulation between new dwellings. This examined data collected by the 1996 English house condition survey and concluded that 670,000 households were bothered by noise from neighbours which could be attributed to poor design of the building or a combination of poor design and behaviour of the neighbours.

Adapted Housing

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to increase the provision of specially adapted housing for the elderly and the disabled. [60547]

Mr. McNulty: The Housing Corporation through the approved development programme (ADP) and supported housing management grant (SHMG) provide specially adapted housing and support for the elderly and disabled. The Housing Corporation through its national investment strategy sets out the priorities against which registered social landlords should bid for resources for both ADP and SHMG. Included in these priorities are housing for older people and supported housing for people with physical disabilities and frail older people. The ADP is set to rise to £1.2 billion in 2003–04, almost double the planned expenditure for 2000–01. The Housing Corporation is currently reviewing its strategy for housing older people to reflect national policy developments such as supporting people and to encourage more joined up solutions to housing support and care needs to this group.

Local housing authorities have a statutory duty to offer disabled facilities grants (DFGs) to eligible applicants who require adaptations to help them live independently in their own homes. The grant is available to homeowners and tenants in both the private and social rented sector. It is subject to a means test. The Government meet 60 per cent. of the total local authority expenditure incurred on DFGs through the payment of specified capital grant. The budget for this grant for English authorities in 2002–03 is £88 million compared with £56 million in 1997–98, an increase of nearly 60 per cent.

Millennium Dome

Mr. Pound: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the future of the Millennium Dome. [60811]

Mr. McNulty: On 29 May 2002, English Partnerships entered into legally binding contracts with Meridian Delta Ltd. (MDL), a consortium consisting of Lendlease plc and Quintain Estates and Development, and with the Anschutz Entertainment Group, for the redevelopment of the dome and approximately 170 acres of land on the Greenwich peninsula. Under the deal, Anschutz will construct a world-class standard 20,000 seat arena inside the dome, capable of hosting a wide range of entertainment and sporting events. No specific price is being paid for the land under the arena, but its value is reflected in the deal as a whole with MDL. Anschutz is committed to investing £135 million, and English Partnerships will be entitled to a share of profits made by the arena, after a priority return to Anschutz.

In the outer rim of the dome, and spilling out into the northern tip of the peninsula, MDL and Anschutz plan to construct a mix of eating, entertainment and leisure facilities—this part of the development is known as the dome waterfront. Again, the land value is reflected in the deal as a whole with MDL. MDL and Anschutz are committed to investing at least £65 million. Again English Partnerships will share in profits.

All risk in respect of the dome will transfer to Anschutz and MDL, who are required to maintain the dome until 2018. Should they decide at that time to remove the dome structure and redevelop the land, English Partnerships will be entitled to a 50 per cent. share of redevelopment proceeds. This protects English Partnerships' position on the redevelopment value of the land.

In respect of the rest of the peninsula land in the deal (around 146 acres), English Partnerships and MDL have agreed that they will develop the site jointly. Development is to take place over the next 20 to 25 years, with an end date of 2025. The detailed terms provide for English Partnerships to retain ownership of its land until individual plots are required for development. The payout will work as follows: first, an agreed minimum land value, on the sale of any parcel of land—this protects against any downturn—secondly, the uplift in the value of land, after planning permission and at the point of sale to a developer, to reflect development value. Calculation of the split varies across the phases of development, but broadly evens out to 50:50—after costs—assuming development of about 14 million square feet. Where MDL develops land itself, English Partnerships will receive the agreed minimum land value plus a share of sale proceeds, or the value of the development—both after costs—once the development is complete.

Under the terms of the original acquisition of the land, British Gas is entitled to 7.5 per cent. of sale proceeds or open market value across the site. This would apply in relation to any onward sale of land on the Greenwich peninsula by English Partnerships.

No negotiations between English Partnerships and British Gas have yet taken place on how exactly British Gas's entitlement is to be interpreted in the context of the deal with MDL and Anschutz. English Partnerships will ensure that the outcome of those negotiations represents good value for money for the public purse.

The deal's three parts—dome, dome waterfront, and the rest of the land—are subject to the grant of planning permission. Participants envisage making an application in the autumn. Until planning permission is granted the site will remain the responsibility of English Partnerships.

In agreeing to accept the terms of this deal, the Government have focused on four main aspects: value for money; regeneration benefits for the area; deliverability and a proper use for the dome.

As regards value for money, we have made it clear that we would only proceed with any deal if it provided proper value for money for the Government. That included comparison with the value for money which could be delivered by demolishing the dome, or by alternative development scenarios retaining the dome. The net present value of the agreements that I have just outlined to English Partnerships, assuming the full scheme is developed, is around £240 million as estimated by independent advisers. The expected cash to be received over a period of around 20 years will be up to £550 million.

The division of these proceeds between the Millennium Commission and English Partnerships has not been finally agreed. At the time of the Legacy deal a formula was agreed. Because that deal was of an entirely different sort to this one, the precise application of the formula to this deal needs to be considered further. But a fair split will be worked out. The process of working out that split does not affect the deal English Partnerships has done with MDL and Anschutz. On the basis of independent advice, we are satisfied that the deal is good value for money.

If the site had been sold outright now with no joint development agreement, the estimated value of the site—the amount we would have obtained in the market—was considerably less than the net present value of the deal of around £240 million. This is so whether the dome was there or not.

The other main comparator that we have considered is whether this current deal would have produced a higher return had the dome been demolished and the land under it dealt with in the same way as the wider peninsula lands. Independent advice from Jones Lang Lasalle satisfies us that the value to the Government of demolishing the dome would produce a lower return for the Government than preserving the dome, and developing the site in the agreed way. To make available more land by the demolition would not increase the amount of land which could be developed because the constraints on development over the period of the development are not the amount of land but planning and transport.

Moreover, we have received professional advice that the establishment of a successful and iconic venue enhances the value of the rest of the development.

These agreements allow the Government to participate in the increasing value of the land across the peninsula. This is sensible, and in the public interest. As the development proceeds, land values will increase. This will be reflected in the land value element in the payment to English Partnerships when the land is sold for development.

The deal also ensures a return to English Partnerships if the dome site is redeveloped at some point in the future. In addition, English Partnerships will share in profits from the arena and from the dome waterfront development.

The deal contains no promise by the Government to a particular crossing across the Thames. There is no commitment of any sort in the deal or associated with it. MDL has confirmed this.

The issue of enhancing the transport infrastructure is of huge importance to many communities in and around London. The increased activity on the Greenwich peninsula which comes from this development will inevitably be a factor which will bear on those decisions. But there is no promise on this issue in connection with the deal. The question of river crossings is a very complex regional issue, extending well beyond the Greenwich peninsula and relating to traffic flows across the region, not just in respect of individual developments.

As regards regeneration benefits, the Greenwich peninsula has for decades been contaminated and badly connected to the rest of London. It has been de-contaminated and the Jubilee line extension brings with it good transport links. This development will bring tens of thousands of jobs and up to 7,000 new homes, many of them affordable. We believe that it will have a significant regeneration effect. It will create a new mini city. The MDL scheme outperforms any other scheme in regeneration benefits.

As regards deliverability, the participants in the development include players with established records in delivering developments of the size and quality this project requires. This is their core business.

Anschutz Entertainment Group is part of the Anschutz Corporation, one of the largest private corporations in the United States of America. It has world-wide sporting and entertainment interests including the Staples Centre arena in Los Angeles. It has the resources to develop and the track record which shows that it can do it. It has the energy and commitment to deliver.

Lendlease is a major development company. It is quoted on the Australian stock exchange, operates in 40 countries and has a market capitalisation of around £2 billion. Quintain is quoted on the London stock exchange and has gross assets of £637 million.

Lendlease owns Bovis in the UK and has successfully developed the Sydney Olympic village and Bluewater shopping centre. It is currently project manager for the ground zero project in New York.

These players have the resources, the experience and the ability to deliver.

As regards a suitable use for the dome, by creating an arena and associated entertainment and leisure facilities we have found an appropriate use for what is widely acknowledged to be a high quality landmark building. Public access is assured. Keeping the dome as the lynchpin of the development has been welcomed by the London borough of Greenwich and the Mayor's office.

The agreements represent excellent value for money. The deal brings substantial regeneration benefits for the immediate area and beyond. It brings into the development players of proven ability and resource. It ensures that the public sector can participate in the increase in value of the whole estate as the development proceeds. It represents a fitting use for the dome which will enhance the value of the whole project and attract people and economic activity.

A huge amount of work has gone into this deal. It represents a very secure foundation on which the Government and their private-sector partners can proceed to deliver the benefits that are available to be harvested from the dome, and for the peninsula. We considered all other options but none offered comparable benefits.

The deal will deliver excellent value for money, thousands of jobs and homes, an exciting use of one of London's landmark buildings and the continued regeneration of a key site in the evolution of Greenwich, London and the Thames Gateway.

Council Tax Discount

Brian Cotter: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress has been made regarding the consultation on the Government's proposals to give local authorities the discretion to reduce the 50 per cent. council tax discount for second homes and long-term empty homes. [60494]

Mr. Leslie: The Government issued "Council Tax: A consultation paper on proposed changes for second homes and long term empty homes" last November. The deadline for responses was 15 February. We are currently considering responses and intend to announce the way forward shortly.

Correspondence

Mr. Weir: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many letters were received by each Minister in his Department in each month since June 1997. [59318]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

The Cabinet Office, on an annual basis, publishes a report to Parliament on the volume of Members' correspondence received by Departments. The report for 2001 was published on Friday 24 May *Official Report*, column 674W. Copies of previous reports are available in the Library of the House.

Information on the volume of other correspondence received by Ministers is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Land Sales

Mr. Luff: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the land that his Department is *(a)* offering for sale and *(b)* plans to offer in the next 12 months, giving its (i) location and (ii) size. [59062]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

The Cabinet Office is not presently offering any land for sale and currently has no plans to do so over the next 12 months.

Universal Banking Service

Brian Cotter: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many times the Ministerial Committee on the Universal Banking Service has met over the past year; and when. [59190]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

It is established practice under part 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to disclose information related to proceedings of Cabinet Committees.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what consultations the Ministerial Committee on the Universal Banking Service has had with outside organisations. [59189]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

The Government Departments involved in universal banking, and the Post Office, have had a number of discussions with outside organisations with an interest in this subject.

Expenditure Authorisation

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on *(a)* the circumstances in which an accounting officer should seek a direction from a Minister before authorising expenditure, *(b)* the number of occasions since 1 May 1997 that such directions have been sought by accounting officers and *(c)* the Department and sum involved and the purpose of the expenditure for which a direction was sought in each case. [54833]

Mr. Boateng *[pursuant to the reply, 8 May 2002, c. 253W]:* It has come to the Treasury's attention that the schedule of ministerial directions was incomplete and should have included a direction issued in 2001 in the Department of Trade and Industry concerning regional selective assistance. I apologise for this omission.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Capital Projects

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many local education authorities award PFI credits for capital investment into new buildings and major refurbishments have been made; what the capital value of each project is; and what stage they are in the PFI procurement process. [59836]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: 68 local education authority schools projects have been awarded PFI credits for new buildings or major refurbishments. Of these, 44 have reached financial and/or commercial close, with a total capital value of £1.229 billion. Another 24 projects are in procurement, having been approved by the Treasury-chaired Project Review Group (PRG). Details of these projects are given on the Department's website at www.teachernet.gov.uk/schoolsprivatefinanceinitiative. A further 30 projects have been awarded PFI credits on a provisional basis and are currently preparing Outline Business Cases for consideration by the PRG.

The capital value in terms of PFI credits for each of the 44 signed projects is shown in the table. The capital value of the 24 projects in procurement and the 30 provisionally approved projects is subject to change.

Local authorities	*PFI credits (£ million)*
Dorset	15.6
Kingston-upon-Hull	2.8
Hillingdon	18.8
Enfield	15.9
Portsmouth	12.4
Leeds	4.1
Birmingham	50.6
Waltham Forest	18.5
Manchester	3.7
East Sussex	19.0
Essex	11.1
Torbay	14.2
Staffordshire	13.7
Sheffield	58.8
Wiltshire	38.6
Stoke-on-Trent	93.0
Haringey	62.5
East Riding	26.0
Brent	9.0
Cornwall	60.7
Derbyshire	29.0
Kent	11.6
Kirklees	59.2
Lancashire	13.4
Liverpool	10.8
Newham	30.0
North Yorkshire	7.2
Wirral	58.5
Redbridge	20.0
Sunderland	12.0
Lincolnshire	12.8
Leeds	45.2
Liverpool	72.5
Southampton	42.6
Dudley	22.0
Brighton and Hove	24.8
Bolton	3.2
Newcastle	47.1
Nottinghamshire	17.2
Stockton	6.1
Tower Hamlets—Mulberry	17.4
Tower Hamlets—Grouped Pilot	88.5
Walsall	8.2
Tameside	20.9
Total	1,229.2

Devolution

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether a Scottish Executive Minister will be a member of the UK delegation to the Education and Youth Affairs European Union Council of Ministers meeting on 30 May; and what information is being provided by her Department to the Scottish Executive in connection with pre-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [60276]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: No Scottish Executive Minister attended the Education and Youth Affairs Council on 30 May 2002. Pre-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament is a matter for that Parliament and for the Scottish Executive The Scottish Executive has provided the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament with full briefing on the council agenda items and is in regular communication with my Department in respect of council business. My Department stands ready to provide any relevant information and ensures at all times that the Scottish Executive is consulted as appropriate on scrutiny issues in advance of council meetings.

Race Relations Policy

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the additional workload for teachers and heads arising from the new statutory requirement to *(a)* publish a race relations policy, *(b)* collect data on pupil performance, admissions and discipline by racial group, *(c)* analyse data on the criteria in *(b)* and *(d)* assess and monitor the data which have been collected and analysed. [60513]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: No such estimates have been made. Schools have been required to collect data on the ethnicity of pupils since 1989, and should already have an equal opportunities policy. This Department has encouraged schools to make more flexible use of administrative and support staff to collect, monitor and analyse data relating to pupils, and we have increased the number of support staff by 78,900 to 213,000 in order to reduce the time teachers spend on non-teaching tasks.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action the Government will take in respect of schools which do not have a written statement of race relations policy in place by 31 May. [60511]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Commission for Racial Equality will be responsible for ensuring that schools comply with the requirement to have a written race equality policy by 31 May. It was given this power by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of (i) secondary and (ii) primary schools which will have a written statement of the race relations policy by 31 May. [60512]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: No such estimates have been made. Under the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, all schools are required to have in place by 31 May a written race equality policy and measures for both assessing and monitoring the impact of all their policies—including their race equality policy—on pupils, staff and parents from different ethnic groups.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies have a policy of not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age. [59451]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department for Education and Skills is committed to raising awareness of age issues throughout the Department and eliminating age discrimination, particularly against older people. Age is a key element of the equal opportunities strategy and policy and will remain so.

Our policy provides that all eligible people must have equality of opportunity for employment and advancement on the basis of their suitability for the work, which is assessed through competence based systems. There is no unfair discrimination on the basis of age, disability, gender, marital status, sexual orientation, race, colour, nationality, ethnic or national origin. Additionally, we continually analyse management information relating to age, to monitor any adverse impact, and improve, our key HR systems.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools had over (i) 10 per cent., (ii) 25 per cent. and (iii) 50 per cent. of pupils who were asylum seekers' children in each of the last five years. [56874]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Information on the number of children of asylum seekers in schools is not collected centrally.

The Refugee Council has estimated that there is in the region of 80,000 children of asylum seekers and refugees in schools in the United Kingdom.

This compares to an estimated 8,397,000 children aged five to 15 years in maintained and non-maintained schools in the United Kingdom and therefore represents on average 0.95 per cent. of school aged children.

Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was spent by her Department on paying pensions to retired employees of her Department in 2001–02; if she will estimate the corresponding amounts to be spent in *(a)* five years' time, *(b)* 10 years' time, *(c)* 20 years' time and *(d)* 30 years' time; if she will estimate in each case the proportion of such liabilities which will arise from (i) unfunded pension schemes and (ii) pre-funded pension schemes; and in the case of pre-funded schemes, if she will estimate the value of the corresponding pre-funded funds in each of these years. [57363]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office on 23 May 2002, *Official Report,* columns 561–63W.

HIV/AIDS

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research her Department has conducted into the levels of awareness of HIV/AIDS among 10 to 24-year-olds between 1987 and 2002. [58784]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department for Education and Skills has not conducted research into the level of awareness of HIV/AIDS among young people. However, the Department of Health funds a four monthly tracking survey of young people aged 13 to 21 as part of the evaluation of the Teenage Pregnancy Strategy. This has consistently shown that 96 per cent. of those surveyed are aware of HIV/AIDS.

A recent report by the Office for Standards in Education recommended that the coverage of HIV and AIDS in schools is enhanced. We have responded to the report by commissioning practical guidance for teachers on HIV and sexually transmitted infections.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average age is at which children in the UK learn about HIV/AIDS in school; and what guidelines are given to teachers on the context of such sessions. [58783]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Teaching about HIV, AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases will normally be introduced to pupils at Key Stage 3 (ages 11 to 14).

Strategies for teaching about HIV/AIDS are covered by our Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) Guidance which was sent to all schools in July 2000. The guidance makes clear that SRE should be firmly rooted in the framework of Personal, Social and Health Education, to ensure that young people learn to respect themselves and make responsible and well informed decisions about their lives.

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many press releases have been issued by her Department in each month of 2002. [59484]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The following table shows the number of press releases issued each month this year to date:

Month	*Number of press releases*
January	21
February	19
March	22
April	20
May	20

The above press releases can be accessed via the Department's website, www.dfes.gov.uk/pns/newslist.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many press releases were issued by her Department *(a)* in each month between May and December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [59483]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Table A shows the number of press releases issued between May and December in 1997.

Table A

Month	*Number of press releases*
May	36
June	41
July	71
August	22
September	35
October	43
November	49
December	41
Total	338

Table B shows number of press releases issued each year from 1998 to 2001.

Table B

Date/Year	*Number of press releases*
1998	598
1999	605
2000	538
2001	395

All press releases dating from 1998 can be accessed via the Department's website, www.dfes.gov.uk/pns/newslist. Press releases dating before 1998 can be accessed via the Central Office of Information (COI) website, www.newsrelease-archive.net/coi/departments.

Free School Transport

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information she has collated on levels of non-attendance by *(a)* Asian girls, *(b)* Afro-Caribbean boys, *(c)* white working class boys and *(d)* pupils reliant on free school transport. [59284]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This level of detail is not available. Information on the number of pupils missing due to authorised or unauthorised absence is collected at school level. The characteristics of individual pupils cannot be identified from these data.

Autism

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to provide appropriate educational facilities for children with autism; and if she will make a statement. [58929]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Local education authorities have a duty to secure sufficient schools in their areas and, in doing so, have regard to the need for securing that special educational provision is made for pupils who have special educational needs, including children with autism. Each year authorities must submit for approval, to the local School Organisation Committee, a School Organisation Plan setting out how they will secure sufficient provision, including the provision proposed for children with special educational needs. Local Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships are responsible locally, in association with local education authorities, for early years education and child care provision and are making special educational needs support a priority between 2002–03 and 2004–05.

Children with autism are benefiting along with all other children from the considerable extra resources this Government have devoted to education, including the three-fold increase in the capital spending on schools from £775 million in 1997–98 to £2.2 billion in 2001–02. The forthcoming guidance from the Department's Autism

Working Group will help schools and local education authorities use the available resources to plan and make good quality provision for children with autistic spectrum disorders.

Exclusions

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if her Department will issue guidance to schools as to the circumstances in which *(a)* permanent exclusion and *(b)* fixed period exclusion are appropriate for pupils found to be taking or in possession of illegal drugs at school. [59903]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Existing guidance on pupil exclusion is contained in Circular 10/99, copies of which are in the Library. My Department will issue revised guidance on exclusion towards the end of this year which will clarify when exclusion is appropriate for incidents connected with illegal drugs including their use and possession in school.

Drugs have no place in our schools and we recently announced a package of new measures designed to tackle the problem. Details are in my Department's Press Notice of 21 May, copies of which are in the Library.

British Sign Language

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many British Sign Language tutors there are in the UK; and what are their qualifications. [60125]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There are no centrally held statistics on the number of British Sign Language tutors. However, inquiries indicate that there are around 800 tutors, but details of the level of qualifications held are not known.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to offer British Sign Language as an option for an additional language as a vocational certificate of education or an advanced vocational certificate of education. [60126]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Responsibility for offering vocational qualifications, and optional units within those qualifications, lies with the awarding bodies. There are no current plans to offer BSL within Foundation and Intermediate GNVQs, advanced vocational certificates of education, or within the new GCSEs in vocational subjects being introduced in September 2002. However, BSL qualifications are offered by the Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People (CACDP). A range of BSL qualifications offered by CACDP, and included in the Department's list of qualifications approved for use in schools and colleges by pupils and students aged pre-16, 16 to 18 and over 18, will be available from August 2002.

Public Consultation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the public consultations undertaken by her Department since June 2001, stating in each case the *(a)* number of respondents and *(b)* percentage of those specifically consulted who responded. [60141]

Estelle Morris: A table showing the public consultations undertaken by my Department since June 2001 follows as requested. The number of respondents to each consultation is also listed. Information on the percentage of those specifically consulted who subsequently responded is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Start date	*Title of consultation*	*Number of responses*
26 June 2001	Professional Duties of Advanced Skills Teachers	32
24 July 2001	Employment of Teachers who have successfully completed their course of teacher training but have not passed their skills test	10
11 June 2001	Teachers' Professional Development—Standards Framework Consultation	53
11 June 2001	Teachers' Professional Development Division—Development Portfolio Consultation	20
9 July 2001	Extending the Use of Parenting Orders	120
30 July 2001	Draft Regulations Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as Amended by the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001	202
31 August 2001	Registration and Monitoring of Independent Schools	422
18 September 2001	Consultation on targets for English and mathematics at Key Stage 20 in 2004	206
8 October 2001	City Academies: Arrangements for Pupils with SEN and Disabilities	37
5 October 2001	Expert support for the development of Foundation Stage Practice	166
1 September 2001	White Paper: Consultation on School Admissions	480
1 September 2001	White Paper: Consultation on Exclusion Appeal Panels	220
1 September 2001	White Paper: The Way Forward—A modernised Framework for School Governance	4,385
1 September 2001	Better Beginnings—Improving quality and increasing provision in early years education and child care	315
11 June 2001	Guidance on Producing a Portfolio	49
27 June 2001	Education Development Plans from 2002—draft guidance	85
23 November 2001	Teachers' Pay Reform—Performance Pay Progression Grant	70
6 November 2001	Teaching Fellowship Scheme (Excellence Fellowship Awards)	67
2 November 2001	Consultation on Proposals arising from the Treasury Review of Ill Health Retirement	78
24 September 2001	16–19 Organisation—Organisation and Inspection	332
5 September 2001	Schools White Paper: Achieving Success	73
12 October 2001	Modernisation of Higher Education Student Support	70
25 November 2001	Building a Strategy for Children and Young People—Children's Consultation	518
25 November 2001	Building a Strategy for Children and Young People—Young People's Consultation	643
25 November 2001	Building a Strategy for Children and Young People—Adults	253
18 December 2001	Review of Arts and Humanities Research Funding	117
19 December 2001	Review of Learning Partnerships	138
26 June 2001	July European Commission Memorandum on Lifelong Learning	250
14 January 2002	Accessible Schools: Planning to increase access to schools for disabled pupils	144

Start date	*Title of consultation*	*Number of responses*
30 January 2002	Quinquennial Review of Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA)	151
25 February 2002	The Adult Common Basic Data Set	43
24 January 2002	Revised Guidance on Exclusions from School—Draft for Consultation	206
18 February 2002	National Centre for Excellence in Science Teaching	329
4 February 2002	Raising Standards—Training and Development for Leaders and Managers	217
15 March 2002	School Workforce Remodelling Agenda	68
12 February 2002	14–19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards	1,049
12 February 2002	14–19: Extending Opportunities, Raising Standards Summary	2,618
27 February 2002	Early Years and Childcare Regulations	259
14 March 2002	Investors In Children	272
19 March 2002	Publication of School and College Performance Tables in 2002	195

Anglo-Italian Meetings

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on how many occasions in the last six months members of her Department have met their Italian counterparts; and what subjects were discussed. [56895]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* My officials regularly meet their Italian counterparts at a range of EU fora covering education, lifelong learning and youth.

Equal Treatment

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the women's organisations which have been consulted over the proposed legislation by her Department during the 2000–01 and 2001–02 Sessions; and if their responses have been published. [58184]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* My Department is keen to include all interested parties in developing policies that affect them. Information on informal consultation is not held centrally. However, the women's organisations which have been formally consulted in writing by this Department since 2000 are as follows:

Women's National Commission

British International Women Graduates

Women in Journalism

National Alliance of Women's Organisations

Royal College of Midwives

Bolton Metro's Corporate Women's Group

National Council of Women of GB.

Individual responses are not published but, in accordance with the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultation, are generally made available to anyone who asks for them.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she has established a baseline for policy appraisals against which to measure progress on equal treatment; and what progress has been achieved. [58182]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* Our approach to ensure progress on equal treatment is to ensure that equality becomes part and parcel of every element of policy, programme and service delivery.

Our recent mainstreaming review indicated that while we have good equality practices in some areas of the organisation, we could do more in the policy processes to support this. As a result, we have further developed this approach by encouraging all our policy makers to "mainstream" equal opportunities into all programmes and policies. To this end, we have developed a webtool to help them build equality considerations into their work from the outset. The "Fairway" webtool also includes good practice examples showing how some policy teams have taken this forward. Other "equality" measures included:

Embedding equality into our staff appraisal process;

Equality processing our business planning and our end of year reviews with the permanent secretary;

We regularly discuss equality and diversity issues with the senior members of the board and regular meetings between the senior equality adviser and the permanent secretary;

A yearly Staff survey which has a specific chapter dedicated to equality and diversity issues.

An example of these actions is that our Connexions Partnerships are required in their business plans to state how they will ensure that personal advisers come from a diversity of backgrounds. The Connexions Service National Unit monitors the diversity of each partnership's personal adviser work force, including gender and ethnicity.

We publicise all this through our internal communications system and our external DfES website (if appropriate).

Effective mainstreaming requires policy developers to work in consultation and partnership with organisations representing minority and disadvantaged groups, using research, monitoring and evaluation to understand customer needs and the impact their policies are having on them.

We will continue to address this and measure our progress.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the subject of each gender impact assessment drawn up by her Department since June 1997, indicating in each case whether the outcome has been *(a)* put out to consultation and *(b)* published. [58183]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* In 1998, in consultation with the Home Office and the former Department for Education and Employment, the Cabinet Office issued Policy Appraisal for Equal Treatment

(PAET) guidelines to all Government Departments. DfES has intentionally not focused just on gender issues but have focused on a wider range of equality issues.

Our recent mainstreaming review indicated that while we have good equality practices in some areas of the organisation, we could do more in the policy processes to support this. As a result, we have further developed this approach by encouraging all our policy makers to "mainstream" Equal Opportunities into all programmes and policies. To this end, we have developed a webtool to help them build equality considerations into their work from the outset. The "Fairway" web tool also includes good practice examples showing how some policy teams have taken this forward. Other "equality" measures included:

Embedding equality into our staff appraisal process;

Equality processing our business planning and our end of year reviews with the Permanent Secretary;

We regularly discuss equality and diversity issues with the members of the board and regular meetings between the Senior Equality Adviser and the Permanent Secretary.

An example of these actions is that our Connexions Partnerships are required in their business plans to state how they will ensure that Personal Advisers come from a diversity of backgrounds. The Connexions Service National Unit monitors the diversity of each partnership's Personal Adviser workforce, including gender and ethnicity.

We publicise all this through our internal communications system or our external DfES website (if appropriate).

Effective mainstreaming requires policy developers to work in consultation and partnership with organisations representing minority and disadvantaged groups, using research, monitoring and evaluation to understand customer needs and the impact their policies are having on them.

We will continue to address this and measure our progress.

Education and Youth Council

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the outcome of the EU Education and Youth Council held on 30 May. [59708]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I attended the Education session of this council. Jane Davidson, Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning in the National Assembly for Wales, attended the Youth session.

The Council held a detailed discussion on the follow-up to the Barcelona European Council which took place in March 2002, focusing in particular on the areas of: vocational training; foreign languages and European citizenship; organisational measures; and quality assurance.

A draft Council Resolution on lifelong learning was agreed without debate and political agreement was reached on a proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the council establishing the European Year of Education through Sport 2004. Ministers also gave political agreement to a proposal for a council decision amending Decision 1999/311/EC adopting the third phase of the trans-European co-operation scheme for higher education (Tempus III) (2000–06).

The council received information from the Commission on a proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the council amending Decision No. 253/2000/EC establishing the second phase of the Community action programme in the field of education "Socrates". A report on the outcome of the Summit of Heads of State or Government of the European Union and Latin America, held in Madrid on 17 and 18 May, was presented by the Presidency.

In the Youth session, the council agreed a draft Resolution on the framework of European co-operation in the youth field. This Resolution will take forward action to implement the proposals within the European Commission's White Paper "A New Impetus for European Youth". Discussion followed on youth participation in society, which is the priority theme of the White Paper. Ministers confirmed the importance of this theme.

The council received information from the Commission on the need to submit proposals in the next year for a new European Youth Programme to succeed the existing programme which is due to finish in 2006. The Presidency also presented a report on the actions it had taken since January 2002 to progress the youth agenda.

A copy of the council minutes will be placed in the Library in due course.

Racist Attacks

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information she collects by LEA on racially motivated attacks in schools. [60256]

Mr. Miliband: Schools are required to record all racial incidents and to report these to their local education authorities annually. Local education authorities and schools are not required to send this information to the Department.

Local Education Authority Targets

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list, for the most recent year in which both sets of information are available, *(a)* the targets agreed by each LEA with her Department and *(b)* their performance against those targets. [59239]

Mr. Miliband: The Department has agreed pupil performance targets with each LEA for 2002 and 2004. Information on their performance against their 2002 targets will be available when this year's results are published in the autumn.

Departmental Policies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if she will list those initiatives of her Department which have been applied in *(a)* Lewisham and *(b)* the Isle of Wight, indicating the level of financial support she has provided in each case and the number of pupils in each LEA; [60229]

(2) if she will list the activities pursued by her Department that have had a particular impact on the Isle of Wight since 7 June 2001. [57676]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Information required has been placed in the Libraries.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the activities pursued by her Department that have had a particular impact on the Wycombe constituency since 17 June 2001. [58626]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

PhD Students

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many PhD students are studying in universities in England and Wales, broken down by *(a)* university and *(b)* course; and what the equivalent figures were in each of the last five years. [55059]

Margaret Hodge: The latest information available has been placed in the Libraries.

Behaviour and Truancy

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the basis is for her statement that £60 million was spent on behaviour and truancy by the last Government. [59283]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Grants relating to truancy, disaffection and behaviour between 1992 and 1997 were as follows.

Financial year	*£ million*
1992–93	5
1993–94	8.9
1994–95	13.7
1995–96	15.4
1996–97	17.5
Total	60.5

This is based on the relevant section of the Grant for Education Support and Training (GEST) which became the Standards Fund from 1998–99. All figures include LEA contributions.

Departmental Sponsors

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what the duties are of hon. Members appointed as sponsors to her Department; and what assistance is given by officials in her Department to them in carrying out these duties; [59976]

(2) which hon. Members have been appointed as sponsors to her Department since 7 June 2001; and when each of them were appointed. [59961]

Estelle Morris: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 22 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 362W.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on how many occasions between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [58729]

Estelle Morris: Between 1 April 2001 and 31 March 2002, a special adviser in my Department travelled abroad on one occasion at a cost of £376.64. All travel by special advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code, and the Civil Service Management Code.

Nurseries

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many nurseries there were; and what proportion of these were located in rural areas, broken down by region in each of the last 10 years. [57462]

Margaret Hodge: The information is not available in the form requested. The information available is shown in Tables 1 and 2. The figures are as returned by local authorities.

The latest figures on day care facilities in England were published by my Department in Statistical Bulletin 08/01 "Children's Day Care facilities at 31 March 2001" in October 2001, a copy of which is available from the Library. An electronic copy of this publication is also available on my Department's website (http://www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics).

Statistics are collected at local education authority level, not split between urban and rural areas. Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs) are responsible for ensuring full coverage of both urban and rural areas within their areas of remit. EYDCPs have been set up in every local authority area of England.

To maximise the support available in rural areas, an additional £22 million has been allocated for a round of smaller Sure Start programmes, delivered through EYDCPs. These new Mini-Sure Starts will provide additional resources to new neighbourhood nurseries and existing child care facilities in rural areas, small towns, and pockets of disadvantage enabling them to offer a wider range of family support.

To date plans for Mini-Sure Starts show that over 65 per cent. of the programmes will be integrated with a neighbourhood nursery, helping to ensure families most in need have access to quality, affordable child care though neighbourhood nurseries and the additional services provided by Sure Start.

Table 1: Number of day nurseries for children under eight—England, 1992–2001

Position at 31 March each year

Year as at 31 March	*Total number of day nurseries*
1992	4,100
1993	4,500
1994	5,000
1995	5,400
1996	5,700
1997	6,100
1998	6,700
1999	7,000
2000	7,500
2001	7,800

Notes:

1. Includes facilities provided by voluntary organisations under agency arrangements, under section 22 of the National Health Service Act 1946.

2. Data collection guidance changed in 1999.

Table 2: Providers in day nurseries by Government office region—England, 1999–2001

Positions at 31 March each year

	All day nurseries		
	1999	*2000*	*2001*
England	7,000	7,500	7,800
North East	190	190	220
North West and Merseyside North West	840	910	940
Merseyside	240	200	250
Yorkshire and Humber	700	690	710
East Midlands	560	660	550
West Midlands	870	900	970
East of England	570	610	600
Greater London			
Inner London	610	650	680
Outer London	550	600	620
South East	1,100	1,240	1,400
South West	770	900	910

Note:

1. All figures are estimates and have been rounded to the nearest 10 or 100 as appropriate. Figures may not add to totals because of rounding.

Pupil Referral

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many places will be available in pupil referral units for pupils of each age cohort in each local education authority in September. [59282]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I am confident that by September 2002 there will be sufficient places within pupil referral units and other alternative education provision for all those who have been permanently excluded. A breakdown of the number of places within pupil referral units is not held, and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of ordinary written questions for her Department were answered within a week of tabling in each month since June 2001; and what proportion of questions for named day received a substantive answer on that day in each month since June 2001. [58989]

Estelle Morris: The details requested are contained in the following table.

Percentage

	Named day PQs	*Ordinary written PQs*
2001		
June	60	88
July	73	84
October	45	48
November	48	45
December	38	56
2002		
January	60	60
February	48	26
March	49	33
April	23	56
May	57	38

Staff Pay

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what have been the total salary costs of each of the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible in each of the last five years. [50302]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested is listed in the table below.

£ million

NDPB	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Adult Learning Inspectorate	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	8.00
British Educational Communications and Technology Agency	2.52	2.42	2.73	3.11	3.22
Construction Industry Training Board[1]	18.71	19.98	21.15	23.21	26.73
Engineering Construction Industry Training Board[1]	1.05	1.04	1.27	1.29	1.34
Higher Education Funding Council	5.06	5.13	6.05	6.90	[2]7.31
Investors in People UK Ltd.	0.80	0.88	1.01	1.09	1.31
Learning and Skills Council	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	136.00
National College for School Leadership	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2.22
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority	n/a	14.27	15.08	15.51	[2]17.57
Student Loans Company	5.62	6.80	9.35	10.42	11.74
Teacher Training Agency	2.45	2.84	3.03	3.63	[2]4.90

[1] The ITB's financial year ends 31 December

[2] Figure not yet audited

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost in 2001–02 was of the pay increase to staff in her Department, agencies and the non-departmental public bodies for which she is responsible; and what the cost of the forthcoming increase will be in 2002–03. [50418]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested for 2001–02 is listed in the table. The information for 2002–03 increases is not yet available.

2001–02 pay increase

	£ million
Department for Education and Skills NDPBs	3.53
Adult Learning Inspectorate	0.30
British Educational Communications and Technology Agency	0.10
Construction Industry Training Board	0.76
Engineering Construction Industry Training Board	0.06
Higher Education Funding Council for England	0.28
Investors in People UK Ltd.	0.03
Learning and Skills Council	2.55
National College for School Leadership	0.19
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority	0.43
Student Loans Company	0.68
Teacher Training Agency	0.16

Teachers' Pay

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to reduce the pay gap between school teachers and college lecturers. [58264]

Margaret Hodge: Teachers in maintained schools are subject to national schoolteachers' pay and conditions. Further education sector colleges are run by independent corporations established under the Further Education and Higher Education Act 1992 and there is no national pay structure in place. Colleges are free to establish pay scales that meet their needs and can be agreed with their staff. This Government have acknowledged the historic funding gap between schools and FE and we have pledged to bring up levels of funding and ensure upward convergence over time. Annual funding for FE has increased by over £1.1 billion between 1997 and 2002–03, up to around £4.3 billion. With a further increase of £300 million planned next year, the real terms increase in total funding between 1997 and 2003–04 will be 26 per cent. The Teaching Pay Initiative (TPI) budget is £311 million over the period 2001–04. This is to reward excellent teaching and is over and above any general pay rise. The additional investment we are making in the FE sector should help meet the pay aspirations of their staff.

Further Education

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what strategy she has in place to recruit and train new staff in further education colleges. [58266]

Margaret Hodge: We are supporting colleges' recruitment strategies by making available over £310 million from 2001 to 2004 through the Teaching Pay Initiative, so that colleges can reward high quality teaching. From September this year, new teachers in shortage subject areas may qualify for payments of £4,000 under the "Golden Hellos" initiative and later this year, subject to the passing of legislation by Parliament, we will introduce a pilot scheme to help to pay off, over time, the student loans of newly appointed teachers in shortage subjects in England and Wales.

We are supporting the professional development of FE teachers and staff through targeted assistance to colleges of £175 million in 2002–03 from the LSC's Learning and Skills Standards Fund. We have also introduced training bursaries for FE teachers in pilot institutions.

Recruiting and training new staff is just one element of the Government's plans to improve the quality and responsiveness of further education. We have therefore started a debate with the sector and will announce later this year our proposals for implementing a strategy, supported by the outcomes of the Spending Review, to raise standards and performance and meet employer and skill needs.

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans the Government have to change the balance in pay levels between further education colleges and secondary schools. [57509]

Margaret Hodge: Teachers in maintained schools are subject to national schoolteachers' pay and conditions. Further education sector colleges are run by independent corporations established under the Further Education and Higher Education Act 1992 and there is no national pay structure in place. Colleges are free to establish pay scales that meet their needs and can be agreed with their staff. This Government has acknowledged the historic funding gap between schools and FE and we have pledged to bring up levels of funding and ensure upward convergence over time. Annual funding for FE has increased by over £1.1 billion between 1997 and 02–03, up to around £4.3 billion. With a further increase of £300 million planned next year, the real terms increase in total funding between 1997 and 03–04 will be 26 per cent. The Teaching Pay Initiative (TPI) budget is £311 million over the period 2001–04. This is to reward excellent teaching and is over and above any general pay rise. The additional investment we are making in the FE sector should help meet the pay aspirations of their staff.

Dr. Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many further education colleges have not implemented the 2001 pay award for further education lecturers. [57508]

Margaret Hodge: The Department does not collect this information centrally. However, we understand from the Association of Colleges that 17 per cent. of colleges have not implemented the 3.7 per cent. pay award recommended by the Association of Colleges and the trade unions. However, 73 per cent. of colleges paid the recommended 3.7 per cent. pay award and 10 per cent. of colleges exceeded the 3.7 per cent. pay award.

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many additional places for 16 to 19 year old students in full-time further education will be created in Warrington in 2003; and what the average cost per student of funding those additional places will be. [56680]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* The information requested is subject to funding negotiations between colleges and local LSCS that will conclude later this year.

Tuition Fees

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of those students in higher education who carry the post code premium were assessed to pay *(a)* full tuition fees and *(b)* no tuition fees in each of the last three calendar years. [57514]

Margaret Hodge: Information as requested is not collected centrally.

Work-related Illness

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many employees of her Department retired through work-related ill health in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost to the Department was. [56055]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department for Education and Skills does not maintain records that enable ill health retirements to be separately identified as work related. For the Department for Education and Skills the number of staff retired with a medical retirement certificate issued by the civil service pension scheme medical adviser for the year 2001 was eight.

Benefits provided on medical retirement are as set out in the rules of the principal civil service pension scheme and laid before Parliament, and provide for an immediate payment of enhanced pension and lump sum. Ill health retirement is met centrally from the civil superannuation vote. For the year ending March 2002, provisional expenditure met from the vote was £310 million in respect of all civil service cases for which an ill health pension has been awarded. These cases number approximately 67,000 and include those who have formerly been ill health retired but who have now reached and exceeded the normal retirement age.

Sixth Forms (Hendon)

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what amounts were allocated for sixth forms to each of the secondary schools in Hendon for academic year 2001–02; and what amounts are being allocated by the Learning and Skills Council for sixth forms to each of the secondary schools in Hendon for academic year 2002–03; and if she will make a statement. [57616]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information for 2001–02 is not available in the format requested. From April this year the Learning and Skills Council allocates funds to LEAs, including Barnet, for their sixth forms. The LSC allocations for each school sixth form, by LEA area, are published on the LSC's website at www.lsc.gov.uk/documents.

Nursery Provision (Lancashire)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many nursery staff have been in service in Lancashire in each year since 1997. [57281]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The available information for maintained nursery and primary schools is shown in the table. Information is not available for early years settings in the private, voluntary and independent sectors.

Full-time equivalent of staff in maintained nursery schools and nursery classes in maintained primary schools in Lancashire[1]

	1997[2]	*1998*[2]
Maintained nursery schools		
Teachers[3]	99.5	97.41
Teaching assistants[4]	134.05	140.93
Administrative staff[5]	14.92	14.92
Other staff[6]	0.08	0.24
Nursery classes in maintained primary schools[7]		
Teaching assistants in nursery classes[4]	101.93	106.49
Other education support staff in nursery classes	3.61	5.98

	Lancashire	*Blackburn with Darwen*	*Blackpool*
1999[8]			
Maintained nursery schools			
Teachers[3]	74.78	22.92	[9]—
Teaching assistants[4]	114.16	37.46	[9]—
Administrative staff[5]	11.53	3.31	[9]—
Other staff[6]	0	0.08	[9]—
Nursery classes in maintained primary schools[7]			
Teaching assistants in nursery classes[4]	83.76	16.16	9.59
Other education support staff in nursery classes	4.03	0.59	0
2000[8]			
Maintained nursery schools			
Teachers[3]	77.69	25	[9]—
Teaching assistants[4]	112.1	38.19	[9]—
Administrative staff[5]	11.55	3.59	[9]—
Other staff[6]	0	0.08	[9]—
Nursery classes in maintained primary schools[7]			
Teaching assistants in nursery classes[4]	77.91	17.11	9.16
Other education support staff in nursery classes	6.11	0	0
2001[8]			
Maintained nursery schools			
Teachers[3]	72.2	19.45	[9]—
Teaching assistants[4]	108.97	38.91	[9]—
Administrative staff[5]	11.69	3.56	[9]—
Other staff[6]	0	0.08	[9]—
Nursery classes in maintained primary schools[7]			
Teaching assistants in nursery classes[4]	75.61	18.6	9.79
Other education support staff in nursery classes	6.94	0.35	0.89
2002 (provisional)[8,10]			
Maintained nursery schools			
Teachers[3]	69.51	19.09	[9]—
Teaching assistants[4]	103.31	40.18	[9]—
Administrative staff[5]	13.09	3.7	[9]—
Other staff[6]	0.32	0.08	[9]—
Nursery classes in maintained primary schools[7]			
Teaching assistants in nursery classes[4]	[11]—	[11]—	[11]—
Other education support staff in nursery classes	[11]—	[11]—	[11]—

[1] Position in January each year.
[2] Before local government reorganisation.
[3] Includes head teacher, qualified and unqualified teachers.
[4] Includes nursery assistants, special needs support staff, minority ethnic pupil support staff and non-teaching assistants.
[5] Includes secretaries and bursars.
[6] Includes other education support staff.
[7] There may also be teachers in nursery classes but it is not possible to separate these from the overall primary school figures.
[8] After local government reorganisation.
[9] Not applicable (no schools of this type).
[10] It is not possible to separate the number of teaching assistants or other staff in nursery classes from the overall primary school figures.
[11] Not available.

Source:

Annual Schools Census

National Child Care Strategy

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will indicate the proposals in the national child care strategy which will most benefit Londoners. [55936]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* The Government aims, over time, to ensure affordable, accessible, good quality child care in every neighbourhood, and to ensure a good quality free early education place for every three and four year old. Londoners are benefiting from the range of measures within the national child care strategy. For example: between 1997 and 2001, 122,000 new child care places have been created in London; in financial year 2002–03 we will pay some £16.7 million in child care grant to London local education authorities to support further development of new child care places; and we are targeting disadvantaged areas in London for 9,060 new neighbourhood nurseries places over the three years to March 2004, with total revenue support of some £39.9 million and capital support of some £16.9 million.

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will report on progress with the child care strategy. [55926]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* The consultation on our document, "Building a Strategy for Children and Young People" generated a good range of comments which we are now considering. Separate reports analysing the responses from children and from young people are already available from the Children and Young People's Unit's website at "www.cypu.gov.uk/consultationresults." The Unit is currently analysing the responses from the consultation with individual adults and organisations, and this report will follow shortly.

The responses have already been fed into the consideration of services for children in the current spending review. We intend to publish our final strategy document later this year.

Assisted Places

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students are on assisted places in the 2001–02 academic year; how much is being spent on these places; and if she will make a statement. [58652]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There are 12,550 pupils holding places under the Assisted Places Scheme in the 2001–02 academic year at a total estimated cost of £53 million in that year. We are phasing out the scheme in accordance with our 1997 manifesto pledge and using the resources saved to reduce infant class sizes.

Departmental Budgets

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of her Department's budgets for the current financial year remain unallocated; and under what budget headings this money falls. [59105]

Estelle Morris: £30 million of the Department's 2002–03 budget remains unallocated. This is currently held under the departmental unallocated provision.

Print and Design Costs

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much her Department spent on print and design costs in 2001–02. [59365]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The majority of the Department's print and design is commissioned by its Publicity Division.

The costs of such work placed in the last financial year are as follows:

	£ million
Print	7.2
Design	2.6
Total	9.8

Regional Organisation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what regional organisation her Department has; and if she will list the counties and unitary authorities in each region in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002. [58944]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department for Education and Skills works at the regional level through the Government offices for the regions. There are nine Government offices in England: south-east, south-west, London, east of England, East Midlands, West Midlands, Yorkshire and the Humber, north-west, and north-east. The Government offices are funded by nine sponsor Departments: the Department for Education and Skills; the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions; the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; the Department of Trade and Industry; the Department for Work and Pensions; the Home Office; the Department for Culture, Media and Sport; the Department of Health; and Cabinet Office. The Regional Co-ordination Unit based in the Cabinet Office has overall responsibility for the Government office network.

The Department commissions Government offices to deliver a range of regionally focused services across the DfES agenda from early years to adult learning. Government offices also ensure that the Department's work is joined up with the regional implementation of programmes and policies of all sponsor Departments, and with the work of regional stakeholders.

Higher Education Funding

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to raise the 10 per cent. postcode premium recognised in higher education funding to 20 per cent. [59292]

Margaret Hodge: The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is reviewing the funding it allocates to higher education institutions to recognise the additional costs of recruiting and retaining students from non-traditional backgrounds (the 'postcode premium'). HEFCE is consulting institutions on widening participation; this includes consultation on the appropriate basis on which the postcode premium is allocated. The deadline for institutions to respond is 19 July.

Plans for spending in future years will depend on the outcome of the spending review.

Scottish Executive

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many times her Office has made representations to the Scottish Executive since May 1999 broken down by *(a)* Department approached, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date; [59534]

(2) how many representations the Scottish Executive has made to her Department since May 1999 broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive Department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date; [59535]

(3) what plans she has to transfer the administration of reserved powers and functions of the Department for Education and Skills, its executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies within its remit from her Department to the Scotland Office. [59536]

Estelle Morris: I refer the hon. Member to the answers given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 24 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 600W.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the mandate of the Tempus Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56718]

Margaret Hodge: The purpose and responsibilities of the Tempus Committee are set out in Council Decision 1999/311/EC of 29 April 1999, which established the third phase of the Tempus programme (Tempus III). The Committee has met twice over the last 12 months. Two officials from the UK attend the Committee meetings. Travel costs for one official are met from Commission resources for the programme. Travel costs for the second official and subsistence costs for both officials, incurred by this Department and the Department for Work and Pensions, are in the region of £1,420 per annum. The Committee is currently considering implications for the programme guide for applicants of the Commission's proposal to extend the programme to countries of the MEDA region.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of such committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com(2001)783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every such committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the mandate of the Co-ordination Group to promote uniformity of application of the general system for the recognition of higher education diplomas (first general system) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56754]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The mandate for this Group is set out in Article 9 (2) of Directive 89/48 EEC as follows:

> A co-ordinating group shall be set up under the aegis of the Commission, composed of the co-ordinators appointed by each Member State or their deputies and chaired by a representative of the Commission. The task of this group shall be
>
> to facilitate the implementation of this Directive,
>
> to collect all useful information for its application in Member States.
>
> The group may be consulted by the Commission on any changes to the existing system that may be contemplated.

The group meets twice yearly and the UK is represented by a DTI official. It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the Committee without incurring disproportionate cost.

The main issues/topics considered at the last meeting were:

Proposed legislative reforms of the system of recognition of professional qualifications;

State of accession negotiations;

Information points from the Education and Culture DG;

Mobilisation of experts in the context of enlargement;

Notification of the measures transposing Directive 99/42.

Steps are being taken to increase the accountability and transparency of comitology committees in general. Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council

Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Com(2001)783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Social Exclusion Unit

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer from the Deputy Prime Minister of 20 July 2001, *Official Report*, columns 461–62W on the Social Exclusion Unit, in which schools targets have been set for the reduction of truancy and which schools have met those targets; in what proportion of schools truancy was more than three per cent. above average in 2001 and what the current proportion is; and how many schools fall into each decile measured by the proportion of pupils days lost through *(a)* unauthorised absence and *(b)* all absence in the most recent year for which information is available. [58933]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In 1999 225 schools were asked to set targets to reduce unauthorised absence. These schools had unauthorised absence three percentage points or more above the average for their sector (primary, secondary or special) for the previous two academic years. Locally determined school level targets were agreed by the school's governing body in close discussion with the education welfare service. 117 schools met the targets that they set for themselves and in total 181 (80 per cent.) decreased their unauthorised absence rate.

In the academic year 2000–01 326 schools recorded absence three percentage points or more above the national average for their sector (0.5 per cent. for primary schools; 1.1 per cent. for secondary schools and 2.2 per cent. for special schools). These are the most recent published results.

It is impossible to calculate meaningful deciles due to the limited range of the data.

Overtime Payments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what her policy is on overtime payments for staff in her Department. [59121]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information is as follows:

Grades AA to SEO

Grades AA to SEO working overtime Monday to Friday receive payment at time and a half or time off equal to the hours worked. Weekend and public holiday overtime attracts either payment at plain time plus time off equal to the hours worked, or payment at double time.

Grades 6 and 7

Once at least eight additional hours are worked in a week, grades 6 and 7 receive a set hourly discretionary payment for additional hours worked outside normal conditioned hours during the week and for additional hours at the weekend. The hourly rates are:

Grade 7

London: £11.72

Elsewhere: £10.89

Grade 6

London: £12.98

Elsewhere: £12.42.

For weekend and public holiday attendance they also receive an hourly rate payment (restricted to the discretionary payment rates) plus time off equal to the hours worked. Time off not taken for the weekend attendance can be used towards the eight hours qualifying for discretionary payments.

SCS

Members of the senior civil service are not eligible for payment for any extra hours worked. Their contract of employment provides that they may be required to work such additional hours as may from time to time be reasonable and necessary for the efficient performance of their duties.

Vocational Qualifications

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 16 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 895W, and with reference to Sir Gareth Robert's Review 'Set for Success—The supply of people with science, technology, engineering and mathematics skills', if vocational qualifications are treated as non-academic. [60561]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) accredit qualifications in relation to three broad categories, general, vocationally-related and occupational. GCSEs in vocational subjects are available and suitable for young people of all abilities, and are categorised as vocationally-related. Other vocational qualifications are categorised according to the published QCA criteria as either occupational or vocationally-related. National curriculum GCSEs and GCE A-levels are categorised as general qualifications.

Vocational/Academic GCSEs

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to the answer of 16 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 895W, how *(a)* vocational and *(b)* academic GCSEs are defined. [60560]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: GCSE qualifications are defined by accreditation criteria set out in the national qualification framework. For new GCSEs in vocational subjects, the qualifications meet the common accreditation criteria for vocationally-related qualifications; for other GCSEs, the common accreditation criteria for general qualifications.

In addition to meeting common criteria, the qualifications must meet additional criteria, specific to GCSEs and GCSEs in vocational subjects, and, where they exist, the requirements of the criteria specific to particular subjects.

Public Bodies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which of the agencies and NDPBs sponsored by her Department have a regional organisation; and if she will list the counties and unitary authorities in each region in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002. [58945]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department for Education and Skills sponsors no agencies or NDPBs that have a regional organisation.

The counties and unitary authorities in each region in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002 are as follows:

Region, counties and unitaries

The unitary authorities that came into being as a result of the last review were established over three years.

East of England Region

- Counties
  - Bedfordshire
  - Cambridgeshire
  - Essex
  - Hertfordshire
  - Norfolk
  - Suffolk
- Unitaries
  - Luton[1]
  - Peterborough[1]
  - Southend-on-Sea[1]
  - Thurrock[1]

East Midlands Region

- Counties
  - Derbyshire
  - Leicestershire
  - Lincolnshire
  - Northamptonshire
  - Nottinghamshire
- Unitaries
  - Derby[1]
  - Leicester[1]
  - Nottingham[1]
  - Rutland[1]

North East Region

- Counties
  - Durham
  - Northumberland
- Unitaries
  - Darlington[1]
  - Hartlepool
  - Middlesbrough
  - Redcar and Cleveland
  - Stockton-on-Tees
  - Tyne and Wear (Met)
    - Gateshead
    - Newcastle upon Tyne
    - North Tyneside
    - South Tyneside
    - Sunderland

North West Region

- Counties
  - Cumbria
  - Cheshire
  - Lancashire
- Unitaries
  - Blackburn with Darwen[1]
  - Blackpool[1]
  - Halton[1]
  - Warrington[1]
  - Greater Manchester (Met)
  - Bury
  - Bolton
  - Manchester
  - Oldham
  - Rochdale
  - Salford
  - Stockport
  - Tameside
  - Trafford
  - Wigan
  - Merseyside (Met)
    - Knowsley
    - Liverpool
    - Sefton
    - St. Helens
    - Wirral

South East Region

- Counties
  - Buckinghamshire
  - Oxfordshire
  - East Sussex
  - Hampshire
  - Kent
  - Surrey
  - West Sussex
- Unitaries
  - Brighton and Hove[1]
  - Isle of Wight (County)
  - Medway[1]
  - Milton Keynes[1]
  - Portsmouth[1]
  - Southampton[1]
  - Berkshire
    - Bracknell Forest[1]
    - Reading[1]
    - Slough[1]
    - West Berkshire[1]
    - Windsor and Maidenhead[1]
    - Wokingham[1]

South West Region

- Counties
  - Cornwall
  - Devon
  - Dorset
  - Gloucestershire
  - Somerset
  - Wiltshire

Unitaries

- Bath and North East Somerset
- Bournemouth[1]
- Bristol
- North Somerset
- Poole[1]
- Plymouth[1]
- South Gloucestershire
- Swindon[1]
- Torbay[1]

West Midlands Region

Counties

- Shropshire
- Staffordshire
- Warwickshire
- Worcestershire

Unitaries

- Herefordshire[1]
- Stoke on Trent[1]
- Telford and Wrekin[1]
- West Midlands (Met)
- Birmingham
  - Coventry
  - Dudley
  - Sandwell
  - Solihull
  - Walsall
  - Wolverhampton

Yorkshire and The Humber Region

Counties

- North Yorkshire

Unitaries

- East Riding of Yorkshire
- Kingston upon Hull
- North Lincolnshire
- North East Lincolnshire
- York
- South Yorkshire (Met)
  - Barnsley
  - Doncaster
  - Rotherham
  - Sheffield
- West Yorkshire (Met)
  - Bradford
  - Calderdale
  - Kirklees
  - Leeds
  - Wakefield

London Region

London Boroughs (Unitaries)

- Barking and Dagenham
- Barnet
- Bexley
- Brent
- Bromley
- Camden
- Corporation of London
- Croydon
- Ealing
- Enfield
- Greenwich
- Hackney
- Hammersmith and Fulham
- Haringey
- Harrow
- Havering
- Hillingdon
- Hounslow
- Islington
- Kensington and Chelsea
- Kingston upon Thames
- Lambeth
- Lewisham
- Merton
- Newham
- Redbridge
- Richmond upon Thames
- Southwark
- Sutton
- Tower Hamlets
- Waltham Forest
- Wandsworth
- Westminster

[1] Established on or after 1 April 1997.

Special Needs

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what types of specific *(a)* handicap and *(b)* special needs are defined as constituting special needs; and how many children there are with each specific type of handicap. [58930]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The guidance contained in the new SEN Code of Practice, which came into force in January 2002, does not assume that there are hard and fast categories of special educational need. It recognises that each child is unique and the questions asked by LEAs should recognise that there is a wide spectrum of special educational needs that are frequently inter-related, although there are also specific needs that usually relate directly to particular types of impairment. Children will have needs and requirements which may fall into at least one of four areas, and many children will have inter-related needs. The impact of these combinations on the child's ability to function, learn and succeed should be taken into account. The areas of need are: communication and interaction; cognition and learning; behaviour, emotional and social development and sensory and/or physical.

Information on numbers of children with specific types of handicap is not available centrally. The Department is considering introducing a requirement for schools and local education authorities to provide this information from 2004.

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children with special educational needs there are at each of stages one to four of the Code of Practice. [58925]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Information is not collected in the form requested. Information on the stages of SEN was collected for the first time in January 2002 but in line with the new SEN Code of Practice which replaced the categorisation of SEN into stages 1–5.

The number of SEN pupils without statements in maintained primary schools in England was 865,140 (or 19.8 per cent of pupils on roll) and 536,810 (or 16.5 per cent of pupils on roll) in maintained secondary schools in January 2002.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children have been statemented in Gloucestershire in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available; and if she will make a statement. [60113]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested is shown in the following table.

Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs (SEN)[1], Gloucestershire local education authority[2] (position in January each year)

Year	*Total pupils*	*Number of pupils with statements of SEN*
1992	75,244	1,476
1993	76,873	1,756
1994	78,447	2,114
1995	80,267	2,240
1996	81,527	2,431
1997	82,630	2,480
1998	83,496	2,472
1999	84,586	2,487
2000	85,407	2,623
2001[3]	85,695	2,561
2002[4]	85,972	2,343

[1] Includes maintained primary and secondary and maintained and non-maintained special schools.

[2] Pupils attending schools within Gloucestershire LEA.

[3] Information submitted by some schools in January 2001 was known to be incomplete and estimates were made at national and regional level to allow for this. Figures shown for Gloucestershire LEA are, however, not adjusted and are as reported to the Department.

[4] Provisional.

Source:

Annual Schools' Census

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children with statements of special educational need were taught in *(a)* maintained special schools and *(b)* other maintained schools in each of the last five years, broken down by local education authority. [58926]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: A table showing the available information has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Class Sizes

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average class size was in *(a)* schools and *(b)* secondary schools broken down by school year and local education authority in each year since 1997. [47481]

Mr. Milliband *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* A table showing the available information has been placed in the Library.

HEALTH

NHS Finance

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from health authorities, PCTs and NHS trusts about the obligation to fund NICE-approved treatments. [45932]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 March 2002]:* According to the Department's records we have received no formal representations from health authorities, primary care trusts and national health service trusts about the statutory requirements to fund treatments recommended by National Institute of Clinical Excellence.

NHS Costs

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the percentage changes in *(a)* all NHS costs and *(b)* NHS drugs costs in each of the past five years. [54017]

Ms Blears: The table sets out the percentage increases in the last five years for national health service drugs expenditure and total net NHS expenditure.

Percentage

		Expenditure		
	FHS drugs	*HCHS drugs*	*Total NHS drugs*	*Total net NHS*
1997–98	8.2	13.2	9.3	5.1
1998–99	6.2	11.3	7.3	5.6
1999–2000	11.4	13.0	11.7	8.9
2000–01	6.8	11.8	7.9	9.7
2001–02	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	12.0

[1] Not available

Dental Amalgam

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will commission research to ascertain whether the kinetics of mercury determined from occupational studies are applicable to patients with dental amalgam restorations; [48831]

(2) if he will commission research to assess the likelihood of harm to pregnant women and their babies from dental amalgam fillings during pregnancy. [48830]

Ms Blears: The 1998 European Union expert report concluded that currently available data indicate that mercury from dental amalgam restorations will not cause an unacceptable health risk to the general population. There is little evidence that an unacceptable health risk is associated with occupational exposure of dental personnel providing due care is used in the preparation and handling of dental amalgam. The same report also concluded that there is no scientific evidence that the use of dental amalgam is related to adverse effects on pre and post-natal health or fertility. There are therefore no plans to commission further research into amalgam safety. However, it remains the Department's advice that dentists should continue to avoid or delay any dental intervention or medication during pregnancy.

NHS Dentistry

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the population of England was registered with an NHS dentist in each year since 1992, broken down by *(a)* region and *(b)* health authority. [56247]

Ms Blears: Arrangements are now in place to ensure that patients can gain access to national health service services simply by calling NHS Direct. This means that even if a patient chooses not to register with a dentist it will still be possible for that patient to access all forms of dentistry that are provided by the NHS.

The following information has been placed in the Library;

The percentage of the population registered with a general dental service (GDS) dentist by regional health authority is shown in table 1 for England at 30 September 1992 to 1995.

The percentage of population registered with a GDS dentist by regional office is shown in table 2 for England at 30 September for each year since 1996.

The percentage of population registered with a GDS dentist by family health service authority is shown in table 3 for England at 30 September 1992 to 30 September 1995.

The percentage of population registered with a GDS dentist by health authority is shown in table 4 for England at 30 September for each year since 1996.

Registrations were first introduced in October 1990. From September 1996, the registration period was changed from 24 months to 15 months for adults, and from 12 months to 15 months for children. As a result of this, data held on registration numbers after 1997 are not comparable to earlier years. The data may also be affected by gradual improvements in the methods used for the removal of duplicate registration records, which were first employed by the dental practice board in 1993.

Some patients choose not to register, and can be seen under occasional treatment arrangements, which were introduced last year.

Mr. Simmonds: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS dentists there are per head of population in *(a)* Boston and Skegness, *(b)* Lincolnshire and *(c)* each other English county. [56150]

Ms Blears: The total number of national health service dentists per 10,000 population in England at 30 September 2001 is shown in the table for each health authority.

The number of NHS dentists in Boston and Skegness, Lincolnshire county and by English county is not available.

The number of NHS dentists includes general dental service (GDS) dentists, dentists working in the salaried services of the GDS, hospital and community dentists and personal dental service (PDS) dentists. The figures are on a headcount basis rather than whole time equivalent (wte) and take no account of part-time working.

Dentists working in more than one dental service are included in each service apart from dentists working in both PDS and GDS who are counted in the GDS only.

Dentists working solely in private dentistry are not covered in these figures.

Total number of dentists per 10,000 population by health authority at 30 September 2001—England

Health authority	*Total dentists per 10,000 population*[1]
England	4.5
Avon	5.5
Barking and Havering	4.2
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	5.0
Barnsley	3.2
Bedfordshire	4.5
Berkshire	4.5
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	4.6
Birmingham	5.1
Bradford	3.8
Brent and Harrow	5.4
Buckinghamshire	5.2
Bury and Rochdale	3.7
Calderdale and Kirklees	4.0
Cambridgeshire	4.3
Camden and Islington	9.4
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	5.3
County Durham and Darlington	2.9
Coventry	4.0
Croydon	5.2
Doncaster	3.7
Dorset	4.5
Dudley	3.4
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	5.5
East Kent	4.0
East Lancashire	4.2
East London and The City	5.0
East Riding and Hull	3.6
East Surrey	4.8
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	4.8
Gateshead and South Tyneside	3.9
Gloucestershire	5.1
Herefordshire	5.7
Hertfordshire	5.2
Hillingdon	4.2
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and SE Hampshire	4.5
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	6.3
Kingston and Richmond	5.6
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	6.4
Leeds	5.0
Leicestershire	3.5
Lincolnshire	3.1
Liverpool	5.6
Manchester	7.5
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	5.5
Morecambe Bay	4.6
Newcastle and North Tyneside	6.2
Norfolk	4.2
North and East Devon	4.8
North and Mid Hampshire	4.1
North Cheshire	4.3
North Cumbria	4.0
North Derbyshire	3.7
North Essex	3.9
North Nottinghamshire	3.3
North Staffordshire	3.1
North West Lancashire	4.3
North Yorkshire	5.0

Total number of dentists per 10,000 population by health authority at 30 September 2001—England

Health authority	*Total dentists per 10,000 population*[1]
Northamptonshire	3.2
Northumberland	3.4
Nottingham	4.0
Oxfordshire	5.0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	4.4
Rotherham	3.6
Salford and Trafford	4.1
Sandwell	4.0
Sefton	4.5
Sheffield	5.4
Shropshire	4.1
Solihull	3.9
Somerset	4.2
South and West Devon	5.6
South Cheshire	4.6
South Derbyshire	3.8
South Essex	3.8
South Humber	3.2
South Lancashire	3.9
South Staffordshire	3.6
Southampton and South West Hampshire	5.1
St. Helens and Knowsley	3.9
Stockport	4.5
Suffolk	3.8
Sunderland	4.1
Tees	4.5
Wakefield	3.8
Walsall	2.7
Warwickshire	3.9
West Kent	4.3
West Pennine	3.6
West Surrey	6.1
West Sussex	5.1
Wigan and Bolton	3.6
Wiltshire	4.5
Wirral	5.0
Wolverhampton	3.9
Worcestershire	4.2

[1] ONS 2000 mid year population estimates based on the 1991 census

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS dentists there are per head of population in *(a)* the Chesham and Amersham constituency, *(b)* Buckinghamshire and *(c)* each other English county. [57993]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected in the form requested but by health authority (HA), many of which are coterminous with county boundaries. The total number of national health service dentists per 10,000 in England at 30 September 2001 is shown in the table for each HA.

The number of NHS dentists includes general dental service (GDS) dentists, dentists working in the salaried services of the GDS, hospital and community dentists and personal dental service (PDS) dentists. The figures are on a head count bases rather than whole time equivalent (wte) and take no account of part-time working.

Dentists working in more than one dental service are included in each service apart from dentists working in both PDS and GDS who are counted in the GDS only.

Dentists working solely in private dentistry are not covered in these figures.

Total number of dentists per 10,000 population by health authority at 30 September 2001

Health authority	*Total dentists per 10,000 population*[1]
England	4.5
Avon	5.5
Barking and Havering	4.2
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	5.0
Barnsley	3.2
Bedfordshire	4.5
Berkshire	4.5
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	4.6
Birmingham	5.1
Bradford	3.8
Brent and Harrow	5.4
Buckinghamshire	5.2
Bury and Rochdale	3.7
Calderdale and Kirklees	4.0
Cambridgeshire	4.3
Camden and Islington	9.4
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	5.3
County Durham and Darlington	2.9
Coventry	4.0
Croydon	5.2
Doncaster	3.7
Dorset	4.5
Dudley	3.4
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	5.5
East Kent	4.0
East Lancashire	4.2
East London and the City	5.0
East Riding and Hull	3.6
East Surrey	4.8
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	4.8
Gateshead and South Tyneside	3.9
Gloucestershire	5.1
Herefordshire	5.7
Hertfordshire	5.2
Hillingdon	4.2
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and SE Hampshire	4.5
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	6.3
Kingston and Richmond	5.6
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	6.4
Leeds	5.0
Leicestershire	3.5
Lincolnshire	3.1
Liverpool	5.6
Manchester	7.5
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	5.5
Morecambe Bay	4.6
Newcastle and North Tyneside	6.2
Norfolk	4.2
North and East Devon	4.8
North and Mid Hampshire	4.1
North Cheshire	4.3
North Cumbria	4.0
North Derbyshire	3.7
North Essex	3.9
North Nottinghamshire	3.3
North Staffordshire	3.1
North West Lancashire	4.3
North Yorkshire	5.0
Northamptonshire	3.2
Northumberland	3.4
Nottingham	4.0
Oxfordshire	5.0
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	4.4
Rotherham	3.6
Salford and Trafford	4.1
Sandwell	4.0
Sefton	4.5
Sheffield	5.4
Shropshire	4.1
Solihull	3.9
Somerset	4.2
South and West Devon	5.6
South Cheshire	4.6
South Derbyshire	3.8
South Essex	3.8

Total number of dentists per 10,000 population by health authority at 30 September 2001

Health authority	*Total dentists per 10,000 population*[1]
South Humber	3.2
South Lancashire	3.9
South Staffordshire	3.6
Southampton and South West Hampshire	5.1
St Helens and Knowsley	3.9
Stockport	4.5
Suffolk	3.8
Sunderland	4.1
Tees	4.5
Wakefield	3.8
Walsall	2.7
Warwickshire	3.9
West Kent	4.3
West Pennine	3.6
West Surrey	6.1
West Sussex	5.1
Wigan and Bolton	3.6
Wiltshire	4.5
Wirral	5.0
Wolverhampton	3.9
Worcestershire	4.2

[1] ONS 2000 mid year population estimates based on the 1991 census.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists in the Chesham and Amersham constituency take NHS patients. [57994]

Ms Blears: Data are not collected centrally for the Chesham and Amersham constituency.

Myotonic Dystrophy

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of research into the *(a)* causes and *(b)* treatment of myotonic dystrophy. [49922]

Ms Blears: The Department has made no recent assessment of research into the causes and treatment of myotonic dystrophy.

X-ray Plates

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number of X-ray plates exposed in the NHS in each of the last five years. [49987]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

However, information on the number of imaging and radiodiagnostic examinations by imaging modality carried out by national health service trusts in England is available on the Department's website www.doh.gov.uk/hospitalactivity.

Students

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost to the NHS would be of providing *(a)* free prescriptions and *(b)* free dental care to students in full-time education; and if he will make a statement. [52910]

Ms Blears: Full-time students under the age of 19 are already entitled to free prescriptions and free dental care. Some other students may be entitled to free prescriptions and free dental care on low income or maternity grounds, or to free prescriptions because they suffer from a medical condition which confers entitlement to exemption from prescription charges. The estimated costs in England of extending free treatment to remaining students in full-time education are shown in the table.

	£ million
Free prescriptions	[1]27
Free dental care	[1]15

[1] Approximately

Voluntary Organisations

Laura Moffatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the contribution voluntary organisations make to the running of the national health service. [53073]

Ms Blears: The Department has not undertaken a specific assessment of the contribution of voluntary organisations to the national health service.

Involving the voluntary sector, particularly within the framework of the compact agreement, is integral to NHS policy development and service delivery. The Department recognises the significant breadth of contributions made to the NHS at all levels by voluntary, community and charitable organisations. At national level these range from membership of the Department's policy development groups to contributing to specific consultation exercises. Locally voluntary organisations often provide specific services, for example volunteer hospital transport schemes to enable better patient access; and providing information and support networks for patients, their carers and families, about living with specific medical conditions.

Asthma

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Buteyko method of asthma treatment. [52553]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 7 May 2002]:* The Department has not commissioned National Institute of Clinical Excellence to undertake a formal evaluation of the Buteyko method of asthma treatment and the Medical Research Council is not currently funding research into this treatment.

The Department recognises that some people find complementary medicine treatments helpful in relieving the symptoms of certain conditions, particularly chronic conditions for which conventional medicine cannot provide a complete solution. Complementary medicine treatments, may be provided on the national health service if those responsible for commissioning health services on behalf of patients locally (primary care trusts) consider that they are a clinically and cost effective means of meeting an identified health need.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the cost would be of providing free medication to all asthmatics irrespective of age; [56442]

(2) what plans the Government have to provide free medication for all asthmatics. [56443]

Ms Blears: We estimate that the loss of prescription charge income in England would be over £50 million a year. Additionally, there could be significant additional costs to the drugs bill if people with asthma who currently pay charges sought prescriptions for medicines and other items which they currently purchase.

Our policy is to give priority to helping people who may have difficulty in paying charges, rather than extending the exemption arrangements to people with other medical conditions including asthma.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when Ministers from his Department last met representatives from the World Health Organisation to discuss the issue of asthma; and what plan of action was agreed to tackle the increase in asthma levels in *(a)* children and *(b)* adults. [59580]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Minister of State (Mr. Hutton) recently attended the World Health Assembly which took place from 13 to 18 May. This included a ministerial Round Table on general risks to health, however asthma was not a formal topic of debate.

Heroin

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths owing to heroin overdose there were in each of the last three years in *(a)* England and *(b)* Bassetlaw. [59630]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. John Mann, dated 10 June 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your question concerning the number of deaths owing to heroin overdose in the last three years in England and Bassetlaw. I am replying in his absence. (59630)

Information is available on the number of deaths related to drug poisoning, where heroin or morphine was mentioned.[1] The latest year for which figures are available is 2000. Information is therefore provided for 1998, 1999 and 2000 and is given in the table below.

Deaths related to heroin or morphine poisoning,[2] England, 1998 to 2000

Calendar year	Number of deaths England	Bassetlaw[3]
1998	618	3
1999	715	
2000	874	

[1] As heroin breaks down in the body into morphine, the latter is often detected at post mortem. For this reason, all deaths mentioning heroin or morphine have been included.

[2] Selected using the following codes from the International Classification of Diseases Ninth Revision, where heroin or morphine was also mentioned:
292 (drug psychoses)
304 (drug dependence)
305.2–305.9 (non dependent abuse of drugs
E850-E858 (accidental poisoning by drugs, medicaments and biologicals)
E950.0-E950.5 (suicide and self-inflicted poisoning by solid or liquid substances)
E980.0-E980.5 (poisoning by solid or liquid substances, undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted)
E962.0 (assault by poisoning—drugs and medicaments).

[3] There are too few deaths in Bassetlaw to show the figures for individual years.

Source:

Deaths occurring in 1998, 1999 and 2000, as recorded on the ONS database of drug-related poisoning deaths using geographic boundaries as at April 2001.

Health Checks

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what means of assessing the success of the Government's programme for health checks for the over-75s are available. [53409]

Jacqui Smith: The Medical Research Council, with the support of the Department, has been conducting a trial of assessment and management of elderly people since 1994. The study is being conducted in over 100 practices in the United Kingdom, covering nearly 33,000 people aged 75 years or over registered with participating practices. The trial is now in the analytic stage, findings will be available in autumn 2002.

Anti-TNF

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to ensure health authorities implement NICE's recommendations on the prescription of anti-TNF for children and adults with severe rheumatoid arthritis. [55271]

Jacqui Smith: On 5 December 2001, we announced that we would meet our commitment to ensure that patients receive drugs and treatments recommended by National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) on the national health service if deemed appropriate by their clinicians. Directions have been issued obliging health authorities and primary care trusts to provide appropriate funding for recommended treatments.

From 1 January 2002, the NHS has three months from the date of publication of each technology appraisal guidance to provide funding, so that clinical decisions made by doctors involving NICE recommended treatments or drugs can be funded.

Prevenar

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the possible *(a)* side effects, *(b)* benefits and *(c)* risks of prescribing the pneumococcal vaccine Prevenar to children who are not identified as at high risk of paediatric pneumococcal disease. [55821]

Ms Blears: Prevenar was authorised by the European Commission in February 2001 for active immunisation of infants and children from two months of age to two years of age against invasive disease (including bacteraemia, sepsis, meningitis, or bacteraemic pneumonia) caused by the streptococus pneumoniae serotypes contained in the vaccine. An assessment of the possible risks and benefits of the vaccine for this indication was considered by the Committee for Proprietary Medicinal Products, the advisory body to the European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products (EMEA) prior to licensing. The at-risk groups were not distinguished. The current product information lists known side effects.

Studies to document the full burden of morbidity attributable to pneumococcal disease in the United Kingdom's children and to evaluate the vaccine's suitability for use in the routine childhood immunisation programme are also in progress by the Department's vaccine evaluation consortium.

In January 2002, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation, which advises the Department on national immunisation policy, recommended that the small number of children under two years who are at particular risk from pneumococcal disease, who would be recommended to receive polysaccharide vaccine if they were over two years, should now receive the new pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (Prevenar).

Performance Targets

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the business of his Department is undertaken electronically with regard to the relevant PSA targets. [56279]

Ms Blears: Information about progress on public service agreement targets will be published in the Department's 2002 departmental report.

Arthritis

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assistance his Department has been given to research into arthritis since 1997; what new treatments have become available for arthritis sufferers; and what payments are made to sufferers of arthritis to assist with medication costs. [56264]

Ms Blears: The main Government agency for research into the cause and treatments of disease is the Medical Research Council (MRC) which receives its funding via the Department of Trade and Industry. The MRC spend is available from 1999 and is an estimated £12.9 million on research relevant to arthritis.

The Department funds research to support policy and the delivery of effective practice in the national health service. The departmental spend on directly commissioned research projects on arthritis since 1997 is an estimated £2.5 million. The Department has also funded projects relevant to arthritis but with wider relevance, and the expenditure on these has not been counted.

In addition to specific projects, the Department provides support for research commissioned by charities and the research councils that takes place in the NHS. Management of much of the research supported by NHS research and development funding is devolved and expenditure at project level is not held centrally by the Department. The total investment is considerably greater than the spend on directly commissioned projects.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) was asked to appraise the use of infliximab (Remicade) and etanecerpt (Enbrel) in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis. NICE issued its guidance on 22 March 2002. NICE has recommended the use of etanercept for the treatment of juvenile idiopathic arthritis (JIA) and etanercept and infliximab for rheumatoid arthritis (RA).

There are no payments made to sufferers of arthritis to assist with medication costs. People with arthritis are entitled to free NHS prescriptions if the patient is under 16 (or under 19 if in full-time education); aged 60 or over; or holds an exemption certificate; or is entitled on the grounds of low income. Prescription prepayment certificates save money for anyone who needs more than a certain number of items over a particular period.

Enbrel

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether Enbrel will be prescribed for arthritis on the NHS. [56915]

Ms Blears: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) was asked to appraise the use of infliximab (Remicade) and etanecerpt (Enbrel) in the treatment of rheumatoid arthritis. NICE issued its guidance on 22 March 2002. NICE has recommended the use of etanercept for the treatment of juvenile idiopathic arthritis and etanercept and infliximab for rheumatoid arthritis.

On 5 December 2001, the Government announced that they would meet their manifesto commitment to ensure that patients receive drugs and treatments recommended by NICE on the national health service if deemed appropriate by their clinicians. Directions have been issued obliging health authorities and primary care trusts to provide appropriate funding for recommended treatments.

Alcohol Misuse

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been achieved towards the target of implementing the national strategy to tackle alcohol misuse by 2004. [56565]

Ms Blears: The NHS Plan said that the Government would implement a national strategy to tackle alcohol misuse by 2004. We are on course to achieve this target. We have made the following progress:

Discussions have been held with other Government Departments on their current and future plans for tackling alcohol misuse;

Links have been built between the strategy and the work on crime reduction;

A framework for certain key elements of the strategy has been put in place; including:

> A training course for general practitioners (GPs) and practice nurses is currently being piloted. This will enable GPs and nurses to identify patients who are drinking hazardously and to decide on whether to offer support and advice to these patients or whether to refer them to specialist treatment services.
>
> An increase in the resources available for substance misuse education in schools—an additional £29.5 million has been put into substance misuse education over the last three years.

Value for Money

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 8 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 269W, on value for money, if he will publish the information used to establish that the Department was on course to deliver the target on value for money changes in the 1998 public service agreement. [56608]

Ms Blears: The published measure for this target was that the Department would achieve its business plan objectives within the running costs limits set by the Comprehensive Spending Review. Running cost plans and outturn against them (where available) have already been published in the Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses (PESA) for the years 1999–2000 to 2002–03, copies of which are in the Library. The statistics demonstrate that the Department is on track to meet the target.

Homeless People

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* number and *(b)* proportion of people (i) sleeping rough and (ii) living in temporary accommodation were looked after by local authorities when they were children. [56566]

Jacqui Smith: As at December 2001 there were some 78,600 households accepted as statutorily homeless by local authorities living in temporary accommodation. A household is the unit used to collect this data—it will include families with children and other vulnerable couples or single people who have a statutory right to assistance to meet their housing needs from local authorities. The rough sleepers unit estimates that as at November 2001 there were 532 people sleeping rough in England on any night. At present the Department does not keep statistics centrally about where young people are living after they leave care.

The Children (Leaving Care) Act commenced in October 2001. This imposes a new duty on local authorities to ensure that care leavers are provided with suitable accommodation, which will not include temporary accommodation. From 2004, local authorities will be required to submit information to the Department about the performance of their leaving care services, including statistics on the numbers of care leavers placed in suitable accommodation.

Reconfiguration Panel

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when will appointments to the reconfiguration panel be completed; and whether *(a)* Kent and Canterbury, *(b)* Royal Hospital Haslar, *(c)* Solihull hospital, *(d)* Kidderminster hospital and *(e)* West Cornwall hospital Penzance will be referred to the panel. [57093]

Ms Blears: It is vital that the independent reconfiguration panel (IRP) has both the confidence of the general public and credibility within the national health service. We are therefore considering our options very carefully before making any decisions about the membership.

The IRP will offer advice to the Secretary of State for Health on any contested reconfiguration proposals that he asks the panel to consider. However, it will not be asked to consider any proposals that were referred to the Secretary of State for Health before the panel begins working—which we anticipate will be in the autumn.

NHS Catering

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 6 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 451W, what significant and complex issues have been found by the Department with regard to the franchising and tendering of NHS catering. [57025]

Ms Blears: The national health service is the single biggest organisation in Europe. It is also one of the biggest purchasers of food.

In catering terms, the sheer size and complexity of the NHS are in themselves sufficient to raise significant issues for any examination of a franchise approach to hospital catering.

Added to this must be the need to reflect the views and preferences of a wide range of patients; the variety of size and type of hospitals for example, acute, mental health and community hospitals; staffing issues; issues about purchasing models and value for money; the geographical dispersion of hospitals; the wide range of nutritional needs presented by patients—including diets for cultural, religious and clinical needs; the variety of catering systems currently in use and the impact of European Union requirements.

Hospital Food

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 17 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 1017W, in what format the results of PEAT evaluations of hospital food will be published. [57092]

Ms Blears: The results of the unannounced inspections of the quality of hospital food will be published at the same time as those of the patient environment assessments undertaken between February and May 2002. The quality of hospital food will be assessed against a 'traffic light' criteria where 'Red' is further improvement needed, 'Amber' acceptable and 'Green' good. The inspections are currently under way and we expect to publish the results shortly.

NHS Menus

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many leading chef dishes are on the new NHS menus; what they are; and how many hospitals have introduced each dish. [56964]

Ms Blears: There is currently a total of 139 leading chef approved dishes in the national dish selector. A full list of the dishes follows. Acute hospitals are required to include at least three of these dishes in their menus each day. No information is collected on which dishes are used by individual hospitals.

Dessert

Apple cake
Banana brulée
Bread and butter pudding
Butterscotch tart
Cherry clafoutis tart
Fruit cake and carrot cake
Hot banana cake with custard
Peach flan
Posh pear and chocolate crumble
Raspberry jelly
Rhubarb and ginger stew with dumplings
Sticky toffee pudding and butterscotch sauce
Strawberry tartlet
Teacup trifle
Toasted oatmeal
Trifle
Vanilla mousse with preserved fruits
Yummy yorkshire pudding

- Dinner choice
  - Aloo kheema mutter (minced lamb with potatoes and tomatoes)
  - Bacon, leek and mushroom pasta bake
  - Baked gammon
  - Beef and horseradish risotto
  - Beef and onion pie
  - Beef bolognaise
  - Beef casserole
  - Beef lasagne
  - Beef masala with potato bhaji
  - Braised beef in mushroom sauce
  - Braised chicken and butternut squash
  - Braised chicken with lentils
  - Braised lamb in cider with parsley dumplings
  - Braised lamb with flageolet beans
  - Braised pork with apple and ginger dumplings
  - Broccoli and herb quiche
  - Cajun fishcakes
  - Casserole of lamb with apricots and rice
  - Cauliflower and broccoli pasta
  - Chicken à la king
  - Chicken and ham pie
  - Chicken and leek pie
  - Chicken and pasta with tomato and herbs
  - Chicken Biryani, tadka daal, cucumber sauce
  - Chicken casserole
  - Chicken escalopes with tomato and coriander sauce
  - Chicken in mustard and coriander sauce
  - Chicken pie and spring onion mash
  - Chicken tikka makhani with cabbage and beans jeera
  - Chicken with tomatoes and peppers
  - Chicken, apple and potato pie
  - Chilli con carne
  - Corned beef and apple hash slice
  - Cottage pie
  - Creamed chicken and vegetables
  - Fish in cheese sauce with mustard mash
  - Fish pie with a potato top
  - Fish portugaise
  - Fricassee of chicken with grain mustard and tarragon sauce
  - Grilled chicken breast with spicy tomato sauce and tagliatelle
  - Hungarian beef goulash with dumplings
  - Irish stew
  - Lamb and vegetable pie
  - Lamb casserole
  - Lamb shahi korma
  - Liver with braised sweet onions
  - Meatloaf with onion marmalade
  - Minced chicken and vegetable pie
  - Nasi goreng with egg
  - Naverin of lamb with couscous and grilled vegetables
  - Parmesan fried chicken escalopes milanese
  - Poached chicken with a vegetable and herb broth
  - Poached smoked haddock in grain mustard sauce
  - Pork goulash
  - Pork, sweet pepper and tomato casserole
  - Pork, apple and sage crumble
  - Roast cod with leek and mushroom sauce accompanied by garlic potato purée
  - Salmon and dill potato bake
  - Salmon fishcakes with parsley sauce
  - Sausage hotpot
  - Soya mince bolognaise
  - Steak and kidney pie with olive oil mash
  - Stewed steak with dumplings
  - Sweet and sour chicken with vegetable fried rice
  - Thai chicken red curry
  - Tuna, tomato and courgette pasta
  - Turkey and apple hotpot
- Light lunch
  - Cauliflower and very cheese sauce
  - Macaroni with smoked haddock and herbs
  - Real cornish pasties
  - Sea food pasta with fresh dill and parmesan
  - Smoked turkey and tomato baguette
- Salad
  - Salad of spinach, tuna, egg and chickpeas
- Sandwich
  - Good old corned beef and apple coleslaw sandwich
- Soup
  - Butter bean and bacon soup
  - Celery and red pepper soup
  - Cream of carrot soup
  - Two soups in a bowl
  - Vegetable and herb soup
- Vegetables
  - Olive oil mashed potatoes
- Vegetarian
  - Bean goulash
  - Boston beans
  - Broccoli and herb quiche
  - Cauliflower and very cheese sauce
  - Cauliflower and broccoli pasta
  - Cheese, leek and egg pie
  - Cheese, onion and potato pie
  - Country vegetable pie
  - Curried vegetables
  - Egg, cashew and chickpea kedgeree
  - Lentil Daal
  - Macaroni cheese
  - Nasi goreng with egg
  - Soya mince bolognaise
  - Vegetable and bean cottage pie
  - Vegetable chilli
  - Vegetable goulash with dumplings
  - Vegetable lasagne
  - Vegetable moussaka
- Elderly
  - Tomato and butter bean soup
  - Red lentil broth
  - Tomato, onion, gruyere and basil quiche
  - Chicken, chicken liver and mushroom casserole

Braised salt brisket with carrots

Braised liver and bacon hotpot

Braised liver with green lentils

Pink salmon, tuna and parsley fishcake

Fillet of mackerel with braised lentils

Sausage meat and bacon meatloaf with sweet onion gravy

Sausage meat, carrot and thyme slice

Ham, cheese, onion and leek pudding

Roast chicken breast wrapped in bacon with stewed onions

Pork blanquette

Broccoli, smoked bacon and sweetcorn quiche

Steamed raspberry pudding

Raspberry blancmange

Black forest trifle

Apricot frangipan filo parcel

Mincemeat and pear filo parcel

Toffee apple roly-poly pudding

Lemon posset

Strawberry white wine jelly.

Health and Safety

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the NHS estate was compliant with fire safety requirements in each of the last five financial years; and what the outstanding cost is of related repairs as of the end of the current financial year. [56944]

Ms Blears: The principal source of information in respect of establishing historic compliance with fire safety requirements is the estates return information collection (ERIC) system where data is returned annually by national health service trusts up to the end of the financial year being reported. Data in respect of non-NHS trust property that form part of the NHS estate (eg health authority offices, primary care groups etc.) are not available.

The most relevant indicator is 'Costs to Achieve Statutory Fire Safety Compliance Standard B (excluding fire safety)'. In this context, condition B is the minimum standard required and is defined in the NHS guidance, estatecode, as meaning buildings which do not have backlog maintenance costs in respect of fire safety deficiencies and which comply with NHS firecode guidance and statutory requirements.

NHS trust accommodation which is currently below condition B standard will include that for which there is work outstanding that is of a relatively low risk but required under statutory legislation. The NHS is always striving to keep up to-date with new legislation and to provide a safe environment for patients, staff and visitors. Fire safety is a serious issue, which is why we have set targets for the NHS in this area and every effort is made to remedy any concerns expressed by local enforcement bodies as quickly as possible. This is reflected in the extremely small numbers of injuries and deaths arising as a result of fires in NHS hospitals in England despite the high volumes of people who access healthcare premises annually. I have also imposed targets set by HSC 1999/191 to reduce backlog maintenance costs associated with fire safety and to achieve compliance with firecode.

The following table identifies the percentage of NHS trusts in England, over the five year period 1996–97 to 2000–01, who report having achieved the desired condition B standard having zero backlog maintenance costs associated with fire safety compliance:

Percentage of total to achieve estatecode condition B—fire safety

Year	
1996–97	8.4
1997–98	9.4
1998–99	9.8
1999–2000	11.1
2000–01	21.0

These figures demonstrate that the numbers of NHS trusts which comply with the fire code requirement are increasing. Clearly, we can do more, and we are doing so through setting and monitoring the aforementioned targets. In addition, progress is expected to further accelerate as the outcome of the increased major capital investment programme in the NHS reaches fruition.

With regard to the current outstanding cost of repairs, the most recent data available are for the year 2000–01. This shows that the total cost of backlog maintenance for NHS trusts in England to achieve estatecode condition B in respect of fire safety compliance at the end of the fiscal year 2000–01 is £239 million. Planned major capital investment throughout the NHS should see the eradication of a large proportion of this backlog.

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the NHS estate was compliant with health and safety requirements at the end of each of the last five financial years; and what the outstanding cost is of repairs as of the end of the current financial year. [56943]

Ms Blears: The principal source of information in respect of establishing historic compliance with health and safety requirements is the estates return information collection (ERIC) system where data are returned annually by national health service trusts up to the end of the financial year being reported. Data in respect of non-NHS trust property that form part of the NHS estate (eg health authority offices, primary care groups etc.) are not available.

The most relevant indicator is 'Costs to Achieve Statutory Health & Safety Compliance Standard B (excluding fire safety)'. In this context, condition B is the minimum standard that NHS trusts are required to meet and is defined in the NHS guidance, estatecode, as meaning buildings which do not have backlog maintenance costs in respect of health and safety deficiencies and which comply with statutory requirements.

NHS trust accommodation which is currently below condition B standards will include that for which there is work outstanding that is of a relatively low risk but required under statutory legislation. The NHS is always striving to keep up to-date with new legislation and to provide a safe environment for patients, staff and visitors. Health and safety is a serious issue, which is why we have set targets for the NHS in this area and every effort is made to remedy any concerns expressed by local enforcement bodies as quickly as possible. This is reflected in the relatively few numbers of health and safety incidents reported under the mandatory Reporting of Injuries Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995 (RIDDOR). I have also imposed targets set by HSC 1999–191 to reduce backlog maintenance costs associated with health and safety requirements and to achieve statutory compliance.

The following table shows the percentage of NHS trusts in England, over the five year period 1996–97 to 2000–01, who report having achieved the desired condition B standard:

Percentage of total to achieve estatecode condition B—health and safety

Year	
1996–97	10.3
1997–98	9.0
1998–99	9.6
1999–2000	7.8
2000–01	18.9

These figures demonstrate that the numbers of NHS trusts which comply with the health and safety requirement are increasing despite the continual introduction of new legislation. Clearly, we can do more, and we are doing so through setting and monitoring the aforementioned targets. In addition, progress is expected to further accelerate as the outcome of the increased major capital investment programme in the NHS reaches fruition.

With regard to the current outstanding cost of repairs, the most recent data available are for the year 2000–01. This shows that the total cost of backlog maintenance for NHS trusts in England to achieve estatecode condition B in respect of statutory health and safety compliance at the end of the fiscal year 2000–01 is £355 million. Planned major capital investment throughout the NHS should see the eradication of a large proportion of this backlog.

Littlemore Hospital

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many *(a)* assessment beds, *(b)* rehabilitation beds and *(c)* beds in pre-discharge flats there are in the medium secure unit at the Littlemore Hospital in Oxfordshire; [56951]

(2) how many staff accommodation units there are at the Littlemore Hospital in Oxfordshire. [56950]

Ms Blears: Information on the average daily number of beds in each national health service trust is available from the Department website. Information by individual hospital site is not collected.

Information on the number of staff accommodation units is not available centrally.

Funeral Arrangements

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 7 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 545W, what the Department's definition of a permanent memorial or marker is. [56992]

Ms Blears: A permanent marker or memorial for a grave would be regarded as being formed from a non-perishable material, for example stone. A permanent marker in respect of a cremation would depend on whether ashes had been interred or scattered. This would take the form either of a marker for a grave, an entry in the book of remembrance, or a permanent memorial plaque.

Pharmacies

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pharmacies were covered by the essential small pharmacies scheme in each of the last five years. [57026]

Ms Blears: The information requested and shown in the table is an extract from Table 6 of the Department's Statistical Bulletin "General Pharmaceutical Services in England and Wales 1991–92 to 2000–01".

Year ending 31 March	*Number of pharmacies which received Essential Small Pharmacy Scheme payments (England only)*
1997	256
1998	255
1999	255
2000	262
2001	243

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many pharmacies there were in rural areas in each of the past five years. [57022]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not held centrally.

Wheelchairs

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many NHS wheelchairs were in use in each of the last five years; [56947]

(2) what the average proportion of the cost of a wheelchair covered by a voucher was in each of the last five years. [56948]

Ms Blears: Figures on the number of national health service wheelchairs in use are not collected centrally, nor are figures for the average cost of a wheelchair covered by a voucher.

Intensive Treatment Units

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many intensive treatment units there are in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland. [56916]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Traditional and Alternative Medicines

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department has spent on evaluating *(a)* traditional and *(b)* alternative medicines in each of the past five years. [56960]

Ms Blears: In relation to the regulation of medicines, there are no existing regulatory categories defined as traditional or alternative medicines and it is not possible to estimate expenditure on the evaluation of such products. The Medicines Control Agency undertakes a wide range of evaluative activity in relation to herbal and homeopathic medicines, many of which have a basis in tradition. These activities include determining whether a product should be classified as a medicine, assessing applications for marketing authorisations for herbal medicines, assessing applications under the homeopathic registration scheme, and assessing safety and compliance issues affecting licensed and unlicensed herbal and homeopathic medicines.

The Department has directly funded a number of research projects which fall within the broad definition of traditional and alternative medicine, most of which are on-going, at a total cost of about £600,000.

In addition, the Cochrane collaboration in the United Kingdom receives substantial support from the NHS research and development levy, and has contributed a large number of systematic reviews of alternative therapies to the Cochrane database of systematic reviews. The website of the Cochrane complementary field (http://www.compmed.umm.edu/Compmed/Cochrane/Cochrane.htm) lists the titles of those Cochrane reviews.

Health Action Zones

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many homes in Tyne and Wear have been insulated as a result of health action zone campaigns. [56932]

Ms Blears: Thirty-eight homes have been insulated and a further 188 have benefited from energy efficiency grants.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were employed in the National Patient Safety Agency at 1 April; and what proportion of those staff have clinical contact with NHS patients. [56858]

Ms Blears: The National Patient Safety Agency employed eleven staff at 1 April 2002, none of whom have clinical contact with national health service patients.

This does not include the National Patient Safety Agency's Chair and 12 non-executive board members—of these, three are practising clinicians.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were employed in his Department at 1 April; and what proportion of those staff have clinical contact with NHS patients. [56863]

Ms Blears: The Department employed 5,288 staff at 1 April 2002.

We cannot give a proportion of these staff who have clinical contact with national health service patients as we do not collect this data.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were employed in the National Institute for Clinical Excellence at 1 April; and what proportion of those staff have clinical contact with NHS patients. [56864]

Ms Blears: I understand that the number of staff employed by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) on 1 April 2002 was 40.

It is not part of NICE's role to provide direct clinical care to patients. In the preparation of its guidance NICE receives advice from individuals and organisations in the national health service who provide such care on a day to day basis.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were employed in the National Health Service Litigation Authority at 1 April; and what proportion of those staff have clinical contact with NHS patients. [56862]

Ms Blears: At 1 April the NHS Litigation Authority employed a total of 145 staff. None of the Authority's staff have any clinical involvement with national health service patients.

Cane Hill, Coulsdon

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which agency in his Department owns Cane Hill, Coulsdon. [56907]

Ms Blears: The Cane Hill site is owned by the Secretary of State for Health as part of the retained estate.

Speech Therapy Service (Southampton)

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the nature and effect of staff shortages at the speech and language therapy service based at the Central Health Clinic in Southampton. [57086]

Ms Blears: The speech and language therapy service is managed by Southampton City Primary Care Trust (PCT) on behalf of several local PCTs including New Forest. The recruitment difficulties affecting the service are mirrored at a national level. The PCT is actively involved in "Improving Working Lives", a national initiative to attract people back to work and other initiatives to do everything possible to improve the recruitment and retention of therapists.

In view of the shortages, the PCT is focusing attention on priority areas such as in-patients, particularly those patients with swallowing problems, which could be potentially life threatening.

Juvenile Sex Abusers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many meetings he has had with ministerial colleagues in the last two years with regard to children and young people who sexually abuse. [57200]

Jacqui Smith: I have had no meetings with ministerial colleagues specifically regarding children and young people who sexually abuse.

Hospital Beds

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost of a *(a)* hospital intensive care bed and *(b)* hospital surgical bed was in the last 12 months, broken down by trust. [57154]

Ms Blears: Information on the 2000–01 average unit costs (per bed day) for each NHS Trust in England for *(a)* intensive care unit beds and *(b)* paediatric intensive care unit beds has been placed in the Library.

Average unit costs for other types of intensive care unit, for example, cardiac intensive care are available, in the Library.

No data are currently available for the average cost of a hospital surgical bed.

Audiology

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the average wait for an audiology appointment *(a)* at the Northern Devon healthcare trust and *(b)* in England has been in (i) each of the last seven years and (ii) each of the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement; [57173]

(2) how many people have been on the waiting list for an audiology appointment at the Northern Devon healthcare trust in each of the last seven years; what has been the average waiting list for an NHS trust for patients waiting for an audiology appointment in each of the last seven years; and if he will make a statement. [57174]

Ms Blears: Figures are collected by consultant specialty and not treatment specialty. As such it is not possible to extract the information requested.

Drug Testing

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he takes to ensure, in the testing of drugs for potential carcinogenicity, commercial companies do not select animal species and strains of species where the incidence of carcinogenicity is low. [56017]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 14 May 2002]:* The rationale for selecting species to be used in the carcinogenicity studies is stated in the guidance documents produced as a result of the International Conference of Harmonisation.

Road Accident Casualties

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money NHS hospitals have claimed from motor insurance providers to recover the cost of treating road accident casualties in each of the last 10 years. [56657]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 16 May 200*[illegible] Prior to 5 April 1999 national health service trusts had responsibility for collecting from insurers charges for hospital treatment following road traffic accidents under the provisions of sections 157 and 158 of the Road Traffic Act 1988. Trust accounts show the following amounts of road traffic income since 1994, the earliest year for which information is available:

	£ million
1994–95	13.1
1995–96	13.1
1996–97	13.6
1997–98	16.6
1998–99	19.6

The system for recovery of these charges changed with the introduction of the Road Traffic (NHS Charges) Act 1999 which came into effect on 5 April 1999 and there is now a new centralised recovery system which is undertaken by the compensation recovery unit (CRU). Since April 1999 the CRU has paid the following amounts to NHS trusts:

	£ million
1999–2000	26.6
2000–01	67.0
2001–02	86.8

The amount collected for 1999–2000 does not represent total income to the NHS in that year. This is because income would have been received directly by trusts in the first part of the year as a carry-over from the old arrangements.

MMR

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children have suffered *(a)* febrile convulsions and *(b)* other adverse effects within 14 days of receiving the MMR vaccine. [40687]

Ms Blears: Since 1987, there have been a total of 3,578 reports containing 5,932 suspected adverse reactions associated with MMR vaccines reported to the Medicines Control Agency. For 2,683 of these suspected reactions it is stated that the reaction occurred within 14 days. There have been 82 reports of suspected febrile convulsions associated with MMR vaccines in which the reporter has stated that the reaction occurred within 14 days. The onset time of a suspected reaction is not always provided by reporters.

Febrile convulsions are a recognised side effect of MMR vaccines and are listed as a side effect in their product information. A United Kingdom epidemiological study has suggested that the risk of febrile convulsions six to 11 days following MMR vaccines is around one case per 3,000 doses (Farrington et al. The Lancet 1995; 345:567–69).

It is important to note that the reporting of a suspected adverse reaction does not necessarily mean that the vaccine caused the reaction and other factors such as concomitant medication and underlying disease may provide an alternative explanation.

Mount Vernon Hospital

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will publish an assessment of the quality of cancer services provided at Mount Vernon Hospital; [48901]

(2) what assessment he has made of the quality of service provided at Mount Vernon Hospital. [48908]

Ms Blears: Cancer services at Mount Vernon Hospital were peer reviewed against national standards in May 2001. This review was part of a national process and the final report was submitted to the Network Board, trusts and health authorities. It was also copied to both London and south-eastern regional offices.

In August 2001 Mount Vernon Hospital was assessed for accreditation as a gynaecological cancer centre. It could not be accredited because it did not have diagnostic, surgical/oncology and palliative care services which would be found in a comprehensive cancer centre. Provisional arrangements have been approved pending the outcome of the long-term review of the Mount Vernon Cancer Network and Centre.

Prior to this the Mount Vernon Cancer Centre was reviewed against Calman Hine standards in 1997. It was given temporary accreditation and asked to meet Calman Hine standards. This temporary accreditation lapsed in 1999 because Mount Vernon Cancer Centre failed to meet the required standards.

The recommendation(s) of the steering group of the Mount Vernon long-term cancer review will be publishing its recommendation(s) shortly to the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire health authority in its capacity as host health authority for the Mount Vernon Cancer Network.

Haemophilia

Mr. Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what clotting factors are available in recombinant products for people with haemophilia; and what assessment he has made as to whether all clotting factors with the least side effects are available to all haemophilia sufferers. [54858]

Ms Blears: The full range of recombinant clotting factors for patients with haemophilia are available for purchase by national health service trusts. Patients who develop antibodies against clotting factors, known as inhibitors, can be treated with a range of products including recombinant factor VIIa. The United Kingdom haemophilia centre doctors organisation has produced guidelines for clinicians for treatment on inhibitors. Treatment is a matter for individual clinical decision.

Biobank UK

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will commission an independent body to undertake an independent scientific peer review of the scientific protocol for Biobank UK. [55635]

Ms Blears: The protocol for the United Kingdom's Biobank project was developed following extensive consultation with the scientific community. Independent international scientific peer review was used to inform the funding decisions made by the Department, the Wellcome Trust and the Medical Research Councils. In all, 12 experts were involved, 10 of whom were from overseas, including the United States of America, Australia and various European countries. None of these had prior involvement in the development of the protocol nor were they involved with organisations likely to participate in the study or benefit financially. A scientific management committee composed of senior scientific advisers will be responsible for overseeing data collection, setting targets, agreeing changes to the protocol, and monitoring scientific output. Scrutiny of the scientific protocol will be an on-going process and it is therefore considered unlikely that an additional body undertaking further independent scientific peer review will add significant value to the UK Biobank project.

Blood Donation

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 25 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 771W, what assessment the Department has made of the reasons underlying the forecast fall in levels of blood donation by 17-year-olds. [57110]

Ms Blears: The table has been updated since the answer of 25 March 2002 to show the final figures for 2001–02.

From 1998 when 17-year-olds were permitted to donate blood the numbers doing so increased for two consecutive years. However, the reduced donations in 2001–02 corresponded with a fall that year, albeit at a slower rate, in the number of 17-year-olds in the general population.

The numbers of 17-year-olds are projected to increase substantially in the next few years. The National Blood Service believes, therefore, that the decline in 2001–02 is likely to be a blip in an otherwise rising trend, rather than a significant downturn.

Financial year	*17-year-old donor count*
1998–99	13,777
1999–2000	19,133
2000–01	19,718
2001–02	17,493

BCG Vaccinations

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason BCG vaccinations are not offered in *(a)* Oxfordshire, *(b)* Avon and *(c)* York and Selby. [56995]

Ms Blears: The Government have recommended continually since 1953 that BCG vaccine should be routinely offered to all school children aged between 10 and 14 years of age. This is based on the advice of an independent expert advisory committee, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).

This recommendation was reviewed by the JCVI during 1996 and their advice was that the schools programme should continue; health authorities were advised of this in July 1996. The decision not to implement this advice in Oxfordshire, Avon and York and Selby was taken locally by the health authorities.

Breast Cancer

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what prior advice is given to patients on the potential adverse effects of radiotherapy in their treatment for breast cancer; [59568]

(2) what procedures are in place to ensure patients receive counselling services following the adverse effects of radiotherapy treatment for breast cancer. [59567]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* Radiotherapy centres are expected to make available information and advice for patients undergoing radiotherapy.

A cancer information advisory group has been set up to oversee the development, content and availability of information for cancer patients.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is due to publish guidelines on supportive and palliative care in October 2002. This will include guidance on information, communication, psychological and social support.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the availability of the new breast cancer drug Xeloda in the treatment of metastatic breast cancer. [59410]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) have been asked to advise on the clinical and cost-effectiveness of capecitabine (Xeloda) for the treatment of metastatic breast cancer. Guidance is due to be disseminated in March 2003, provided there are no appeals.

In August 1999 the Department issued guidance which asks national health service bodies to continue with local arrangements for the managed introduction of new technologies where guidance from NICE is not available at the time the technology first became available. These arrangements should involve an assessment of all the available evidence.

Skin Cancer

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department is taking to increase the educational awareness of skin cancer in *(a)* children and *(b)* adults. [59574]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* Information about sun safety will be available from the normal routes as well as through NHS Direct. We launched on 14 March a new departmental website www.doh.gov.uk/sunsafe providing sun safety advice. The website has been designed with both young children and their parents and teachers in mind. We are also collaborating with other key stakeholders this year in ensuring that a range of sun safety advice is publicly available. For example, the recently launched Cancer Research (UK) leaflet "Malignant Melanoma" describes the facts and signs of melanoma, for which the Department provided funding.

Cancer Treatment

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what sum was made available for cancer treatment in the financial year 2002–03 at Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust; what sum for cancer treatment at Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells was sought for 2002–03; and what changes have been made to the allocation of resources for 2002–03 for cancer treatment at Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust. [57004]

Ms Blears: In 2002–03 £17.7 million was made available to Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells National Health Service Trust for cancer treatment. The increase in the allocation of resources for 2002–03 for cancer treatment at the trust was £2.04 million.

The 2002–03 Kent Cancer Service Delivery Plan, developed in October 2001, identified a requirement of £17.9 million for Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust.

Oesophageal Cancer

Mr. Jim Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made about possible links between the use of chemicals in vegetables and cancer of the oesophagus. [58158]

Ms Blears: Reports of links between chemicals in vegetables and cancer of the oesophagus relate to speculation concerning possible effects of nitrate. I am informed that the Food Standards Agency (FSA) is aware of the scientific developments in this area and is investigating the matter.

Vegetables, particularly green leafy vegetables, contain the highest concentrations of nitrate in the diet. Although some of this nitrate comes from the use of conventional and organic nitrogen fertilisers on crops most is naturally occurring. Low light intensity during the growing period is the main influence on nitrate concentrations in plant tissue.

Many studies have investigated the possibility of a link between nitrate and cancer, but these have failed to provide convincing evidence that nitrate intake in the UK causes cancer. A new study by Professor McColl at the University of Glasgow has speculated on a possible association with oesophageal cancer in Scotland. The FSA agree with Professor McColl that the results are preliminary and require further investigation. Other areas of the United Kingdom with high nitrate intakes do not show similar high levels of the oesophageal cancer reported in Scotland. There is also new evidence available which suggests that dietary nitrate has beneficial effects. The FSA has commissioned a three-year project to characterise the potential benefits versus possible toxicity to humans from nitrate in the diet. The results of this work will be available later this year.

Lung Cancer

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of people in England diagnosed with non-small cell lung cancer were entered into clinical trials in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [57943]

Ms Blears: The Department does not collect this information centrally. However, the national cancer research network has just started to collate detailed figures on the numbers of people entering clinical trials for cancer.

Abortion

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what evidence he has collated on whether sex selective abortions are taking place in the UK. [57685]

Ms Blears: We have no evidence that sex selective abortions are being performed. An abortion may only take place on grounds under the Abortion Act 1967, as amended. While abortion on grounds of foetal sex alone is not specifically prohibited, it is illegal. The sex of an unborn child might, however, be a legitimate factor if in a practitioner's judgment, an abortion in a particular case is justified on the medical grounds specified in the Abortion Act, for example in sex-linked inherited conditions.

Taiwan (World Health Organisation)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if Taiwan has been granted observer status in the World Health Organisation; and if he will make a statement. [58137]

Ms Blears: Taiwan has not been granted observer status in the World Health Assembly.

Myalgic Encephalitis

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people suffer from myalgic encephalitis in England, broken down by region. [58058]

Ms Blears: Information on the prevalence of individual conditions is not collected centrally. The report of the independent chronic fatigue syndrome/myalgic encephalitis working group, published in January 2002, estimated a population prevalence of around 0.2 to 0.4 per cent. in adults and around 0.07 per cent. in children.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Mr. Bill O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress with support and treatment for people suffering with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. [57622]

Jacqui Smith: In recent years the Department has encouraged a number of initiatives taken by professional bodies and voluntary groups to raise awareness of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and to facilitate accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment. We currently support, including provision of grant aid, the work of the "contact a family ADHD alliance" project.

In guidance on the use of the drug methylphenidate in the treatment of ADHD in children, published in October 2000 by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE), it was made clear that a diagnosis of ADHD should be based on a timely, comprehensive assessment conducted by a child/adolescent psychiatrist or a paediatrician with expertise in this disorder. Referrals for specialist assessment can come from a number of sources including family members, general practitioners, social workers and teachers. NICE also recommended that drug treatment with methylphenidate, where appropriate, should be seen as part of a comprehensive treatment programme, which includes psychological, educational and social interventions, for children with a diagnosis of severe ADHD.

EC Decisions

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list those organisations *(a)* within and *(b)* without the UK that will receive information under Commission Decision 2002/253/EC; [57854]

(2) if he will make a statement on the circumstances under which, under Commission Decision 2002/253/EC (OJ L86, 3 APR 02), patients' case histories may be circulated in the European Communities. [57856]

Ms Blears: Commission Decision 2002/253/EC merely establishes the case definitions to be used to compare national surveillance data from the member states. It does not establish systems for collecting or disseminating information.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the criteria for the selection of communicable diseases under Commission Decision 2002/253/EC. [57859]

Ms Blears: The criteria for selection of disease or special areas to be covered by epidemiological surveillance within the European network for communicable diseases surveillance and control are laid down in annexe II of the Commission Decision of 22 December 1999, supported by all the member states on the diseases to be covered by the community network. Decision 2002/253/EC fulfilled the requirement of Article 3(c) of Decision 2119/98/EC setting up the Community network to determine case definitions.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the post-analysis action to follow the sharing of data under Commission Decision 2002/253/EC. [57858]

Ms Blears: Data for some of the diseases listed in Commission Decision 2002/253/EC establishing case definitions are already covered by disease specific surveillance networks which publish their analyses. A generic system to compare routine data on other diseases has not yet been established.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has *(a)* received and *(b)* called for, with respect to Commission Decision 2002/253/EC, from civil rights organisations; and if he will make a statement. [57855]

Ms Blears: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has neither received nor called for representations from civil rights organisations in respect of Commission Decision 2002/253/EC.

Health Care

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he expects to produce proposals for reform of the complaints procedure used in the NHS when adverse medical events occur; [58143]

(2) if he will make a statement as to the policy adopted in the NHS when adverse health care events occur. [58142]

Ms Blears: We are looking to introduce reforms to the national health service complaints system from 2002. As part of the reform process, we are considering how complaints can promote learning to help reduce risk to future patients and in this way improve quality of care and patient safety where relevant. We are also exploring how appropriate links can be made between complaints and the work of the national patient safety agency.

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to amend the way in which provision for clinical negligence cases is made in the NHS accounts for England. [58144]

Ms Blears: National health service summarised accounts are prepared to comply with accounting standards, United Kingdom Government accounting and procedures, resource accounting manual and Companies Acts. There are no changes planned to these standards and regulations that will affect the disclosure of clinical negligence liabilities in NHS accounts.

Organ Donation

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Baillieston (Mr. Wray) of 25 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 963W, on organ donation, when the consultation paper on the review of the law governing the taking, removal and use of human tissue will be published. [58263]

Jacqui Smith: A consultative report has been completed and will be published very shortly.

Coronary Care

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospitals have specialist heart treatment units; and what proposals he has to increase this amount. [57815]

Ms Blears: 29 national health service trusts in England have specialist heart units, undertaking heart operations. A further specialist centre is being built in Wolverhampton, which will come into service in 2003. Eight existing centres are being modernised and expanded, at a cost of £170 million, providing 12 additional cardiac operating theatres and 380 extra beds in some of the areas with the highest rates of heart disease.

All acute NHS trusts provide a cardiology service, referring to a specialist heart unit when appropriate.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has gone into research of drugs to aid in the treatment of heart failure; and which of these drugs have become available since 1997. [57816]

Ms Blears: Pharmaceutical companies fund the large majority of research into new drugs. Information on their research for drugs to aid the treatment of heart failure is not collected by the Department.

No drugs are licensed solely for the treatment of heart failure. A range of drugs originally developed for the treatment of coronary heart disease and hypertension have been found to be beneficial in the treatment of heart failure. The evidence for new indications usually arises over a period of time as research emerges from different trials.

Most of the drugs used in the treatment of heart failure were available before 1997.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures have been taken since 1997 to address the incidence of heart failure; and if he will make a statement. [57814]

Ms Blears: Since 1997 we have made coronary heart disease, the commonest cause of heart failure in this country, a major focus of health policy. Prevention, treatment and care are addressed in "Saving Lives: Our Healthier Nation" (June 1999), The national service framework (NSF) for coronary heart disease (March 2000) and the NHS Plan (July 2000). The NSF establishes the standard of care the national health service will provide for patients with heart failure and outlines the strategy to tackle this over the next 10 years. Chapter six of the NSF sets out how the NHS and others can help people with heart failure live longer and achieve a better quality of life.

Linear Accelerators

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the recommended number of linear accelerators per one million population is. [58640]

Ms Blears: There is no formal Department recommendation on the number of linear accelerator treatment machines which serve each million population. The Department is aware of the advice given by the Royal College of Radiologists that four linear accelerator treatment machines should serve each million population. Following two central initiatives, this target is expected to be achieved by 2004.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS health authorities provide treatment through linear accelerators; how many linear accelerators are operational within those trusts; and how old each linear accelerator is. [58639]

Ms Blears: All strategic health authorities commission radiotherapy services for patients at radiotherapy centres, which may be located within its boundaries. The following health authorities provided radiotherapy treatment using linear accelerators (linacs) at the trusts indicated at January 2001.

From a survey carried out in 2001 155 linacs were identified to be operational in the national health service. The commissioning dates for each linac is published at www.canceruk.net. Since that survey it is estimated that 47 new machines have been delivered by central initiatives alone. Information concerning the numbers and ages of such machines in Wales is also available at the same web address.

The Royal College of Radiologists is about to embark on its own survey of radiotherapy facilities, from which information will be made available on the same web-address in the forthcoming few months.

Health authorities with radiotherapy centres located within its boundaries. Also given is the number of operational linacs at January 2001

Health authority	*Radiotherapy centre*	*Number of operational linacs*
Cambridgeshire	Addenbrooke's NHST	4
Norfolk	Norfolk and Norwich university hospital NHST	3
North Essex	Essex rivers health care NHST	2
South Essex	Southend hospital NHST	2
Suffolk	Ipswich hospital NHST	2
Hertfordshire	West Hertfordshire hospitals NHST	4
Barking and Havering	Barking Havering and Redbridge hospitals NHST	2
Barnet Enfield and Haringey	North Middlesex university hospital NHST	2
Camden and Islington'	Royal Free Hampstead NHST	2
	University College London hospitals NHST	5
Ealing Hammersmith and Hounslow	Hammersmith hospitals NHST	5
East London and the City	Barts and the London NHST	4
Kensington Chelsea and Westminster	Royal Marsden NHST	8
Lambeth Southwark and Lewisham	Guys and St. Thomas' hospital trust	3
Manchester	Christie's hospital NHST	8
North West Lancashire	Preston Acute hospitals NHST	3
Wirral	Clatterbridge Centre for Oncology NHST	7

Health authorities with radiotherapy centres located within its boundaries. Also given is the number of operational linacs at January 2001

Health authority	*Radiotherapy centre*	*Number of operational linacs*
East Riding and Hull	Hull and East Yorkshire hospitals NHST	1
Leeds	Leeds Teaching hospitals NHST	7
Newcastle and North Tyneside	The Newcastle upon Tyne hospitals NHST	6
North Cumbria	North Cumbria Acute hospitals NHST	1
Tees	South Tees hospitals NHST	4
Berkshire	Royal Berks and Battle hospitals NHST	2
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	Brighton health care NHST	2
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	Portsmouth health care NHST	2
Northamptonshire	Northampton general hospital NHST	2
Oxfordshire	Oxford Radcliffe hospitals NHST	4
Southampton and South West Hampshire	Southampton university hospitals NHST	3
West Kent	Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHST	5
West Surrey	Royal Surrey county hospital NHST	4
Avon[1]	United Bristol health care NHST	5
	Royal United hospital Bath NHST	2
Cornwall and Isle of Scilly	Royal Cornwall hospitals trust	0
Dorset	Poole hospitals NHST	3
Gloucestershire	Gloucestershire hospitals NHST	3
North and East Devon	Royal Devon and Exeter health care NHST	2
South and West Devon[1]	Plymouth hospitals NHST	3
	South Devon health care NHST	1
Leicestershire	University hospitals of Leicester NHST	3
Lincolnshire	United Lincolnshire hospitals NHST	2
Nottingham	Nottingham City hospital NHST	3
Sheffield	Sheffield Teaching hospitals NHST	4
Southern Derbyshire	Southern Derbyshire Acute hospitals NHST	2
Birmingham	University hospital Birmingham NHST	5
Coventry	University hospitals of Coventry and Warwickshire NHST	3
North Staffordshire	North Staffordshire hospital NHST	2
Shropshire	Royal Shrewsbury hospitals NHST	1
Wolverhampton	The Royal Wolverhampton hospitals NHST	2

[1] × 2 radiotherapy centres

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the recommended replacement age of linear accelerators is; and how old each linear accelerator in service within each NHS health authority that provide radiotherapy treatment is. [58641]

Ms Blears: There is no formal recommended replacement age for linear accelerators (linacs) within the national health service in England.

The age of each linac in service following a survey carried out in 2001 is published at www.canceruk.net This lists each linear accelerator in use along with the dates when each machine was commissioned.

Osteoporosis

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to investigate the use of *(a)* ultrasound and *(b)* biochemical tests in combination with Dexa scanning for identifying osteoporosis in (i) the population and (ii) a sub-set of the population; and if he will ask the National Screening Committee to commission a review of the area this year before its autumn workshop. [58394]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave him on 3 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 1042W.

The United Kingdom national screening committee will review its advice and the evidence available at its meeting on 26 June 2002 and make recommendations.

Bounty Pack

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place a copy of the bounty pack issued to new mothers in the Library. [58768]

Ms Blears: The bounty pack is not issued by the Department. The bounty pack is provided by the commercial organisation Bounty UK Ltd. and consists of sample products. Full information on Bounty UK is available at www.bounty.co.uk.

Patient Data

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in relation to the Health Service (Control of Patient Information) Regulations 2002, what steps he will take to inform patients about *(a)* the disclosure of personal data to cancer registries and other bodies and *(b)* their right to object to such processing of personal data; and if he will make a statement. [59220]

Ms Blears: All national health service bodies are already required by data protection legislation to provide patients with information about all likely processing and disclosures of personal data. The Information Commissioner has recently published guidance on the "Use and Disclosure of Health Data" which clarifies these requirements. The right to object to processing of personal data where the Health Service (Control of Patient Information) Regulations 2002 are in effect is provided by the Data Protection Act 1998 and awareness of these rights is promoted by the Information Commissioner.

However, the Department will be issuing guidance to health service bodies that will both complement the Information Commissioner's and make it clear that where patients object to a disclosure under the permissive provisions of the Health Service (Control of Patient Information) Regulations 2002, their objections should normally be respected. A sample leaflet for informing patients about the regulations and what they should do if they are unhappy about possible disclosures will be included within this guidance.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he proposes to take if health professionals refuse to provide personal data to cancer registries and the like without the consent of the patient as required under the Health Service (Control of Patient Information) Regulations 2002. [59219]

Ms Blears: I have no plans to introduce a requirement for health professionals to provide personal data to cancer registries. While the Health Service (Control of Patient Information) Regulations 2002, when they come into force, would permit me to introduce such a requirement in the public interest I will only do so if so advised by the independent patient information advisory group. In the absence of such a requirement, the regulations are permissive rather than prescriptive, allowing but not requiring information to be disclosed. However, if such a requirement were to be introduced the action to be taken in cases of non-compliance will need to be determined on a case by case basis.

Still-born Babies

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the certification and registration of still-born babies of between 18 and 24 weeks gestation. [59162]

Ms Blears: The Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953, as amended, provides for the registration of babies born dead after 24 weeks gestation. When a baby is born dead before 24 weeks gestation (the legal age of viability), the law does not require the birth to be certified or registered.

If a baby is born dead before 24 weeks gestation, parents can obtain a certificate from the doctor or midwife who attended the delivery, stating that their baby was born before the legal age of viability and showed no signs of life. This will enable the parents to have their baby buried or cremated. The Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society's Guidelines "Pregnancy loss and the death of a baby. Guidelines for professionals (1995)" recognise that forms and certificates are often greatly valued by parents who otherwise may have little or no evidence or mementoes of their baby's existence. It states that it is good practice to offer all parents a copy to keep, whether or not they need it for practical reasons and that the documents should, where possible, be sensitively and sympathetically worded.

Care Home Beds

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the change in the number of care home beds in Somerset since 1997. [59354]

Jacqui Smith: The table shows the number of places in residential care homes and registered beds in nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics in Somerset area in 1997 and 2001. The total number of beds has increased by just over 11 per cent. between 1997 and 2001.

Residential places[1] and registered nursing beds[2] in Somerset area in 1997 and 2001

At 31 March	*Places in residential care homes*	*Registered nursing beds in nursing homes[3,4]*	*Total care beds*
1997	3,380	2,632	6,012
2001	4,101	2,580	6,681

[1] Places registered within Somerset local authority, exclude children beds.

[2] Beds registered within Somerset health authority, all client groups.

[3] Registered beds in general and mental nursing homes, private hospitals and clinics.

[4] Figures for registered nursing beds relates to registered beds during the period 1 October 1996 to 31 March 1997.

Source:

Department of Health's annual returns.

Personality Disordered Offenders

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how ongoing support and supervision will be arranged for personality disordered offenders discharged into the community and managed primarily by health services. [59015]

Jacqui Smith: The care programme approach will be the key method for providing support for personality disordered offenders discharged into the community. The care plan is managed by multi-disciplinary teams lead by health professionals.

There will still be a requirement for probation officers to follow up offenders. No one will be discharged without full support and unless assessed to be at low risk of causing harm to others.

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health [illegible]at requirement there will be on those in the health service providing supervision and treatment to personality disordered offenders in the community to collaborate with other statutory and voluntary agencies in the provision of services and sharing of information. [59016]

Jacqui Smith: The White Paper "Reforming the Mental Health Act" says that in new mental health legislation "there will be a new duty covering the disclosure of information about patients suffering from mental disorder between health and social services agencies and other agencies, for example housing agencies or criminal justice agencies."

The personality disorder strategy forensic group commissioned by the Department is collating examples of effective multi agency protocols for information sharing, in order to produce guidance on minimum standards for all multi agency public protection panels (MAPPPs). The draft strategy is likely to include guidance to mental health trusts for a requirement that senior clinicians sit on MAPPPs. A draft strategy will be available for consultation in October 2002.

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will take steps to ensure that chartered psychologists are able to make a leading contribution to *(a)* the development of services for personality disordered offenders and *(b)* future revisions of mental health legislation. [59014]

Jacqui Smith: The Department conducts regular meetings with key stakeholders like the British Psychological Society who will continue to be involved at key stages of the development of policy in this area.

Included in the expert group commissioned by the Department to produce a strategy on services for people with personality disorder (PD), are four chartered psychologists. This will ensure that psychologists can take a leading role in development of the strategy.

Oral Tobacco Products

Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans the Government have to introduce legislation to ban the import of oral tobacco products. [58901]

Ms Blears: The sale of oral tobacco products with the exception of chewing tobacco and tobacco intended to be smoked is already banned in the UK. Because of this there has not been a need to ban imports of these products.

Since 1992 it has been illegal to place tobacco for oral use on the market in this country. A Community-wide ban was put in place in the 1992 Council Directive 92/41/EEC, and became part of UK law under the Tobacco for Oral Use (Safety) Regulations 1992 (SI 3134). The Europe-wide ban was renewed in 2001 in European Union Directive 2001/37/EC.

The Government are committed to reducing all forms of tobacco use, and have introduced a comprehensive programme of action to address both the supply and the demand of tobacco products.

Work-related Illness

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many claims for work-related illness were settled by his Department in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was in compensation. [56075]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* There were two successful claims at employment tribunals, against the Department, linked to work-related illness during the year April 2001 to March 2002.

The total compensation paid was £88,500.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many days of sick leave were taken by employees in his Department in the last year for which records are available; what proportion of those were due to work-related illness or injury; and what the cost was to the Department. [56077]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The latest annual report published by the Cabinet Office, "Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service—2000", shows that, in 2000, the Department's unadjusted average working day absence per staff year was 5.5, down from 6.6 in 1999. Figures for 2001 or later years are not yet published.

While the Department collects data on sickness absence, which includes work related illness or injury, it is not possible to identify if the cause was work related. It is not possible, therefore, to identify these costs.

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many employees of his Department retired through work-related ill-health in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was to the Department. [56076]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* Records are not maintained by the Department which enable ill health retirements to be separately identified as work related. For the Department the number of staff retired with a medical retirement certificate issued by the civil service pension scheme medical adviser for the period 1 April 2001–30 April 2002 was six.

As to the matter of costs, expenditure for medical retirement is not met by the employing Departments but centrally funded from the Civil Superannuation Vote.

GP Exercise Referrals

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what funding is allocated for general practitioner exercise referrals in the financial year 2002–03; [58318]

(2) what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the GP exercise referral schemes; [58311]

(3) what he is doing to promote GP exercise referral schemes; [58313]

(4) what research he has commissioned into general practitioner exercise referrals; [58316]

(5) how many general practitioner exercise referral schemes exist; [58315]

(6) how many patients have been the subject of GP exercise referrals. [58317]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* The national quality assurance framework on exercise referral systems, published last year, aims to improve the quality of existing referral schemes and help the development of new ones. The guidelines were also promoted at two regional seminars for primary care and leisure services. The Department does not keep a national register of practices which offer these schemes, or the number of participants. These details are held locally by primary care trusts (PCTs) or local authorities.

The Department does not organise and centrally fund such schemes. It is up to PCTs, in conjunction with local authorities, to determine whether an exercise referral scheme fits with their broader plans for promoting physical activity.

The Department has funded two reviews by the former health education authority that documented progress and effectiveness of exercise referral schemes. The research showed that better designed referral schemes can lead to small levels of increased participation in activity, but that practice across the country was highly variable. There is on-going research of £1.1 million via the health technology assessment programme, including two projects looking at exercise referral schemes.

Mixed-sex Wards

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he expects to meet his target on mixed-sex wards by December. [58299]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* We remain confident that the target of eliminating mixed-sex accommodation in 95 per cent. of trusts by the end of the year is achievable.

Ongoing monitoring of the progress of the project continues and indicates that progress towards the targets is being maintained. National health service trusts are working hard to ensure that this remains so.

Additional professional and technical support is being made available to those who are finding meeting the targets particularly challenging.

Managing Information

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether it is part of the job of the director of finance of the NHS Executive to ensure that up-to-date management information is made available to the Executive routinely and to Ministers on request. [58296]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* The director of finance for the Department is responsible for ensuring that Ministers and the departmental board are provided with relevant and up-to-date financial management information.

NHS Executive (Finance Director)

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the name and salary is of the finance director of the NHS Executive. [58303]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* The Department's finance director is Richard Douglas. His salary is £105,000 per annum.

Nurses Agencies Regulations

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the timetable is for the nurses agencies regulations upon which he has been consulting. [58319]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* In order to allow agencies sufficient time to prepare for implementation, the commencement of regulation by the national care standards commission for nurses agencies will be 1 September 2002.

Final versions of the regulations and national minimum standards will be published shortly.

Parliamentary Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of parliamentary advisers appointed to serve his Department. [56981]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* Ministers in this Department have made no such appointments.

Trust Directors

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many executive directors of NHS trusts were *(a)* made redundant and *(b)* retired early in 2001–02 as a result of reorganisations and mergers of NHS trusts; and what the total cost of the financial packages was, including redundancy payments and pension arrangements. [56499]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* Accounts information for 2001–02 will normally be available once validation checks have been completed by the Department in November 2002.

The accounts will include costs incurred as a result of redundancy or early retirement including associated pension costs. However, the accounts will not separately identify the numbers or the total cost of financial packages for executive directors who were made redundant or who retired early as a result of reorganisations and mergers of national health service trusts.

Casualty Units

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time was in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2001 to be seen by a doctor for treatment in casualty. [57526]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* Information regarding average waiting times to see a doctor for treatment in accident and emergency (A&E) is not collected centrally.

From August 2001, data on total time in A&E from arrival to admission, transfer or discharge has been collected.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many casualty units have been modernised since 1997. [57525]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* The accident and emergency (A&E) modernisation programme was launched in 1998. A total of £150 million has been invested enabling 180 A&E departments to be modernised.

Sun Protection Cream

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) 24 April, *Official Report*, column 68W, on sun protection cream, how many hits the website www.doh.gov.uk/sunsafe has had since it was launched; and how much funding his Department has given to the National Radiological Protection Board this year to raise awareness of the general public of the dangers of skin cancer. [59578]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The sunsafe pages of the Department's website had 54,790 hits[1] between 14 March and 22 May 2002. The Department provides core funding for the National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB), but it is a matter for NRPB to determine what resources are devoted to raising awareness of the dangers of skin cancer.

[1] hits are the total number of requests made on the server during the time period specified, but does not include images.

Clinical Negligence

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on clinical negligence claims faced by the NHS; and how many claims there have been in each year since 1995. [58209]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* The Department does not hold figures for all clinical negligence claims made against the national health service.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of medical negligence the NHS Litigation Authority is *(a)* investigating and *(b)* defending against compensation claims brought against health authorities by former patients. [59569]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The national health service litigation authority is currently handling 1,929 clinical negligence cases brought against health authorities. All of these claims are defended until they are settled or successfully repudiated and it is not possible to show which of these are being investigated.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the proposed White Paper on clinical negligence indicated in the Department of Health's response to the Kennedy report published in January. [58999]

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish the White Paper on clinical negligence Reform. [59566]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* In July 2001 the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) was asked to set up an advisory group to look at the reform of clinical negligence in the national health service. It has not yet been possible to publish proposals for reform, because of the complexity of the issues raised by potential reforms, the need to consult widely (including through the Lord Chancellor's Department on how compensation is paid) and also to consider how potential proposals sit alongside a concurrent review of the NHS complaints procedure. Nevertheless, the CMO has now held the last of his advisory group meetings and will shortly publish the findings along with recommendations for reform.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated net value of outstanding clinical negligence claims against the NHS in England was at 31 March 2000. [59000]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The estimated net value of outstanding clinical negligence claims against the national health service in England at 31 March 2000, as reported in the NHS Summarised Accounts for 1999–2000 was £2.6 billion.

Digital Hearing Aids

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost to the NHS is of providing a patient with *(a)* a hearing test and *(b)* a digital hearing aid; and if he will make a statement. [49961]

Jacqui Smith: Some hearing tests are undertaken in audiological medicine out-patient clinics. The national average cost for a first attendance at these clinics in the financial year 2000–01 was £123, while the national average cost for a follow up attendance was £98. The fitting of hearing aids (which might include a hearing test along with counselling) in the same period cost £171 per person. The average cost to the national health service of a digital hearing aid in that period was £276. Since then the NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency has been able to negotiate with several providers to reduce the average cost of those digital aids to £159. An NHS digital hearing aid negotiating team, chaired by James Strachan, Chief Executive of the Royal National Institute for Deaf People, is leading further negotiations to achieve the best possible digital hearing aid price and contract.

Repair and Maintenance

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much money budgeted for repair and maintenance was not spent *(a)* in each NHS region and *(b)* in England, in the most recent year for which figures are available, indicating how much was attributable to (i) fire safety and (ii) other safety costs. [53400]

Ms Blears: Money for repair and maintenance is currently derived from block capital allocations provided annually to each national health service trust. The amount budgeted and spent on each element is then determined by each NHS trust. In addition, the major capital investment programme set out in the NHS Plan is making a significant contribution to improving the quality of the NHS estate. Figures are not collected centrally on the amount of block capital sums budgeted and expended against repair and maintenance by each NHS trust.

General Practitioners

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average number of hours worked per week by general practitioners is. [56911]

Mr. Hutton: We do not collect actual hours worked by general practitioners, however we do collect contractual commitments i.e. full time, three quarter time, job share and half time. This information is available in table 3 and 4 of the Statistical Bulletin 'Statistics for General Medical Practitioners in England: 1991–2001' copies of which are available in the Library.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 29 April, *Official Report*, column 631W, whether the findings of the Department's policy research programme and the health technology assessment programme will play a part in the criteria in allocating extra GP golden hello funding for local PCTs. [59556]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The current list of under-doctored primary care trusts eligible for additional payments under the national health service general practitioner golden hello scheme is based on general medical services census data and comprises the lower 50 per cent. of primary care trusts assessed on the basis of the number of general practitioners per 100,000 weighted head of population.

We have undertaken to review the list of under-doctored primary care trusts periodically but do not propose to depart from using census data as the basis for the list.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what evidence he received of drug trials often not being carried out on older patients so drugs would not be designed to meet their needs, as published on page 6 of the NSF for Older People Interim report on Age Discrimination; and if he will place the evidence in the Library; [58852]

(2) what evidence he received of age discrimination in staffing ratios, as set out on page 6 of the NSF for Older People Interim report on Age Discrimination; and if he will place the evidence in the Library; [58853]

(3) if he will set out the evidence found of areas and services considered to be affected by implicit age discrimination, as set out in table 4, page 7 of the NSF for Older People Interim report on Age Discrimination; [58856]

(4) if he will set out the evidence found of council policies identified in audits that could be age discriminatory, as set out in table 3, page 7 of the NSF for Older People Interim report on Age Discrimination; [58855]

(5) what information he collects and monitors regarding Standard 1 of the NSF for Older People as set out in the NSF for Older People Interim report on Age Discrimination, page 10, paragraph 27. [58851]

Jacqui Smith: Monitoring of the milestones in standard one of the national service framework began with the October 2001 milestone, reported on in an interim report published in April 2002. As part of the monitoring of written age related policies the older people's local implementation teams (LITs) were asked to give examples of any issues of concern in relation to implicit or wider age discrimination that arose during their local scrutiny. All the issues in the questions were reported by various LITs as having being discussed as issues of potential concern. Monitoring information on the progress against the April 2002 milestone will be available in the summer.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what further work his Department is undertaking to ensure that he receives greater detail about individual policy age discrimination, as set out in paragraph 13, page 6 of the NSF for Older People Interim report on Age Discrimination. [58854]

Jacqui Smith: The are no plans to collect more detailed information at a national level. A report of the local audit of written policies and the local plans to address any individual age discriminatory policies found are to be reported within the next published annual reports of local organisations.

Victoria Climbie Inquiry

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when Lord Laming will respond to the Victoria Climbie inquiry; and if he will make a statement. [58847]

Jacqui Smith: The Victoria Climbie inquiry, of which Lord Laming is the chair, is expected to report later this year. The Government will consider the inquiry's recommendations very carefully before responding to them.

Fair Access to Care Services Guidance

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the Fair Access to Care Services guidance. [58845]

Jacqui Smith: The guidance was published on 28 May 2002 under cover of a local authority circular, LAC(2002)13. Copies will be placed in the Library.

Epilepsy

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many sudden unexpected deaths from epilepsy there were in *(a)* Blackpool, *(b)* the north-west and *(c)* the UK in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [58834]

Jacqui Smith: The figures for the number of deaths from epilepsy are as follows.

	England and Wales	*North-west*[1]	*Blackpool*
1996	836	134	Nil
1997	824	126	2
1998	848	150	4
1999	870	141	2
2000	850	112	3

[1] North-west Government office region

Note:

"Sudden Epileptic Death" was defined as a death where the underlying cause was epilepsy and where "sudden death" appeared in the cause of death text when it was certified.

Source:

Office for National Statistics

Mr. Gordon Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what facilities and support are available to epilepsy sufferers and their families in the Blackpool area. [58835]

Jacqui Smith: An out-patient service which is based at the neurology department of the Blackpool Victoria Hospital is available to residents in the Blackpool area and surrounding locality. Those patients requiring more specialist assessments and treatment are referred to the Royal Preston Hospital which provides the specialist service for epilepsy sufferers across Lancashire and South Cumbria. This is a clinic-based service under the direction of two consultant neurologists. A specialist nurse is also available who can provide follow up support to patients and families as appropriate. Where necessary patients can also be referred to the David Lewis Centre in Cheshire which provides a specialist centre for assessing and managing severe or complex epilepsy.

Accommodation Centres

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the proposed accommodation centres will be required to register with the Care Standards Commission. [59183]

Jacqui Smith: No.

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if children in accommodation centres will have access to local child and adolescent mental health services. [59182]

Jacqui Smith: Children in the proposed accommodation centres for asylum seekers will have the same access to local child and adolescent mental health services as other children.

Foster Care

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children are in *(a)* public and *(b)* private foster care in each authority; and of those, what proportion are out-of-area placements. [58840]

Jacqui Smith: At 31 March 2001, there were 38,400 children being looked after by local councils in England, who were in foster care. Of these, 9,100 (or 24 per cent.) were in placements outside the boundaries of the council responsible for their care.

The Department does not collect figures on the numbers of children in private foster care.

Multiple Sclerosis Care

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidelines are in place for the appointment of MS nurses. [59216]

Jacqui Smith: There are no formal central guidelines in place for the appointment of multiple sclerosis (MS) nurses. The development and funding of specialist nursing posts to treat specific conditions such as MS is for primary care trusts, in partnership with other local stakeholders, to determine.

Health Service Circular HSC 2002–004 on the 'Cost effective provision of disease modifying therapies for people with multiple sclerosis' does, however, contain some guidance on the funding of MS nurses as they relate to that scheme.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects that the NICE guidelines on MS services will be issued. [59217]

Jacqui Smith: The National Institute for Clinical Excellence currently expects to issue its clinical guideline on multiple sclerosis services in June 2003.

Communication Aids

Mrs. Fitzsimons: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many adults with physical disabilities have been supplied with communication aids by community equipment stores in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2002. [59753]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mrs. Fitzsimons: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ring-fence funding for communication aids within extra funds provided for community equipment. [59751]

Jacqui Smith: Additional funding for community equipment services has been, and will be, distributed through increased baseline allocations to health and social services in the years 2001–02 to 2003–04. Provision for improving funding for communication aids is part of those increased allocations and there are no plans to ring-fence it separately.

Equipment Service

Mrs. Fitzsimons: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the funding allocation to the Equipment Service has been spent on physical equipment. [59752]

Jacqui Smith: Additional funding for community equipment services has been, and will be, distributed through increased baseline allocations to health and social services in the years 2001–02 to 2003–04. Information about spend on physical equipment is not collected centrally.

Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the cost of establishing the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection. [59870]

Jacqui Smith: Estimates of the cost of establishing the new health inspectorate will be made in preparing the required legislation.

Legal Claims

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to address the issue of increasing legal claims against the NHS. [60016]

Ms Blears: In July 2001 the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) was asked to set up an advisory group to look at the reform of clinical negligence in the NHS. It has not yet been possible to publish proposals for reform, because of the complexity of the issues raised by potential reforms, the need to consult widely (including through the Lord Chancellor's Department on how compensation is paid) and also to consider how potential proposals sit alongside a concurrent review of the NHS complaints procedure. Nevertheless, the CMO has now held the last of his advisory group meetings and will shortly publish the findings along with recommendations for reform.

Anti-TNF Therapy

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will list each health authority area where anti-TNF therapy is *(a)* available and *(b)* unavailable; [41443]

(2) what plans he has for increasing access to anti-TNF therapy. [41442]

Ms Blears *[holding answers 11 March 2002]:* The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is conducting an appraisal of anti-TNF treatments. Guidance was issued to the national health service on 22 March 2002.

We do not hold information centrally about the current availability of these treatments.

Unpaid Advisers

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 18 April 2002, *Official Report,* column 1177W, what the *(a)* names and *(b)* responsibilities are of unpaid advisers who have assisted the work of his Department since June 1997 but are not included in the Cabinet Office's annual report "Task Forces, Ad Hoc Advisory Groups and Reviews 2000–01". [57037]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* Ministers have not appointed unpaid advisers other than those accounted for in the list of task forces, reviews and other ad hoc advisory groups.

However, a large number of outside experts provide their time and knowledge to the Department on an ad hoc basis as and when appropriate and without payment. I am grateful to all of them for their help which enriches the work of the Department. Information is not held centrally about such individual contributions.

Midwives

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress to increase staff retention among midwives. [58189]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* The Department and the Royal College of Midwives are working closely to improve recruitment and retention by promoting flexible working, childcare, diversity and tackling harassment.

Pay for midwives has increased by at least 26 per cent. Since 1997 and a new grading agreement has been introduced.

The number of midwives (headcount) increased by 510 between September 2000 and September 2001. 2,000 more midwives are planned by 2006.

Workforce development confederations are modelling the future maternity work force taking into account programmes such as Birthrate Plus.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the likely main incentives for attracting former midwives back into the profession. [59412]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The Return Journeys booklet is the result of an assessment of returners' needs and sets out the incentives for people to return to a career in midwifery, or other health care careers in the national health service. I will arrange for a copy to be placed in the Library.

The Improving Working Lives initiative is making return to the NHS more attractive.

We are working with the Royal College of Midwives, local supervisory authorities for midwifery, heads of midwifery and workforce development confederations to improve the return journey for midwives.

Smallpox Vaccine

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what selection criteria the contract to produce smallpox vaccine for the UK Government were awarded. [57377]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* Detailed confidential discussions were held with five major pharmaceutical companies who were known to have vaccine manufacturing capabilities either in the UK or in Europe. The key criterion for awarding the contract for smallpox vaccine was the ability to supply the quantity of vaccine of the preferred strain within the desired timescale.

Correspondence

Mr. Cran: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when a substantive reply will be given to Mrs. S. J. Havis's letter of 19 March, concerning child abuse deaths. [59226]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* A reply was sent on 20 May.

School Nursing Service

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many qualified nurses are employed by the school nursing service in each PCT; [59419]

(2) how many PCTs operate pupil drop-in surgeries by school nurses in primary schools; [59422]

(3) what services to pupils are normally performed by the school nursing service; [59423]

(4) what plans he has to expand the schools nursing service. [59420]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* Information is not collected centrally on the number of pupil drop-in surgeries run by school nurses, nor are numbers of nurses employed in the school health service collected separately from returns on the overall community nurse work force. Expansion of the school nursing service is a matter for primary care trusts, which are tasked with providing for the health care needs of their local population.

Services to pupils normally provided by the school nursing service include supporting children and young people with medical needs in schools. Services are also designed to reduce health inequalities through programmes to improve and protect health such as sexual health and relationships, accident prevention, nutrition and physical activity, parenting, smoking cessation, and immunisation.

Improving the health of children and young people and reducing inequalities are priorities for this Government. Additional work is being developed within the children's national service framework, national healthy schools standard and the teenage pregnancy unit.

Biological Parents (Tracing Rights)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on enabling children conceived using donated sperm to trace their biological fathers. [59424]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* We have not yet taken a view on this matter. An open consultation continues until 1 July this year on the provision of information about donors. The consultation document asks, among other things, for views as to whether identifying information about future donors should be made available. Copies of the consultation document are in the Library.

School Fruit

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) on 29 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 624W, on school fruit, what guidance there is to ensure that his Department buys British when purchasing apples for the national school fruit scheme. [59557]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The Department contracts with various suppliers and distributors to supply fruit for the national school fruit scheme. In all of its procurements, the Department is obliged to secure value for money through competition and has to consider EC Procurement Directives; therefore, the Department is unable to insist upon only British products being purchased. We would, however, expect UK growers to be well placed to meet the challenge of supplying fruit for the scheme.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding has been allocated to each department within each NHS trust for NICE recommended treatments, drugs and technologies. [59559]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* We have not allocated earmarked funding for National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) recommended treatments. However, national health service bodies have a statutory obligation to fund such treatments. General allocations to health authorities take account of the pressures on pay, prices and the cost of implementing NICE recommendations which they all face. Allocations have increased by at least 6 per cent. in real terms in 2002–03.

Missed Appointments

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what methodology was used by his Department to quantify how much money it was costing the NHS from patients missing GP appointments each year. [59576]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* Information on missed general practitioner appointments is not collected by the Department which has consequently not published any estimates of costs.

Locums

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued to hospital trusts when negotiating for locum contracts for doctors and nurses with private agencies. [59441]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The Department is publishing a code of practice on the supply of temporary staffing shortly, which will support trusts in purchasing temporary staff from commercial and in-house providers of temporary staff.

Commercial agencies are providing temporary staff to trusts through co-ordinated contracts, which include quality, risk and value for money criteria.

NHS Consultants

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS consultants retired in each year since 1997. [59570]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The figures in the table show the number of consultants who received a pension award, from the National Health Service Pension Scheme, in each of the financial years 1997 to 2001. The figures include all types of retirement, including age, ill health, voluntary early, preserved pensions, and premature, which may be subject to retrospective adjustment following validation processes.

Year	*Consultant Pension Awards*
1997	415
1998	450
1999	400
2000	403
2001	497
Total	2,165

Overseas Treatment

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer on 29 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 626W, on overseas treatment, what the estimated number of patients for the next six months booked to receive overseas treatment was. [59558]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* No such information is held centrally. It is for local commissioners to decide, in the light of capacity constraints across their local health economies, and taking into account the different commissioning options available to them, whether or not to refer patients overseas for treatment.

Fraud

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what procedures are in place to encourage members of the public and NHS staff to report suspected incidents of fraud in the NHS. [59554]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* Since the formation of the National Health Service Counter Fraud Service (NHS CFS) in 1998, every health body is required in Secretary of State Directions to have a dedicated and accredited local counter fraud specialist (LCFS) who can be contacted by NHS staff to report any suspicion of fraud in the NHS. One of the many functions of the LCFS is to contribute to a wider change in public and staff attitudes towards fraud in the national health service, using a variety of measures to develop an anti-fraud culture.

In addition, the NHS CFS has the Fraud and Corruption Reporting Line (FCRL), which is a secure channel for members of the public and NHS staff to report any suspicion of fraud in the NHS.

A series of fraud awareness presentations (FAPs) has also been given to every health authority, NHS trust, primary care trust and local professional committee, to not only provide details of the work of the NHS CFS but how to report a suspicion of fraud through their LCFS, regional NHS CFS office or the FCRL.

Over 600 of these presentations have been delivered to date and questionnaires completed by attendees reflect the development of an anti-fraud culture. The questionnaires have shown 99 per cent. of NHS staff are now clear about their role in countering fraud.

The NHS CFS also has a series of counter-fraud charters signed with all of the professional associations, 113 patient groups and the Royal College of Nursing. The number of NHS staff and contractors covered by counter-fraud charter agreements to work together to counter fraud is more than 400,000. Work continues to increase this number.

These charters demonstrate the development of a real anti-fraud culture among those working within the NHS.

Psychiatric Nurses

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many psychiatric nurses have been recruited to NHS mental health authorities in each year since 1997. [59572]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The national health service does not have mental health authorities. Information on overall numbers of psychiatry nurses is given by health authority. In 2001 there were 41,540 psychiatry nurses compared to 39,110 in 1997, an increase of 2,430 or 6 per cent.

This information has been placed in the Library.

Mental Health

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the new primary care trusts have a mental health specialist responsible for commissioning mental health services. [60568]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not collect information about the qualifications of staff involved following 'Shifting the Balance of Power' in commissioning mental health services. Primary care trusts (PCTs) will provide some services themselves; they will commission service from other providers, both local and non-local; and they will have collaborative arrangements with other PCTs for commissioning highly specialised services. PCTs are accountable to their strategic health authority (StHA) for discharging these functions effectively. In all cases, it will be important to work in partnership with existing stakeholders, pool expertise and ensure sufficient dedicated capacity to develop effective health needs assessments, and plan and secure effective service delivery. We believe that mental health local implementation teams offer a strong and stable platform to continue joint commissioning approaches to mental health service development.

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recourse is available to people requiring particular mental health services at primary care level, when those services are not accessible *(a)* through their general practitioner and *(b)* within the area of their primary care trust. [60564]

Jacqui Smith: Most patients want the best treatment at a convenient place and service agreements will be designed to secure this. It is why we have embarked on a radical programme of modernisation to improve access, reduce unfair variation, raise standards, and provide quicker and more convenient services. Our programme of work includes a national service framework for the delivery of modern mental health and social services, and significant extra investment.

Following 'Shifting the Balance of Power' primary care trusts (PCTs) are responsible for commissioning services for their populations. They are accountable to their strategic health authority (StHA) for discharging this function effectively. PCTs will provide some services themselves and will also commission service from other providers, both local and non local. With regard to more specialised services that, by their very nature, are provided from relatively few providers, PCTs will increasingly have collaborative commissioning arrangements with other PCTs. This will enable them to pool expertise and ensure sufficient dedicated capacity to develop effective health needs assessments, and plan and secure delivery of services. In addition, there is the flexibility within the national health service of making referrals into the private sector if, in the judgment of clinicians and commissioners, an individual's needs warrant this, and the service is an appropriate one.

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many primary care trusts have commissioned *(a)* counselling, *(b)* cognitive therapy, *(c)* psychotherapy, *(d)* complementary therapy and *(e)* exercise on prescription for people with mental health problems. [60566]

Jacqui Smith: Central records are not kept of commissioning by primary care trusts of the services listed. However, we are well aware that these approaches are of benefit in mental health promotion, and in the treatment of mental illness. Clinical decisions about their use for individual patients are taken locally in the context of national guidance, the evidence base, and the available resources. We have set out seven standards for the delivery of effective mental health services in the mental health national service framework. Standards one, two and three set out the action needed to ensure effective access to assessment and treatment in and through primary care. The Department published an evidence based clinical guideline 'Treatment Choice in Psychological Therapies and Counselling' to help guide referrers. 'Making it happen—A guide to delivering mental health promotion' was published by the Department later in 2001; it contains a section entitled 'Physical activity as treatment', and in March 2001 we published a response to the Lords inquiry on complementary medicine, welcoming the report's recommendations.

Suicide

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what resources have been allocated for the public relations strategy to reduce suicide. [60532]

Jacqui Smith: We published a comprehensive, evidence-based strategy to prevent suicide for public consultation on 26 April 2002. We are currently developing a strategy to ensure that the final agreed national suicide prevention strategy, which we plan to launch in September 2002, is publicised effectively.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the Advisory Committee for the Transparency of Measures Governing the Pricing of Medicinal Products for Human Use is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55358]

Ms Blears: A consultative committee was established by Council Directive 89/105/EEC to implement the Directive, which relates to the transparency of measures regulating the prices of medicinal products for human use and their inclusion in the scope of national health insurance systems. Its task is to examine questions relating to the application of this Directive brought up by the Commission or at the request of a member state.

The Committee last met in early 1999.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the advisory committee on the training of chemists is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56759]

Ms Blears: The advisory committee on pharmaceutical training (ACPT) is one of a group of committees set up to advise the European Commission and member states on matters relating to the training of workers whose professions come under sectoral directives guaranteeing free movement and automatic recognition of qualifications.

The ACPT was set up by Council Decision 85/434/EEC. Its mandate is set down in Article 2, which states that:

> 1. The task of the Committee shall be to help to ensure a comparably high standard of pharmaceutical training in the Community.
>
> 2. It shall carry out this task, in particular, by the following means:
>
> exchange of comprehensive information as to the training methods and the content, level and structure of theoretical and practical courses provided in the member states,
>
> discussion and consultation with the object of developing a common approach to the standard to be attained in the training of pharmacists and, as appropriate, to the structure and content of such training,
>
> keeping under review the adaptation of the pharmaceutical training to developments in pharmaceutical science and teaching methods.
>
> 3. The Committee shall communicate to the Commission and the member states its opinions and recommendations including, when it considers it appropriate, suggestions for amendments to be made to the articles relating to pharmaceutical training in Council Directives 85/432/EEC and 85/433/EEC.
>
> 4. The Committee shall also advise the Commission on any other matter which the Commission may refer to it in relation to pharmaceutical training.

Each advisory committee has three experts from each member state—one each from the practising profession, the education establishments and the competent authorities concerned. Three alternates are also appointed. Members and alternates are nominated by Ministers, following consultation with the relevant professional bodies.

The advisory committee members' expenses fall to be paid by the Commission (or on occasion by the professions concerned). There is thus no direct charge to public funds.

Member states are currently considering Commission proposals for streamlining the directives and processes relating to free movement of professionals. None of the advisory committees has met during the last 12 months; and none of them has any items under consideration.

In April this year, the issues arising from the Commission's proposals for the future of professional recognition were submitted to the Parliamentary Scrutiny Committees (Explanatory Memorandum No. 7239/02—COM(2002)119final).

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the Committee on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provision of the member states concerning the manufacture, presentation and sale of tobacco products is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [57480]

Ms Blears: Under EU Directive 2001/37/EC on the manufacture, presentation and sale of tobacco products, provision is made for a Committee to be set up to assist the European Commission in developing and updating the provisions of the Directive. The Committee is currently in the process of being set up and its first meeting is anticipated to take place before the end of this year. The United Kingdom will be represented by one expert, and the costs associated with it are not yet known. The work programme of the Committee has not been confirmed but is likely to build on Article 11 of the Directive, which highlights a number of areas which should be reviewed or developed in the light of developments in scientific and technical knowledge.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the Committee on the Community action programme on injury prevention is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [57475]

Ms Blears: Committee was established under Article 5 of the Decision 372/1999/EC, adopting a programme of community action on injury prevention in the framework for action in the field of public health, to assist the Commission in implementing the programme.

The committee met twice in the last twelve months, on 20 June 2001, and 18 December 2001, when it was formally disbanded.

The UK was generally represented by two officials from the Department and the Department for Trade and Industry. Three officials attended the June meeting.

The travel costs are reimbursed by the commission for two delegates at each meeting. Therefore the cost to public funds was overnight subsistence for all the delegates, in accordance with the policy of individual Departments, and one return airfare to Luxembourg. A record of the individual costs to each Department is not centrally held.

There are currently no items under consideration of the committee, as it was disbanded in December 2001.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line

with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the Community action programme on health promotion, information, education and training is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [57477]

Ms Blears: The European Union Committee for the implementation of the Community action programme on health promotion, information, education and training was mandated under Article 5 of Decision 645/96/EC of the European Parliament and the Council. The committee assisted the Commission in taking forward the programme by providing opinions on proposed measures by the Commission. It is due to terminate with the introduction of the new EU action programme on public health.

The committee met twice in the last year, in May 2001 and February 2002. One UK official from the Department attended on each occasion.

Travel and subsistence claims paid from public funds were £346. The commission reimbursed international airfare costs.

Details about the committee, the programme and funded projects can be found on Europa, the EU online website: http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/index en.html.

Genetic Information

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the Government will introduce legislation for the protection of personal genetic information before members of the public are asked to donate blood samples to Biobank UK. [55631]

Ms Blears: The United Kingdom's Biobank will conform to all relevant ethical and legal guidelines regarding consent, confidentiality and use of human tissue, biological samples and genetic information. Also, as recommended in the report on research databases published recently by the human genetics commission ("Inside Information—balancing interests in the use of personal genetic information"), governance of the UK Biobank will be overseen by an independent body that is separate from its owners and users. The Government do not currently intend to introduce further safeguards for the protection of personal genetic information before members of the public are asked to donate blood samples to the UK Biobank.

Retained Organs Commission

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were employed in the Retained Organs Commission at 1 April; and what proportion of those staff have clincial contact with NHS patients. [56856]

Ms Blears: The retained organs commission employed 19 full or part-time staff (a total of 17.2 whole-time equivalent staff) at 1 April 2002. None of these staff has clinical contact with national health service patients.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 11 June 2002

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the number of farm businesses in receipt of compensation during the foot and mouth epidemic which have since *(a)* been sold and *(b)* ceased to trade as farms. [54341]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 7 May 2002]:* No formal assessment has been made of the number of farm businesses in receipt of compensation during the foot and mouth epidemic which have since *(a)* been sold and *(b)* ceased to trade. However, an informal survey conducted by the Department in February 2002 suggested that 6 per cent. of farmers whose animals had been infected with foot and mouth disease intend to move out of farming.

Committee Mandates

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the EU Committee for the adaptation to scientific and technical progress and implementation of the directives on waste is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; when it is next due to meet; what the UK representation on it is; whether any experts nominated by the Scottish Executive *(a)* have been and *(b)* are members of it; and if she will make a statement. [60390]

Mr. Meacher: The Committee's mandate is determined by Articles 17 and 18 of the Waste Framework Directive, Article 9 of the Hazardous Waste Directive and Article 11 of the End-Of-Life Vehicles Directive. In summary, its mandate is to assist the European Commission to adapt aspects of those Directives in the light of scientific and technical progress.

The Committee met on 6 July 2001, 30 January 2002 and 22 May 2002. The UK's representation is determined by the agenda for each meeting but the basic representation is usually two officials.

The Scottish Executive have not nominated any experts to attend the Committee's meetings. However, my officials work closely with the Scottish Executive on waste management issues, including those dealt with by the Committee.

Waste Management

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what investigations she has made into alternative ways of disposing of unwanted *(a)* hazardous and *(b)* non-hazardous items; and if she will make a statement. [60100]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The EU Landfill Directive bans the landfilling of:

Liquid waste.

Waste which in the conditions of landfill is explosive, oxidising, corrosive, flammable or highly flammable.

Chemical substances from R&D or teaching, e.g. unidentified or new laboratory residues whose effects on man or the environment are not known.

Hospital and other clinical wastes arising from medical or veterinary establishments which are infectious.

Whole used tyres from 2003 and shredded used tyres from 2006.

Any waste that does not fulfil the waste acceptance criteria.

Some of the wastes banned from landfill are not generally landfilled at present. For those that are, research for the Department concluded that there were sufficient alternative disposal systems (in use or planned) to cope with the large volume of organic process waste streams requiring diversion from landfill. Examples given included:

Pyrolysis and gasification—commissioned in some major industrial sites already.

Merchant treatment plants for organic wastes offering pre-treatment, such as air stripping or pH balancing.

Existing landfill leachate plant could treat a range of aqueous organic waste streams, further developments could provide a wider range of outlets for organic wastes.

Some water companies are encouraging greater use of their spare capacity in aerobic and anaerobic treatment systems

Solvent recovery plants have some spare capacity and are planning investment to recover useful materials from aqueous feedstock.

High temperature incineration.

The report suggested additional facilities might be required for oily wastes, contaminated soils, and inorganic chemical wastes.

The Government are also working in partnership with the tyre industry through the Used Tyre Working Group (UTWG) investigating alternative disposal, recycling and recovery options for those tyres displaced from landfill with the aim of ensuring that sufficient capacity is available to handle those tyres displaced from landfill.

Correspondence

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter of 11 September 2001 from the hon. Member for Torbay on behalf of Mr. Moore of Paignton. [58921]

Mr. Morley: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 12 November 2001.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letter of 28 November 2001 from the hon. Member for Torbay on behalf of Mr. Jones of Torquay. [58924]

Mr. Morley: The hon. Member's letter was transferred to the Department for Trade and Industry as the issues it raised are the responsibility of that Department. My hon. Friend the Minister of State for Energy and Industry (Mr. Wilson) replied on 12 March 2002.

Farm Subsidies

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to rationalise the main funding schemes in the uplands to provide a simplified system of support for farmers in these areas. [59705]

Mr. Morley: The Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food recommended that the long-term aim for less favoured area support should be an integrated tiered payment scheme reflecting environmental and social benefits, actual cost of landscape, wildlife and access maintenance and the economic difficulties of traditional hill farming. The Government will take full account of this recommendation in reviewing the hill farm allowance and the current agri-environment schemes. In addition, plans are being drawn up for a small farmers scheme which will provide a simplified claims procedure for small farmers in the uplands and lowlands.

Fishing Industry

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what was the *(a)* value of and *(b)* number of jobs in the UK inshore fishing industry in each year since 1997. [60158]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* Accurate estimates of the value of jobs in the inshore fishing industry are not available. Vessels under 10 metres in length comprise most of the UK inshore fleet, and Table 1 shows the value of landings made by these vessels for 1997 to 2001. The available data on jobs in the fishing industry cover only numbers of fishermen working on vessels. The information is given in Table 2; information for vessels under 10 metres is available only for England and Wales.

Table 1: Value of landings by the under-10m fleet, 1997–2001

Year	*Value (£ million)*
1997	60.0
1998	69.1
1999	56.0
2000	48.2
2001	50.1

Source:
Fisheries Departments in the UK

Table 2: Number of fishermen 1997–2000

Year		*England and Wales*	*Scotland*	*Northern Ireland*	*United Kingdom*
1997	10m and under	5,129	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Over 10m	4,300	n/a	n/a	n/a
	All vessels	9,429	8,194	981	18,604
1998	10m and under	5,045	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Over 10m	4,066	n/a	n/a	n/a
	All vessels	9,111	7,771	1,007	17,889
1999	10m and under	4,100	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Over 10m	3,596	n/a	n/a	n/a
	All vessels	7,696	7,330	935	15,961
2000	10m and under	4,185	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Over 10m	3,121	n/a	n/a	n/a
	All vessels	7,306	6,092	686	14,084

Source:
Fisheries Departments in the UK

Regional Organisation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what regional organisation her Department has; and if she will list the counties and unitary authorities in each region in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002. [58934]

Mr. Morley: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs was created in June 2001 from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food and parts of the Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Home Office.

In relation to MAFF in 1997 there were nine regional service centres carrying out work for the Ministry. There were also three regional areas for the State Veterinary Service, and offices in Scotland and Wales. The counties for each of these offices are laid out in the table. The unitary authorities are not included in this table due to the disproportionate cost of providing such information in the requested form.

On 1 April 2001 the regional service centres were dissolved and the Rural Development Service was established with eight regional offices to take forward the England Rural Development Programme. Since the creation of DEFRA in June 2001, the Government offices have also carried out work for my Department.

The details of the counties and unitary authorities for the regional offices of the Rural Development Service, the State Veterinary Service and the Government offices in 2002 are set out in the second table.

1997 MAFF regional structure

MAFF regional service centres/counties	*State Veterinary Service*
South West Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly	West'
Wessex (Bristol) Somerset, Dorset and Wiltshire	
South Mercia (Worcester) Hereford and Worcester Gloucestershire West Midlands Warwickshire	East
South East (Reading) Greater London, Kent, East and West Sussex, Surrey, Hampshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire	

1997 MAFF regional structure

MAFF regional service centres/counties	*State Veterinary Service*
Anglia (Cambridge) Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Bedfordshire	(East)
East Midlands (Nottingham) Leicestershire Northamptonshire Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire	North
North Mercia (Crewe) Greater Manchester, Cheshire, Staffordshire, Shropshire (see footnote 1) and Merseyside	(North)
North East (Northallerton) North Yorkshire, West Yorkshire, South Yorkshire and Durham	
Northern (Carlisle) Lancashire, Cumbria, Northumberland and Tyne and Wear	
	Wales Scotland

[1] Includes Shropshire

2002 DEFRA regional structure

RDS/GO regions	*Counties*	*Unitary authorities*	*SVS regions*
South West	Cornwall, and the Isles of Scilly, Devon, Somerset, Dorset, Wiltshire, Gloucestershire	Plymouth, Torbay, Poole, Bournemouth, Bristol, South Gloucestershire, Bath and North East Somerset, North Somerset, Swindon	West
West Midlands	Shropshire, Worcestershire, Warwickshire, Staffordshire—see footnote 1	Herefordshire, Telford and Wrekin, Stoke-on-Trent—see footnote 1. The metropolitan authorities in the West Midlands	
East—East of England	Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, Hertfordshire, Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire	Peterborough, Luton, Southend-on-Sea, Thurrock	East
South East	Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire, Surrey, Kent, West Sussex, East Sussex	Isle of Wight, Milton Keynes, Brighton and Hove, Medway, Portsmouth, Southampton, Bracknell Forest, Reading, Slough, West Berkshire, Windsor and Maidenhead, Wokingham	
London	Greater London		
East Midlands	Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Lincolnshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire	Leicester, Rutland Derby, Nottingham	North[1]
North East	Northumberland, Durham	Darlington, Hartlepool, Stockton on Tees, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland. The Metropolitan authorities in Tyne and Wear	
North West	Cumbria, Lancashire, Cheshire	Blackpool, Blackburn with Darwen, Warrington, Halton. The Metropolitan authorities in Merseyside and in Greater Manchester	
Yorkshire and Humber	North Yorkshire	York, East Riding of Yorkshire, Kingston Upon Hull, North Lincolnshire, North East Lincolnshire. The Metropolitan authorities in South Yorkshire and in West Yorkshire	North
			Wales Scotland

[1] Includes Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent

Energy Efficiency

Mr. Tyler: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the potential carbon savings are in the EU as a result of the proposed energy performance of buildings directive expressed in tonnes of carbon dioxide. [45138]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 21 March 2002]:* The European Union Final Energy Demand by sector and by fuel in 1997 (Mtoe) indicated that 40.7 per cent. of final energy demand would come from buildings[1]. A further review by the European Union[2] reviewed existing energy efficiency measures and identified buildings as a priority action area for the short and medium term. An action plan[3] outlined ways to limit carbon dioxide emissions from buildings and to improve their energy efficiency.

In the UK, the residential and tertiary building sectors have been shown to be the largest overall end users of energy, mainly for heating, lighting, appliances and equipment. The energy consumed in buildings in the UK amounts to 46 per cent. of the national total (27 per cent. from the domestic sector and 19 per cent. from the non-domestic sector). This equates to about 235 million tonnes of carbon dioxide every year—or about 63.5 million tonnes of carbon per year (MtC/year).

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[1] Source: Energy in Europe—European Union Energy Outlook to 2020, special issue November 1999. The Shared Analysis Project, EEC.

[2] Communication from the Commission of 29 April 1998: Energy Efficiency in the European Community—Towards a Strategy for the Rational Use of Energy.

[3] Action plan to improve energy efficiency in the European Community, 2000. Commission Proposal COM (2000) 247 final http://europa.eu.int/scadplus/leg/energy/lvb/127033.htm.

GM Crops

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what recent meetings she has had with her EU counterparts to discuss regulation of GM crops; and if she will make a statement; [58128]

(2) what recent meetings she has had with her counterparts in the EU at which plans to change the procedure for approval of GM foods and seeds within the EU was discussed. [58547]

Mr. Meacher: The Secretary of State attended Environment Council in October 2001, at which the proposed regulations on traceability and labelling of food and feed products derived from genetically modified organisms were discussed. She also attended the Agriculture Council on 23 October, at which the proposed regulations for GM food and feed and the proposed regulations on traceability and labelling were discussed.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what bilateral meetings she and her officials have had with the United States Department of Agriculture at which the subject of GM crops was discussed; and if she will make a statement. [58127]

Mr. Meacher: The Secretary of State visited the USA in December 2001 and April 2002 and discussed GM crops in meetings with her counterparts. There have recently been discussions of an informal nature at official level with USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and Agricultural Research Service.

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many press releases have been issued by her Department in each month of 2002. [59481]

Mr. Morley: Our records show that the DEFRA Press Office have issued a total of 169 press releases in the first four calendar months of 2002.

	Press releases issued
January	44
February	33
March	48
April	44
Total	169

Flooding

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will estimate the cost to the Environment Agency and local authorities of sandbag deployment in areas experiencing and prone to flooding in each of the last five years. [59271]

Mr. Morley: The cost of sandbag deployment is highly variable and is not recorded separately from other costs of dealing with flooding emergencies. For example, in emergency situations, bags can be supplied full or empty. They may be filled manually on site or by bagging machines, if access to the problem area is easy. Alternatively, they may be filled at a central depot and transported by road or air, as for example occurred in the north-east during autumn 2000.

The information requested is therefore not available and cannot be provided without incurring disproportionate costs.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Zimbabwe

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what measures the Government are taking to ensure that international aid given to Zimbabwe is linked to *(a)* allowing UN observers into the country and *(b)* land reform. [60190]

Clare Short: There are no links between our humanitarian aid, which is managed outside of Government channels, and land reform. The UN already has a large presence in Zimbabwe implementing emergency programmes. This includes the presence of food programme monitors in 19 districts. Our aid for Zimbabwe is confined to humanitarian assistance, and the prevention and mitigation of HIV/AIDS.

United Nations Commission on Human Rights

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which resolutions were supported by the UK representatives at the recent annual session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. [58628]

Mr. MacShane: I have been asked to reply.

This year the Commission passed over 100 resolutions. The UK supported (through co-sponsorship and in votes) 72 resolutions including those on the death penalty, a draft optional protocol to the Convention Against Torture, rights of the child, freedom of expression, torture and the rights of persons with disabilities. We also co-sponsored initiatives on countries including Iraq, Burma, Sudan, Cuba, East Timor, Cambodia, Colombia and Israel and the Occupied Territories.

I will send the hon. Member a full voting record, which shows how each country voted on each resolution and the outcome of the texts. A copy will also be placed in the House of Commons Library.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the outcome of the recent annual session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights. [58630]

Mr. MacShane: I have been asked to reply.

Promotion of human rights is at the heart of our foreign policy. The Commission on Human Rights is the UN's main human rights forum. The UK is committed to playing a major role at CHR, and has been one of its most active and committed members since its inception in 1946. The recent session adopted over 100 resolutions on human rights issues. The UK actively supported over 70 of these. Particular achievements were resolutions on a draft optional protocol to the Convention Against Torture, the death penalty, rights of people with disabilities and rights of the child, and the Commission's condemnation of human rights violations in Burma, Iraq, Sudan, Cuba and the Democratic Republic of Congo. We were, however, disappointed by the lack of progress in some areas, including racism, and the reluctance of the Commission to condemn human rights violations in some parts of the world, including Zimbabwe, Iran and Chechnya. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs addressed the plenary of this year's Commission on 18 April. A copy of his speech can be found on the FCO website.

Subcontinent

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent representations she has made to the Governments of India and Pakistan regarding their policy on land mines. [59852]

Mr. MacShane: I have been asked to reply.

Since July 1998, when the United Kingdom became a state party to the Ottawa Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines, we have lobbied all users of land mines, including India and Pakistan, to ratify the Convention. Both states claim political and defence reasons for not doing so.

TRANSPORT

Railways

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when the GNER franchise will next be advertised. [59355]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The current franchise agreement expires in April 2005. The Strategic Rail Authority will put arrangements in place for awarding a new franchise, in good time and in the light of progress on the development of the proposed East Coast Main Line infrastructure upgrade.

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions (1) whether inspection bodies operating in the UK railway systems are accredited by UKAS; [59168]

(2) whether UKAS accredited personnel certification is used for those undertaking track maintenance and safety; [59166]

(3) if the sub-contractors employed by Railtrack operate quality management systems certified by UKAS accredited certification bodies. [59167]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

I understand that there are currently no certification bodies accredited by UKAS for railway specific purposes. UKAS will provide advice to the Strategic Rail Authority on the appointment of notified bodies under the Railways (Interoperability) (High-Speed) Regulations 2002.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list *(a)* the contractors and *(b)* sub-contractors responsible to Railtrack for maintenance of the track for each operating zone; what changes have taken place since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [59325]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

My Department does not hold the information requested, which are operational matters for Railtrack.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether *(a)* he and *(b)* his officials have met directors of Network Rail since they announced their bid for Railtrack. [59357]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

It is not the normal practice of the Government to discuss details of meetings or discussions with private individuals or companies.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions whether train operating companies' driving staff are required to carry, and complete when they judge necessary, report forms detailing irregularities, incidents and other matters related to safe operation of the railways which are the responsibility of rail companies, their contractors and their sub-contractors. [58860]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

Train operating companies have various reporting forms on which drivers record delays and other incidents as they occur. Drivers submit these written reports to their line management at the earliest opportunity and before signing off duty. These forms usually have a section that prompts action by the train operator's management to inform Railtrack of incidents as necessary.

Drivers are required to report to the signaller all incidents that have an immediate effect on the safety of train operation or on the operation of the line. Reports are made at the time of the incident by either cab secure radio or signal post telephone.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what discussions *(a)* he, *(b)* his Ministers and *(c)* his officials have had with the Solicitor-General on the case for a corporate manslaughter charge arising from the Paddington rail crash since 20 May. [59819]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

None.

Mr. Norman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what assessment *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the Strategic Rail Authority has undertaken of the ability of station operators to conform with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. [59634]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The Strategic Rail Authority published its code of practice "Train and Station Services For Disabled Passengers" on 6 February 2002. The Authority is currently reviewing each train operators Disabled People's Protection Policy (DPPP) against its code of practice and its DPPP guidance to identify where current facilities need to be improved.

Mr. Mike Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he has received the report of the rail industry interview process carried out by Mercer Management Consulting. [61250]

Mr. Spellar: Following the High Court's decision to place Railtrack plc into administration last October, the Government wanted the development of railway policy to be based on a full understanding of the issues facing the rail industry. The Government therefore commissioned Mercer Management Consulting to manage a series of interviews with rail industry stakeholders to gather views about all aspects of the UK railways. Mercer kept the Government informed of the views expressed throughout the process and has now produced a report summarising the key messages heard. This has been made public today, and copies have been placed in the House Libraries.

Uff-Cullen Recommendations

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions which of the Uff-Cullen recommendations have been implemented. [59356]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The Health and Safety Commission (HSC) published the first action plan/progress report, indicating firm commitments to implement the recommendations of the Joint Inquiry into Train Protection Systems, on 27 September 2001. A copy is available in the House Library. The HSE are currently analysing progress towards implementation of the recommendations with the intention of publishing a further progress report before the end of July 2002. A copy will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Dibden Bay Planning Inquiry

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the planning inquiry at Dibden Bay will report. [60425]

Mr. Jamieson: The inquiry is currently timetabled to finish at the end of this year. On that basis we are expecting to receive the inspector's report in the latter half of 2003.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library copies of the evidence that his Department has given to the planning inquiry at Dibden Bay. [60415]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department has not supplied any evidence to the Dibden Bay inquiry.

Traffic Management

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what guidance he gives to local authorities and to elected mayors on the timing sequence of traffic lights on trunk roads to ensure that congestion is minimised. [59107]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

The Highways Agency issues advice on the safety-related timings for traffic signals. These are contained in their Design Manual for Roads and Bridges.

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will take steps to introduce during non-rush hour periods traffic lights which have a light vehicle flow which are switched to show only a flashing amber light in each direction. [59184]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

We do not think this is appropriate. A short flashing amber stage is already used at Pelican pedestrian crossings and has a specific meaning—if there are no pedestrians on the crossing the driver may proceed with caution. The same signal sequence cannot safely be used to indicate a different message.

The adoption of this proposal could confuse drivers and increase the likelihood of accidents at junctions, particularly those where the visibility of crossing traffic is limited, for example, by difficult junction geometry.

It is believed that the flashing amber sequence was introduced in the USA to help counter the inherent inefficiencies of fixed-time signals, particularly at off-peak times. As most traffic signals in the UK are traffic responsive, there would be little if any improvement in efficiency from adopting this proposal because our traffic signals are able to respond to varying traffic demands without compromising road safety.

Channel Tunnel

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will make a statement on the arrangements to secure rail freight through the channel tunnel; and who will pay for them. [59069]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

It is for the French railway industry and public authorities to ensure that rail freight through the channel tunnel is not disrupted by incursions into the Fréthun freight yard. SNCF has just announced investment of euro 7.5 million to improve physical security measures at Fréthun. I understand that this will be funded by Réseau Ferré de France.

Swanwick Air Traffic Control Centre

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made by *(a)* the Health and Safety Executive and *(b)* the Civil Aviation Authority of the operation of the new air traffic control centre at Swanwick; if he will place copies of related documentation in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [60400]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 759–60W.

The Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), the air safety regulator, gave National Air Traffic Services its full approval to take Swanwick into operation. Assessments made by the CAA are a matter for that organisation.

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on recent safety levels at the Air Traffic Control Centre in Swanick with special reference to reports of the *(a)* Health and Safety Executive and *(b)* Civil Aviation Authority. [60272]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) on 10 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 759–60W.

The Civil Aviation Authority, the air safety regulator, remains satisfied that there are no breaches of the CAA safety regulations nor is flight safety affected.

Working Time Directive (Maritime Sector)

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps are being taken by the Department to monitor the effects of the implementation of the EU working time directive in the maritime sector. [60165]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* When the directive is implemented in the UK the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, as the competent authority, will be responsible for enforcing its provisions and monitoring its operation.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress the Department is making in implementing the EU working time directive in the maritime sector. [60167]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* Regulations are in preparation to implement the directive in the UK.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the need in implementing the EU working time directive to include measures to limit the maximum number of hours worked in the maritime sector. [60166]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* In implementing the working time directive in the maritime sector the UK, like several of its EU partners, has elected to apply the option within the directive of specifying the minimum hours of daily and weekly rest which must be provided to seafarers. The maximum number of hours which may be worked each day and each week can be calculated by reference to these minima.

Passenger Transport Authorities

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what benchmarks are laid down for staffing levels in PTAs. [60677]

Mr. Jamieson: None.

Roads (Newcastle to Edinburgh)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what planned works there are on the *(a)* A68, *(b)* A696 and *(c)* A7 between Newcastle and Edinburgh; [60644]

(2) what his estimate is for the increase in traffic on the *(a)* A68, *(b)* A696 and *(c)* A7 between Newcastle and Edinburgh over the lifetime of the 10-year plan; [60646]

(3) if he will list the major infrastructure work carried out on the *(a)* A68, *(b)* A696 and *(c)* A7 between Newcastle and Edinburgh in the last 15 years, in each case giving (i) the aim and nature of the works, (ii) the name of the Government body responsible, (iii) the length of time the works took and (iv) the costs of the works. [60643]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mrs. Theresa May, dated 11 June 2002:

I have been asked by the Secretary of State for Transport to reply to your recent Parliamentary Questions about the A68, A696 and A7 between Newcastle and Edinburgh.

The Highways Agency only has responsibility for trunk roads in England, in this case the A696, part of the A68 and a short section of the A7 in England between Carlisle and the Scottish border that is earmarked for detrunking. Roads in Scotland, including the remaining sections of the A68 and A7, are the responsibility of the Scottish Executive.

The only major infrastructure work carried out over the last 15 years on the A68/A696 was the building of the A696 Woolsington Bypass which connected to the A1 Newcastle Western Bypass providing better access to Newcastle International Airport. The scheme was completed in 1990, was delivered by the then Department of Transport and cost £12.6 million.

Improvement works currently planned for the A68/A696 include carriageway widening and resurfacing of the A696 at Heeston Bank, carriageway resurfacing and bridge deck waterproofing on the A68 between Whitelees Farm and Carter Bar, bridge deck waterproofing on the A68 at Rochester and various small highway improvements on the A696 at Ponteland.

On behalf of the Ministry of Defence, we plan to harden verges along the A696 to provide passing points for Army tank convoys travelling to and from the MOD Otterburn Training Area. We hope to finish these works by November 2003.

The Highways Agency does not forecast increases in traffic for specific roads. However, the growth in traffic on rural single carriageway roads in the National Road Traffic Forecast 1997 is forecast to be 22% by 2011, relative to 1996 levels.

If you require any further information, Peter Moffatt in our Leeds Office will be happy to assist you. He can be contacted on 0113 283 6503.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* cars, motorbikes and vans, *(b)* lorries and *(c)* camper-vans and caravans used the (i) A68, (ii) A696 and (iii) A7 between Newcastle and Edinburgh on an average day in the last 12 months. [60645]

Mr. Jamieson: The available information on the average numbers of vehicles per day on the A696/A68/A7 route between Newcastle and Edinburgh in 2000, is given in the table:

Vehicle type	*Number*
Cars	5,041
Motorcycles	68
LGV (vans)	639
HGV (lorries)	446

Road Haulage Vehicles

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many road haulage vehicles were inspected by the vehicle inspectorate in each of the last three years. [60457]

Mr. Jamieson: Information about the vehicle inspectorate's enforcement activities for the three years to the end of March 2001 is published in the inspectorate's Effectiveness Report 2001, a copy of which has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what resources were provided for inspections of road haulage vehicles with regard to overloading and vehicle drivers' hours offences, in each of the last three years. [60456]

Mr. Jamieson: Traffic examiners (TEs) carry out weighings and check compliance with drivers' hours legislation as part of their duties. The vehicle inspectorate (VI) employed 175 TEs in 1999–2000 and 2000–01. The number of TEs increased to 209 at the end of 2001–02 in response to additional funding from the Road Haulage Forum. In addition to VI's network of permanent weighbridge sites, a number of mobile weighpads were introduced in 2000–01 which have improved VI's ability to target its checks. Work will be done in 2002–03 to test electronic tachograph analysis equipment which will improve the examiner's ability to detect drivers' hours and other offences.

Parking

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much in the last financial year for which figures are available each local authority in England and Wales has raised from the issuing of *(a)* parking permits, *(b)* parking meters and *(c)* pay and display systems. [55797]

Mr. Spellar: I have been asked to reply.

Separate statistics on local authority income from parking permits, parking meters and pay and display systems are not collected centrally. A table showing the expenditure on and income from parking for local authorities in England in 2000–01 has been placed in the Libraries of the House. Local authorities in Wales spent £10.72 million on parking and received income of £16.58 million in 2000–01.

Railtrack

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what powers the administrators of Railtrack have to sell *(a)* major stations, *(b)* other property and *(c)* other land assets independently of the remainder of the rail network. [60650]

Mr. Jamieson: In accordance with section 59 of the Railways Act 1993, the railway administration order made in respect of Railtrack plc directs that the affairs, business and property of the company shall be managed by the administrators for the achievement of the purposes of the administration order. The purposes of the order include transferring the network undertaking as a going concern and ensuring that the management of the rail network can be properly carried on pending a transfer.

The administrators have the power to sell major stations, other property and other land assets, but may use it only to achieve the purposes of the administration order. Furthermore, to protect the public interest, it is a condition of its network licence that Railtrack plc (in administration) may not dispose of land without the consent of the Rail Regulator.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many full-time engineers were employed by Railtrack who worked on *(a)* maintenance and *(b)* enhancements and projects on 24 September 2001; how many there are; and how many have joined the company since 5 October 2001. [60653]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 617W. Further information is not held in the form requested.

Vehicle Registration

Mr. Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve the vehicle registration system. [60884]

Mr. Spellar: Some months ago the Department undertook a review of the vehicle registration system in partnership with the insurance industry. Research was undertaken by the Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science, University College London (JDI). The review examined ways of enhancing the accuracy of databases, improving enforcement arrangements and providing more reliable services to benefit all motorists. The JDI report made 11 recommendations. The first of these, the introduction of continuous registration, has already been accepted and enabling provisions have been included in the Finance Bill. The details of those provisions and the other recommendations will be discussed in detail with stakeholders prior to implementation. I have made available copies of the JDI report in the Library of the House.

Cycling

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many kilometres were cycled per person in each of the last three years. [60455]

Mr. Jamieson: The latest data available, from the National Travel Survey, cover the average distance cycled for those living in Great Britain for the years 1998, 1999 and 2000:

	Distance cycled per person per year (kilometres)
1998	58
1999	68
2000	59

The volatility of the single year figures is likely to be a result of the relatively small sample sizes and the geographical clustering of the sample. Cycling patterns over individual years are also very dependent on the weather.

Carbon Dioxide Emissions

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate the average carbon dioxide emissions for a motorist using their car in the last 12 months in the UK. [60427]

Mr. Jamieson: In 2000 (the latest year for which data are available), it is estimated that average carbon dioxide emissions from cars in the UK were three tonnes.

International Flights

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many international flights there were from the UK *(a)* over the North Atlantic, *(b)* to other EU countries and *(c)* to other world destinations in each quarter of the last five years. [60655]

Mr. Jamieson: The number of international flights from the UK *(a)* over the North Atlantic *(b)* to other EU countries and *(c)* to all other world destinations in each quarter of the last five years is shown in the table. Flights are attributed only to their final overseas destination and not, if any, to intermediate destinations. There were a similar number of international flights arriving in the UK.

Flights from the UK over the North Atlantic[1]

	Q1	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*
1997	8,786	11,053	12,782	10,677
1998	9,840	12,226	13,782	11,674
1999	10,733	12,730	14,208	12,103
2000	11,380	13,256	14,550	12,332
2001	11,442	13,597	14,171	10,897

[1] Flights to USA and Canada

Flights from the UK to other EU countries

	Q1	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*
1997	77,409	92,483	99,661	86,195
1998	83,351	99,510	109,436	93,357
1999	89,997	106,602	117,345	99,812
2000	97,906	115,318	127,260	105,324
2001	100,194	119,921	130,702	102,997

Note:

For the purpose of this analysis Gibraltar has been included in 'other EU countries'

Flights from the UK to other world destinations

	Q1	*Q2*	*Q3*	*Q4*
1997	29,621	34,194	36,624	33,264
1998	31,363	35,272	38,332	34,219
1999	33,240	36,186	38,917	34,216
2000	33,074	36,203	39,577	35,725
2001	33,852	37,537	40,031	34,329

Note:

Flights are attributed to the overseas country of destination and not to each point of call. For example a flight whose route is Gatwick—Paris—Tunis is allocated only to 'other world destinations'.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidelines he has issued to the CAA on the relationship between the number of flights *(a)* over the North Atlantic, *(b)* to other EU countries and *(c)* to other world destinations, and the level of the price cap that the CAA places on the fees that NATS charges airlines. [60656]

Mr. Jamieson: I have issued no guidelines on these matters to the CAA. Although the initial price cap on NATS was set by the Government, as is usual when a public entity is transferred to the private sector, the CAA is the economic regulator of NATS and the Government do not interfere with its discharge of its economic regulatory duties.

High Speed Network

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much money has been set aside as part of *(a)* the SRA Plan and *(b)* the 10-Year Plan for the implementation of the EU directives on interoperability on the high speed network. [60413]

Mr. Jamieson: Neither the 10-Year Plan or the SRA Strategic plan identify specific sums for implementing the high speed interoperability directive which does not, in itself, require projects to be initiated. However, new high speed projects will have to comply with the Directive and the cost of implementation will be taken into account when those projects are developed.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the costs of implementing the EU directives on interoperability on the high speed network. [60411]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the regulatory impact assessment produced in support of the Railways (Interoperability) (High-Speed) Regulations 2002 implementing the high-speed interoperability directive, a copy of which was placed in the Libraries of the House on 25 April 2002.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the percentage of the possible costs for implementing the EU directives on interoperability on the high speed network, that will be borne by *(a)* the Government, *(b)* the successor to Railtrack, *(c)* the SRA, *(d)* freight rail companies and *(e)* passenger rail companies. [60412]

Mr. Jamieson: No assessment has been made of the potential allocation of costs arising from implementation of the high speed interoperability directive which does not, in itself, require projects to be initiated. However, new high speed projects will have to comply with the directive and, to the extent that this results in costs being incurred by network or train operators (which will vary from project to project), those costs will be taken into account in the railway funding and charging regime in the usual way.

Non-departmental Bodies

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the non-departmental bodies attached to his Department that have a responsibility for transport issues, listing their responsibilities in each case. [60422]

Mr. Jamieson: The main non-departmental public bodies whose responsibilities are transport issues, are:

The Commission for Integrated Transport's remit is to provide independent advice to Government on the implementation of the integrated transport agenda, to monitor developments across transport, environment, health and other sectors and to review progress. Its responsibilities are UK-wide in respect of those matters reserved to the UK Government after devolution to

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and it also advises Government on all aspects of integrated transport policy in England.

The Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee advises Government and industry on the transport and built environment needs of disabled people.

The Northern Lighthouse Board and Trinity House Lighthouse Service provide marine aids to navigation to make transport safer.

The Strategic Rail Authority's purposes are set out at section 205 of the Transport Act 2000.

The Traffic Commissioners have responsibility in their geographical area for the licensing of operators of heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) and of buses and coaches (PSVs); the registration of local bus services; and disciplinary action against drivers of HGVs and PSVs.

Bus Companies

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what incentives he has given to encourage bus companies to convert their fleets to use more environmentally friendly fuels. [60642]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government have introduced a range of measures to encourage environmentally friendly buses. These include: lower fuel duties for cleaner fuels; reduced vehicle excise duty for buses that meet tighter emissions standards; and grants from TransportAction for buses that run on cleaner fuels or are fitted with pollution reducing technology. In addition the Green Fuels Challenge programme is supporting, through duty exemptions, hydrogen fuel cell buses.

Hazardous Materials

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* road and *(b)* rail accidents there have been in each of the last three years which involved vehicles transporting dangerous or hazardous materials. [60663]

Mr. Jamieson: The number of road and rail accidents notified to the Health and Safety Executive under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations for 1995 for the past three years is:

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*[1]
Overturning or serious damage to a tank while conveying by road prescribed dangerous substances, or the uncontrolled release or fire involved the substance being conveyed	28	21	26
Uncontrolled release or escape of a dangerous substance, or a fire involving the dangerous substance, when being conveyed by road in a vehicle	24	44	74
Rail accidents involving vehicles transporting dangerous goods	11	4	4

[1] Provisional

Electoral Arrangements

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what estimate he has made of the *(a)* numbers and *(b)* percentage of residents who were not registered on the electoral register in (i) the UK, (ii) Greater London and (iii) Enfield in each of the last five years. [58972]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

Data on which to make such an estimate are not available.

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much public expenditure was incurred in organising the 2001 general election in *(a)* the UK, *(b)* Greater London and *(c)* Enfield; and if he will make a statement. [58967]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

The funds made available to acting returning officers to conduct the 2001 general election were as follows:

(a) England and Wales—£27 million;

(b) Greater London—£5 million; and

(c) Enfield—£153,000.

These figures represent advances made; when final accounts are submitted and paid they are expected to rise. In addition in England and Wales, around £18 million was paid for the delivery of candidates' election material and for electoral equipment. No further breakdown of this figure is available in the form requested. The responsibility for funding parliamentary elections in Scotland and Northern Ireland are matters for the Secretaries of State for Scotland and Northern Ireland, respectively.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pensions

Mr. Watts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will introduce proposals to change the pensions rules to remove the ability of companies to take contribution holidays from their employees' pension schemes. [51377]

Mr. McCartney: The Government do not have any plans to change the rules about, or to prevent firms from taking, contribution holidays from their defined benefit pension schemes. Under Inland Revenue rules, pension funds that are funded in excess of 105 per cent. of their liabilities must take action to reduce that surplus. That action might take the form of improved benefits for members, contribution holidays for members or sponsoring employers, or a taxable return to the employer.

It is for the individual scheme (trustees) to decide how best to deal with a fund surplus according to the particular circumstances of each scheme.

The Pensions Act 1995 provides that before any surplus is returned to an employer, all current and future pensions in payment should be increased annually in line with the retail prices index up to a maximum of 5 per cent. In addition, trustees have to satisfy themselves that the use of the surplus is in the interest of the members, and that members should be notified of the proposal.

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the development of statutory money purchase illustrations and composite annual pension benefit statements. [59063]

Mr. McCartney: We have been working closely with the Faculty of Actuaries and the Institute of Actuaries to produce regulations and guidance that will mean people paying toward money purchase benefits will, starting in April 2003, receive an annual illustration of what their future pension might be. Regulations were laid before the House on 20 May, and a technical memorandum has been published on the Faculty of Actuaries and Institute of Actuaries website.

This is an important development that will help people plan more effectively for retirement.

The combined pension forecasting service, that gives information about state and private pensions together, was launched in October 2001 at the industry's annual pensions show. Since that date, the service has been open to all pension providers to register their interest in participating.

We are also looking at the feasibility of a composite pension forecast, where information about state pension would be combined with details of private pensions from more than one provider. This is still at a very early stage, but we are working closely with the office of the e-envoy and people in the pensions industry.

Departmental Staff (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what percentage of *(a)* civil service, *(b)* executive agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public body jobs under the remit of his Department are located in Scotland; and how many of each have been relocated to Scotland since May 1997. [56304]

Mr. McCartney: Information on the number and percentage of Department for Work and Pensions jobs in Scotland as at 1 April 2002 is in the following table.

None of these posts have relocated to Scotland since May 1997.

	Number of posts	*Percentage of total DWP*
Executive agencies	12,255	12.2
Independent statutory bodies	0	0
Others	1,192	6.2

Notes:

1. The numbers are expressed in whole time equivalent rounded to the nearest whole number.
2. The figures do not include casual posts.

Anti-fraud Hotline

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many calls have been dealt with by the anti-fraud hotline in the last year for which figures are available; how many cases of suspected fraud have been reported to the hotline; how many of these cases have been investigated; how many of them have led to a successful prosecution; and how many of them have led to a custodial sentence. [56417]

Malcolm Wicks: The National Benefit Fraud Hotline receives over 17,000 calls a month, resulting in more than two prosecutions a day.

The available information is in the table.

National Benefit Fraud Hotline 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002

	Number
Number of calls received	205,999
Number of cases of suspected fraud reported[1]	161,052
Number of resulting investigations	108,986
Number of resulting benefit rate changes	[2]6,385
Number of prosecutions so far	768
Number of resulting custodial sentences	[3]Not available

[1] Including referrals received by telephone, e-mail and post.

[2] Figures include increases and decreases and can relate either to fraud, client error or official error.

[3] Information is not collated centrally on the number of custodial sentences arising from investigations as a direct result of calls to the hotline.

Source:

National Benefit Fraud Hotline Management Information.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what representations he has received about changing the eligibility for winter fuel payments when couples separate after the eligibility date; and if he will make a statement. [58393]

Mr. McCartney: Queries are received from time to time regarding revised entitlement to benefits following a change in a person's circumstances. However, entitlement to a winter fuel payment is based on the individual's circumstances in the qualifying week. Changes of circumstance occurring after that date are irrelevant but could affect entitlement to a winter fuel payment the following year.

Older People

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent steps he has taken to develop his Department's strategy to help older people. [59650]

Mr. McCartney: In developing the Department for Work and Pension's strategy to help older people, the creation of the Pension Service is a major step forward. The Pension Service has a customer focus that will provide support to pensioners via 26 pension centres, backed by a local service providing face to face contact to those pensioners unable to use the telephone.

Over the next 18 months the Pension Service will develop and implement the Government's new pension credit, which will provide additional income for some 3.9 million pensioners.

In addition to this the Pension Service is working closely with other Government Departments, local authorities and voluntary organisations to improve services to older people. Groups such as Better Government for Older People and Partnerships Against Poverty are helping the Pension Service to develop its strategies and service while local partnerships, for example through Care Direct, are being pursued to provide a more joined up service to pensioners.

For those older people not yet ready to retire, Jobcentre Plus will continue to provide support with new deal 50 plus and work to change employers attitudes to older people through the age positive campaign. In the longer term the Government will be legislating against age discrimination in employment by 2006.

Smoking

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to the answer from the Secretary of State for Health of 21 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 302W, on smoking, if he will estimate the savings to public funds relating to pension payments as a consequence of premature deaths among smokers. [60267]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available.

SERPS

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what data he has collated on the proportion of people earning above £10,000 per year who have been contracted out of SERPS and the state second pension over the past three years. [60486]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is not available.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many individuals *(a)* receive SERPS and *(b)* have contributed to SERPS but are yet to receive any pension. [60487]

Mr. McCartney: The latest figures available show that 6.24 million people were in receipt of an additional pension from SERPS[1].

The latest available information is that around 22.2 million people under state pension age have built up some entitlement to an additional pension from SERPS[2].

Sources:

[1] Pensions Strategy Computer System.

[2] National Insurance Recording System.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the *(a)* mean and *(b)* median payment of SERPS has been in the five most recent years for which he has data. [60488]

Mr. McCartney: The information is in the table.

Mean and median amounts of additional pension (SERPS)

£ weekly

	Mean amount	*Median amount*
31 March 1997	10.90	6.87
31 March 1998	11.82	7.42
31 March 1999	13.10	8.35
31 March 2000	14.37	9.25
31 March 2001	15.13	9.64

Notes:

1. Average amounts are based on pensioners' entitlement records on Pension Strategy Computer System at the date of extraction.
2. Mean and Median amounts are rounded to the nearest penny.
3. Figures are for GB only.

Source:

RP administrative data.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many pensioners he expects will be receiving SERPS in *(a)* five *(b)* 10 and *(c)* 15 years' time; [60489]

(2) what the *(a)* mean and *(b)* median payment of SERPS will be in (i) five, (ii) 10 and (iii) 15 years' time. [60490]

Mr. McCartney: The information available is in the following table.

	People in receipt of additional pension[1] (million)	*Mean amount of additional pension[1] (£ weekly)*
2007–08	8.6	19.60
2012–13	9.9	21.70
2017–18	10.6	23.05

[1] SERPS and the state second pension.

Notes:

1. Number of recipients of additional pension rounded to the nearest 100,000.
2. Mean weekly amounts rounded to the nearest 5p, in 2002–03 prices.

Source:

Government Actuary's Department.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Key Stage 2 Tests

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of pupils were omitted from the calculation of the LEA average in KS2 performance tables in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001 because they met the criteria of having English as an additional language, being new to English schooling and having joined their primary school during years 5 or 6 in each. [60038]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what number and percentage of pupils were allowed additional time for completion of KS2 tests in 2002 because of special needs or EAL needs for each LEA. [60039]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority collects information on special arrangements, including the use of additional time, from local education authorities at pupil and school level. The information for 2002 is currently being collected and figures will be available at the end of June 2002.

Further Education

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the areas where reorganisation of 16 to 19 provision has taken place in each year since 1997, listing in each case the general further education colleges, sixth form colleges and school sixth forms involved. [60040]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested is contained in tables, copies of which I have placed in the Library.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the proposals under consideration involving changes to the organisation of 16 to 19 provision. [60044]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department has been informed of the following proposals for schools to open new, or close existing, sixth forms for which we understand a decision has not yet been made by the local School Organisation Committee:

Name of school	*LEA*
Proposals to establish new sixth forms	
The Giles School	Lincolnshire
Proposals to close sixth forms	
Batley High School for Boys	Kirklees
Colne Valley High School	Kirklees
St. Thomas Becket RC High School	Knowsley
Stratford Foundation School	Newham
Tideway Community School	East Sussex

Information held by the Department on proposals for the reorganisation of colleges in the FE sector is as follows:

> A proposal for Teesside College and Middlesbrough College to merge and to form Middlesbrough College has been submitted by the LSC to the Secretary of State.
>
> A feasibility study has been completed into the possible merger of Oxford College and North Oxfordshire College. The LSC has proposed that an area wide review of provision should be carried out before any decisions are made.
>
> Additionally, the organisation of 16–19 provision is reviewed in those local areas where a recent Area-Wide inspection has so recommended. In such cases the Learning and Skills Council is required to agree an Action Plan with local partners, before seeking Ministerial approval.

Pupil Absence

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the target proportion of pupil days to be lost through absence was for *(a)* each LEA and *(b)* England in each year since 1997. [59117]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* There is no target proportion of pupil days to be lost through absence for England. In the past local education authorities have only set targets for unauthorised absence through their Education Development plans. Local education authorities were asked to set new targets for the proportion of pupil days lost in their Education Development Plans this year, these targets will apply to the academic years 2002–03 and 2003–04. Education Development Plans are published by local education authorities.

Correspondence

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many letters were received by each Minister in her Department in each month since June 1997. [59315]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Cabinet Office, on an annual basis, publishes a report to Parliament on the volume of Members' correspondence received by departments. The Report for 2001 was published on Friday 24 May (22 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 326W). Copies of previous reports are available in the Library of the House.

Information about other correspondence received by Ministers (ie Treat Official correspondence) is not held centrally and can be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

School Bullies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance she has issued to appeals panels on overturning head teachers' decisions to exclude *(a)* bullies and *(b)* racist bullies. [60132]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Earlier this year we consulted publicly on a draft revised version of the guidance on the use of exclusion in our Circular 10–99 'Social Inclusion: Pupil Support'. This made clear that the Secretary of State would normally regard it as inappropriate to reinstate a pupil permanently excluded for (among other things) persistent and defiant behaviour—which would encompass bullying including racist bullying. All forms of bullying need to be dealt with firmly by schools. We cannot direct appeal panels to take particular decisions in particular cases, but we have made clear that they should also consider the impact that a reinstatement might have on other members of the school community.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Local Taxes and Rates

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister what council tax and non-domestic rates collection rates were achieved by English billing authorities in 2001–02. [61296]

Mr. Raynsford: I am publishing today figures showing that English councils have collected an extra £40 million in council taxes this year by simply improving on council tax collection rates. The figures show the good start of a joint initiative launched last year by us and the Local Government Association (LGA), to help poorly performing councils improve their collection rates.

English councils had collected £12.84 billion in council taxes for 2001–02 by the end of March 2002. The figures represent 96.1 per cent. of the £13.36 billion collectable. This is an increase of 0.3 per cent. on the previous year.

We recognise that council tax collection has therefore improved slightly, and that many councils are making a great effort. However, half a billion pounds was still uncollected last year. We recognise that this is money that could have been spent on local services and we believe there is still room for improvement. The Council Tax Collection Help Team which we set up with the LGA last year will continue its work to identify and tackle barriers to better performance and encourage good practice.

We also recognise that the in-year collection rate does not provide the full picture of the work authorities put in to collecting council tax. We will also be collecting and publishing authorities' levels of arrears and performance in collecting them.

The councils showing the best improvements in their performance include Hackney Council, which improved its collection rate from 67.8 per cent. during 2000–2001 to 74.0 per cent. this year, an increase of 6.2 percentage points; Lambeth Council, which improved its collection rate from

82.0 per cent. during 2000–2001 to 86.5 per cent. this year, an increase of 4.5 percentage points; and Southwark Council, which improved its collection rate from 87.1 per cent. during 2000–2001 to 90.2 per cent. this year, an increase of 3.1 percentage points.

Other improving councils include North Hertfordshire, an increase of 2.8 percentage points, Waltham Forest, an increase of 2.6 percentage points, Castle Point, an increase of 2.5 percentage points, South Gloucestershire UA, an increase of 2.5 percentage points, and Oxford City, an increase of 2.4 percentage points.

In addition, figures show that £14.42 billion in non-domestic rates for 2001–2002 had been collected by the end of March. This represents 97.9 per cent. of the £14.74 billion collectable, an improvement of 0.5 percentage points on last year.

Background note "Information for the Minister (Not for the public domain)".

Local Authority Grant

Ms Coffey: To ask the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister how and when he intends to consult on new formulae for distributing general grant to local authorities in England. [61295]

Mr. Raynsford: We will consult publicly on the new system over the summer, ahead of implementing change in the 2003–04 Local Government Finance Settlement. The consultation document will include the principles for the new system and will show the effects of a range of possible options for each formula. We intend to start the consultation by mid-July.

Indices of Deprivation

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister what plans his Department has to include in the Indices of Deprivation statistics on access to local services and public transport for those over 65 and 75 years in the most deprived wards; and whether indicators on age-related issues will be included in the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit's review of how the Indices of Deprivation may be developed. [60623]

Mr. McNulty: The Indices of Deprivation (ID 2000) has been developed to provide a measure of how deprived a particular area (ward or local authority district) is relative to the rest of the country.

The current 'Access to Services' domain measures the extent to which people have poor geographical access to certain key services. Three of the indicators included in the domain (access to post offices, large food shops and doctors surgeries) measure geographical access to services for people on low incomes (ie claimants of means-tested benefits). As such, this will include pensioners who are eligible for income support payments.

The ID 2000 has been designed to reflect deprivation as experienced by all age groups, including the elderly. The forthcoming review on the further development of the indices will continue to maintain this objective.

Home Ownership

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister how many home-owners there were in *(a)* 1979, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* at the latest date for which figures are available; and what percentage of the population this represented at each of these dates. [60792]

Mr. McNulty: Consistent estimates of the number of owner occupied households are not available before 1981. For England, the information requested for 1981, 1979 and 2000 is given in the following table.

Owner occupied households in England

Year	*Owner occupied households (thousand)*	*All households (thousand)*	*Percentage of owner occupiers*
1981	9,860	17,225	57
1997–98	13,940	20,250	69
2000–01	14,437	20,660	70

Source:
Survey of English Housing, ODPM

House Fires

Mrs. May: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many households were made homeless by house fires in each of the last six years. [60434]

Mr. McNulty: Precise information is not collected centrally. Data presented in the quarterly Statistical Release on Statutory Homelessness includes the number of households accepted by local authorities where homelessness was due to an emergency (table 3), but this does not distinguish cases involving house fires. Copies of the latest Statistical Release, issued on 14 March 2002 and covering the period to end December 2001, are available in the Library.

Mrs. May: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people were *(a)* killed and *(b)* injured in house fires in the UK in each of the last six years, broken down by (i) deliberate and (ii) accidental fires. [60433]

Mr. Raynsford: The following table shows the number of people killed or injured in deliberate and accidental dwelling[1] fires in the UK between 1995 and 2000.

	Deliberate fires[2]		*Accidental fires*	
	Deaths[3]	*Injuries*[3]	*Deaths*[3]	*Injuries*[3]
1995	78	1,932	481	11,176
1996	76	2,026	488	12,163
1997	65	2,019	497	12,877
1998	59	2,152	454	12,827
1999	65	2,068	398	12,556
2000[4]	51	2,326	396	12,065

[1] Including caravans, houseboats and other non-building permanent dwellings.

[2] Includes those fires where deliberate ignition is merely suspected.

[3] Including brigade casualties.

[4] Data for 2000 are provisional. Death figures have been estimated to take account of revisions expected to occur as a result of checks made against death certificates later in the year.

Mrs. May: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many house fires there were in each of the last six years broken down by *(a)* deliberate and *(b)* accidental fires in each fire authority. [60437]

Mr. Raynsford: The information is contained in the table.

Fires[1] in dwellings[2] by brigade area and motive, UK, 1995–2000

	1995[3]			1996			1997		
Brigade area	*Total*	*Accidental*	*Malicious*	*Total*	*Accidental*	*Malicious*	*Total*	*Accidental*	*Malicious*
United Kingdom	66,401	52,761	13,640	71,709	57,456	14,253	72,492	58,708	13,784
England and Wales	55,182	43,783	11,399	59,955	48,152	11,803	60,957	49,568	11,389
England	52,175	41,212	10,963	56,626	45,396	11,230	57,584	46,783	10,800
England: Non-met counties	26,645	22,231	4,414	29,381	24,787	4,594	29,970	25,569	4,401
Avon	841	689	152	980	814	166	1,047	896	151
Bedfordshire	458	379	79	466	357	109	536	424	112
Berkshire	559	492	67	646	568	78	671	596	75
Buckinghamshire	646	543	104	726	643	83	738	631	107
Cambridgeshire	491	395	96	562	433	129	579	453	126
Cheshire	922	770	152	1,010	804	206	1,069	875	194
Cleveland	1,117	545	571	954	581	373	852	594	258
Cornwall	375	354	21	452	414	38	481	455	26
Cumbria	543	459	84	609	517	92	587	505	82
Derbyshire	644	555	89	710	603	107	773	650	123
Devon	1,030	904	126	1,117	987	130	1,189	1,086	103
Dorset	467	430	37	522	478	44	568	519	49
Durham	658	530	128	653	539	114	719	566	153
East Sussex	890	779	111	1,000	867	133	995	852	143
Essex	1,015	883	132	1,091	978	113	1,041	918	123
Gloucestershire	471	405	66	479	432	47	511	461	50
Hampshire	1,138	993	145	1,410	1,159	251	1,321	1,141	180
Hereford and Worcester	529	471	58	670	615	55	762	679	83
Hertfordshire	725	644	80	903	805	98	951	853	98
Humberside	907	695	211	1,018	797	221	1,082	797	285
Isle of Wight	116	108	8	154	144	10	163	155	8
Kent	1,176	1,001	175	1,316	1,110	206	1,401	1,217	184
Lancashire	2,290	1,832	458	2,413	2,042	371	2,287	1,909	378
Leicestershire	765	597	168	825	625	200	774	603	171
Lincolnshire	404	337	68	429	338	91	475	412	63
Norfolk	532	462	70	551	469	82	629	549	80
North Yorkshire	450	406	44	567	524	43	476	433	43
Northamptonshire	564	478	87	671	567	104	780	643	137
Northumberland	277	239	38	358	312	46	324	271	53
Nottinghamshire	1,028	771	257	1,161	897	264	1,158	937	221
Oxfordshire	485	428	56	520	453	67	452	393	59
Shropshire	370	317	53	370	315	55	382	340	42
Somerset	341	314	28	363	338	25	389	350	39
Staffordshire	875	739	135	983	820	163	956	827	129
Suffolk	574	523	51	559	516	43	563	512	51
Surrey	616	558	58	669	615	54	701	646	55
Warwickshire	373	327	46	397	339	58	416	367	49
West Sussex	607	555	52	626	565	61	670	597	73
Wiltshire	375	323	52	468	404	64	498	454	44
Isles of Scilly	0	0	0	3	3	0	2	2	0
England: Met-counties	25,530	18,981	6,549	27,245	20,609	6,636	27,613	21,214	6,399
Greater Manchester	4,425	3,196	1,230	4,835	3,527	1,308	4,934	3,607	1,327
Merseyside	2,720	1,861	860	2,782	1,955	827	2,932	2,009	923
South Yorkshire	1,371	1,093	279	1,441	1,092	349	1,416	1,116	300
Tyne and Wear	2,081	1,180	902	1,913	1,239	674	2,117	1,456	661
West Midlands	4,240	3,141	1,099	4,643	3,418	1,225	4,610	3,504	1,106
West Yorkshire	2,656	1,930	725	2,925	2,142	783	2,875	2,156	719
Greater London	8,037	6,581	1,455	8,705	7,236	1,469	8,729	7,366	1,363
Wales	3,006	2,571	435	3,329	2,756	573	3,373	2,784	589
North Wales	686	615	71	805	704	101	758	656	102
Mid and West Wales	915	834	81	949	816	133	999	860	139
South Wales	1,406	1,122	284	1,576	1,237	339	1,616	1,268	348
Northern Ireland	2,067	1,558	509	2,238	1,606	632	2,210	1,616	594
Scotland	9,152	7,420	1,732	9,516	7,698	1,818	9,325	7,524	1,801
Strathclyde	4,620	3,776	845	4,685	3,823	862	4,716	3,845	871
Highland and Islands	339	321	17	309	288	21	288	269	19
Grampian	668	576	92	757	632	125	711	605	106
Tayside	772	628	144	834	670	161	780	647	133
Lothian and Borders	1,765	1,252	513	1,906	1,367	539	1,832	1,264	568
Fife	469	391	78	475	404	71	463	410	53
Central	349	317	32	367	329	38	356	317	39
Dumfries	171	158	12	186	185	1	179	167	12

	1998			1999			2000[4]		
Brigade area	*Total*	*Accidental*	*Malicious*	*Total*	*Accidental*	*Malicious*	*Total*	*Accidental*	*Malicious*
United Kingdom	71,077	57,718	13,359	72,228	58,366	13,862	70,897	56,655	14,242
England and Wales	59,680	48,701	10,979	60,808	49,497	11,311	59,413	47,929	11,484
England	56,464	46,052	10,412	57,490	46,744	10,746	56,184	45,277	10,907
England: Non-met counties	29,463	25,008	4,455	29,942	25,563	4,379	29,243	24,539	4,704
Avon	974	831	143	970	826	144	976	820	156
Bedfordshire	485	368	117	431	366	65	463	374	89
Berkshire	695	612	83	726	673	53	687	616	71
Buckinghamshire	740	636	104	679	609	70	669	569	100
Cambridgeshire	569	442	127	547	432	115	547	444	103
Cheshire	1,067	888	179	999	835	164	999	818	181
Cleveland	776	545	231	836	562	274	951	658	293
Cornwall	445	400	45	436	408	28	470	426	44
Cumbria	641	576	65	609	535	74	551	466	85
Derbyshire	775	655	120	783	663	120	734	617	117
Devon	1,144	1,055	89	1,226	1,128	98	1,290	1,118	102
Dorset	510	462	48	491	446	45	530	478	52
Durham	702	601	101	677	567	110	690	572	118
East Sussex	1,043	904	139	1,128	993	135	1,038	900	138
Essex	1,024	879	145	1,220	1,064	156	1,265	1,073	192
Gloucestershire	512	460	52	521	474	47	456	408	48
Hampshire	1,428	1,212	216	1,491	1,290	201	1,407	1,269	138
Hereford and Worcester	743	679	64	689	640	49	594	537	57
Hertfordshire	894	812	82	947	856	91	936	851	85
Humberside	1,060	788	272	1,104	820	284	1,043	743	300
Isle of Wight	169	162	7	165	164	1	151	141	10
Kent	1,318	1,113	205	1,272	1,108	164	1,242	1,051	191
Lancashire	2,324	1,894	430	2,273	1,729	544	2,299	1,770	529
Leicestershire	838	607	231	737	567	170	656	488	168
Lincolnshire	457	379	78	519	446	73	512	444	68
Norfolk	574	471	103	583	508	75	584	489	95
North Yorkshire	503	451	52	545	479	66	666	597	69
Northamptonshire	714	596	118	715	580	135	653	501	152
Northumberland	311	251	60	308	269	39	332	266	66
Nottinghamshire	1,074	870	204	1,109	886	223	1,043	799	244
Oxfordshire	509	461	48	474	421	53	490	429	61
Shropshire	357	296	61	436	380	56	361	317	44
Somerset	385	351	34	387	349	38	436	390	46
Staffordshire	985	866	119	1,182	1,047	135	926	778	148
Suffolk	523	472	51	554	500	54	510	447	63
Surrey	666	615	51	629	588	41	645	585	60
Warwickshire	396	343	53	402	349	53	353	287	66
West Sussex	648	570	78	659	577	82	651	544	107
Wiltshire	484	434	50	482	428	54	435	387	48
Isles of Scilly	1	1	0	1	1	0	2	2	0
England: Met-counties	27,001	21,044	5,957	27,548	21,181	6,367	26,941	20,738	6,203
Greater Manchester	4,782	3,531	1,251	5,120	3,697	1,423	4,934	3,654	1,280
Merseyside	2,914	2,023	891	3,018	2,009	1,009	3,023	1,975	1,048
South Yorkshire	1,483	1,165	318	1,433	1,092	341	1,463	1,092	371
Tyne and Wear	2,318	1,721	597	2,241	1,696	545	2,210	1,717	493
West Midlands	4,400	3,428	972	4,429	3,444	985	4,243	3,201	1,042
West Yorkshire	2,582	1,940	642	2,505	1,877	628	2,510	1,904	606
Greater London	8,522	7,236	1,286	8,802	7,366	1,436	8,558	7,195	1,363
Wales	3,216	2,649	567	3,318	2,753	565	3,229	2,652	577
North Wales	704	607	97	824	704	120	776	674	102
Mid and West Wales	955	831	124	1,029	884	145	984	566	118
South Wales	1,557	1,211	346	1,465	1,165	300	1,469	1,112	357
Northern Ireland	2,243	1,601	642	2,005	1,398	607	2,175	1,505	670
Scotland	9,154	7,416	1,738	9,415	7,471	1,644	9,309	7,221	2,088
Strathclyde	4,575	3,795	780	4,727	3,774	953	257	3,685	1,007
Highland and Islands	322	300	22	288	274	14	273	257	16
Grampian	761	658	103	885	762	123	864	723	141
Tayside	730	603	127	795	636	159	788	619	169
Lothian and Borders	1,752	1,207	545	1803	1,241	562	1,765	1,174	591
Fife	510	422	88	437	363	74	418	326	92
Central	354	300	54	326	282	44	335	279	56
Dumfries	150	131	19	154	139	15	174	158	16

[1] Including late call, heat and smoke (LCHS) incidents. Fires are sampled and weighted to brigade totals.

[2] Includes caravans, houseboats and other non-building structures used solely as a permanent dwelling.

[3] Excludes some late call, heat and smoke incidents.

[4] Figures for 2000 are provisional.

Sound Insulation

Mrs. May: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent estimate he has made of the cost per household of improving sound insulation in houses affected by poor sound insulation. [60661]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has not made an estimate of the cost of improving sound insulation for the existing housing stock. However, in a House of Lords ruling on two Appeal Court cases determined in 1999, it was estimated that the average cost of installing sound installation in the flats in question was £8,000 per flat. The cost in any particular case would depend on the nature and extent of the work required.

Electronic Services

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister of the central Government Departments and agencies required to meet the Prime Minister's target for electronically available services by 2005, what common problems have been revealed through the regular e-business strategy documents; and how they are being addressed. [55985]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

The latest e-business strategies were submitted to the e-envoy during summer 2001. An analysis of the strategies revealed several common issues.

> There is a need for staff to gain necessary skills. Departments are tackling this in a number of ways with support from the centre. For example the office of the e-envoy has developed a skills map for e-government which identifies all the skills that might need to be considered when implementing e-services. In addition, the Centre for Management and Policy Studies ran a series of events where the leadership dimensions of successful e-government projects was addressed.
>
> Additional resources are required to support IT-enabled change programmes—this is being addressed in part under the current spending review. In addition Departments may bid for funding from the Capital Modernisation Fund and Invest to Save Budget.
>
> Departments need to update existing, or legacy, IT systems. This is a matter for Departments to address. Centrally, the Government Gateway infrastructure allows joined-up government services to be delivered electronically.
>
> In order to more reliably assess the costs and benefits from e-government, the office of the e-envoy are considering with HM Treasury the case for developing additional guidance addressing the appraisal of risks involved in realising the benefits from e-delivery projects.
>
> Internet-enabled 'intermediaries'—acting on behalf of their customers—can provide better access to e-government services for those without other means to benefit from online access. The office of the e-envoy has worked with intermediaries, including the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (NACAB) which has received funding to assist its advisers in 1,400 centres to deliver e-government services and advice to individuals who may not have direct internet access themselves.

Air Miles

Mr. Barker: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many air miles he has been awarded from flights at public expense since 1 June 2001; [57837]

(2) how many *(a)* air miles and *(b)* other airline rewards members of his Department have been awarded in total since 1 June 2001. [57834]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

All travel arrangements for Ministers are made in accordance with the rules set out in the "Ministerial Code" and "Travel by Ministers", copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Travel arrangements by officials are delegated to Departments in accordance with the Civil Service Management Code.

Travel by officials in my Department is subject to internal Cabinet Office guidelines, which state that benefits of frequent flying and similar schemes deriving from expenditure on official business should be used for official travel or forgone, as set out in the answer given by the then Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster on 15 March 1994, *Official Report*. column 646W.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Holiday Industry

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to create an independent regulator for the holiday industry; and if she will make a statement. [59097]

Miss Melanie Johnson: A considerable body of consumer protection legislation applies to the holiday industry and there are no plans to create an independent regulator.

Arms Exports

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what licences have been granted for equipment on the military list to *(a)* Georgia, *(b)* Uzbekistan, *(c)* Kyrgyzstan, *(d)* Tajikistan, *(e)* Turkey, *(f)* Bahrain, *(k)* Oman, *(l)* Jordan and *(m)* Yemen in each month since September 2001, including military list and dual-use ratings; what equipment is covered under these licences; and if she will make a statement. [60626]

Nigel Griffiths: The number of Standard Individual Licences (SIELs) covering items on the military and dual-use lists issued to end users in Georgia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, the Philippines, Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Bahrain, Oman, Jordan and Yemen in each month since September 2001 is set out in the tables that I have placed in the Libraries of the House today. Individual licences might cover a range of items with various ratings. Where this is so, the licence is included in the tables in the total for all of the relevant ratings.

The summary description of the items covered by these ratings will be published in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls, copies of which will be available in the Libraries of the House. In addition some of the countries are permitted destinations on certain Open General Export Licences, copies of which are also placed in the Libraries of the House. All relevant export licence applications are considered very carefully on a case-by-case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria, in the light of the circumstances prevailing at the time. The criteria include a specific reference to the behaviour of the buyer country with regard to the international community, as regards in particular to its attitude to terrorism, the nature of its alliances and respect for international law.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to improve the process for granting arms export licences. [60240]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government recognise that the system for processing export licence applications requires continuous improvement if we are to deliver a more efficient and effective export licensing system, which is both accountable and transparent.

The Export Control Organisation (ECO) has introduced a number of initiatives to improve the risk assessment and to reduce the time taken to process individual export licence applications. These include the roll out of new enhanced IT systems that will allow exporters to submit applications for a Standard Individual Export Licence over the internet.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking about reports that UK arms dealers are offering prospective brokers means of circumventing licensing requirements; and if she will make a statement. [59662]

Nigel Griffiths: The Government and the UK enforcement authorities take very seriously reports of any breaches of UK export licensing requirements.

I understand that the police and HM Customs and Excise are investigating the case which was recently reported.

Street Trading

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has received regarding the *(a)* reform and *(b)* repeal of the Pedlars Act 1871; and what plans she has to amend legislation relating to street trading. [60498]

Miss Melanie Johnson: One representation has been received suggesting reform or repeal of the Pedlars Act 1871 from Chelmsford borough council. I have no plans to amend street trading legislation.

Director of Civil Nuclear Security

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she will place the report of the Director of Civil Nuclear Security in the Library. [61138]

Mr. Wilson: The report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry by the Director of Civil Nuclear Security "The State of Security in the Civil Nuclear Industry and the Effectiveness of Security Regulation" will be placed in the Library of both Houses today. It is also being made available on the DTI website www.dti.gov.uk.

New Corporate Identities

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent work her Department has undertaken on new corporate identities; and if she will make a statement. [60073]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The independent review of company law set in hand by my Department considered the case for new corporate identities and recommended a new form of incorporation for charities. In addition, this Department's Social Enterprise Unit established a working group on issues surrounding social enterprises. The Government are carefully considering the final report of the company law review.

Internal Market, Consumer Tourism Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the outcome was of the Internal Market, Consumer and Tourism Council on 21 May; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [59177]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Council conclusions were agreed on the Community Patent stating that the Presidency package is the basis for further work but that nothing is finally agreed until there is agreement on the whole package and that further work is needed on jurisdiction in particular. There was political agreement on the Public Procurement Directive and on the European Co-operative Society Statute.

Resolutions were agreed on the Future of European Tourism and supporting the Commission's approach to better regulation. There was political agreement on the substance of the Customs 2007 programme, to continue and enhance customs co-operation, although the UK and two other member states maintained reservations on the legal base.

There was a policy debate on the draft sales promotion regulation and Commission briefings on consumers and the euro, the follow-up to the Green Paper on EU Consumer Protection, services of general economic interest and on the proposal for a consolidated directive on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications. The Commission presented its recently adopted Consumer Policy Strategy 2002–06 and there was a Presidency presentation on the fourth European Consumers' Day in Madrid. There was a short discussion on the 2002 Review of the Internal Market Strategy, the Single Market Scoreboard and the Joint Work Programme of the Three Presidencies and a Presidency briefing on the proposal for a regulation on Food Hygiene.

Under Any Other Business the Commission urged member states to accept the European Parliament's broad endorsement of the Council's common position on the Distance Marketing of Financial Services Directive.

The UK voted in favour of the two legislative items—the public procurement directive and the European Co-operative Society Statute. Conclusions were adopted on the Community Patent with the UK in favour. The Resolutions on Tourism and Better Regulation were agreed also with the UK in favour. The UK voted against political agreement on the Customs 2007 item, due to the proposed legal base.

Small Businesses

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further measures she is taking to address the impact of late payments of invoices on small businesses. [59645]

Nigel Griffiths: We are ensuring that from 7 August 2002:

all businesses and public sector bodies can claim interest for late payment;

creditors can claim a fixed sum of compensation to cover debt recovery costs if they have to chase up late payment;

all businesses and public sector bodies can challenge contractual terms that do not provide a substantial remedy for late payment;

SMEs are provided with the right to have appropriate organisations and a trade association act on their behalf and to challenge unfair contractual terms that try to remove or alter their right to statutory interest; and

a simple reference rate will be created which will be set for six months and used to determine the late payment interest rate. (The late payment interest rate is the reference rate plus 8 per cent.) This will make it easier for firms to calculate the interest they may be owed.

Lakshmi Mittal

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer given by the Foreign Secretary on 21 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 255W, on meetings with embassy staff, what the commercial benefit to the United Kingdom was of the Lakshmi Mittal Romanian steel contract. [60552]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the right hon. Member to the answers given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister to the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) and the hon. Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 610–12W.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Child Care

47. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, when the most recent assessment was made of the *(a)* present and *(b)* future child care needs of people who work in the Palace of Westminster. [57427]

Mr. Kirkwood: I refer the hon. Lady to the reply I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) on 30 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 691W.

Catering and Cleaning Staff

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if all House of Commons catering and cleaning staff *(a)* are included in the House-wide annual performance appraisal process and *(b)* have personal development plans that are regularly reviewed and updated. [59682]

Mr. Kirkwood: All the Departments of the House have achieved recognition as Investors in People; this process has involved ensuring that the appraisal systems are operating effectively, and that personal development is given due attention.

Management and administrative staff of the Refreshment Department are included in the House-wide annual performance review process, and the department operates two separate appraisal schemes developed to meet the specific needs of its catering staff. All catering staff have personal development plans which are reviewed and updated regularly. In addition, the department last year became an approved centre with the Hospitality Awarding Body to register and certificate its own National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs). So far, three staff of the Department have been trained as NVQ Internal Verifiers and a further 12 staff are qualified NVQ Assessors. Last year over 50 staff of the Refreshment Department achieved nationally recognised trainer qualifications.

All House cleaning staff are included in the House-wide annual performance appraisal process. They have annual personal objectives, which are agreed with line managers and are regularly reviewed. Their training and development needs are identified and updated through that process.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Programme Motions

48. **Mr. Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the President of the Council what recent representations he has received about the working of programme motions on legislation. [57428]

Mr. Robin Cook: The hon. Member himself has made representations as have some other hon. Members. The Modernisation Committee will report on programming before the end of the Session.

House of Lords Reform

49. **David Taylor:** To ask the President of the Council what representations he has received from campaigning organisations following his statement on 13 May to the House on Lords reform. [57429]

Mr. Robin Cook: We have received one communication from Charter 88 about the setting up of the Joint Committee which the two Houses are in the process of establishing. I would expect any representations about the substance of reform now to be made to the Joint Committee.

Parliamentary Proceedings (Access)

50. **Julie Morgan:** To ask the President of the Council what proposals he plans to put to the Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons relating to making proceedings in the House more accessible to visually disabled people. [57430]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Select Committee on Modernisation of the House of Commons has a full programme, but I am sure my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House will be interested in proposals from any hon. Members. The House of Commons Commission may also have an interest.

Parliamentary Terminology

51. **Mr. Bryant:** To ask the President of the Council if he will bring forward proposals to reform the use of parliamentary terminology in the business of the House. [57431]

Mr. Bradshaw: My right hon. Friend has no such plans at present.

Disqualification

52. **Andrew Mackinlay:** To ask the President of the Council if he will introduce legislation providing for parity of treatment between Members of both Houses in relation to disqualification following imprisonment consequent upon criminal conviction. [57432]

Mr. Bradshaw: In their proposals on House of Lords reform, the Government consulted on possible changes to the rules which would enable those members of the House of Lords who had been sentenced to particular terms of imprisonment to be expelled from the House. House of Lords reform will now be looked at by a Joint Committee of both Houses of Parliament. It would be premature for the Government to introduce any measures in advance of that Joint Committee reporting.

People's Peers

53. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the President of the Council when the House of Lords Appointments Commission is to embark on its proposed road shows to encourage applications from putative people's peers. [57433]

Mr. Bradshaw: I understand that the Commission has yet to finalise plans for its forthcoming programme of regional visits.

Legislation

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Council if he will ensure that each new Bill undergoes pre-legislative scrutiny similar to that of the Communications Bill. [60065]

Mr. Robin Cook: As I made clear to my hon. Friend in answer to his question of 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 395, it is our intention that pre-legislative scrutiny should become the norm for Government legislation. However, capacity constraints, including the number of the Parliamentary draftsmen, mean that it may take some years to achieve this. The appropriate form of scrutiny will vary from Bill to Bill. Many draft Bills will fall naturally to pre-existing Select Committees, some may be scrutinised by Joint Committees and others by ad hoc Committees of either House. The detailed method of scrutiny is a matter for the Committee examining a particular Bill.

The Government nevertheless welcome the use of electronic forms of communication to involve the public in such scrutiny.

Travel

Mr. Allen: To ask the President of the Council if he will ask the Commission to amend the rules concerning spouse warrants to enable hon. Members' families to travel more often. [60066]

Mr. Robin Cook: This is not a matter for the Commission. I am not aware of great demand for an increase in the present number of 15 return journeys for spouses and each child, but this would be an issue the Speaker's Advisory Panel could consider if there are substantial concerns.

DEFENCE

Armed Forces Pension Scheme

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 12 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 178W, on the armed forces pension scheme, when he will write to the hon. Member. [43325]

Dr. Moonie: I wrote to the hon. Member on 6 June and a copy of my letter has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the agencies that have been responsible for the administration of armed forces pensions since 1972. [60543]

Dr. Moonie: Until 1997, when the Armed Forces and Administration Agency (AFPAA) was formed as a partnership between Ministry of Defence and Electronic Data Services (EDS), administration for the armed forces pension scheme was undertaken in-house by the three single services. From 1997, AFPAA has undertaken the administration, ie the calculation and award, of pensions on behalf of Navy and RAF personnel, with administration for the Army remaining with that service until 1 October 2001, when it too became part of AFPAA.

The actual payment of pensions to retired forces personnel has since been made on MOD's behalf in respect of Navy and RAF personnel and Army officers, by the 1830s Paymaster (formerly Paymaster General). Payments of pensions for other ranks in the Army were retained in house until 1 October 2001, when these payments were also transferred to Paymaster.

NATO

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the agenda is of the meeting of NATO Heads of State and Government in Prague from 18 to 24 November; and what the United Kingdom's objectives are for the meeting. [59822]

Mr. Hoon: The NATO summit will take place in Prague on 21–22 November. There is no formal agenda as yet, although we expect that capabilities, enlargement, the new relationship with Russia, NATO's adaptation to the changed strategic setting, strengthening of the NATO-EU relationship and partnership will be discussed. The United Kingdom's principal objective at Prague will be to ensure the continued effectiveness and relevance of an enlarged Alliance in the face of new challenges.

Nuclear Deterrents

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people working in the armed forces are directly employed in the area of nuclear deterrent. [60284]

Dr. Moonie: There are currently some 1,509 full-time armed forces posts in the Ministry of Defence and its agencies for tasks directly related to the nuclear deterrent, though not all posts are filled at any given time. In addition, a number of other service personnel spend some of their time directly or indirectly on such tasks but comprehensive data are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will estimate the cost *(a)* of retaining the nuclear deterrent by the UK in each year since 1990 and *(b)* of being a part of NATO and the percentage this was of the defence budget in each year since 1997. [60283]

Mr. Hoon: The estimated total acquisition cost of the Trident programme is £9,764 million. As described in the Strategic Defence Review Supporting Essay 5 of July 1998, a copy of which is in the Library of the House, the average annual operating cost of the Trident force is expected to be around £280 million. As a percentage of the defence budget, the capital and running costs for retaining the United Kingdom's nuclear deterrent for each year since 1990 were as follows:

Financial year	*Capital costs*	*Running costs*
1990–91	4	1
1991–92	5	1
1992–93	4	1
1993–94	4	1
1994–95	3	1
1995–96	2	1
1996–97	2	1
1997–98	1	1
1998–99	1	1
1999–2000	1	1
2000–01	1	2

These figures do not include the costs of the WE177 free-fall nuclear bomb and Lance nuclear artillery system that went out of service in 1997–98 and 1992–1993 respectively.

The United Kingdom's contributions to NATO's Security Investment Programme and Military Budget are funded by the Defence budget. For each year since 1997, these were as follows:

Financial year	*£ million*	*Percentage*
1997–98	102.032	0.459
1998–99	110.477	0.471
1999–2000	103.812	0.436
2000–01	101.411	0.408

Final figures for 2001–02 are not yet available.

Public Consultation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the public consultations undertaken by his Department since June 2001, stating in each case the *(a)* number of respondents and *(b)* percentage of those specifically consulted who responded. [60143]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* Since June 2001 the Ministry of Defence has completed or undertaken the following public consultations:

Armed Forces Pension Scheme Review

Joint Compensation Review

2nd Consultation on the Introduction of a Voluntary Screening Programme for Depleted Uranium

MOD Police Quinquennial Review.

The MOD also issued a public discussion document on the Strategic Defence Review (SDR) New Chapter during this period.

1,500 Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS) Review and Joint Compensation Review (JCR) consultation documents were issued in March 2001 with a closing date of 31 July 2001 for responses. These were issued to all units of the three services and also sent to ex-service organisations such as the Forces Pension Society, Widows Associations and the Royal British Legion. 20,000 leaflets were also distributed to serving members of the armed forces and the consultation documents were issued on the MOD website. 203 responses were received in total, with some respondents commenting on both the AFPS and JCR. Responses were received from all the principal ex-service organisations specifically consulted.

The 2nd consultation on the Introduction of a Voluntary Screening Programme for Depleted Uranium was issued in April 2001 with a closing date of 4 July 2001 for responses. A total of 21 responses were received by the Department and a full summary of the responses received is available on the MOD website.

I am unable to provide the requested information for the MOD Police Quinquennial Review in the time available. I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

In addition, the SDR New Chapter public discussion document has attracted a wide range of constructive responses, some 315 to date. The closing date for responses was 15 March 2002 and all have been given full consideration in the continuing SDR New Chapter work.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Mr. Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on compensation for the families of nuclear test veterans. [60780]

[illegible] Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has every confidence in the independent studies carried out by the National Radiological Protection Board and the Imperial Cancer Research Fund that showed veterans' participation in the nuclear test programme has not had a detectable effect on their expectation of life, or on their risk of developing cancer or other fatal diseases. Consequently grounds do not exist for compensation to be paid to British nuclear test veterans or their surviving spouses and families. There are no plans to review this position.

Military Threat

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the potential threat from *(a)* Iraq, *(b)* Iran, *(c)* Syria, *(d)* Libya and *(e)* North Korea. [60257]

Mr. Hoon: We assess that there is no immediate threat of military attack by Iraq, Iran, Syria, Libya or North Korea to the United Kingdom mainland, although Iraq threatens RAF aircraft patrolling the Iraqi No-Fly Zones daily.

An assessment of the ballistic missile and weapons of mass destruction programmes of a number of countries was included in a "Supplementary Memorandum to the House of Commons Defence Committee: The Ballistic Missile Threat" of 18 March 2002 and, with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, a "Joint Memorandum to the House of Commons Defence Committee: Missile Defence" of 11 February 2002.

We continue to monitor developments closely, particularly as they might affect deployed forces.

Armed Forces (Minority Representation)

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what future targets have been set to achieve higher ethnic minority representation in the armed forces; and if he will make a statement. [61246]

Mr. Ingram: The armed forces are seeking an approach that recognises and values diversity, without in any way compromising their commitment to comply with equality legislation and eradicate any form of harassment, intimidation or unlawful discrimination. The new diversity policy has been embodied in a revised Armed Forces Personnel Strategy Guideline, a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House; this sets out the armed forces' diversity goal, and the principles which underpin it, and seeks to define diversity in a military context, demonstrating its importance for the achievement of operational effectiveness while recognising the unique circumstances of the armed forces.

The armed forces are determined to become more representative of the ethnically diverse society they serve. Targets remain an important means of achieving this. For the future, I have agreed that this year's target should be for each service to increase recruitment of ethnic minorities by a further 1 per cent. of all recruits, subject to an overall target of 6 per cent. This marks the continuation of the major drive by the armed forces over the past four years to attain a proper share of talent available in the ethnic communities. Future goals for ethnic minority representation and recruitment will be set in the coming year, taking account of the results of the ethnic origin resurvey of armed forces personnel currently under way, ethnic minority recruiting achievement and evidence on ethnic minority numbers likely to emerge from the 2001 national census.

War Widows Pilgrimage Scheme

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received to extend the War Widows Pilgrimage Scheme; and if he will make statement. [61247]

Dr. Moonie: Following a recent approach by the Royal British Legion, I have agreed to an extension of the War Widows Pilgrimage Scheme for a further two years, until 31 March 2005. The Government greatly appreciate the excellent work of the Royal British Legion who administer this subsidised scheme on our behalf. To date the scheme has enabled more than 4,000 widows to visit their husband's grave in many parts of the world.

Porton Down

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for epidemiological research on Porton Down volunteers; and if he will make a statement. [61248]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has accepted a recommendation by the Medical Research Council (MRC) to fund research to be undertaken by Dr. Kate Venables of Oxford University and colleagues from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and from Imperial College, London. This research will consist of a one-year pilot study to assess the incidence of mortality and cancer among a selected group of 500 Porton Down volunteers compared with a control group of 500 other members of the armed forces and a small scale questionnaire study to evaluate volunteers' own views of their health status.

The pilot study will commence later this month and will take about a year to complete. The MRC will be in a position towards the end of the pilot study to advise MOD whether the available historical data are of sufficient quality and quantity to allow a full scale epidemiological study to proceed.

BioReliance

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contact was made between his Department and BioReliance after the visit of his Department's officials in late 2001. [57315]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) on 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 478W.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Paddington Rail Crash

Mrs. May: To ask the Solicitor-General on what basis the CPS decided that the investigation of the case of corporate manslaughter arising from the Paddington rail crash should be re-opened. [59817]

The Solicitor-General: The CPS has advised the police to undertake limited inquiries to determine whether or not there is an impediment in linking the management of the signal sighting around Ladbroke Grove, in particular Signal SN109, with the actual circumstances of the Ladbroke Grove collision. This was on the basis of having considered further legal advice.

Mrs. May: To ask the Solicitor-General when the CPS *(a)* decided and *(b)* informed the British transport police that the investigation of a corporate manslaughter charge in relation to the Paddington rail crash should be re-opened. [59818]

The Solicitor-General: The CPS considered the advice that it would offer to the British transport police over a number of weeks, and kept the British transport police informed of its developing thinking. A decision was made recently and formal notification of its advice was made by the CPS to the British transport police on 21 May.

Letters to interested parties, including victims' relatives, were dispatched that day. If any further evidence is obtained that will, of course, be considered by the CPS. The HSE has in any event announced its intention to issue proceedings against Railtrack and Thames Trains for offences contrary to sections 2 and 3 of the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974.

Freedom of Information

Harry Cohen: To ask the Solicitor-General what plans she has to propose changes to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to align its provisions with the Council of Europe Recommendation on Freedom of Information; and if she will make a statement. [59206]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

None. I am advised that the Freedom of Information Act 2000 is fully consistent with the Council of Europe Recommendation on access to official documents (Rec. (2002)2).

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Hockey

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what estimate she has made of *(a)* the number of people who play hockey, *(b)* the number of children and young people who play hockey and *(c)* the trend in levels of participation in hockey; [58323]

(2) if she will make a statement on the effect of the financial situation of English Hockey on the organisation and promotion of hockey among young people; [58322]

(3) if she will make a statement on the state of hockey in England; [58324]

(4) what steps she is taking to promote and develop hockey among young people in the inner cities. [58325]

Mr. Caborn *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* The Government Plan for Sport sets out a framework and range of policies aimed at increasing participation in all sports particularly among young people with an emphasis on the part that sport can play in tackling a range of objectives including social exclusion, crime reduction and better health. The implementation of programmes to promote and develop particular sports is a matter for the relevant governing bodies.

Following a Special General Meeting on 4 May 2002, the English Hockey Association is currently being restructured into a new organisation to be called "Hockey England Ltd.". I am assured that, despite this restructuring, the new governing body intends to continue actively to promote the sport at all levels in the future. Its main funding comes from annual subscriptions paid by member clubs, of which there are approximately 1,650 representing some 165,000 active club members playing in some 4,300 teams. In addition, elite English hockey players and the governing body's grass roots activities will continue to receive support and funding from Sport England. When the restructuring has been completed the new governing body expects to be a strong, financially solid organisation providing for hockey requirements at all levels in England. It believes that the game will continue to be played by people of all ages and both sexes with a high proportion of participants from ethnic minorities.

The governing body has a network of regional development managers across England in the north, south, east, west and midlands. Each of these managers has a specific brief to aid and assist the development of hockey in the regions, with specific emphasis on youth and in the inner cities in particular.

The General Household survey carried out in 1996, the latest year for which this survey collected figures for sports participation, indicated that in England 118,000 adults had played hockey at least once in the previous four weeks. Sport England's Young People in Sport Survey carried out in 1999 indicated that 409,300 young people aged six to 16 participated in hockey out of school lessons at least 10 times in the previous 12 months, while in school lessons 1,200,000 young people participated at least 10 times in the last 12 months. The governing body's view is that the numbers involved in men's, women's and mixed hockey will remain constant and that participation by juniors is likely to rise due largely to the increasing use of artificial pitches.

Culture and Audiovisual Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the outcome was of the Culture and Audiovisual Council held in Brussels on 23 May; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including their voting record; and if she will make a statement. [60491]

Dr. Howells: The culture and audiovisual Council held in Brussels on 23 May discussed future EU cultural co-operation, the preservation of digital content for future generations and proposals to revise the Directive on "Television Without Frontiers". A lunchtime discussion addressed the role of private sector cultural sponsorship.

Resolutions were agreed by unanimity on a work plan for future EU cultural co-operation and on the importance of ensuring that digital content is preserved so as to be accessible by future generations.

Discussions on the future of the current framework programme for cultural co-operation—Culture 2000—were of a preliminary nature only and there was no vote. The UK view was that the existing programme should be extended in order to allow sufficient time to review its impact to date and to discuss its successor. The Commission has agreed to produce a report on the existing scheme by the end of 2002 and will also put forward a number of proposals for further discussion.

All delegations agreed that the review of the "Television Without Frontiers" Directive should be preceded by detailed debate and reflection and the Commission agreed to produce a work programme by the end of 2002. There was no formal vote. The priority for the UK will be to ensure that discussions on the review of the Directive take into account the provisions outlined in the draft communications Bill, published by my Department earlier this month.

The lunchtime discussion reiterated the importance of private sector cultural sponsorship and it was agreed that Member States should discuss ways of sharing experiences and agreeing best practice. This was an informal discussion and there was no vote. The UK fully supported the outcome of the debate.

European Football Championships 2008

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assistance is being given to support the bid of Scotland and Ireland to stage the 2008 European Football Championships. [60232]

Dr. Howells: The Government consider the Scotland and Ireland bid to be a strong one, and will give their full support. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met the Scottish Minister for Culture, Tourism and Sport on 18 March to discuss how DCMS may best support the bid team's efforts. To date, central Government support has centred on the provision of the formal guarantees required by UEFA. As well as a statement of UK Government support for the bid, these included commitments from the Department for Work and Pensions, the Home Office, HM Customs and Excise and other Departments, covering issues of work permits, immigration control and value added tax.

Television Licence

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost would be of removing the requirement for a TV licence for people between 70 and 75 years. [60482]

Dr. Howells: In 2001–02 total expenditure on free TV licences for people aged 75 and over was £369.57 million. If everyone aged 70 and over had been eligible for a free TV licence in 2001–02, the additional cost would have been £182 million.

Sport England

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage of the sum given in each of the last three years to Sport England was allocated to model aircraft flying. [59781]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* None of Sport England's Exchequer income has been given to model aircraft flying in any of the last three years. The lottery funds awarded were as follows:

Lottery funding

Year	*£*	*Percentage of total lottery income*
1999–2000	0	0
2000–01	2,850	0.00127
2001–02	4,683	0.00160

Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities Programme

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much money has been granted under the Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities Programme, broken down by region. [59778]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The total amount of funding committed to date in the United Kingdom under the New Opportunities Fund's Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities programme is £25,379,355. This comprises £17,432,146 in England, £6,058,366 in Scotland, £1,426,271 in Wales and £462,572 in Northern Ireland. The table breaks down funding in England by region, where such a breakdown is possible.

Region	*Funding (£)*	*Number of projects*
Eastern	1,041,989	32
East Midlands	1,061,908	49
London	1,687,502	58
North East	2,415,197	71
North West	3,112,983	100
South West	2,416,668	70
West Midlands	2,609,675	53
Yorkshire and Humberside	1,916,851	66
South East	1,114,525	56

Tourism (England)

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her proposals for the marketing of tourism in England. [60035]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* Proposals for the modernisation and reform of tourism were announced on 13 May and further details will be announced later in the summer.

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which *(a)* individuals and *(b)* companies or organisations her Department consulted on the proposals for the marketing of tourism in England. [60034]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* Since the difficult events of 2001, we have consulted a wide variety of individuals and organisations about the future arrangements for domestic marketing. Our emerging proposals have been discussed with key industry stakeholders at the Tourism Forum, organised by the English Tourism Council, and at a special seminar chaired by the Secretary of State at Hartwell House. We have also worked closely with the Tourism Alliance and many national and regional tourism bodies.

Arts Development

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will respond to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee's third report on arts development. [61137]

Tessa Jowell: The Government's response to the report was laid before Parliament earlier today.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Departmental Staff (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many and what percentage of *(a)* Civil Service, *(b)* executive agencies and *(c)* non-departmental public body jobs under the remit of his Department are located in Scotland; and how many of each have been relocated to Scotland since May 1997. [56303]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: No civil service or executive agency jobs under the remit of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office are located in Scotland.

For non-departmental public bodies, 34 jobs (3.11 per cent.) are located in Scotland. All these were located in Scotland prior to 1997. A further 20 British Council slots will be relocated to Edinburgh between now and summer 2003.

Disclosure of Interests

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what rules apply to the disclosure of interests on the part of those serving on public bodies which are responsible to his Department. [56452]

Mr. Straw: All advisory and executive non-departmental public bodies (NDPB) are required to adopt a board members' code, based on guidance produced by the Cabinet Office, and they should have registers of interests. The definition of interests is ultimately for individual Departments since they are best placed to decide what might be thought to influence members of their NDPBs.

The following table lists the NDPBs sponsored by this Department and in each cases indicates what the relevant code of practice is and where it is available.

Non-departmental public body	*Present status*	*Information available*
British Council	Code of best practice for board members adopted on 1 November 1994	Available on request from the secretariat of the British Council
Wilton Park Academic Council	Draft code of practice to be adopted on 13 June 2002. WPAC also hold 'conflict of interests' register	Once approved, will be on WPAC website www.wiltonpark.org.uk/
British Association for Central and Eastern Europe	Does not have a register of interest, though compliant with Companies Act requirement for board members to declare any other company directorships	—
Great Britain China Centre	Has a register of executive committee members' interests relevant to its activities	May be obtained by contacting GBCC in writing. Details also given on website (www.gbcc.org.uk)
Britain Russia Centre	No code of practice in respect of its disclosure of interest currently in place	Board members sign an annual declaration provided by the auditors that they have had no personal gain or financial interest from/in BRC activities. Website: www.briteastwest.org.uk/
Diplomatic Service Appeals Board	Code of practice currently being drafted. Register of interests covered in application forms	Information can be obtained from Secretary, DSAB, FCO, London SW1A 2PA
Westminster Foundation for Democracy	Code of practice under review. Do hold a register of interests. WFD also has code of conduct for board members which includes the obligation to declare any material interests	Held by company secretary. Website www.wfd.org/
Government Hospitality Advisory Committee for the Purchase of Wine	Code of practice adopted	Published in annual report. Information can be obtained from the Head of Government Hospitality, Lancaster House, St. James's, London SW1
Marshall Aid Commemoration Commission	Code of practice adopted by commission on 25 April 1997	Documents available from commission secretariat at Association of Commonwealth Universities (not on website but details in ACU annual report)

Libya (Flight LAA 1103)

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the outcome was of meetings held in the last six months between his staff at the Tripoli Embassy and the Libyan authorities on the subject of a crash report into flight LAA 1103. [57016]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given him by my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw), then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, on 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 533W.

Pakistan

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations the Government have made to the Government of Pakistan on the protection of women's rights. [58342]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We and our EU partners regularly raise our human rights concerns, including women's rights issues, with the Pakistan authorities. The Government of Pakistan have made progress over the last year in addressing the position of women through electoral reform and their National Commission on the Status of Women. We support these steps and are supporting Pakistani women's groups in their campaigns to promote women's rights within the existing Islamic legal framework.

The EU Human Rights Group takes a close interest in human rights development in Pakistan. The Group is currently considering what further action they should take.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what information was provided by the French authorities to his Department concerning the visit of Zimbabwean Police Commissioner Augustine Chihuri to that country recently. [59199]

Mr. Straw: As they were obliged to, under the terms of the EU travel ban, the French authorities provided full relevant information prior to Chihuri's recent attendance at the 14–16 May Interpol meeting in Lyon.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the meetings of international organisations which the Zimbabweans who are listed on the UK/EU travel ban list are allowed to attend. [58959]

Mr. Straw: There is no defined list. The terms of the Common Position imposing the travel ban allow Member States to grant exemptions on the grounds of

"humanitarian need, including religious obligation, or on the grounds attending meetings of international bodies or conducting political dialogue that promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Zimbabwe".

In practice, EU Member States examine visa applications from banned Zimbabweans on a case-by-case basis and consult other partners before reaching a final decision.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what date his Department was contacted by the French authorities concerning the visit of the Zimbabwean Police Commissioner Augustine Chihuri; and what response his Department gave to the French. [59198]

Mr. Straw: We understand that Chihuri entered France on a single-entry 10-day visa on 11 May and returned to Zimbabwe on 20 May.

The French authorities alerted EU partners to Chihuri's application for a visa on 27 March. They explained that they were obliged under Article 15 of the Interpol Accord to allow Chihuri, a Vice-President representing Africa on Interpol's Executive Committee, to attend the organisation's 14–16 May meeting. The French authorities noted that the exemptions allowed under the EU travel ban include permission for banned individuals to attend international meetings of this kind.

My Department accepted the legal basis of the French request, but asked the French authorities to attach maximum restrictive conditions to Chihuri's entry visa and, where possible, to restrict his movements on EU soil to the immediate vicinity of the Interpol meeting.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has received from European Government representatives since 11 March concerning Zimbabwean Ministers attending meetings in Europe, while they are on the EU sanctions list. [58960]

Mr. Straw: The terms of the EU travel ban allow banned individuals to attend meetings of international organisations based in Europe which are subject to established treaty arrangements. These may effectively require a host country to allow access irrespective of any ban.

France informed EU partners on 27 March that Augustine Chihuri had applied to attend an Interpol meeting in Lyon from 14 to 16 May, and again on 23 May that he had applied to attend another meeting from 18 to 20 June. France noted its obligation under the Interpol Accord to allow national representatives to attend meetings at the headquarters of this international organisation. France issued him a restrictive, single entry 10-day visa for the May meetings, and a five-day visa for the June meeting. Spain has reported an application from Chihuri to enter Spain following the June meeting. This application has been refused.

France also reported a request from Zimbabwean officials on behalf of Robert Mugabe, Elliot Manyika, Elisha Muzonzini and Stanislaus Mudenge for permission to enter France while transitting Paris airport en route from New York on the weekend of 11 May. The request was turned down. Germany informed partners on 27 May that Stanislaus Mudenge had applied to enter Germany on private business. The application was turned down.

Italy alerted partners on 29 May and 5 June to requests from Robert Mugabe, Stanislaus Mudenge, Elliot Manyika, George Charamba and Joseph Made for permission to attend the UN Food Summit in Rome from 10 to 13 June. Italy noted its obligation to allow these individuals entry to attend this UN summit. They are likely to be given a five-day single entry visa.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how long the Zimbabwean Police Commissioner Augustine Chihuri was in the European Union. [59197]

Mr. Straw: We understand that Chihuri entered France on a single-entry 10-day visa on 11 May and returned to Zimbabwe on 20 May.

Falkland Islands

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has recently discussed with the Argentine Government a change in sovereign status of the Falkland Islands. [58954]

Mr. Straw: The British Government have no doubt about their sovereignty over the Falkland Islands and have held no recent meetings with Argentina about the future status of the Islands.

United Kingdom Overseas Territories

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the constitutional position of *(a)* the Falkland Islands and *(b)* Gibraltar. [58955]

Mr. Straw: The constitutional position of the Falkland Islands is expressed in the preamble to Chapter 1 of the 1985 Falkland Islands Constitution Order. In the case of Gibraltar this is expressed in the preamble to the 1969 Gibraltar Constitution Order. The constitutional positions of Gibraltar and the Falkland Islands are bound by the legal frameworks in which they are set, and in this respect they are quite distinct.

Jonathan Lincoln Brown

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations his Department has made to the Government of Oman about a constituent, Jonathan Lincoln Brown; and if he will make a statement. [58932]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Mr. Brown is involved in a private legal dispute. We have assisted him where we properly can in a number of matters. These included representations to the Omani Government requesting them to consider Mr. Brown's case compassionately because of his mother's ill health and subsequent death. Our ambassador raised the case with the Omani Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The embassy were also instrumental in ensuring Mr. Brown received an appeal date. We remain in contact with Mr. Brown and are providing all proper consular assistance.

Afghanistan

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what date his Department received reports and representations from the International Committee of the Red Cross regarding the conditions of fighters held in Shibergan prison in Afghanistan; and what action his Department has taken. [58844]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I understand that this Department did not receive any representations from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) regarding the conditions of fighters held in Shiberghan prison in Afghanistan.

Our Embassy staff in Kabul are in frequent contact with the ICRC, which monitors closely the situation and welfare of all prisoners in Afghanistan. The ICRC is concerned about conditions in the camp. A number of prisoners have been released since February, but the prison continues to hold some 1,600 men (it was designed to hold 1,000). The ICRC began a feeding programme for prisoners in mid-April.

Throughout the conflict last autumn, we urged the Northern Alliance to respect international human rights laws, including the Geneva Conventions, and to treat humanely all those who surrendered and were taken prisoner. Since then, we have made clear to the Afghan Interim Administration that we expect them to respect their international obligations, including to treat their prisoners humanely.

The former Foreign Office Minister with responsibility for South Asia, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter, raised our concerns most recently on 27 May, when he discussed the reported mistreatment of prisoners with the Afghan Foreign Minister, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah. The US$4.5 billion pledged by the international community for the reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan over the next five years should help to improve conditions across the country, including in prisons. The Afghan Interim Administration has asked General Dostum, the regional commander with responsibility for the camp, to ensure that conditions at Shiberghan are improved swiftly.

Kaliningrad

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on co-operation between Kaliningrad and the European Union. [59368]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government recognise that Kaliningrad is a significant issue in the EU-Russia relationship.

The EU recognises also the impact that enlargement will have on Kaliningrad. Due to concerns over illegal migration, the EU has made clear that visa-free transit will no longer be possible between Kaliningrad and the rest of Russia after Poland and Lithuania have joined the European Union.

The Union has therefore developed a package of assistance: to facilitate the issuing of visas; to promote workable border arrangements; and to support Kaliningrad's economic development. This assistance is intended to help Kaliningrad benefit from the opportunities offered by EU enlargement. Implementation of this package will depend on overall agreement between the EU and Russia. The issue was discussed at the EU-Russia summit on 29 May. Expert level contacts between the two sides will continue.

Angola

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps his Department has taken since 5 April to help the implementation of the ceasefire agreement between the Government of Angola and the UNITA rebels; what reports he has received from his staff in the area about possible problems; what representations he has made to the Government of Angola with respect to creating a lasting peace; and if he will make a statement. [58908]

Mr. MacShane: We are in close contact with the Angolan Government, from President dos Santos down. We discussed the latest developments with Foreign Minister Miranda in London in March. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development held follow-up discussions in Luanda in April. We are also in touch with Ibrahim Gambari, the UN Secretary General's Special Adviser on Africa (including talks on 6 June), and with our EU colleagues, with the aim of encouraging transparent dialogue between all parties.

There have been reports that quartering areas are over-stretched and unable to meet the basic welfare needs of former UNITA troops and their families. We have played a leading role with other donors to encourage the UN and Government of Angola to overcome earlier co-ordination problems and to agree roles and responsibilities in the quartering areas. The UN has now begun work on implementing relief activity, within guidelines agreed with the Angolan government. Her Majesty's Government are contributing $1 million to the UN's office for the co-ordination of humanitarian affairs (OCHA) in Angola. It is important that the Angolan Government fulfils its own stated obligations and that it continues to co-operate fully with the international community, particularly on the humanitarian relief agenda.

European Council (Seville)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's priorities are for the European Council's meeting at Seville; by what standards he will judge the success of the meeting; and if he will make a statement. [59101]

Peter Hain: We want Seville to give fresh impetus to the EU's work to combat illegal immigration, by strengthening the EU's borders, enhancing our work with source countries in tackling the causes and consequences of illegal migration, and focusing the EU's policies and resources more sharply. We also want Seville to agree a package of reforms to the workings of the Council, to improve its efficiency and make it more transparent to the citizen. In addition, Heads of State and Government will discuss enlargement, in particular how to communicate its benefits more effectively to public opinion; other aspects of the future of Europe debate; sustainable development; a range of economic and social topics to continue to deliver the Lisbon agenda; and a number of CFSP issues.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proposals the Government will be putting forward on the reform of the European Union's rotating presidency to the European Council's meeting at Seville; and if he will make a statement. [59099]

Peter Hain: The Government would like agreement at the Seville European Council on practical steps to improve the way the Council works. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister set out some concrete ideas in his joint letter to Prime Minster Aznar with Chancellor Schröder in February. Seville, however, cannot agree changes to the rotating presidency system: such changes would require amendments to the Union's treaties; these can only be agreed at an Intergovernmental Conference (expected to take place in 2004).

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's aims are for the promotion of environmental strategies in the European Union's external responsibilities at the European Council's meeting at Seville; and if he will make a statement. [59100]

Peter Hain: The Government want the European Council in Seville to elaborate the external dimension of the EU's sustainable development strategy. This strategy aims to strike a balance between the environmental, economic and social objectives of society, in order to maximise well-being in the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. We want the EU to agree a set of priority objectives, with related targets and actions. These should include improving coherence between its internal and external policies and addressing developing country concerns such as market access. A commitment at Seville will demonstrate the EU's engagement with the global agenda for sustainable development, poverty eradication and achieving the UN's Millennium Development Goals.

The European Council is also the opportunity for the EU to make a clear statement on sustainable development and to prepare for the forthcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg later this year. We favour decisions by the Council on the EU's top priorities for political agreement at Johannesburg, such as initiatives on freshwater and sanitation, and sustainable energy.

Press and Public Relations

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much expenditure his Department has incurred in 1997–98 on employing external consultants to deal with the press or public relations of his Department. [59497]

Mr. MacShane: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) on 24 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 999W.

That answer covered the period 1998–2002. In 1997–98, the British Council paid £23,500 to a consultancy which looked at the British Council brand development and identity.

Tibet

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times in the last three years he has met his Chinese counterpart to discuss Tibet. [59597]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has met his Chinese counterpart, Tang Jiaxuan, several times in the last three years to discuss issues of international and bilateral concern. He has raised our concerns over Tibet twice, most recently in January this year.

Uzbekistan

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many UK observers were *(a)* sent by his Department and *(b)* part of international missions to Uzbekistan on 5 December 1999; and if he will make a statement. [59686]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Neither the Foreign and Commonwealth Office nor the OSCE sent observers to Uzbekistan for the parliamentary elections on 5 December 1999. No other international missions were deployed.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many UK observers were present in Uzbekistan on 27 January; and if he will make a statement. [59683]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK did not send official observers to the national referendum, which took place in Uzbekistan on 27 January 2002. However, the Government of Uzbekistan invited two UK nationals in a private capacity.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports have been received by his Department on human rights in Uzbekistan since April 1997; and if he will make a statement. [59688]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) receives regular reporting on human rights in Uzbekistan from our embassy in Tashkent. The embassy closely monitors the human rights situation in the country and is in regular contact with the leaders of independent human rights organisations and international NGOs based there. The FCO also receives information direct from human rights organisations. For example, in January, Human Rights Watch wrote to the Department outlining concerns about human rights in Uzbekistan. In the same month, the UK ensured that issues highlighted by Human Rights Watch were raised at the EU-Uzbekistan Cooperation Council.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when representations have been made by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* UK diplomatic staff in Tashkent to the Government of Uzbekistan concerning human rights since April 1997; and if he will make a statement. [59687]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) frequently raises human rights concerns with the Ambassador of Uzbekistan in London. It also contributes to EU statements and raises human rights issues and individual cases together with EU partners at the OSCE.

In Tashkent, the embassy monitors the human rights situation and maintains a close dialogue with human rights groups. General human rights concerns and individual cases are raised by senior FCO officials visiting Uzbekistan and by the British Ambassador. The embassy also makes representations with EU colleagues.

UK diplomatic staff regularly remind Uzbekistan of its international obligations under the OSCE charter and the EU Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, as well as under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which Uzbekistan signed in 1995.

The UK has carried out, with the cooperation of the Uzbekistan authorities, a number of projects to improve human rights, including most recently a project to install electronic recording equipment in courtrooms.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many UK observers were present at the presidential elections in Uzbekistan on 9 January 2000; and if he will make a statement. [59684]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The UK did not send official observers to the presidential elections which took place in Uzbekistan on 9 January 2000.

UN Conventions (Terrorism)

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the *(a)* 12 UN conventions related to terrorism and *(b)* countries that have both signed and ratified all 12 conventions. [60778]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The twelve UN conventions related to terrorism are:

Convention and Certain Other Offences Committed on Board Aircraft (Tokyo 14/06/63)

Convention for the Unlawful Seizure of Aircraft (The Hague 16/12/70)

Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Aircraft (Montreal 23/09/71)

Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes Against Internationally Protected Persons, Including Diplomatic Personnel (New York 14/12/73)

Convention Against the Taking of Hostages (New York 17/12/79)

Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Materials (Vienna 03/03/80)

Protocol for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts of Violence at Airports Serving International Aviation, complementary to the Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Aircraft (Montreal 24/02/88)

Convention for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Maritime Navigation (Rome 10/03/88)

Protocol for the Suppression of Unlawful Acts Against the Safety of Fixed Platforms on the Continental Shelf (Rome 10/03/88)

Convention on the Marking of Plastic Explosives for the Purpose of Detection (Montreal 01/03/91)

UN Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings (New York 15/12/97)

UN Convention for the Suppression of Financing of Terrorism (New York 09/12/99).

The states which have signed and acceded to all 12 Conventions and Protocols are: Canada, Chile, the Netherlands, Peru, the United Kingdom and Uzbekistan.

We have placed in the House Library details of the status of state's accession to each UN Convention or Protocol.

European Union Business

Kali Mountford: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the *(a)* forthcoming business in the Council of the European Union for June and *(b)* major European Union events for the period between 1 July and November. [61249]

Peter Hain: The information is as follows.

4 June—ECOFIN—Brussels

1. Adoption of the agenda
2. (poss.) Approval of the list of "A" items
3. Preparation of the Seville European Council

Council report on Broad Economic Policy and Guidelines

Council report on administrative co-operation in tax matters

4. (poss.) Recasting of the Financial Regulation
5. Macro-financial assistance

Policy debate

6. Directive on prospectuses

Policy debate

7. (poss.) Directive on Institutions for Occupational Retirement Provision

Political agreement

8. Sixth half-yearly Commission report on the Financial Services Action Plan
9. Tax Matters

Tax Package

Savings taxation

    Report on dependent or associated territories
    Report on negotiations with third States

Code of Conduct: progress report

(poss.) Taxation of biofuels

    Political agreement

(poss.) Energy taxation

Administrative co-operation in tax matters

    Council conclusions

VAT treatment of cross-border motor vehicle leasing

10. Methods of evaluating output gaps
11. Advantages of the different types of pension schemes
12. Other business

6–7 June—Industry and Energy Council—Brussels

1. Approval of provisional agenda

2. (poss.) Approval of the list of "A" items

3. Competitiveness and enterprise policy in the EU

(a) Commission communication "Productivity: the key to competitiveness"—annual Commission report on competitiveness (2002)

Presentation by the Commission and discussion

Council conclusions

(b) Communication from the Commission on the impact of the e-Economy on European businesses: economic analysis and political implications 14748/01 ECO 367

Council conclusions

(c) Report on the European Charter for Small Enterprises: Follow-up to the Barcelona European Council on 15 and 16 March 2002

Presidency briefing 6125/02 ECO 38

4. Sustainable development

(a) Strategy for chemicals

Commission briefing

(b) Contribution of enterprise policy to sustainable development

Discussion

Council conclusions

5. Steel

(a) Expiry of the ECSC treaty

Commission briefing

(b) Situation on the world steel market

Commission briefing

6. (poss.) Shipbuilding

(a) Fifth report from the Commission to the Council on the situation in world shipbuilding

Presentation by the Commission 8689/02 RC 6

(b) Proposal for a Council regulation concerning a temporary defensive mechanism inn shipbuilding (LA)(*) (Articles 87(3) and 89 of the treaty) 11335/01 RC 14 WTO 83

7. Competition

(a) Proposal for a Council regulation on the implementation of the rules on competition laid down in Articles 81 and 82 of the treaty and amending regulations (EEC) No. 1017/68, (EEC) No. 2988/74, (EEC) No. 4056/86 and (EEC) No. 3975/87

Progress report

(b) XXXIst Commission report on Competition Policy 2001

Presentation by the Commission 8455/02 RC 4

8. (poss.) Reduction/re-orientation of public aid, State-aid scoreboard—spring 2002 edition

Presentation by the Commission

9. Life sciences and biotechnology—A strategy for Europe

Council conclusions 6415/02 RECH 40 ENV 103 CONSOM 14 SAN 24 DEVGEN 15 MI 31 IND 23 AGRI 43 SOC 87 RELEX 27 EDUC 30 AG 6

10. Euromed—industrial cooperation

Presidency briefing on the outcome of the Ministerial Conference in Malaga on 9 and 10 April 2002 7922/02 ECO 116 MED 30

11. G10 medicinal products

Report from the High-Level Working Party on innovation and the supply of medicinal products

Commission briefing

Energy (7 June 2002)

12. Proposal for a Council regulation on state aid to the coal industry after the expiry of the ECSC treaty (LA) (*) (Articles 87 and 89 TEC)

Political agreement

13. Internal market in electricity and gas

(a) Proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directives 96/92/EC and 98/30/EC concerning common rules for the internal market in electricity and natural gas (LA) (*) (Article 95 TEC)

Political agreement

(b) Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on conditions for access to the network for cross-border exchanges in electricity (LA) (Article 95 TEC)

Progress report

14. Proposal for an amendment to the Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Decision 1254/96/EC laying down a series of guidelines for trans-European energy networks (LA) (Article 196 TEC)

General approach

15. Proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the promotion of the use of biofuels for transport (LA) (Article 175 TEC)

General approach

16. Energy Charter

Progress report

17. Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council adopting a multi-annual programme for action in the field of energy: "Intelligent Energy for Europe" Programme (2003–2006) (LA) (Article 175 TEC)

Presentation by the Commission

18. Security of energy supply

Commission briefing on follow-up to consultations on the Green Paper on security of supply

Other business

Other business

3—Brussels—Employment and Social Affairs Council

3—Brussels—Eurogroup (evening)

4—Brussels—ECOFIN

6–7—Brussels—Convention on the Future of Europe—Plenary Session

6–7—Madrid—EU-ASEM meeting (EU 15)

6–8—Brussels—Foreign Affairs (ASEM Ministers)

10–11—Brussels—General Affairs Council

10–11—Brussels—Agriculture Council

11—Brussels—Fisheries Council

13–14—Brussels—Justice and Home Affairs Council

17–18—Brussels—Transport and Telecommunications Council

17–18—Brussels—General Affairs Council

21–22—Seville—European Council

24—Brussels—General Affairs Council (evening)

24–25—Brussels—Convention on the Future of Europe—Plenary Session

24–25—Brussels—Environment Council

25—Brussels—ECOFIN

26—Brussels—Health Council

The following are the principal events in the EU between 1 July and November 2002. The list is based on the information available at the date of issue.

Date	*Venue*	*Event*
July		
12–13	Kolding	Meeting of Employment and Social Policy Ministers (Informal)
15–16	Brussels	Agriculture Council
19	Brussels	Budget Meeting
19–21	Århus	Environment Ministers meeting (Informal)
22–23	Brussels	General Affairs Council
August		
31–1	Elsinore	Gymnich (Ministerial Informal)
September		
6	Brussels	ASEM Economic Ministers Meeting
6–8	Copenhagen	ECOFIN (Ministerial Informal)
8–10	Nyborg	Agriculture Council (Ministerial Informal)
12–13	Copenhagen	Justice and Home Affairs Council (Ministerial Informal)
22–23	Copenhagen	ASEM Meeting
23–24	Brussels	Agriculture Council
26	Brussels	Internal Market, Consumer Affairs and Tourism Council
27	Tent	ACP-EU Ministers Meeting
30	Brussels	Research Council
30–1	Brussels	General Affairs Council
October		
3–4	Brussels	Transport and Telecommunications Council
8	Brussels	ECOFIN
October		
8	Brussels	Employment and Social Policy Council
14	Brussels	Fisheries Council
14–15	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs, and Civil Protection Council
15–16	Brussels	Agriculture Council
17	Brussels	Environment Council
18–19	Aalborg	Internal Market, Consumer Affairs and Industry Meeting (Ministerial Informal)
21–22	Brussels	General Affairs Council
24–25	Brussels	European Council
November		
1	Brussels	Culture Council
2	Brussels	ECOFIN—Troika meeting on Macro-Economic Dialogue
12	Brussels	Education and Youth Council
14–15	Brussels	Internal Market, Consumer Affairs and Youth Council
18	Brussels	Fisheries Council
18–19	Brussels	General Affairs Council
19–20	Brussels	Agriculture Council
22	Brussels	Development Council
25–26	Brussels	Budget [Council]
25–26	Brussels	Industry and Energy Council
28–29	Brussels	Justice and Home Affairs, and Civil Protection Council

SCOTLAND

East Coast Main Line

4. **Mr. Luke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with the Strategic Rail Authority about improvements to the east coast main line north of Edinburgh. [57382]

Mrs. McGuire: My predecessor and Scotland Office officials met with senior management from the Strategic Rail Authority on 16 May. They discussed a range of issues including matters relative to the east coast main line north of Edinburgh.

It was clear from the meeting that Richard Bowker leads a senior management team with a vision and commitment to improve rail services, knowledge of the rail system, and a pragmatic approach to getting the job done.

National Minimum Wage

5. **David Hamilton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many people in Scotland benefit from the national minimum wage. [57383]

Mrs. Liddell: Some 110,000 people across Scotland have benefited from the national minimum wage since it was introduced in April 1999.

Economic Trends

6. **Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on business growth and inward investment in Scotland. [57384]

Mrs. Liddell: Business support is devolved and policy responsibility rests with the Scottish Executive with delivery through the enterprise networks in Scotland. Scottish Development International will be publishing its latest annual inward investment results later this year.

This Government have put in place macroeconomic policies which are delivering economic stability, low inflation and low interest rates—providing a platform for business growth and confidence.

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last met the Minister for Enterprise, Transport and Lifelong Learning; and if she will make a statement on prospects for economic prosperity with reference to inward investment. [57389]

Mrs. Liddell: I meet with Ministers of the Scottish Executive on a regular basis.

The UK economy coped well with the challenges posed by the world economic slowdown in 2001 and grew by 2.25 per cent. in 2001—the fastest of any G7 economy. The UK fundamentals remain strong—with the UK on course for sustained growth with low inflation. Scottish Development International, which is responsible to the Scottish Executive, will be publishing its latest annual inward investment results later this year.

Air Links

7. **Mr. Tom Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on progress made on expanding direct air links from Scottish airports to European destinations. [57385]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government, together with the Scottish Executive, will shortly publish a regional consultation document on air services in Scotland. This will set out the options for development of Scotland's airports and air services for the next 30 years.

Over the past year I have held meetings with the airlines, business organisations in Scotland and with the airport operators and tourism authorities with the aim of stimulating a response to the demand for more direct flights.

Scottish Tourism

8. **Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what steps she is taking to promote Scottish tourism. [57386]

Mrs. Liddell: I am undertaking a wide range of events to assist in promoting tourism to Scotland. On 15 May I hosted a reception for the overseas and UK managers of the BTA. On 26 June, I will join my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the Secretary of State for Wales in hosting a reception at Dover House to thank the partners of the BTA for their contribution to the one million extra visitors advertising campaign.

My Friends of Scotland team work very closely with the BTA and VisitScotland to ensure that the tourism message is a key part of my efforts to promote Scotland around the world.

Customs Officers

9. **Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she last discussed the deployment of customs officers in remote areas of Scotland with Treasury Ministers. [57387]

Mrs. McGuire: My right hon. Friend has frequent discussions with Treasury Ministers on a wide range of issues.

Broadband Coverage

10. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what joint initiatives she has launched with the Scottish Executive to increase the coverage of broadband in Scotland. [57388]

Mrs. Liddell: The UK Government work closely with the Scottish Executive to ensure that reserved and devolved responsibilities relating to the extension of broadband coverage in Scotland are co-ordinated.

The Government have made available a £30 million fund for broadband, of which the Scottish Executive will receive £4.4 million to promote affordable pervasive access to broadband connections across Scotland.

Economic Development

12. **Mr. McFall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans she has for increased public expenditure on economic development in Scotland. [57390]

Mrs. Liddell: The Government provided a substantial increase for public expenditure in Scotland in the 2002 Budget. Scotland will receive annual increases ranging from £224 million in 2003–04 to £3.2 billion in 2007–08. Economic development is a devolved matter and it is for the Scottish Executive and the Scottish Parliament to decide on the allocation of resources according to their own priorities for Scotland.

Fireworks

13. **Mr. Roy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with ministerial colleagues about the regulation of firework sales. [57391]

Mrs. McGuire: The Government is aware about concerns in this area and is carefully considering what action should be taken.

Enterprise

14. **Chris Grayling:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what joint initiatives she has launched with the Scottish Executive to encourage enterprise in Scotland. [57392]

19. **Mr. Francois:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what joint initiatives she has launched with the Scottish Executive to encourage enterprise in Scotland. [57397]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office continues to promote joint working between the Government and the Scottish Executive across a wide range of issues where there are shared or complementary interests, including matters which will encourage enterprise.

Business Links (Europe)

15. **Rosemary McKenna:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent steps she has taken to further the interests of Scottish business within the European Union. [57393]

Mrs. Liddell: The EU is Scotland's most important export market representing 63 per cent. of Scottish manufactured exports. I have regular discussions both with business organisations and within Government to ensure that Scottish business benefits from membership of the EU.

Asset Seizures

16. **Ann McKechin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the action being taken to seize the assets of major drug dealers in Scotland. [57394]

Mrs. McGuire: We are determined to put in place even stronger seizure and confiscation procedures than currently exist and the Proceeds of Crime Bill, once law, will achieve that. This is a top priority and I will be working with Home Office and Scottish Executive colleagues to ensure the overall anti-drugs messages are effective.

Postal Services

17. **Mr. Alan Reid:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry concerning deregulation of postal deliveries in Scotland. [57395]

Mrs. McGuire: None. Regulation of postal services in Scotland is a matter for Postcomm.

22. **Dr. Murrison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the reform of postal services in Scotland. [57400]

Mrs. McGuire: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier today to the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray), *Official Report*, column 703.

23. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she will next meet representatives from Consignia to discuss the reform of Scotland's postal services. [57401]

Mrs. McGuire: I have no immediate plans to meet with representatives from Consignia. However, I am in touch on a regular basis with a wide range of individuals and organisations in relation to postal services in Scotland.

Military Bases

18. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland when she next expects to meet MOD officials to discuss military bases in Scotland. [57396]

Mrs. McGuire: My right hon. Friend has regular contact with the Ministry of Defence to discuss a wide range of issues, including military bases in Scotland.

In 2000 (the latest year for which figures are available) the total deployment of defence personnel in Scotland was 24,400 of whom 15,100 were service personnel and 9,300 were civilian employees. This represents around 9.2 per cent. of UK defence personnel deployment.

Pensioner Income

20. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what plans she has to meet representatives of pensioners in Scotland to discuss the uptake of minimum income guarantee and the pensions credit. [57398]

Mrs. McGuire: I will be speaking at the Scottish Pensioners' Forum annual conference on 18 June in Dundee.

National Security

21. **Mr. Dalyell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list her responsibilities in relation to national security. [57399]

Mrs. Liddell: I have no specific responsibilities for national security other than those discharged collectively through Cabinet and my membership of the Civil Contingencies Committee.

Asbestos

24. **Jim Sheridan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on delays in payment of compensation to those with asbestos-related diseases in Scotland and the action taken by her to reduce delays. [57402]

Mrs. Liddell: I held a meeting on 24 April to discuss delays in dealing with claims against Chester Street. I have also issued a newsletter to all Scottish MPs. Progress is being made and a Service Standard has been laid down for dealing with Chester Street claims. Under this Service Standard, where damages are agreed and payment is due from the Association of British Insurers or the Financial Services Compensation Scheme, claims will be processed and paid within 25 working days. This timetable is dependent on documents requiring a claimant's signature being returned promptly.

Aggregates Tax

25. **Mr. Bacon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will make a statement on the aggregates tax as it affects quarrying in Scotland. [57403]

Mrs. McGuire: The levy came into effect on 1 April 2002. It has been introduced to address the environmental impacts of the extraction and transportation of aggregates, including noise, dust, vibration, visual intrusion, loss of biodiversity and amenity. The levy will result in prices for primary aggregates which better reflect these environmental costs, and so encourage both the use of recycled aggregates as an alternative and more efficient use of aggregates.

Part of the revenue from the aggregates levy will be used to establish the new Sustainability Fund, which will promote environmentally beneficial practices such as the use of recycled aggregate. Scotland stands to benefit from some £3 million from the fund.

CABINET OFFICE

Refurbishment (22 Whitehall)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Cabinet Office when he will complete the inquiry into the procurement of timber for the refurbishment project of 22 Whitehall. [57131]

Mr. Alexander: As my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister stated to the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Ms Walley) on 14 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 567W, an initial report has been received and there will be a report to the House when the report is finalised.

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Cabinet Office what the median length of time has been between the departure of a chief executive and the commencement in post of a successor for all non-departmental public bodies since 1997. [59715]

Mr. Alexander: Following the machinery of Government changes announced by the Prime Minister on 29 May, none of the non-departmental public bodies for which the Cabinet Office is responsible require a chief executive or equivalent.

Parliamentary Ombudsman

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Cabinet Office what instructions are given to officials on responding to requests for papers by the Parliamentary Ombudsman. [60578]

Mr. Alexander: Guidance to officials on responding to requests for papers by the Parliamentary Ombudsman is set out in 'Handling of Parliamentary Ombudsman Cases.'

'The Ombudsman in Your Files, the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information' and guidance on its interpretation are also relevant.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Information Technology

34. **Dr. Cable:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on the use of IT in the court system. [57412]

Yvette Cooper: Current IT systems in the courts are relatively old, limited in their scope and in their ability to communicate with IT in other parts of the justice system.

The Lord Chancellor's Department has started a programme of IT modernisation to improve service to users of the justice system and to meet the e-Government targets set by the Prime Minister.

The first step in this process is well under way with the introduction of a modern IT infrastructure and is 75 per cent. complete in the magistrates courts. Subject to funding, it will be completed in 2004 for the Crown and civil courts.

Justice of the Peace

35. **Hugh Robertson:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement about the nationality requirements for appointment as a justice of the peace. [57413]

Yvette Cooper: As the hon. Member may know, my noble and learned Friend recently discovered that 22 people have been appointed as magistrates contrary to the nationality requirements of the Act of Settlement 1701. This Act requires people seeking a place of trust under the Crown to hold citizenship of Britain, Eire or a Commonwealth country. We are considering ways to allow the 22 people to return to sitting at the earliest opportunity.

King Edward VIII

36. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will arrange for the release of official papers relating to the abdication of King Edward VIII. [57416]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the number of written questions I have answered on this subject. Any official papers relating to the abdication of King Edward VIII will need to be re-reviewed by Departments. It is hoped that the results of the review will be known and put into effect by the end of the year.

Queen's Counsel System

37. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement about reform of the QC system. [57417]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Queen's Counsel system is one of a number of issues relating to the legal profession raised in the OFT report, which fall to my noble and learned Friend the Lord Chancellor to consider. The Government plan to consult on those issues before the summer recess.

Magistrates Courts

38. **David Taylor:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans she has for the rural magistrates court network. [57418]

Yvette Cooper: Magistrates courts committees (MCCs) are taking account of the need of rural users in the delivery of their services, by taking forward the rural proofing initiative, as set out in the rural White Paper. The Countryside Agency's rural proofing checklist was sent to all 42 MCCs in May 2001, to encourage MCCs to take into account the interests of rural communities when developing or implementing existing or new policy.

Furthermore, my Department has been and continues to work closely with the Countryside Agency and the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, to put in place protocols to ensure that rural proofing options are carefully considered, before any decisions on the future of magistrates courts are concluded.

42. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she next expects to meet representatives of the magistracy to discuss magistrates courts in small towns. [57422]

Yvette Cooper: My predecessor my hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Mr. Wills) said in the debates on 1 May and 15 May that he would meet representatives of the magistracy to discuss magistrates' courts in Essex and Wiltshire. My office is in the process of arranging these meetings, but no dates have yet been confirmed.

Witness Protection

39. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what is the Government's policy on the protection of witnesses on court premises. [57419]

Yvette Cooper: The Government's policy is to provide adequate protection for witnesses on court premises to allow them to give their best evidence.

The Court Service recognises that while witnesses are on court premises we have a responsibility to do what we can to prevent intimidation. For example, in all 67 designated street crime courts witnesses use a separate entrance or are segregated immediately on arrival. Provision for segregated waiting arrangements are made, as well as for separate catering and toilets to be used.

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Services

40. **Julie Morgan:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what discussions the Lord Chancellor has had with the National Assembly for Wales about the operation of CAFCASS in Wales. [57420]

Ms Rosie Winterton: None. Since the creation of the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS), representatives of CAFCASS at board and director level have met, among others, the Assembly Minister for Health and Social Services, Jane Hutt, and the Heads of Government Offices in Wales. The director and members of CAFCASS (Cymru) have also attended a number of conferences organised by the National Assembly for Wales.

Court Sittings

41. **Andy Burnham:** To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what action the Lord Chancellor's Department will take to facilitate the extension of court sitting hours in selected areas to deal with street crime; and if she will make a statement. [57421]

Yvette Cooper: Extended court hours are currently being piloted in certain Magistrates courts in areas of high street crime, in London and Manchester. On completion of the four month pilot period at the end of September we will assess whether such an approach is a cost-effective means of reducing delays and best serves the needs of victims and witnesses, and in the light of that assessment will consider its possible extension to other criminal courts.

Court Reform

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, (1) pursuant to the answer of 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 414W, if she will make a further statement on her plans to reform *(a)* criminal and *(b)* magistrates court; [60191]

(2) what plans she has to introduce a White Paper on the reform of *(a)* criminal and *(b)* magistrates courts; when she intends to publish that White Paper; and if she will make a statement. [60192]

Yvette Cooper: Sir Robin Auld's Review of the Criminal Courts in England and Wales makes wide-ranging recommendations. The period for comment closed on 31 January. The Government have taken no decisions on the report and are now considering the recommendations in detail, taking account of the comments received. The Government will announce their conclusions by way of a White Paper before the summer recess.

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what representations she has had from *(a)* magistrates and *(b)* magistrates courts committees, following her review of the criminal and magistrates courts system; and if she will a statement. [60193]

Yvette Cooper: We have received nearly 500 responses. On behalf of *(a)* magistrates, we have received responses from over 60 individuals who identified themselves as magistrates; and *(b)* of the 42 magistrates courts committee areas representations have been received from 37 areas.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the mandate of the Committee on the service in the member states of judicial and extrajudicial documents and on co-operation between the courts of the member states in the taking of evidence in civil or commercial matters is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [58451]

Yvette Cooper: There are two separate committees, one relating to the regulation on the service in the member states of judicial and extrajudicial documents and the other relating to the regulation on co-operation between the courts of the member states in the taking of evidence in civil and commercial matters. The former has met once in the last year to provide information to bring the regulation into force. No further meetings have been scheduled. The UK was represented by an official from the Lord Chancellor's Department and another from the Scottish Executive. The cost of attendance at this meeting was approximately £400. The latter will not meet until after the Regulation applies from 1 January 2004. It will meet only when it is necessary to review the standard forms in the annexe to the regulation. As both committees are responsible only for the implementation of regulations that have already been subject to parliamentary scrutiny there are no plans to change the accountability or transparency of either.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the mandate of the Committee on the jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgments in matrimonial matters and in matters of parental responsibility for children of both spouses and on the jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgments in civil and commercial matters (Brussels I and II) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [58452]

Yvette Cooper: The committees which considered the two conventions mentioned (Brussels I and II) concluded their work over a year ago and are no longer in existence. Neither committee met within the last 12 months.

Mortgage Defaults

Chris Ruane: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many court repossessions of homes because of default on mortgages there have been in each of the last 20 years. [58666]

Yvette Cooper: Specific reasons for the instigation of mortgage possession proceedings in the county courts are not collected centrally and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost to the Department. However, for information purposes, figures are provided in the table illustrating the number of possession warrants executed as a percentage of orders made for both mortgage and rent possessions. It is not currently possible to split the warrants executed figure into mortgage and rent components.

Mortgage and rent possession actions—possession orders and warrants issued and executed

Mortgage and rent possession actions

		Possession warrants:		*Warrants executed as percentage of:*	
	Possession orders made[1]	*Issued*	*Executed*	*Orders made*	*Warrants issued*
2001	158,857	133,500	65,620	41.3	49.2
2000	161,746	134,478	61,581	38.1	45.8
1999	171,518	136,718	68,723	40.1	50.3
1998	178,291	129,961	59,701	33.5	45.9
1997	157,025	115,646	49,865	31.8	43.1
1996	159,052	111,473	48,587	30.5	43.6
1995	157,857	117,301	51,096	32.4	43.6
1994	141,242	115,688	49,222	34.8	42.5
1993	188,007	124,271	51,333	27.3	41.3
1992	223,839	124,211	62,439	27.9	50.3
1991	237,918	133,101	61,139	25.7	45.9
1990	216,288	106,980	41,799	19.3	39.1
1989	164,843	85,310	29,287	17.8	34.3
1988	117,879	70,121	28,588	24.3	40.8
1987	101,340	66,813	30,092	29.7	45.0
1986	91,091	59,971	30,302	33.3	50.5
1985	82,516	53,172	26,116	31.6	49.1
1984	79,917	49,563	23,934	29.9	48.3
1983	87,748	45,817	20,[illegible]73	23.2	44.5
1982	106,555	50,711	20,[illegible]51	19.7	41.3

[1] Includes suspended orders

Funding (Luton, South)

Margaret Moran: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what moneys have been provided *(a)* directly and *(b)* via agencies for which the Department has responsibility to the Luton, South constituency since 1997. [58593]

Yvette Cooper: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Land Sales

Mr. Luff: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will list the land that her Department is *(a)* offering for sale and *(b)* plans to offer in the next 12 months, giving its (i) location and (ii) size. [59061]

Yvette Cooper: The Lord Chancellor's Department currently has *(a)* no land which is offered for sale and *(b)* no plans to offer any land for sale in the next 12 months.

Celebrations

Tim Loughton: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what arrangements her Department has made to celebrate *(a)* St Patrick's Day, *(b)* St George's Day, *(c)* St Andrew's Day and *(d)* Her Majesty the Queen's Golden Jubilee; and how her Department celebrated St David's Day. [42304]

Yvette Cooper: I apologise for the delay in replying. This was due to an administrative oversight. I refer the hon. Member to the reply the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport gave to the hon. Member for Suffolk, South (Mr. Yeo) in response to his question of 30 January 2002, *Official Report,* 11 February 2002, columns 58–59W.

The Department flies the Union flag on certain days of the year known as 'named days'. 'Named days' include St David's Day (in Wales), St George's Day (in England), St Andrew's Day (in Scotland), but not St Patrick's Day.

The Union flag was flown on Coronation Day (2 June) as this was a 'named day'.

Supreme Court

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on her policy on a separate new Supreme Court; and if she will make a statement. [57695]

Yvette Cooper: The Government do not believe that a sufficient case has been made for the abolition of the Appellate Committee of the House of Lords and its replacement by a separate new Supreme Court.

Youth Court

Kate Hoey: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what assessment the Department has made of the effect on the attendance of witnesses of youth court adjournments. [60327]

Yvette Cooper: A joint monitoring scheme with the Crown Prosecution Service and other criminal justice agencies began on 1 April in all magistrates courts. This collects data for all adjourned trials including youth cases, and includes the attendance of witnesses. The first quarterly figures will be available in July 2002. The Crown court also operates a similar monitoring scheme. The data will inform a research project, planned to start later this year, to investigate the effect of trial adjournments on witness attendance. It will include youth cases.

Correspondence

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what targets her Department and the agencies it sponsors have for responding to correspondence *(a)* from hon. Members and *(b)* from members of the public; and what her Department's performance against such targets has been for each of the last 36 months in both categories. [31006]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Pursuant to my reply of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 842–44, I regret that the information provided for Court Service HQ for 1 April 2001 to 31 December 2001 was incorrect. The 1 April 2001 to 31 December 2001 figure of 94 per cent. represented performance against the previous 20 working day target and not the current 15 working day target. The table for the "Percentage of correspondence from MPs answered within target" should have read:

Percentage of correspondence from MPs answered within target

Per cent.

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*1 April 2001 to 31 December 2001*
LCD Headquarters	88	76	73	75
Land Registry[1]	100	91	93	79
Public Trust Office[2]	99	83	78	—
Public Guardianship Office	—	—	—	52
Public Record Office	100	100	96	100
Court Service HQ[3]	99	93	94	74

[1] Figures for the Land Registry are for the calendar years 1998, 1999 and 2000.

[2] The Public Guardianship Office was created on 1 April 2001 when the Public Trust Office ceased to exist.

[3] The Court Service target in 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 was 20 working days and was tightened to 15 days from 1 April 2001. The percentage figure for 1 April 2001 to 31 December 2001 is against the 15 day target.

PRIME MINISTER

Lakshmi Mittal

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer by the Foreign Secretary of 21 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 255, on meetings with embassy staff, what the overall benefit to the United Kingdom was of the Lakshmi Mittal Romanian steel contract. [60550]

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. Member to the answers I gave the hon. Members for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) and for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 610–12W.

Nepal

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the discussions he held with the Nepalese Prime Minister on his recent visit to London; and what commitments were made regarding military assistance and exports. [60628]

The Prime Minister: I refer the right hon. and learned Gentleman to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin) on 20 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 55W.

The United Kingdom will be hosting a conference in London in June with the aim of bringing together the international community to agree a common strategy of support for Nepal. This will address security concerns as well as the political and developmental challenges facing Nepal.

Royal Marriages

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with his counterparts in independent countries within the Commonwealth where the Queen is head of state about providing for *(a)* the monarch and *(b)* the heir to the throne to enter into a morganatic marriage. [57415]

The Prime Minister: None.

TREASURY

Aggregates Levy

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if a review date has been set when the effectiveness of the Sustainability Fund established by the Aggregates Levy will be assessed. [59402]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

The Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund will be distributed through the Countryside Agency, English Heritage, English Nature, WRAP, DTI's Construction Innovation and Research Management Programme, DTLR's Planning Research programme, Clean Up programme and Freight Facilities Grant. It will run for two years initially, with £29.3 million available each year. The fund aims to reduce damage to the environment from extracting aggregates by reducing the demand for primary aggregates, promoting more environmentally friendly extraction and transport and reducing the effect of local aggregate extraction.

Monitoring and review arrangements will be put in place to assess the impact of the fund and help inform future decisions on how the fund works, although there is no specific review date.

Press Office

Mr. Burns: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total cost of running the Department's press office was in *(a)* 1996–97 and *(b)* the latest year for which figures are available. [46811]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* It is not possible to separate out figures for the cost of running the press office. The number of press officers employed across this period remained broadly constant. Figures are available for the total running costs for the strategy and public inquiry unit and press office combined, which were as follows:

1996–97: £694,419

2000–01: £1,235,649.

Monetary Policy Committee

Mr. Jack: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which members of *(a)* the Monetary Policy Committee and *(b)* his office had communications by (i) personal meeting, (ii) telephone call, (iii) e-mail and (iv) other forms of communications during the period 1 March 2001 to 31 March 2002; and how many such contacts occurred. [60258]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor meets with the Governor of the Bank of England regularly to discuss a wide range of issues. He does not have regular contact and there are no official meetings with other members of the MPC.

Hospital Transport

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if his Department will bring forward proposals to exempt VAT paid by charities on fuel for *(a)* the transport of out-patients to hospital in voluntary sector-run patient transport vehicles and *(b)* for accident and emergency transport which would otherwise be undertaken by NHS ambulance trusts. [60621]

John Healey: Long-standing agreements with our European partners mean that the UK may not relieve road fuel from VAT. Accident and emergency transport is undertaken only by NHS ambulance trusts.

VAT Exemptions (Voluntary Sector)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if his Department will bring forward proposals to exempt from VAT, projects whereby voluntary organisations in the care sector extend their building in order to take on new partnership arrangements with a local authority. [60622]

John Healey: Construction of new buildings and of annexes to existing buildings by charities, including those in the care sector, is already subject to a zero rate of VAT provided the building or annex is to be used for a relevant charitable purpose. The Government have no plans to extend VAT reliefs in this area.

Construction Industry

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will extend the Inland Revenue definition of a permanent place of work in respect of those employed in the construction industry. [60549]

Dawn Primarolo: Employees working in the construction industry are subject to the same tax rules as other employees. We have no plans to change this.

NORTHERN IRELAND

IRA Ceasefire

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 23 May 2002, Ref. 48766, on the IRA ceasefire, what activities *(a)* within and *(b)* outside the UK by the Provisional IRA he assessed in order to reach his determination on the level of threat to the ceasefire; and what activities he defines as constituting a breach of the ceasefire. [60259]

Jane Kennedy: The Secretary of State keeps the status of all paramilitary ceasefires under constant review. Any judgment on the status of an organisation's ceasefire is made in the round in the light of all the available information and taking account of the views of security advisers.

Job Advertisements

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to his answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 579W, on job advertisements, what the outcome was of the advertisements placed in each case; and how many more have joined his Department's payroll as a result. [50554]

Jane Kennedy: As a result of the advertisements, detailed in the answer of 4 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 579W, all the vacancies have been filled/are in the process of being filled by successful candidates. A total of 15 new starts have so far joined the Department's payroll.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the statutory instruments issued by his Department in the last 12 months, indicating *(a)* the purpose of each and *(b)* the cost of each to (i) public funds, (ii) businesses and (iii) individuals. [36230]

Jane Kennedy: The information requested is as follows:

Statutory instrument—The Financial Investigations (Northern Ireland) 2001

Purpose

This amends Part IV of the Proceeds of Crime (Northern Ireland) Order 1996 (NI9) ("the 1996 Order").

The Order provides additional investigation powers to cover investigations into the extent or whereabouts or property held or transferred within the previous six years by or to a person who has benefited from conduct of a criminal nature. The Order also allows senior customs officers to apply for a financial investigator to be appointed and other powers to assist in the recovery of the proceeds of crime. The Order also extends a power to require information regarding money laundering and a power to require a solicitor to provide information as to whether a specified person was a client of his in respect of certain matters and about the nature of any transaction relating to them. The Order also extends the time limit for bringing summary proceedings for offences.

Costs

There will be a neutral impact on any public expenditure incurred on implementing the proposals, as they will be met within existing resources. It is anticipated that these proposals will result in additional revenue from the confiscation of the proceeds of crime. There will be a small impact on businesses, particularly solicitors. It is anticipated that no more than eight man hours would be required to meet an individual request from a financial investigator at £15 to £20 per hour, this suggests a maximum of £160 per request. As to the number of requests that are likely to be made on solicitors for information in a similar regime which already exists regarding banks 20 such requests have been made since 1998. There will be no financial impact on individuals.

Statutory Instrument—The Police (Northern Ireland) Order 2001

Purpose

The Order amends two provisions of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000. Section 41, which deals with trainees, is amended so that, before the Northern Ireland Policing Board is established, references to the Board are to be construed as references to the Police Authority for Northern Ireland.

Section 76 is amended so that draft orders under section 47(3) (renewal of temporary provisions on recruitment) and 54 (emblems and flags) are subject to the affirmative resolution procedure rather than the procedure provided for in section 6 of the Statutory Instruments Act 1946.

The Order also amends the Firearms (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 to include police trainees and police reserve trainees in the provision which exempts police officers from the need for a firearm certificate.

Costs

No costs to either public funds, businesses or individuals.

Statutory Instrument—The Criminal Injuries Compensation (Northern Ireland) Order 2001

Purpose

This Order repeals the Criminal Injuries (Compensation) (Northern Ireland) Order 1988. It replaces the arrangements under that Order for paying compensation for criminal injuries. The key features of the new arrangements are:

(a) the introduction of a new statutory scheme;

(b) the establishment of a tariff of injuries to calculate the standard amount of compensation;

(c) in certain cases payment for loss of earnings and special expenses;

(d) the introduction of a new bereavement support payment;

(e) provision for review of decisions;

(f) the establishment of an independent appeals panel to hear appeals against decisions of the Secretary of State;

(g) the introduction of funded support and assistance from a designated body to replace paid legal assistance.

Costs

It is anticipated that the proposed scheme will be capable of delivering fair compensation without incurring any additional costs to the Exchequer. It is likely that savings will accrue in the longer term, but, for the initial five years, additional funds for the compensation budget will be necessary while claims are settled under both the new and existing schemes. There are no costs to businesses and individuals.

Young People

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on what subjects and on which dates his Department has consulted organisations representing young people; and if he will list such organisations. [52496]

Jane Kennedy: The information requested is set out in the following table.

Organisation	*Subject consulted on*	*Date consulted*
Childline	Proposed Draft Criminal Injuries Compensation (NI) Order	June 2001
Children's Law Centre	Proposed Draft Criminal Injuries Compensation (NI) Order	June 2001
Putting Children First	Proposed Draft Criminal Injuries Compensation (NI) Order	June 2001
Youth Council for NI	Proposed Draft Criminal Injuries Compensation (NI) Order	June 2001
NIACRO	Community Safety	2000
Youth Council	Community Safety	2000
DENI	Community Safety	2000
Extern	Community Safety	2000
Belfast Education and Library Board	Community Safety	2000

Press Subscriptions

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list the newspapers subscribed to *(a)* Monday to Saturday and *(b)* on Sunday by his Department, stating for each subscription (i) the number of copies taken, and (ii) the annual cost. [52829]

Jane Kennedy: The information requested is as follows:

Newspapers	*Number of copies per week*
Monday to Saturday	
Belfast Telegraph	373
Daily Express	62
Daily Mail	101
Daily Mirror	68
Daily Record	5
Daily Star	45
Daily Telegraph	106
Evening Standard	11
Financial Times	53
Guardian	101
Independent	96
Irish Independent	71
Irish News	213
Irish Star	5
Irish Times	164
Morning Star	1
News Letter	212
The Sun	70
The Times	139
Weekly newspapers	
Andersonstown News	2
An Phoblacht	1
Antrim Guardian	4
Antrim Times	1
Armaghdown Observer	1
Ballymena Guardian	2
Ballymena Times/Observer	1
Ballymoney and Moyle Times	2
Banbridge Chronicle	3
Carrick Advertiser	2
Coleraine Chronicle	3
Coleraine Times	1
County Down Spectator	4
Derry Sentinel	1
Derry Journal	9
Derry People (Donegal News)	1
Down Democrat	1
Down Recorder	3
Dromore Leader	2
Dungannon Observer	1
Fermanagh Herald	2

Newspapers	*Number of copies per week*
Impartial Reporter	2
Larne Times	3
Lurgan Mail	2
Lurgan Portadown Examiner	1
Mid Ulster Mail	2
Mid-Ulster Observer	3
Mourne Observer	2
Newry Democrat	2
Newry Reporter	3
Newtownabbey Times	3
Newtownards Chronicle	4
Newtownards Spectator	2
North Belfast News	2
Northern Constitution	2
Outlook	1
Portadown Times	3
Roe Valley Sentinel	2
Strabane Weekly News	2
Strabane Chronicle	2
Tyrone Constitution	2
Tyrone Courier	2
Tyrone Times	1
Ulster Star	4
Ulster Gazette	2
Ulster Herald	2
Sunday newspapers	
Independent on Sunday	5
Ireland on Sunday	2
Mail on Sunday	4
News of the World	4
Observer	6
Sunday Business Post	3
Sunday Express	5
Sunday Independent	4
Sunday Life	9
Sunday Mirror	5
Sunday People	5
Sunday Telegraph	5
Sunday Times	6
Sunday Tribune	5
Sunday World	9

The annual cost is £63,528.55.

Victims' Rights

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures are in place to protect the rights of victims of terrorism in Northern Ireland; which of the measures for victims' rights contained within the Belfast Agreement have been implemented; and what plans he has to protect victims' rights. [53690]

Mr. Browne: The Belfast agreement 1998 makes specific reference to the importance of acknowledging and addressing the suffering of victims of violence as a necessary element of reconciliation, and recognises the need to provide services that are supportive and sensitive to their individual needs.

In November 1997 the Government had appointed Sir Kenneth Bloomfield as head of a Victims' Commission

"to examine the feasibility of providing greater recognition for those who have become victims in the last 30 years as a consequence of events in Northern Ireland"

and asked him to consult various organisations concerned with the welfare of the bereaved and disabled as well as with community groups, churches and political parties and to make recommendations.

Following publication of his report "We Will Remember Them" in April 1998, the Government appointed Adam Ingram as Minister for Victims and the Victims Liaison Unit was established to take forward the implementation of the report. Since then Government have committed more than £18.25 million to support victims of the Troubles, funding a number of initiatives including:

£700k for a family trauma centre in Belfast which provides therapeutic service addressing the psychological needs of families and young people.

£300k for an educational bursary pilot scheme—for individuals whose education was directly affect by the Troubles. 350 people received awards.

£4 million to the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund with a commitment of a further £1 million for 2003–04. The fund has put in place a number of schemes including:

The small grants scheme

The chronic pain management scheme

The respite break scheme

The wheelchair assessment scheme

The amputee assessment scheme

The education and training scheme

£225k initially for a victim support grants scheme to assist community groups and voluntary organisations to take forward recommendations in the Bloomfield report; and more recently a further £750,000 to extend this small grants scheme.

£6.1 million core funding for groups who support victims of the troubles.

£500k for initiatives in Great Britain including £250k for the legacy project. This project aims to identify and meet the needs of victims of the troubles living in Great Britain.

£1.5 million over the next three years for the development of the Northern Ireland Centre for Trauma and Transformation.

£1.5 million over the next two years to the Devolved Administration's Strategy Implementation Fund to help NI Departments fulfil their commitment to addressing victims' needs.

It is now four years since the Bloomfield report was published and I replaced Adam Ingram as Victims Minister last June. I am currently reviewing the Government's strategic approach to the needs of victims in the context of the ongoing political process.

Also, as part of the Belfast Agreement and the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission was given the responsibility of advising the Secretary of State on the scope for defining, in Westminster legislation, rights supplementary to those in the ECHR which, taken together with the ECHR, could constitute a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. The agreement also says that the Bill should reflect the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland.

The Commission consultation document "Making a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland" indicated that the rights of victims, both those arising from the conflict and more generally, should be included in a Bill of Rights. The Government have drawn no policy conclusions from the consultation document but will give careful consideration to the formal recommendations made by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission which we expect to receive in 2003.

Correspondence

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many letters were received by each Minister in his Department in each month since June 1997. [59311]

Jane Kennedy: The information requested by the hon. Member is listed in the following table. It is not possible to attribute letters separately to the Minister of State and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland from members of the public. The combined totals have been provided on a separate table.

Letters received by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland since June 1997

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
January	—	1,184	627	571	346	415
February	—	1,053	724	1,073	268	423
March	—	899	939	731	255	284
April	—	841	657	757	200	251
May	—	959	446	636	196	235
June	—	1,082	892	458	238	—
July	1,143	1,292	1,092	382	258	—
August	641	1,118	740	265	388	—
September	1,091	1,056	902	278	191	—
October	952	712	874	296	561	—
November	736	543	969	321	370	—
December	643	487	375	184	198	—

Letters received by the Minister(s)[1] of State for Northern Ireland since June 1997

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
January	—	106 + 12	67 + 15	56	45	60
February	—	107 + 29	53 + 22	52	38	62
March	—	110 + 28	102 + 21	68	54	58
April	—	89 + 19	70 + 19	38	39	55
May	—	102 + 22	53 + 15	42	41	39
June	—	84 + 14	88 + 21	83	38	—
July	73 + 13	92 + 24	71 + 22	61	58	—
August	49 + 21	75 + 10	56	52	43	—
September	48 + 14	81 + 27	73	40	36	—
October	61 + 21	72 + 42	94	51	57	—
November	48 + 21	61 + 33	97	50	81	—
December	58 + 14	57 + 20	85	30	43	—

[1] From July 1997 until July 1999 there were two Ministers of State at the Northern Ireland Office.

Letters received by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland since August 1999

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
January	—	—	—	8	4	38
February	—	—	—	14	7	28
March	—	—	—	19	10	35
April	—	—	—	11	3	28
May	—	—	—	7	3	23
June	—	—	—	9	12	—
July	—	—	—	4	25	—
August	—	—	21	8	30	—
September	—	—	18	3	26	—
October	—	—	13	5	24	—
November	—	—	9	7	21	—
December	—	—	3	3	18	—

Letters received by the Minister(s) of State and Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland from members of the public

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
January	—	18	14	13	14	27
February	—	75	16	7	9	14
March	—	124	19	7	6	7
April	—	20	13	21	9	10
May	—	27	5	16	3	—
June	—	10	9	4	10	—
July	20	19	7	22	7	—
August	7	11	9	2	19	—
September	10	5	7	11	7	—
October	13	17	14	6	27	—
November	14	11	11	12	15	—
December	10	6	4	4	8	—

Police Ombudsman

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what targets have been drawn up by the police ombudsman for the number of days taken to complete each stage of the complaints process; and what his assessment is of progress made towards meeting these goals. [43891]

Jane Kennedy: The police ombudsman advises that the targets for dealing with complaints are contained in the police ombudsman's corporate statement and annual business plan 2001–02. The targets are reproduced in the table and include the current levels of achievement. In a number of categories the process for measuring the level of achievement against target is currently at the development stage and therefore these figures are not yet available.

Target	*Level of achievement*
95 per cent. of telephone calls to the FreePhone number answered within 20 seconds	100 per cent. answered within 20 seconds
90 per cent. of complaints to be acknowledged by letter within three working days	77 per cent. acknowledged within three working days
90 per cent. of complainants calling at the Office to be seen within 10 minutes of arrival	100 per cent. seen within 10 minutes
90 per cent. of complaints to be allocated action within three working days	74 per cent. allocated action within three working days
90 per cent. of complaints for fast tracking to be allocated action within one working day	95 per cent. allocated action within one working day

Target	*Level of achievement*
90 per cent. of complaints to be referred for Informal Resolution within three working days of consent being given	78 per cent. referred within three working days of consent being given
90 per cent. of complainants to be kept informed of progress of Informal Resolution within seven weeks	Target deemed inappropriate—progress of Informal Resolution is within control of the police
90 per cent. of complainants to be contacted within three working days of complaint being allocated	Measurement methodologies currently in development; no information available
90 per cent. of statements from complainants to be taken within 21 days of complaint being allocated	Measurement methodologies currently in development; no information available
95 per cent. of complainants to be kept informed of progress at least every four weeks	Measurement methodologies currently in development; no information available
95 per cent. of police officers to be kept informed of progress at key stages of the investigation	Measurement methodologies currently in development; no information available
95 per cent. of emergency incident calls from the police to be responded to 24 hours a day	Measurement methodologies currently in development; no information available
70 per cent. of arrivals at emergency incident locations to within three hours at any time (1.5 hours in Greater Belfast)	Measurement methodologies currently in development; no information available
70 per cent. of investigations completed by the office not to exceed 110 working days	Measurement methodologies currently in development; no information available
95 per cent. of forensic exhibits for evidence to be submitted to forensic lab within two working days	Measurement methodologies currently in development; no information available

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will break down the number of complaints received by the police ombudsman by *(a)* perceived community origin, *(b)* gender and *(c)* other recorded categories of complainant. [43890]

Jane Kennedy: The police ombudsman advises that a monitoring form is issued to all complainants asking a number of questions. The answer provided is based on a return of monitoring forms from 2,731 complainants during 2001–02.

(a) Community background of complainants

		Percentage of	
Community background	*Number*	*Total*	*Those with known community background*
Catholic	208	8	40
Church of Ireland	117	4	22
Presbyterian	118	4	22
Methodist	26	1	5
Other religion	40	1	8
No religion	15	1	3
Unknown	2,207	81	—
Total	2,731	100	100

(b) Gender of complainants

Gender	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Percentage of those with known gender*
Male	1,981	73	74
Female	694	25	26
Unknown	56	2	—
Total	2,731	100	100

(c) Age of complainants

Age group	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Percentage of those with known ages*
16–20	253	9	20
21–30	423	15	33
31–40	328	12	25
41–50	186	7	14
51–60	74	3	6
60+	29	1	2
Unknown	1,438	53	—
Total	2,731	100	100

Marital status of complainants 2001–02

Marital status	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Percentage of those with known marital status*
Married	184	7	35
Single	194	7	37
Separated	63	2	12
Widowed	12	0	2
Divorced	48	2	9
Co-habiting	26	1	5
Unknown	2,204	81	—
Total	2,731	100	100

Occupational status of complainants 2001–02

Occupational status	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Percentage of those with known occupational status*
Working full-time	138	5	26
Working part-time	37	1	7
Unemployed	122	5	23
Student	14	1	3
Self-employed	60	2	11
Retired	26	1	5
Other	7	0	1

Occupational status of complainants 2001–02

Occupational status	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Percentage of those with known occupational status*
Permanently sick	85	3	16
Looking after family	40	1	8
Unknown	2,202	81	—
Total	2,731	100	100

Ethnic origin of complainants 2001–02

Ethnic origin	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Percentage of those with known ethnic origin*
White	516	19	99
Indian	1	0	0
Pakistani	2	0	0
Mixed	1	0	0
Other	5	0	1
Unknown	2,206	81	—
Total	2,731	100	100

Disability of complainants 2001–02

Disability	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Percentage of those known*
Yes	159	6	19
No	678	25	81
Unknown	1,894	69	—
Total	2,731	100	100

HEALTH

Patient Records

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of *(a)* primary care and *(b)* hospital trusts have implemented electronic patient record systems. [47000]

Ms Blears: Currently 98 per cent. of general practitioners' practices are computerised and linked to a national electronic network to support email communications and web browsing. Most of them operate clinical systems as part of their practice computerisation and an electronic patient record (EPR) will be part of the system. The level of detail and functionality varies significantly from practice to practice. In the majority of cases at present it will cover the electronic storage of basic patient and administrative details, medication and recent consultations with the GP.

At present six trusts have complete hospital wide EPR systems that meet the functionality described under level 3. However many more have some applications in place, for example results reporting and order communications. In addition some trusts have chosen to implement elements of EPR beyond level 3 with functionality around decision support and knowledge management or picture archiving and communications systems to support improved patient care.

That is why we are taking action by introducing a new national programme and implementation plan for information technology (IT) in the National Health Service. This will significantly step up the pace of getting modern IT in place to support frontline patient care and also ensure that IT both drives change and gets the best from the extra resources the NHS is now getting.

The key points from the programme are:

a new national IT programme director who will be responsible for the implementation of this programme;

stringent national standards for data and IT in the NHS;

an improved partnership with the IT industry and healthcare IT suppliers to increase the IT capacity for the NHS;

a new procurement strategy to accelerate the impact of IT across the NHS

better central management which will include a ministerial taskforce chaired by my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, The Lord Hunt of Kingsheath, to ensure the advice and involvement of key healthcare professional and representative groups.

The intention has always been to have a first generation of electronic records in use across the NHS from 2005. This will be the starting point from which the NHS can begin to apply the electronic record as a clinical tool in diagnosis, treatment, interventions and healthcare. By 2008, as indicated in "Delivering the NHS Plan", we will expect to see all the advanced applications and functionality of electronic patient records in all primary care trusts and trusts.

Mount Vernon Hospital

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what discussions he has had with the Eastern Region Health Authority and the London NHS Region about the future of services at Mount Vernon Hospital; [48900]

(2) how many meetings he has had with NHS agencies about services provided at the Mount Vernon Hospital. [48904]

Mr. Hutton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health has not formally met with National Health Service agencies or regional offices. I have been made aware of the issues at my regular meetings with the director for London's directorate of health and social care. Also my hon. Friend the Minister for Public Health has had regular meetings with the director for the midlands and east of England on this issue.

Correspondence

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the reasons for the delay in replying to the letter from the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield to him dated 1 October 2001. [51579]

Ms Blears: I regret the delay was due to an administrative oversight.

Primary Care Premises

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of primary care premises are over 30 years old. [53366]

Mr. Lammy: The data held centrally are those from surveys of health centres and general practitioner (GP) premises carried out by district valuers in 1999. These data indicate that some 52 per cent. of premises were originally constructed over 30 years ago.

This proportion will be reduce as new premises are constructed under the NHS Plan.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the Standing Committee on Medicinal Products for Human Use is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55369]

Mr. Lammy: The standing committee on medicinal products for human use is a regulatory committee which assists the European Commission (EC) in exercising its powers of implementation and facilitates the adoption of draft measures in the field of medicinal products for human use. It also adopts decisions on centralised marketing authorisation applications and other regulatory actions referred to it by the European medicines evaluation agency (EMEA). It operates mainly by written procedures as set out in legislation. It meets only exceptionally, either on the chairman's initiative or at the reasoned request of the representative of a member state. The committee last met on 23 March 2000. The UK is represented by the chief executive of the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) or his deputy and, as MCA is a trading fund of the Department, no cost to public funds is generally incurred in supporting the committee's work.

Together with member states, the EC is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

> "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation under this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report of the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the Pharmaceutical Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55371]

Mr. Lammy: The pharmaceutical committee fulfils a useful role in that it provides a forum for European Union member states to exchange views and information. Its task is to assist the European Commission (EC) and to examine:

> any question relating to the application of directives on proprietary medicinal products which are brought up by its chairman—either on his initiative or at the request of the representative of a member state;
>
> any other question in the field of proprietary medicinal products brought up by its chairman—either on his initiative or at the request of the representative of a member state.

The EC consults the committee when preparing proposals for, or amendments to, directives in the field of proprietary medicinal products. During 2001 the committee met on 5 April, 5 July and 16 November, and in 2002 it met on 14 May. The pharmaceutical committee network on bioterrorism was an ad hoc group which met twice, on 23 January 2002 and 20 February 2002. No further meetings of the network are planned.

The UK is represented jointly by two senior public health officials from the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) and the Department. The EC reimburses travel and subsistence costs for one delegate from each member state. The annual cost of the committee's work to public funds varies according to the number of meetings held and make-up of the UK representation. The MCA provides the main Government support for the work of the committee and usually represents the UK. As the MCA is a trading fund of the Department, this incurs no cost to public funds. If a Department official attends with the MCA delegation, his/her expenses will be borne out of public funds. This has happened twice in the last 12 months and the amount of travel and subsistence involved was in the region of £860.00.

Information about associated costs to public funds attributable to the Department, other than travel and subsistence, is not readily available and would incur disproportionate cost to identify.

The committee considers a wide range of issues relating to medicines regulatory matters and a summary of its discussions is put on the EC's website after each meeting. Further details and documents are available from the EC on request.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the Community action programme on the prevention of drug dependence in the framework of the action plans for public health is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [57479]

Ms Blears: The EU Committee for the implementation of the Community action programme on the prevention of drug dependence was mandated under Article 5 of Decision 102/97/EC of the European Parliament and the Council (amended under Article 4 of Decision 521/2001/EC). The committee assisted the Commission in taking forward the programme by providing opinions on proposed measures by the Commission. It is due to terminate with the introduction of the new EU action programme on public health.

The committee met once in the last year, in January 2002. The United Kingdom is normally represented by an official from the Department.

Costs of the committee to public funds are minimal. Meetings last one day and the Commission pays the travel costs of nominated representatives. UK Departments are required to pay subsistence and UK travel costs.

The financial framework for implementation of the Community action programme on the prevention of drug dependence, from 1 January 2002 to 31 December 2002, is euro 5.38 million.

The Commission has now decided which projects it will fund. This list will be published on the Department's website.

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com [2001] 783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website http://europa.eu.int/comm/health/index en.html.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the Community action programme on health monitoring in the framework of the action plan for public health is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the United Kingdom representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [57476]

Ms Blears: The EU Committee for the implementation of the Community action programme on health monitoring was mandated under Article 5 of Decision 1400/97/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council. The committee assisted the Commission in taking forward the programme by providing opinions on proposed measures by the Commission. It is due to terminate with the introduction of the new EU action programme on public health. The EU health monitoring programme is focused on the establishment of a consistent, permanent and coherent community health monitoring system.

The committee met on two occasions in the last 12 months. One UK official from the Department attended the October 2001 and February 2002 meetings.

Domestic travel and subsistence claims paid from public funds were £348. The Commission reimbursed international travel costs.

Full details of the health monitoring work programme—including details of all projects funded between 1998 and 2001—are presented on Europa (the EU on-line website: http://europa.eu.int/index—en.htm).

Together with member states, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

> "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

NHS Dentistry

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provisions he is making for the future expansion of NHS dentistry. [55574]

Mr. Lammy: Over the last 18 months we have spent £100 million on modernising National Health Service dentistry. £10 million of this was for the Dental Care Development Fund and the Dentistry Action Plan Fund to support local plans to improve access. This money enables health authorities to assist dentists seeking to set up new practices and to expand and modernise existing ones.

During 2001 the Chief Dental Officer led a working group to look at "Options for Change" to modernise NHS dentistry building on the Government's strategy document "Modernising NHS dentistry: Implementing the NHS Plan", published in September 2000.

This group has completed its deliberations and the Government announced on 25 April that we intend to move forward plans to reform NHS dentistry developed by the "Options for Change" group.

Haemophilia

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will instigate an investigation into the change of treatment for haemophilia patients in the 1970s from a cryoprecipitate treatment originating from a single donor to an unheated treatment derived from large donor pools; [56024]

(2) what plans he has had to hold a public inquiry into how haemophiliac patients in the 1980s contracted hepatitis C and the HIV virus. [56026]

Ms Blears: There are no plans to hold a public inquiry or to investigate haemophilia treatment practices in the 1970s.

We understand that treatment with cryoprecipitate carried a number of disadvantages compared to pooled clotting factors. It required the patient to be treated in hospital, it could not be given to children, it was unsterilised and carried the risk of a number of side effects.

Pooled plasma products did not carry these disadvantages and were therefore keenly received by patients and clinicians. It was not until the mid to late

1980s that the risks from hepatitis C were fully understood by which time viral inactivation of pooled plasma products had been introduced.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 14 May 2002 to the hon. Member for Falkirk East (Mr. Connarty), *Official Report*, column 618W, on haemophilia, if he will make a statement on the length of time the Government are taking to make a decision on whether to make recombinant clotting factors available to all haemophiliacs. [58848]

Ms Blears: We have nothing further to add to our earlier response. We are still considering the provision of recombinant clotting factors for all haemophilia patients in England and will make a decision later this year.

Operating Instruments

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) upon whose recommendation, and for what reasons, disposable instruments were introduced for use in hospital operating theatres in England; what tests were carried out on the new disposable instruments; from which manufacturers the disposable instruments were sourced; what procedures were established to monitor the introduction and use of the instruments; and if he will make a statement; [56502]

(2) for what reasons deaths and adverse incidents resulting from the use of disposable operating instruments do not have to be reported; how many deaths have been reported and over what period; if complications resulting from use of disposable instruments have been related to specific manufacturers; and if he will make a statement; [56504]

(3) on what date a surgeon first complained to the authorities about the quality of the newly introduced disposable operating instruments; and how many complaints have been made since then; [56503]

(4) what steps his Department has taken to identify and contact parents and relatives of patients who have suffered adverse incidents in hospital operating theatres as a result of the use of disposable instruments who were not informed of their use at the time of the operations; and if he will make a statement. [56505]

Mr. Lammy: The move to single use instruments for tonsil and adenoid surgery was part of the Department's strategy to reduce the risk of transmitting variant Creutzfeldt Jakob Disease (vCJD) through surgical instruments. This was in accordance with advice received from the Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC).

When the tenders for the contract were returned, a visual inspection of the instruments offered by all suppliers was undertaken. Once specific suppliers had been short-listed, their products were sent out to randomly selected ear, nose and throat surgeons to be used during operations. After each operation, the surgeons were asked to complete an evaluation form. The results of this evaluation were used during the selection of the successful suppliers.

There are five companies on the National Health Service Purchasing and Supply Agency's framework agreement for single use instruments. They are:

Meditech Systems Ltd.
B+H Surgical Instrument Makers
Rocialle Medical Ltd.
Trust Sterile Services
Axis Medical Ltd.

We believe that there are other manufacturers of single use instruments who supplied products direct to NHS trusts, outside the Agency's framework agreement.

In October 2001, the Department sent a questionnaire to all members of the British Association of Otorhinolaryngologists to ask their opinion of the single use instruments. As a result of the comments made, minor alterations were made to the product specification of some products, such as mouth gags.

The medical devices regulations require device manufacturers to demonstrate that their devices meet essential safety requirements prior to placing them on the market. The safety and performance of devices in service is monitored by a mandatory vigilance system. Manufacturers are obliged to inform the competent authority (in the UK this is the Medical Devices Agency (MDA)) when an incident has occurred, involving their device, which may have caused a death or serious injury or which has the potential to cause death or serious injury.

In addition, the MDA also operates a voluntary user reporting system for users to report any adverse incident involving a medical device. The MDA first received an adverse incident report from a user in April 2001. Since then, the MDA has received reports of incidents concerning all the manufacturers listed above. The MDA has identified from its adverse incident database a total of 125 reports in relation to non-powered instruments, (108 prior to December 2001). 24 reports have also been received relating to powered instruments (diathermy). Each incident has been investigated in conjunction with the device manufacturers and appropriate action taken. One death has been formally reported to the MDA. We are aware of a second, which is presently under investigation.

There are possible risks in all surgical procedures. Therefore, before each operation, the clinician should explain the risks involved and any alternative treatment, to allow the patient or their family to give informed consent to the surgery. Tonsil and adenoid surgery is a relatively low risk operation, but where adverse incidents occur they are treated on a case by case basis by the NHS trust where the operation took place. Patients who have had their tonsils removed with single use instruments should not be concerned of any long-term effects following the surgery.

Food Allergies

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were recorded as suffering from food allergies in each of the last five years. [56909]

Ms Blears: Data are not available for the prevalence of food allergy by individual year. The number of individuals suffering allergic reactions to food in the developed countries of the western world appears to be on the increase, which is in line with increases seen in other atopic diseases such as hay fever and asthma. In the UK general population, the calculated prevalence of adverse reactions to food (including food allergy) is less than 2 per cent.

Vaccines

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation regarding the pneumococcal vaccine. [56917]

Ms Blears: The joint committee on vaccination and immunisation (JCVI) has identified issues relating to the development of policies for the future use of pneumococcal vaccines, which they are addressing. Studies on the interaction between pneumococcal vaccine and the current childhood immunisation programme are under way. The JCVI will review these when they are complete.

Brushing for Life Campaign

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer of 17 April, *Official Report*, column 1019W, what the cost per tube was of toothpaste distributed; what areas of the country were targeted for the project; and what evaluation of the scheme has taken place. [57091]

Mr. Lammy: The total cost of each pack provided under the scheme is less than £1. The exact price is commercially sensitive information.

£1 million has been set aside for the project. It initially covered the 21 health authorities with the highest levels of dental decay—11 in the North, 5 in Yorkshire and 5 in London—and also all areas not in receipt of fluoridated water where there are Sure Start schemes. However, we have since added 5 more in the North, 3 in Yorkshire and 2 in Devon, bringing the total health authorities benefiting from this scheme to 31.

The Department has commissioned The Guys, Kings and St. Thomas Dental School to evaluate the scheme, which is due to run for 3 years.

Bed Blocking

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to address bed blocking in the Hampshire Health Authority; how many cases there have been in 2002; how many were from rural areas of Hampshire; and if he will make a statement. [57346]

Jacqui Smith: Health and local authorities are working together to take action to improve the situation. In October 2001, additional funding of £300 million was announced to tackle this problem. In 2002–02, Hampshire received an additional £2.436 million from this money. The allocation for 2002–03 is £5.160 million.

All information, collected centrally, on delayed discharge in December 2001, quarter 3 of 2002–02, has been placed in the Library. This is the most recent period for which figures are currently available.

National School Fruit Scheme

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of apples and pears supplied to the pilots for the National School Fruit Scheme in *(a)* autumn 2000 and *(b)* autumn 2001 were of UK origin; and if he will list the other countries of origin of the apples and pears. [57167]

Jacqui Smith: In Autumn 2000 all apples and pears supplied to the original national school fruit scheme pilots were from UK. In Autumn 2001 almost all apples and most pears supplied to a much larger number of pilot sites were from UK. Detailed information on other countries or origin for this period is not held centrally.

Clinician Connect

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the NHS health authorities whose entire computer network *(a)* supports and *(b)* does not support Clinician Connect. [58644]

Mr. Lammy: Clinician Connect is the programme managed by the National Health Service information authority for the NHS in England to provide all NHS Trust staff in England with email and browser facilities using the NHS national network, NHSnet.

All health authorities are connected to the NHSnet, and are therefore able to share information with those clinicians in Trusts who have access to facilities on the network. An exercise is currently under way to monitor progress with Clinician Connect; as at 17 May 2002, 61 Trusts had achieved 100 per cent. coverage for their staff.

Administration of the NHS in Wales is the responsibility of the National Assembly for Wales.

General Practitioners

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the average number of patients served by each general practitioner in *(a)* the Weston Area Health Trust, *(b)* the Avon Health Authority and *(c)* England. [58821]

Ms Blears: Information on general practitioners is collected and held by primary care trust (or their predecessor primary care groups and health authorities) rather than by National Health Service trust. In 2001 average list sizes were: (a) North Somerset Primary Care Group—1,700; (b) Avon Health Authority—1,705; (c) England—1,841.

Departmental Policies (Wycombe)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the activities pursued by his Department that have had a particular impact on the Wycombe constituency since 7 June 2001. [58624]

Ms Blears: This information can only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The Departmental Report for the Department sets out the aims and objectives for the Department, and describes the main activities which supports them. It covers different business areas for which the Department is responsible: public health, the National Health Service, social care and departmental management. It sets out resources committed to each, the results that are being achieved and the priorities for the future. The 2001 report can be found on the following website: hhtp://www.doh.gov.uk/dohreport/report 2001.

The 2002 Departmental Report will be published shortly.

Treatment Costs

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost has been of treating a patient *(a)* in a GP surgery and *(b)* through NHS Direct in the last 12 months. [58668]

Mr. Lammy: NHS Direct does not treat patients. The service provides advice to callers on a range of issues including health scares, appropriate access to healthcare, health information and self care.

The average cost of a call to NHS Direct in 2001–02 was about £17.92 although this is expected to fall significantly in the future as call volumes rise. The National Audit Office have found that half of callers are directed to forms of care they would not have chosen and that this tends to be care of a lower level and cost of intervention. More than half of NHS Direct costs are saved in this way.

General practitioners provide a range of services for the treatment of patients. The latest survey estimated data available (2000–01) suggest that a general practitioner consultation costs around £14.

Teenage Pregnancy

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on the media campaign aimed at reducing teenage pregnancy in each year since 2000–01. [58766]

Jacqui Smith: The teenage pregnancy national media campaign consists of press and radio adverts, underpinned by public relations and partnership work. Expenditure was £2.2 million in 2000–01 and £2.5 million in 2001–02. We expect investment this year to be at least £2.5 million.

Operating Theatres

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the correlation between operating theatre space and staffing levels in *(a)* Somerset and *(b)* Somerset and Dorset strategic health authority. [59353]

Ms Blears: The Department does not collect this information.

Chiropody/Podiatry Services

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many new chiropody/podiatry episodes of care were begun in each of the last five years in *(a)* the south-east region *(b)* East Sussex, Brighton and Hove and *(c)* Eastbourne; [59215]

(2) how many patients were discharged from NHS chiropody/podiatry lists in Eastbourne in each of the last five years. [59214]

Ms Blears: Information about the number of patients discharged from national health service chiropody/podiatry lists in Eastbourne is not available centrally.

Information about the number of new chiropody/podiatry episodes of care for the last five years in the south-east region and for those NHS trusts which provide a chiropody service within the East Sussex, Brighton and Hove health authority, which covers Eastbourne, is shown in the table.

	1996–97	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
South-east region	131,393	119,009	119,422	111,169	98,725
NHS trusts					
Eastbourne and County Healthcare	3,441	3,350	3,559	2,576	2,756
Eastbourne Hospitals	1,207	1,067	1,255	1,455	1,290
Hastings and Rother	2,426	2,328	2,462	1,608	2,006
South Downs Health	6,726	6,758	5,237	2,270	2,620

Source:
Form KT23, Department of Health, Statistics Division (SD3G)

Multiple Sclerosis Care

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the centres at which the drugs Avonex, Betaferon, Copaxone and Rebif will be provided to multiple sclerosis (MS) patients; and how many MS patients are waiting to be assessed for treatment with these drugs. [59212]

Mr. Lammy: It has been estimated that up to 9,000 multiple sclerosis (MS) patients in England and Wales may be eligible to receive treatment under the risk-sharing scheme, which started on 6 May 2002. Some centres have now started prescribing under the scheme, though the guidance in HSC 2002–04 recognises that appropriate national health service infrastructure may not yet be in place in some localities. It may take 18 months or longer before all potentially eligible patients are assessed under the scheme. The list of locally agreed prescribing centres is not yet finalised. The scheme co-ordinator, whose appointment will shortly be announced, will collect information on progress and activity under the scheme, but as yet such details are not available centrally.

Pesticide Poisoning

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many cases have been recorded by the National Poisons Information Service since 1996 of lindane poisoning in children up to 14 years of age; what the level of exposure was in each case; and whether these cases were *(a)* fatal lindane poisonings, *(b)* non-fatal, hospitalised lindane poisonings and *(c)* non-hospitalised lindane poisonings; [59635]

(2) if he will produce an annual report of confirmed and suspected pesticide poisonings recorded by regional centres of the National Poisons Information Service, aggregated with those recorded by the *(a)* Health and Safety Executive's Pesticide Incident Appraisal Panel and *(b)* Pesticides Safety Directorate; [59636]

(3) how many inquiries have been received by the National Poisons Information Service since 1996 regarding lindane. [59637]

Ms Blears: Since 1996 the national poisons information service (NPIS) has received 376 inquiries from national health service health care professionals about lindane poisoning, of which 178 reported lindane poisoning in children up to 14 years of age. In nearly all cases the individuals were asymptomatic or suffered only mild transient symptoms.

The NPIS centres only record data related to the inquiries they receive and the extent and format of the data held varies from centre to centre. They do not necessarily receive inquiries in every case and will only rarely be provided with information about the level of exposure. NPIS systems are not designed to follow up poisoning incidents and centres can never be certain whether the condition reported at the time of the inquiry was related to the agent implicated nor whether the clinical condition improved or deteriorated thereafter.

The annual reports of the Health and Safety Executive's Pesticide Incident Appraisal Panel (PIAP) collate reports made to enforcing authorities (Health and Safety Executive and local authorities) which have been investigated. The Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD) does not separately record suspected incidents of exposure to pesticides.

The information available from NPIS and PIAP reflect the different objectives of the schemes and are thus difficult to aggregate. The Advisory Committee on Pesticides is considering approaches to assessing information on pesticide-related ill health.

Mount Vernon Hospital, Northwood

Mr. Wilkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the future of the Cancer Centre at Mount Vernon Hospital, Northwood. [59590]

Ms Blears: The recommendations of the review steering group were made on 29 May 2002 to the Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire Strategic Health Authority in its capacity as host health authority for the Mount Vernon Cancer Network. The health authority will consider the Mount Vernon Long-Term Cancer Review Report in the context of its acute services review which is not yet completed.

The recommendations are:

The review group's recommendation is that a new integrated cancer centre be established on the site of a new hospital in Hertfordshire. This would include the clinical specification set out in the report (pages 27–32) and an ambulatory radiotherapy unit on the Mount Vernon site. The centre should also have a major research and education facility. This is strongly recommended as the preferred option of the review group.

In the interim period before this new hospital is built, it is absolutely essential that there is significant investment on the Mount Vernon site to maintain and develop the excellent services it currently provides. The review group notes that the case for such investment has been accepted by the Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire StHA.

The group accepts that Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire StHA may not be able to commit itself to the creation of a new hospital in Hertfordshire and reluctantly recognises that there has to be a reserve position. In these circumstances it would accept the need for the StHA to consider an integrated cancer centre on either the Watford General, Hemel Hempstead or Queen Elizabeth II DGH sites. This is solely on the condition that the full range of services (pages 27–32) to complement an integrated cancer centre is available on the selected site.

The steering group is unable to recommend development of the future cancer centre on the Mount Vernon site as it is not consistent with the principles underlying the Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire StHA acute services review, nor in line with the cancer and acute service strategies in this part of North West London and runs the risk of destabilising local services. In reaching this recommendation, the group was conscious of the esteem in which Mount Vernon is held and the loyalty of its staff. The group was aware of the impact on research in the interim period.

Staff and press briefings were held on 29 May 2002 with an MP briefing scheduled for 12 June 2002 following the Whitsun recess.

Mental Health

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are being taken within primary care trust areas to ensure that sufficient information is given to mental health service users to enable them to make informed choices before drugs are prescribed and throughout treatment. [60565]

Jacqui Smith: Empowering patients to take an active role in their care is a key theme in the NHS Plan. We know that people are more likely to take their medicines correctly when they understand and agree with their treatment, and have been active partners in prescribing decisions. The NHS Plan set a target for all primary care trusts to have schemes in place so that people get more help from pharmacists in using their medicines by 2004. We are also investing in medicines management services including through the medicines management collaborative hosted by the national prescribing centre.

These actions are underscored by standards two and three of the national service framework for mental health and by targets set for those with severe mental illness in the service and financial framework for 2001–02 and the priorities and planning framework for 2002–03; they set out how copies of care plans should be provided for patients. The task force on medicines partnership, established in January 2002, also aims to improve the use of medicines in the National Health Service by involving patients as partners in prescribing decisions and supporting them in medicine-taking.

In addition, all National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) appraisals and guidance have sections designed for patients themselves to provide up to date information on the management of their conditions to help them make informed choices about their treatment. Information about this is available from the NICE website at: www.nice.org.uk

Noise

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made as to the impact on *(a)* children and *(b)* adults of being chronically exposed to loud noise. [60659]

Ms Blears: As part of a joint programme with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department of Health commissioned a research programme designed to study the non-auditory health effects of noise.

Five research projects were funded under this programme, three of which concentrated on the non-auditory effects of noise on children at school and in the home, one concentrated on the effects of occupational noise and the fifth concentrated on noise and insomnia.

The five projects have recently completed and reported, and the results of the research will be discussed with colleagues from other Departments later in the year.

Full details of the study are available on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/hef/airpol/aipolh.htm.

Strokes

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of extra spending announced for the NHS in the recent Budget will be allocated for treatment of and research into strokes. [60128]

Jacqui Smith: As a result of the Budget, the national health service in England will receive an annual average real-terms growth in resources of 7.4 per cent. for the five years from 2003–04 to 2007–08. Decisions about allocation of this increased funding will be announced later this year.

The Medical Research Council (MRC) is the main Government agency for research into the causes of and treatments for disease. The MRC spent £3.4 million on stroke research in 2000–01 and does not anticipate a major change to this level of support.

Departmental Polices (Hull, North)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what impact his Department's policies have had on the Kingston upon Hull, North constituency since 1997. [60548]

Jacqui Smith: Detailed information on the impact of Department's policies nationally is set out in the Department's annual reports. A copy of the most recent report "Department of Health—Government Expenditure Plans 2001–02" is available in Library and on the Department of Health website at www.doh.gov.uk/dhreport

The impact of policies is not examined by constituency.

Smallpox

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what analysis his Department has undertaken of the risks of passing Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease to recipients of a smallpox vaccine made from bovine cell culture. [44007]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 26 March 2002]:* We are not aware that the manufacture of any smallpox vaccine prepared in the past utilised virus culture in bovine cell lines.

If a manufacturer wished to produce smallpox vaccine using virus culture in bovine cells, the appropriate regulatory guidance on cell characterisation and storage would have to be followed.

European legislation demands that an application for marketing authorisation of a medicinal product in the European Union must include satisfactory demonstration of compliance with the European note for guidance on minimising the risk of transmitting animal spongiform encephalopathy agents via human and veterinary medicinal products.

Inventures

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what financial targets have been set for Inventures. [50805]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* The Department sets NHS Estates key tasks and targets on an annual basis. These targets are agreed with Ministers. One of these targets requires the agency (including Inventures) to achieve a cumulative operating surplus on ordinary activities before interest and dividends of at least 0.6 per cent. of the value of sales during the period from 1 April 1999 to March 2003.

Inventures is essentially a consultancy business employing approximately 270 staff with an annual turnover of approximately £15 million. It provides a wide variety of property services including planning, financing, procuring and managing all aspects of healthcare environment and estates. Its primary customers are the Department of Health and national health service trusts.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of cardiac care units in the NHS operate upper age limits or other restrictions in accessing heart by-pass operations on grounds of age; and what percentage of units have age-related policies for treatment of thrombosis. [55318]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 May 2002]:* It is an underlying principle of national health service care that access to services is based on clinical need alone. Cardiac care units have been informed that it is unacceptable to limit access on the basis of age. We are not aware of any NHS cardiac care unit or other NHS cardiac service that currently restricts access to its services on the basis of age.

Food Supplements

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement about the incorporation of EU directives on food supplements and herbal medicines into UK law; and what assessment he has made of the impact on the over the counter availability of food supplements and herbal medicines following the incorporation into UK law of the EU directives. [57973]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 22 May 2002]:* The food supplements directive must be transposed into UK law by the last day of the month, one year after the date of entry into force of the Directive.

The Directive will not immediately outlaw any products already on the UK market. Lists of permitted vitamin and mineral sources remain open, pending safety assessments for additional substances. The Government welcomes the amendment to Article 4(6)(b) which was recently adopted by the European Parliament and which extends the time for dossier submission from 18 to 36 months after the Directive comes into force. The Directive gives Member States the opportunity to allow continued sale of products containing vitamin and mineral sources not yet on the permitted list for up to seven years after the Directive comes into force, pending safety assessment of these sources. When implementing the Directive, the Government intends to take full advantage of this flexibility.

Incorporation into United Kingdom law of the proposed Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products will be subject to the outcome of European negotiations. On the basis of the formal proposals published in January 2002 by the European Commission, we anticipate that consumers will have continuing access to a wide range of traditional herbal remedies sold over the counter.

Features of the proposed Directive which might, in principle, inhibit availability are the requirements relating to safety and quality and the definition of traditional use. However, our assessment is that the introduction of the proposed safety and quality standards is necessary for effective public health protection and the maintenance of public confidence in the sector. This in turn will ultimately affect the strength of public demand for herbal remedies. The proposed standards are ones which are already successfully met by many manufacturers in UK and elsewhere of traditional herbal remedies.

As to the definition of traditional use, we take the view that a large number of unlicensed herbal remedies currently on the market, and sold legally under Section 12(2) of the Medicines Act, 1968, have a strong basis in tradition and so should be able to satisfy the requirement to demonstrate traditional usage. This assessment is based, for example, on the extensive herbal literature covering various herbal traditions, on the activities of herbalists over many decades in supplying herbal medicinal products to individual patients following consultation, and on the existence of large numbers of long-standing licensed herbal remedies in the UK and elsewhere.

It will not be possible to predict for some time to come the full extent to which herbal remedies will be sold under this Directive. One important issue is that there are likely to be significant numbers of products with a clear basis in tradition and containing herbal ingredients which, depending on the presentation of the company's specific product, may legally be sold either as medicines or in another regulatory product category such as food, cosmetic or general consumer product. There may therefore be options for companies in relation to many such products as to which regulatory route would be most advantageous.

The Medicines Control Agency is holding a public consultation on the proposed Directive including its likely regulatory impact. The consultation document (MLX 283) can be viewed on the Agency's website www.mca.gov.uk. The consultation period closes on 21 June 2002.

Food Standards (Mobile Retailers)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) on 26 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 519W, on food standards (mobile retailers), what extra resources the Government are planning to give local authority environmental health inspectors in the enforcement of food hygiene standards of mobile retailers and takeaway establishments. [59547]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* Local authorities already receive funding, through the revenue support grant, to enable them to undertake food law enforcement inspections to the full range of food premises, of which mobile retailers form a very small part. It is for individual local authorities to decide specific resource allocations for these purposes.

Hepatitis

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies have been carried out into the anticipated incidence of chronic hepatitis B over the *(a)* next 5 years and *(b)* next 10 years. [60520]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The public health laboratory service (PHLS) has estimated the current incidence of chronic hepatitis B infection using laboratory reports of acute hepatitis B infection from 1992 to 1996. The estimate is based on reports to the PHLS, the proportion of cases that develop symptoms and the proportion that progress to chronic infection.

The PHLS estimates that in the United Kingdom, there are an annual average of 311 hepatitis B infections that lead to chronic infection.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the members of the Steering Group on hepatitis C and *(b)* the terms of reference of the group. [60406]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The membership of the Hepatitis C strategy steering group is as follows:

Chairman

Professor Howard Thomas, Imperial College School of Medicine, London and Chairman, Advisory Group on Hepatitis

Members

John Bryce, lay member

Jim Camp, Needle Exchange Forum

Hannah Cinamon, Health Promotion England (until November 2001)

Professor Chris Day, Medical School, Newcastle University

Manlio Fahrni, Chair of *Re-act* and vice-chair of the recently launched national forum, the UK Assembly on Hepatitis (from September 2001)

Jo Guy, Hepatology Nurse Specialist, Southampton General Hospital

Dr. Paul Hatton, Consultant in Communicable Disease Control, Leeds health authority and member, Advisory Group on Hepatitis

Lorraine Hewitt, Action on Hepatitis C and member, Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs

Nigel Hughes, British Liver Trust

Professor Will Irving, Department of Microbiology, University of Nottingham and member, Advisory Group on Hepatitis

Tania Machell, Head of National Hepatitis C Resource Centre, Mainliners (from July 2001)

Grant McNally, National Drug Users Development Agency

Dr. Mary Ramsay, Public Health Laboratory Service Communicable Disease Surveillance Centre

Professor Gerry Stimson, Centre for Research on Drugs and Medicine, Imperial College School of Medicine, London

Professor John Strang, Director of the National Addiction Centre, Maudsley Hospital, London and member of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs

Monique Tomlinson, Deputy Director, Mainliners (until July 2001)

Dr. Martyn Wake, General Practitioner, south west London.

Its terms of reference are:

"To oversee development of the Department's strategic approach to hepatitis C by bringing together issues relating to prevention, control and treatment and to produce a document within the year, for consultation with the national health service, professional bodies and the voluntary sector and community sectors".

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what studies have been carried out since 1997 to monitor the changes in the epidemiology of hepatitis C infection in England following the introduction of an effective antiviral treatment with interferon and ribavirin; and if he will make a statement. [60526]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* We are not aware of any national studies on the effect of the introduction of treatment for hepatitis C infection with interferon and ribavirin on its epidemiology.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 10 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 406W, on hepatitis C, what proportion of those cases identified had persistent viraemia. [60404]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The information requested is not available. However, several studies have shown that persistent viraemia occurs in about 80 per cent. of cases with antibody positive hepatitis C diagnoses.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 10 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 406W, on hepatitis C, if the figures given included testing carried out in virology departments of teaching hospitals and private laboratories. [60403]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The information already provided about antibody positive hepatitis C diagnoses does include those reported to the public health laboratory service (PHLS) by laboratories in teaching hospitals and the private sector.

Most national health service microbiology laboratories (including laboratories in teaching hospitals) and some private microbiology laboratories voluntarily report diagnoses of hepatitis C to the PHLS. Reports from private laboratories form a very small proportion of all reports received.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of patients have chronic liver diseases in the UK owing to chronic infection with hepatitis C virus. [60522]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The data requested are not available. However, in 2000–01, there were 27,827 finished consultant episodes in national health service hospitals in England with a primary diagnosis of liver disease. Of these, 524 finished consultant episodes had a secondary diagnosis of chronic viral hepatitis C.

Notes:

1. A finished consultant episode is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within the year.

2. Occasionally there may be missing records or missing diagnosis/operation codes in the HES records so a scaling factor is applied to allow for this. However these grossing factors have not yet been applied to the 2000–01 data.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been diagnosed with acute hepatitis *(a)* A, *(b)* B, *(c)* C, *(d)* D, *(e)* E and *(f)* G in each year since 1990; and if he will make a statement. [60521]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The information available is given in the tables.

Laboratory reports, England and Wales 1990–2001[1]

	Number of people diagnosed
Hepatitis A infection	
1990	7,545
1991	7,202
1992	6,762
1993	3,957
1994	2,413
1995	1,750
1996	1,086
1997	1,310
1998	1,104
1999	1,389
2000	1,047
2001	772
Acute hepatitis B infection	
1990	618
1991	572
1992	531
1993	629
1994	631
1995	614
1996	569
1997	652
1998	843
1999	725
2000	661
2001	534

[1] 2001 data are provisional.

Source:

Public Health Laboratory Service

Laboratory reports, England and Wales 1994–2001[1]

	Number of people diagnosed
Hepatitis E infection	
1994	12
1995	33
1996	52
1997	21
1998	56
1999	30
2000	34
2001	25

[1] 2001 data are provisional

Source:

Public Health Laboratory Service

The majority of cases of acute hepatitis C infection do not result in symptoms. Laboratory reports of antibody to hepatitis C do not distinguish between new and previous infections. Hepatitis D can only occur in people infected with hepatitis B and separate data on hepatitis D infections are not collected routinely. Hepatitis G is not known to cause hepatitis.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will publish the consultation paper on a strategy for hepatitis C. [60405]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) on 14 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 630W.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what *(a)* percentage and *(b)* sums of the budgets of each health authority and primary health trust in England are allocated for the treatment of hepatitis C; [60525]

(2) if additional funding will be made available to primary health trusts for the use of pegylated interferon for the antiviral treatment of chronic hepatitis C, and if he will make a statement. [60523]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* Health authority allocations for 2002–03 increased by £3,704 million, or 9.9 per cent.

It is for health authorities in partnership with primary care trusts and other local stakeholders to determine how best to use their funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities and modernising services.

A key priority for the use of additional funding is the implementation of guidance from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE). We have referred pegylated interferons for the treatment of hepatitis C to NICE for inclusion in its work programme.

Wheelchairs

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much the NHS has spent on the provision of electrically-powered indoor/outdoor wheelchairs in each year since 1997; [27351]

(2) how many people have utilised NHS vouchers as part-payment for powered wheelchairs in each year since 1997; [27350]

(3) how many electrically powered indoor/outdoor wheelchairs have been made available in each year since 1997. [27348]

Jacqui Smith: Pursuant to her reply of 22 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 763W: I regret that my previous reply was incorrect. It should read:

Expenditure on electrically powered indoor/outdoor wheelchairs (EPIOCs) are as follows.

Expenditure on powered indoor/outdoor wheelchairs—England

£000

	Amount
1997–98	6,428
1998–99	8,099
1999–2000	6,892
2000–01	8,803

Figures are not collected centrally for numbers of vouchers issued separated into manual wheelchairs and EPIOCs.

The following table gives the only data available centrally. A number of these figures are incomplete (as annotated):

England	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Number of powered wheelchairs issued	4,464	4,033	3,388	3,279[2]
Number of vouchers issued for wheelchairs	560[1]	5,010[2]	6,305	6,250[2]

[1] Collection of data was not mandatory

[2] Incomplete figure (one return missing)

HOME DEPARTMENT

Race Relations Act

Mr. Bailey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to make changes to current authorisations under section 19D of the Race Relations Act 1976, as amended. [61371]

Beverley Hughes: I have today revoked the authorisation signed by my hon. friend the member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche) on 23 April 2001 which permits immigration officers to discriminate in the examination of passengers from certain specified ethnic or national groups. We have kept this authorisation under close review in the light of intelligence assessments from the Immigration Service. After a year's experience of operating the authorisations, the Immigration Service has found it sufficient to rely on the authorisation made on 27 March 2001 which permits it to prioritise certain passengers for additional examination on the basis of their nationality. We will keep under review the possible need for further authorisations permitting discrimination on grounds of ethnic or national origin where necessary in respect of specific targeted operations.

Community Police Officers

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department further to his answer of 11 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 565W, how many community police officers there are on the beat, broken down by division. [58344]

Mr. Denham: The information in the table has been provided by the Chief Constable of Greater Manchester police (D. Wilmot Esq QPM). The number of officers shown as on the beat comprises those carrying out the role of community beat constable or that of area/community sergeant.

Division	*Community Police Officers on the beat*[1]
North Manchester Division	4[illegible]
South Manchester Division	89
The City of Salford Division	63
Tameside Metropolitan Borough Division	29
Stockport Metropolitan Borough Division	42
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Division	54
Wigan Metropolitan Borough Division	40
Trafford Metropolitan Borough Division	27
Bury Metropolitan Borough Division	21
Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Division	39
Oldham Metropolitan Borough Division	31
Total	483

[1] Figures are for 22 May 2002

Crime Statistics

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of crime is *(a)* committed by and *(b)* committed against young males between the ages of 14 and 24 years; and if he will make a statement. [56224]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* Statistics of recorded crime are not collected by age, principally because a part of it is unsolved and therefore details of suspects are not known.

The available information relates to persons convicted or cautioned for notifiable offences in England and Wales in 2000, 41 per cent. of whom were males aged 14 to 24 years.

The 2000 British Crime Survey estimates that 25 per cent. of all personal crime (wounding, assault, robbery, theft from the person and other personal theft) reported to the survey was committed against males between the ages of 16 and 24.

Lay Visitors Scheme

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many complaints have been made about the operation of the police station cells lay visitors scheme in each constabulary in each of the last three years for which records exist; [53927]

(2) how many visits have been made in each police authority under the lay visitors scheme and its successor in each of the last three years for which records are available; [53928]

(3) what the cost was of running the lay visitors scheme for each police authority in each of the last three years for which records exist; [53924]

(4) if he will list the police authorities and other bodies that have made representations to him calling for changes to the custody visitors schemes, indicating the changes requested. [53923]

Mr. Denham: During the most recent review of the Home Office guidance to the police on lay/custody visiting, representations were received from the following bodies:

Police Authority
- Cheshire
- Derbyshire
- Dorset
- Greater Manchester
- Metropolitan
- Norfolk
- North Yorkshire
- North Wales
- Nottinghamshire
- West Yorkshire
- Wiltshire

Police Force
- Derbyshire
- Greater Manchester
- Lancashire
- South Yorkshire
- Surrey
- Sussex

Other Body
- Association of Police Authorities
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary
- Independent Custody Visitoring Association
- Police Complaints Authority
- Police Federation
- Superintendents' Association.

The most common issues raised were the organisation, recruitment and conditions of service of lay/custody visitors, as well as the administrative support provided by police authorities. There were also concerns about the level of training provided and procedures for carrying out visits, such as frequency and visiting in pairs.

Records of numbers of visits, the costs of running schemes and the number of complaints received are not kept centrally and the information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The Police Reform Bill before Parliament includes provisions for placing independent custody visiting on a statutory basis. Custody visiting schemes in each police authority will then be mandatory and a supporting code of practice will provide for consistent standards across England and Wales.

Asylum Seekers

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if the Centrex site at High Ercall has been proposed as a site for an asylum seeker accommodation centre. [52353]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 25 April 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) gave on 14 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 597W, when she announced that the Home Office would shortly be submitting planning notifications for accommodation centres at three sites. My hon. Friend also announced that a further three sites required further work before a decision could be taken as to whether to proceed to planning notifications.

Alongside the competition for the design, build and operation of accommodation centres the private sector were invited to submit their own proposals. All of these will be given due consideration across a range of criteria.

On 18 April 2002, my hon. Friend told the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson), *Official Report*, column 1168W, that the site at High Ercall had not been proposed to the Home Office. Since that time a proposal has come forward. This does not necessarily mean that the site has become a serious prospect; nor will we be in a position to know whether it has until a full evaluation has taken place.

However, the general position remains that we will not be putting details of potential new sites into the public domain unless and until they are considered to be a serious prospect for the siting of an accommodation centre.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what travel allowances will be paid to enable asylum seekers to comply with reporting requirements. [59995]

Beverley Hughes: The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill contains a provision which if introduced will allow the Secretary of State to meet the travel costs of asylum seekers required to report. The Bill does not provide that travel expenses will be met in all cases. It is intended to meet the reasonable costs of travel where appropriate.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the possible use of Sully hospital in Cardiff to house asylum seekers. [58837]

Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Warrington, North (Helen Jones) on 14 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 597W.

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many residents of Glasgow, Cathcart constituency have successfully applied for asylum in the past two years; [58874]

(2) how many residents of Glasgow, Cathcart constituency have applied for, and been refused, asylum in the last two years; [58873]

(3) how many asylum seekers living in Glasgow, Cathcart constituency are awaiting the outcome of their asylum applications; [58872]

(4) how many residents of Glasgow, Cathcart constituency have been removed from the UK following their failure to be granted asylum in the past two years. [58875]

Beverley Hughes: Asylum applications data are not available at regional level except by port (for those applications made at port—these accounted for 36 per cent. of applications in 2001).

Corresponding information on initial decision outcomes, cases outstanding and removals relating to persons in particular areas of the United Kingdom is also unavailable. The requested information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost by examination of individual case records.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the purpose is of the new asylum registration cards; and what statutory limits will be placed on their use. [57996]

Beverley Hughes: The Application Registration Card (ARC) is being issued to asylum seekers and their dependants as an acknowledgement of their application for asylum. It replaces the Standard Acknowledgement Letter (SAL) that has been widely forged.

The card will be used to obtain access to the services and benefits to which many asylum seekers are entitled including support payment in cash from National Asylum Support Service (NASS)-enabled Post Offices. Asylum seekers will be expected to produce their ARC when reporting to the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, as a means of identification.

Clause 117 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill introduces offences in relation to the fraudulent use or production of application registration cards.

Asylum Accommodation Centres

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who is negotiating on behalf of the Government with Severn Waste Services for the purchase of land necessary to construct an access road to the Throckmorton site for a possible asylum accommodation centre; and if he will make a statement. [57113]

Beverley Hughes: I understand that dialogue is continuing between the site owner, QinetiQ, and Severn Waste. The proposal for an access road has its origins in QinetiQ's plan to establish a science park at Throckmorton airfield, which are well known and which pre-date our proposal for an accommodation centre for asylum seekers.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer of 11 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 718W, on asylum accommodation centres, what evaluation has taken place of bids to develop and operate asylum accommodation centres; and if he will make a statement. [59369]

Beverley Hughes: No bids have yet been invited to develop and operate accommodation centres.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with the Defence Estates organisation about its planned disposals of land and the suitability of such land for use as an asylum accommodation centre. [59070]

Beverley Hughes: We are working very closely with the Defence Estates organisation on the accommodation centres programme. In relation to discussions on the Throckmorton site, we are conducting these with QinetiQ.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many representations he has received supporting the establishment of an asylum accommodation centre at Throckmorton, Worcestershire. [59086]

Beverley Hughes: A planning notification has not yet been submitted in respect of the proposed accommodation centre at Throckmorton.

The consultation period of the planning process has therefore not yet begun.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will meet residents of the Buckingham constituency who will be affected if plans proceed for an accommodation centre for asylum seekers in Piddington. [57653]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Office will shortly be taking part in public consultation as part of the planning process. We are discussing with Cherwel district council the exact nature that the consultation will take.

Juvenile Sex Abusers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures his Department takes to address the needs of children and young people who sexually abuse; and if he will make a statement. [57197]

Hilary Benn: Dealing with children and young people who sexually abuse requires contributions from different agencies, covering youth justice, child welfare, and education and health, including child and adolescent mental health agencies.

Specific Home Office measures include the Home Office sponsored Youth Justice Board's funding of £60,000 for six projects that work with this group of young people, and a grant of £87,442 to a project developing and piloting new assessment methods. The Board are also working with the National Organisation for the Treatment of Abusers and the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) to develop good practice and guidance for youth offending teams, and within the juvenile secure estate.

The National Probation Service, jointly with the Prison Service and Youth Justice Board, are funding a pilot young sex offenders project for young people aged between 15 and 21, offering specialist assessments and interventions both in custody and in the community.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many meetings he has had with ministerial colleagues with regard to children and young people who sexually abuse in the last two years. [57199]

Hilary Benn: I have had no formal meetings with ministerial colleagues specifically regarding children and young people who sexually abuse.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of children and young people who are required to register in accordance with the Sex Offenders Act 1997 received treatment for sexually abusive behaviour in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 200[illegible] [57176]

Hilary Benn: The Sex Offenders Act 1997 requires offenders cautioned, convicted, or found not guilty by reason of insanity in respect of an offence specified in Schedule One to the Act to provide certain details to the police. There is no centralised "register" of sex offenders, as such. It is not, therefore, possible to disaggregate the number of young people from adults subject to the Act's requirements.

Neither the Home Office nor the Youth Justice Board holds statistics on the number of young offenders who are required as a condition of their sentence to undertake treatment to address sexually abusive behaviour.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in implementing the recommendations made as a result of the consultation, 'Setting the Boundaries: Reforming the Law on Sex Offences'. [57188]

Hilary Benn: We are currently considering how to update existing legislation on sex offences in the light of the recommendations contained in 'Setting the Boundaries' and more than 700 responses that were received during the consultation period. We intend to bring forward legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out the regulations by which schedule 1 status is applied to juveniles. [57177]

Hilary Benn: Schedule 1 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 is a list of violent and sexual offences against children. This list has been used by various agencies as a way of identifying those who may pose a risk to children. There are currently no regulations that deal specifically with juveniles who commit a schedule 1 offence.

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funding was available for programmes which addressed the needs of children and young people who sexually abuse in *(a)* 1998, *(b)* 1999, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2001. [57321]

Hilary Benn: Full information is not held centrally. Specific related programme funding includes the Home Office sponsored Youth Justice Board's funding of six projects between 1999 and 2002, which totalled £600,000. The board are also providing funding totalling £87,442 between October 2001 and December 2003 to a project developing and piloting new assessment methods, and funding totalling £14,921 between November 2001 and March 2003 to a project examining the national provision of services.

The National Probation Service is funding a pilot young sex offenders project designed to provide a specialist assessment and intervention service for young people aged between 15 and 21. The pilot received grant funding of £243,000 in 2001–02 and has a budget of £331,000 for 2002–03.

Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will proscribe the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine under the Terrorism Act 2001; and if he will make a statement. [59006]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The list of proscribed organisations is kept under review and decisions to proscribe or deproscribe are taken after careful consideration of all relevant aspects.

National Asylum Support Services

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when NASS subcontracted its telephone inquiries function to an outside source; to which organisation it has been subcontracted, and for what period; for what reason the decision to subcontract the work was taken; what assessment he has made of the quality of information given out; and if he will make a statement. [58529]

Beverley Hughes: The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) has not subcontracted its telephone inquiries function.

The Immigration and Nationality Enquiry Bureau (INEB), part of the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, is responsible for handling inquiries about subsistence payments, and where it is believed support has been terminated erroneously, INEB takes these inquiries to enable NASS caseworkers to resolve queries more efficiently and in a shorter timescale.

All other telephone inquiries are handled by NASS staff.

Mortuaries

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) who has responsibility for providing public mortuaries; [59440]

(2) if he will list public mortuaries in England, indicating who is responsible for running them. [59439]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* Under the Public Health Act 1936, local authorities have the power to provide public mortuaries and post-mortem rooms. In practice, I understand that most coroners and local authorities rely on the national health service facilities for mortuary provision.

Following a recent survey carried out by the Home Office, we are aware that the following local authorities in England provide a public mortuary service:

London borough of Barnet
London borough of Brent
London borough of Bromley
London borough of Croydon
London borough of Greenwich
London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham
London borough of Hillingdon
London borough of Lewisham
London borough of Newham
London borough of Westminster
Birmingham city council
Bracknell Forest council
Bradford metropolitan district council
Brighton and Hove city council
Bournemouth borough council
Cannock Chase district council
High Peak borough council
Kingston upon Hull city council
Liverpool city council
Pendle borough council
Rossendale borough council
Sheffield city council
Stoke-on-Trent city council
Wolverhampton city council.

Prisoners

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the number of prisoners who have *(a)* drug and *(b)* alcohol problems; and what services are available to them. [59625]

Hilary Benn: Every prisoner on reception receives a health examination and during that assessment a prisoner will be encouraged to disclose any drug or alcohol misuse problem. Figures on those with substance misuse problems are not kept centrally. Epidemiological surveys show that around 80 per cent. of prisoners had used drugs prior to prison, with 54 per cent. admitting dependency. Random mandatory drug testing figures show that, nationally, 11.6 per cent. of prisoners tested positive for drugs in 2001–02.

An integrated range of drug treatment and support services is available to prisoners comprising:

detoxification services available in all local and remand prisons;

counselling, assessment, referral, advice and throughcare (CARATs) available in all prisons;

50 intensive treatment programmes; and

voluntary drug testing programmes are available throughout the prison estate.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what percentage of prisoners had no fixed accommodation upon release from prison in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and what services are available to find accommodation; [59626]

(2) how many prisoners left prison and went directly into employment in the last 12 months for which figures are available; and what services are available to prisoners to find employment upon release from prison. [59624]

Hilary Benn: The Prison Service undertook a large-scale survey in November and December 2001 of sentenced prisoners nearing release. 33 per cent. said they did not have accommodation arranged on release. 24 per cent. said they had a job to go to on release and six per cent. a training place.

By comparison, in a prisoner resettlement survey conducted by the National Association for Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NACRO) in 1992, 48 per cent. said they needed help with long-term housing and 89 per cent. were likely to face unemployment on release.

Many establishments provide services to help prisoners find accommodation and employment on release, often in partnership with Jobcentre Plus, the National Probation Service or voluntary sector organisations. These include housing advice centres, jobsearch training and support, and the piloting in eight prisons from summer 2002 of new technology giving access to Jobcentre Plus information on employment vacancies across the country. The Prison Service Custody to Work programme, with £30 million earmarked over 2001–04, is geared towards increasing the number of prisoners getting jobs or training places after release through the development of such resettlement activity.

Further impetus to improving the accommodation and employment services available to prisoners has been provided by the thematic review of resettlement published by the Inspectorates of Prisons and Probation in October 2001, and by the Social Exclusion Unit's current study on reducing re-offending by released prisoners, which is expected to report later in the year.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what arrangements are in place for prisoners held in the high secure unit at HMP Belmarsh to take regular daily exercise; and how much fluid is available to each prisoner per day. [59867]

Hilary Benn: All prisoners in the High Secure Unit are able to have one hour of exercise in the open air each day. In addition they are also able, subject to staff availability, to attend the gymnasium three times each week. Each residential spur has either an exercise bike, rowing machine or step exerciser available for use by prisoners.

Every cell contains a cold water tap providing drinking water. Each residential spur also has a water heater to provide prisoners with hot drinks. To cover those periods when prisoners are locked in their cells, each person is provided with a vacuum flask so as to enable them to make hot drinks, for which purpose they each receive a weekly allowance of tea, coffee and powdered milk. Every day each prisoner will also receive one 200ml carton of milk.

All prisoners are allowed to purchase items from the prison shop. Among items that are available are canned and bottled carbonated drinks as well as still drinks. Additional quantities of tea, coffee and hot drinks are also available for purchase.

Television Licences

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* male and *(b)* female prisoners are in prison in connection with non-payment of television licences. [58638]

Hilary Benn: The latest provisional data (representing 30 April 2002) show that there were no people in Prison Service establishments in England and Wales for using a television without a licence at that time.

Prisoner Suicides

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many *(a)* attempted suicides and *(b)* suicides there were in prisons in England and Wales in each of the last 20 years; and what percentage of the prison population this represents; [58634]

(2) how many *(a)* attempted suicides and *(b)* suicides there were in each prison in the UK in the last 20 years; and what percentage of the prison population in each prison this represents. [58633]

Hilary Benn: The available information is set out in tables, which have been placed in the Library. Figures for "attempted suicide" (for which there is no separate definition) are subsumed within those for self-harm, which cover all acts of self-injury, however non-serious. The definition of self-harm and recording practices are under review. Information relating to prisons in Scotland and Northern Ireland is a matter for the Scottish Executive and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Dr. John Reid) respectively.

HMP Belmarsh

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when and for what reasons the special secure unit at HMP Belmarsh was redesignated a high secure unit; and what the principal differences in prison regime are. [59866]

Hilary Benn: The high security unit at Belmarsh is a four spur, 48 cell facility holding both 'high' and 'standard' risk category A prisoners. In the event of a category A prisoner being received at Belmarsh with an 'exceptional' risk classification, then one spur of the unit will become a special secure unit. When this situation arises, the facility operates as a special secure unit.

There are no principal differences in the regime offered to prisoners caused by change of designation. The main difference arising from the change of designation would be in respect of general security measures taken by staff.

Hezb-e Tahrir

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if his Department has classified Hezb-e Tahrir as a terrorist organization; what changes have been made in its classification since January 1999; and if he will make a statement. [59685]

Mr. Blunkett: This organisation is not on the proscribed list of organisations contained in schedule 2 of the Terrorism Act 2000.

The list of proscribed organisations is kept under review and decisions to proscribe or deproscribe are taken after careful consideration of all relevant aspects.

Animal Rights Protests

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many successful prosecutions of animal rights activists have occurred since the provisions of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 came into force; and what sentences were handed down. [57014]

Hilary Benn: Information on prosecutions under the provisions of the 2001 Act relating to intimidatory assemblies and malicious communications will be published for the first time in 2003, although this will not distinguish between prosecutions of animal rights extremists and other people since the characteristics of court defendants are not collected centrally.

Damilola Taylor

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to the answer of 15 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 700W, on Damilola Taylor, if he will define vulnerable or intimidated witnesses; what his criteria are for this definition; and which agents and agencies he consulted on this definition. [60080]

Hilary Benn: Sections 16 and 17 of the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 define vulnerable and intimidated witnesses in terms of their eligibility for assistance from special measures to achieve best evidence.

Vulnerable witnesses are those (other than the defendant) who are eligible for assistance because they are under 17 at the time of the hearing or because the court considers that the quality of their evidence is likely to be diminished for reasons of physical disability, physical or mental disorder or a significant impairment of intelligence and social functioning.

Intimidated witnesses are those who are eligible for assistance because the court is satisfied that the quality of their evidence is likely to be diminished by fear or distress about testifying. The court has to take into account the nature and alleged circumstances of the offence, the age of the witness and any views expressed by him or her, and any behaviour towards the witness on the part of the accused, members of the family or associates of the accused or any other person who is likely to be an accused or witness in the proceedings.

Where relevant, the court must also take into account the witness's social and cultural background and ethnic origin, domestic and employment circumstances and religious beliefs or political opinions.

A complainant in respect of a sexual offence who is a witness in proceedings relating to that offence is also eligible for assistance unless the witness has informed the court that he or she does not wish to be eligible.

The definitions in sections 16 and 17 of the 1999 Act were based on the recommendations of 'Speaking Up for Justice', the report of the inter-departmental working group which is available in the Library and to which I referred in my earlier answer. This contains a literature review and a summary of representations received from organisations and individuals.

Data Protection

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the draft codes of practice which relate to the use and retention of communications data as defined in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000; if he has revised his estimates on the costs to industry of the retention of such data; and if he will make a statement as to why the draft code of practice which relates to retention of communications data has not yet been issued. [59265]

Mr. Blunkett: The codes of practice relating to the access and retention of communications data are being developed in consultation with communications providers, the security, intelligence and law enforcement agencies and the Interception and Information Commissioners respectively. A draft of the access code will be laid before Parliament shortly, and a retention code will be issued for public consultation. Discussions with communications providers are forming the basis of the Government's assessment of the cost of retention.

Youth Offending

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to tackle persistent youth offending. [57064]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* We have given the courts new secure remand and tagging powers for 12 to 16-year-olds who repeatedly offend on bail. Both started in the 10 street crime priority areas on 22 April. Tagging started in the rest of the country on 1 June 2002, and secure remands will start on 16 September 2002.

We have also delivered the youth justice pledge by halving the time from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders; funding the Youth Justice Board's intensive supervision and surveillance programmes for the most prolific offenders; and we have introduced the detention and training order for persistent and more serious young offenders.

Devolution

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to transfer the administration of reserved powers and functions of his Department, its executive agencies and non-departmental public bodies within its remit from his Department to the Scotland Office; [59513]

(2) how many representations the Scottish Executive has made to his Department since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Scottish Executive Department, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date; [59514]

(3) how many times his office has made representations to the Scottish Executive since May 1999, broken down by *(a)* Department approached, *(b)* subject and *(c)* date. [59515]

Mr. Blunkett: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my right hon. Friend, the Prime Minister on 24 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 600W.

Yarl's Wood

Mr. Patrick Hall: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) of those detainees who were present at Yarl's Wood Immigration Detention Centre on the evening of 14 February and who had been removed from Britain as of Tuesday 21 May, how many were due to be questioned by the police as part of the criminal investigation into the disturbances at Yarl's Wood but were not questioned before removal; [59218]

(2) of those detainees who were present at Yarl's Wood Immigration Detention Centre on the evening of 14 February and who had been removed from Britain as of Tuesday 21 May, how many had been questioned by the police as part of the criminal investigation into the disturbances at Yarl's Wood. [59250]

Beverley Hughes: The questioning of detainees by the police as part of the criminal investigation into the disturbances at Yarl's Wood is a matter for Bedfordshire police.

Information about subsequent removals is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost by an examination of individual case files.

Haslar Detention Centre

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department why the road signs directing the public to Haslar Detention Centre have been replaced by signs reading Immigration Removal Centre Haslar; and whether these changes reflect a change of purpose for the establishment. [60398]

Beverley Hughes: We announced our intention to redesignate existing detention centres as "Removal Centres" in the recent White Paper, Secure Borders, Safe Haven: Integration with diversity in modern Britain. There is provision in the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill currently before Parliament to amend references to detention centres in the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999 and elsewhere so as to formally reflect their change of name to removal centres.

This change will reinforce the key part these centres play in the removal of failed asylum seekers and others. There are no substantive changes to the provisions relating to the purpose and operation of these centres.

Prison Service

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the fines imposed on private sector contractors within the Prison Service for not meeting targets have been *(a)* paid and *(b)* overturned on appeal in each of the last three years. [58389]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* The number of fines imposed in the last three years is as follows:

1999–2000: 11

2000–01: 7

2001–02: 3.

All of the fines have been paid and none have been overturned on appeal.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff were employed by the Prison Service in each of the last five years. [58391]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* The information is contained the table:

	Prison Service staff in post
31 March 1997	39,629
31 March 1998	41,056
31 March 1999	42,683
31 March 2000	43,683
31 March 2001	43,800
31 March 2002	44,463

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison officers have left the service within *(a)* one year and *(b)* two years of starting in each of the last five years. [58390]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* The information is contained the table. Reliable leavers information including date of recruitment is not available before June 1998.

	Left within one year of recruitment	*Left within up to two years of recruitment*
1998–99[1]	41	65
1999–2000	61	98
2000–01	46	93
2001–02	32	107

[1] June 1998 to March 1999 only.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff *(a)* were recruited to and *(b)* left the Prison Service in each of the last five years. [58392]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* The information, which includes casual staff, is contained in the table.

	Recruits	*Leavers*
1997–98	4,732	[1]—
1998–99	4,144	2,817
1999–2000	4,419	3,316
2000–01	3,466	3,812
2001–02	4,337	4,211

[1] Reliable information on leavers during 1997–98 is not available.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration is given to ease of access for family visits in placing prisoners. [58843]

Hilary Benn: All prison establishments are required to consider a number of factors when placing a prisoner, one of which is the home area of prisoners and their visitors.

The Prison Service places great importance on prisoners having regular and productive visits in order to maintain close and meaningful ties with their families as part of their effective rehabilitation.

However, high population levels throughout the prison estate can lead to prisoners being transferred from their home area to prison establishments with a greater number of vacancies to create capacity for remand prisoners within those prisons that serve the courts.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of prisoners in each prison are *(a)* married or in long-term relationships, *(b)* have children under 18 and *(c)* both. [58842]

Hilary Benn: On reception into prison all prisoners are asked about their marital status. They cannot be required to provide this information. As of 24 May, 10,786 male prisoners and 571 female prisoners described themselves as married or cohabiting. This amounts to 16 per cent. of the prison population. The information is not available by individual establishment. Information about prisoners with children is not collated. However, surveys suggest that about 60 per cent. of prisoners have children of whom about half have dependent children.

Wolds Prison

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the officially designated maximum prisoner capacity is for HMP Wolds. [57587]

Hilary Benn: Wolds prison has an operational capacity of 410.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what facilities are available at HMP Wolds for prisoners with mental health problems. [57588]

Hilary Benn: Prisoners with mental health problems can be cared for in the health care centre at Wolds prison, which provides for up to 16 in-patients. A number of the nurses caring for these patients are specifically qualified to work with mentally ill prisoners. A psychiatrist visits the prison on a weekly basis to provide psychological and counsellor support to those within the health care centre and on normal location. Wolds prison also works very closely with agencies to provide secure hospital accommodation and mental health community support for those prisoners being discharged.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many positive drug tests were recorded at HMP Wolds in the past three years. [57586]

Hilary Benn: For the year ending 31 March 2000, 58 drug tests at Wolds prison were recorded as positive. The figures were 38 and 16 for the years ending 31 March 2001 and 2002 respectively.

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many assaults on staff there were at HMP Wolds in the last three years. [57585]

Hilary Benn: For the year ending 31 March 2000, there were 14 assaults by prisoners on staff. The figures were 16 and nine for the years ending 31 March 2001 and 2002 respectively.

Coroners

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on progress of the review of the coroners' system. [57698]

Hilary Benn: The review has so far involved a number of regional visits to coroners and meetings with the public, as well as with the Department for Health, the Retained Organs Commission, the Lord Chancellor's Department, the Judicial Studies Board and other relevant organisations. Time has also been spent in Northern Ireland, and review team members have attended Home Office-run coroner training events. The review team hope to issue a consultation on document shortly.

Brixton Prison

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of the staff employed in Brixton prison in each year since 1996 have formerly been members of the security services in Northern Ireland. [58280]

Hilary Benn: Information on the earlier careers of prison staff is not held in the form required and would necessitate examining around 1,300 files, and interviewing several hundred staff, many of whom no longer work for the Prison Service. This could be done only at disproportionate cost.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action has been taken to ensure that the sabotage of cell bell alarm systems identified by the Chief Inspector of Prisons in his inspection of HMP Brixton on 26 to 29 June 2000 is not repeated. [58277]

Hilary Benn: New procedures were put in place following the inspection to ensure the cell call bells remain in working order. The cell call system is checked daily by wing staff and night orderlies. No reports of a failure of the system have been reported since the new procedure was introduced.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what disciplinary action has been taken against those involved in the sabotage of cell bell alarm systems identified in the inspection by the Chief Inspector of Prisons of HMP Brixton on 26 to 29 June 2000. [58276]

Hilary Benn: Despite investigation, no member of staff has been identified as being responsible for sabotaging the cell call bell system at Brixton prison. It has not, therefore been possible to take any disciplinary action.

The Prison Service takes a very serious view of such matters and, should information come to light which is strong enough to support taking disciplinary action, this will be done.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the deaths of Irish citizens in Brixton prison since 1996. [58332]

Hilary Benn: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply my hon. Friend Minister of State, Home Office (Beverley Hughes) gave my hon. Friend, the Member for Kingston-upon-Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) on 21 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 268W, which explained that a review is to be conducted into the deaths of Irish prisoners at Brixton since 1998. There were no such deaths between 1996 and 1998.

Prison Staff Deployment

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to review the deployment of prison staff now in charge of Irish prisoners who have served in the security forces in Northern Ireland. [58279]

Hilary Benn: None. Detailed information about earlier careers of members of staff is not collated and to do so would involve disproportionate cost.

Irish Prisoners

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received in the last six months from the Irish Government, Irish community organisations and individuals on the deaths of Irish prisoners in British prisons; and what action he has taken as a result. [58275]

Hilary Benn: Correspondence has been received from the Irish in Britain Representation Group. A reply will be sent shortly.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to include an Irish category based on CRE guidelines in the system for ethnic monitoring in Her Majesty's prisons. [58278]

Hilary Benn: The Commission for Race Equality's (CRE) "Ethnic Monitoring—A Guide for Public Authorities" recommends adopting the ethnic categories used in the 2001 Census and this incorporates the use of an Irish category. All civil service Departments were required by the Cabinet Office to undertake an ethnicity re-classification exercise. The format for the classifications was provided to reflect the latest census classification. The Prison Service are in the process of adopting the Census 2001 categories.

An ethnicity re-classification exercise of all Prison Service staff was undertaken in October 2001. Every member of staff was asked to complete a questionnaire which allowed their ethnic origin to be recorded in a category as provided for in the 2001 Census. Arrangements are also being made to update.

Court Adjournments

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department has made of the trend in the number of court cases that are adjourned one or more times, and the effect that these adjournments have on other parts of the court service. [58858]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

Sample surveys of magistrates court cases show that the proportion of defendants whose cases were adjourned in these courts fell from 50 per cent. in 1997 to 44 per cent. in 2001. In the magistrates courts a joint monitoring scheme with the Crown Prosecution Service and other criminal justice agencies began on 1 April 2002, to collect data for all adjourned trials, including the number of previous adjournments. The first quarterly figures will be published in July 2002. The Crown court also has a national monitoring scheme for adjourned trials. Data from both sources will inform a research project, planned to start later this year, into the effect of trial adjournments.

Youth Justice

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many and what proportion of cases in magistrates courts involving young people as a defendant *(a)* went ahead at the first hearing, *(b)* were adjourned once before the case is heard and *(c)* were adjourned more than once before the case is heard in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [58859]

Yvette Cooper: I have been asked to reply.

During last year, 26 per cent. of young defendants had their cases completed at the first listing, 23 per cent. had one adjournment and 51 per cent. were adjourned more than once. These figures are taken from sample surveys, so total numbers are not available.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 12 June 2002

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Accommodation Review

Mr. Steen: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, what the cost to public funds is of the accommodation review being undertaken by HOK International Ltd.; and for what reason the review is not being undertaken in-house. [59780]

Mr. Kirkwood *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The cost of the accommodation review is £169,700. HOK International Ltd. is assisting the Serjeant at Arms and a project team representing all Departments of the House to carry out the review of the House of Commons estate on behalf of the Board of Management. The consultancy was let to bring in expertise and resources not available in-house. The aim of the review is to identify options and to make recommendations that will assist the House in forming its accommodation strategy over the period 2003–08.

Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards

Sir George Young: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission, if he will make a statement on the resources available to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. [61775]

Mr. Kirkwood: The House's Internal Review Service (IRS) has now reported to the Commission. The principal findings are:

> that the Parliamentary Commissioner's present time commitment of three days a week should be sufficient to cope with current and expected future need;
>
> that the temporary office support post should be made permanent;
>
> that there should be a new post of investigative support officer to assist the Commissioner with detailed day-to-day work. This would also enable the Registrar of Members' Interests to concentrate on, and help the Commissioner with, the preventive, educational and advice aspects of the work.

At its last meeting the Commission discussed the report and its findings with the chairman of the Committee on Standards and Privileges and with the Parliamentary Commissioner, who expressed themselves content with the additional resources proposed. Following that meeting, copies of the report were given to members of the Committee on Standards and Privileges. They, too, indicated that they were content with what was proposed. The Commission has therefore directed that the report's recommendations should be implemented.

Following implementation, the staff of the Commissioner's office will be: the Commissioner, the registrar, the assistant registrar, the investigative support officer, the Commissioner's personal assistant, and a general office assistant.

The report recommends that the IRS should conduct a verification review in 12 months' time. The Commission will take any action necessary as a result of that review, but in any event remains committed to providing whatever resources, both in terms of staff and days worked, that may be required.

I am placing a copy of the review manager's report in the Library and on the parliamentary website at www.parliament.uk. I am also arranging for a copy to be sent to the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Peace Process

5. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his assessment is of levels of bipartisan support for the peace process. [57735]

Dr. John Reid: We believe that all those with the interests of Northern Ireland at heart should come together in support of the peace process and the continuing implementation of the Belfast Agreement. The backing we receive here is essential to our efforts to sustain and carry forward the process.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

6. **Mr. McCabe:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the new criminal injuries compensation scheme for Northern Ireland. [57736]

20. **Mr. Patrick Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken to improve the criminal injuries compensation scheme for Northern Ireland. [57751]

22. **David Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the new criminal injuries compensation scheme for Northern Ireland. [57753]

Mr. Browne: The scheme, introduced on 1 May, put in place many of the recommendations of the independent review of compensation carried out by Sir Kenneth Bloomfield. It is similar to arrangements in the rest of the UK, and is designed to provide innocent and deserving victims of crime with a quicker and easier way to obtain compensation for their injuries. The tariff amounts of compensation for pain and suffering have been set at existing average levels within Northern Ireland. Additional payments can be made for pecuniary loss and other expenses. Many improvements to the eligibility criteria will ensure that compensation is widely available to those who have suffered at the hands of violent criminals.

Bloomfield Report

7. **Mr. Tom Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps the Government have taken to implement the recommendations of the Bloomfield report. [57737]

Mr. Browne: The Government have made substantial progress towards implementation of the Bloomfield report. We have established the Northern Ireland Memorial Fund, which we continue to support financially; the family trauma centre in Belfast; and a new Northern Ireland Centre for Trauma and Transformation which will be based in Omagh. We provide core funding to victims' groups; we fund the Legacy Project, based in Warrington; and we part-fund the implementation of the Devolved Administration's Victims' Strategy. We have revised the criminal injuries compensation scheme and took steps to facilitate the recovery of the 'Disappeared.'

Decommissioning

8. **Mr. Joyce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent assessment is of the prospects for further decommissioning of weapons by Loyalist terrorists. [57739]

28. **Mr. Gardiner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what his latest assessment is of the prospects of decommissioning of weapons by loyalist terrorists. [57759]

Dr. John Reid: The Government have consistently called for decommissioning from all paramilitary organisations. We have had two acts of decommissioning from the IRA. That must be the start of a process. It is imperative that we now see reciprocation from loyalists, and all groups dismantling all the apparatus of terror.

15. **Mrs. Ann Winterton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on prospects for further decommissioning of IRA weapons. [57746]

Dr. John Reid: The second act of decommissioning, reported on by the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning on 8 April 2002, indicates the IRA's commitment to the process. The commission is continuing its contact with the IRA representative to facilitate the ultimate decommissioning of all IRA arms. However, this progress needs to be part of an ongoing process and indeed must involve all paramilitary groups. All paramilitary groups must end all forms of terrorist activity and dismantle the apparatus of terrorism.

Integration

9. **Mr. Wray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent measures the Government have taken in Northern Ireland to assist the integration of the Catholic and Protestant communities. [57740]

Mr. Browne: We are committed to upholding the principles of partnership, equality and mutual respect, which are cornerstones of the Belfast Agreement. Through working towards full implementation of the Agreement, the Government continue to promote inclusivity at all levels.

Terrorist Disbandment

10. **Mr. Donaldson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment he has made of the progress towards the disbandment of the Provisional IRA and other terrorist groups in Northern Ireland. [57741]

Jane Kennedy: We need to see the dismantling of all the apparatus of terror, and the decommissioning of weapons and mindsets. We need to complete the transition away from violence. The IRA has embarked upon a process of decommissioning: it is imperative that we now see reciprocation from loyalists, and the standing down and disbandment of all paramilitary organisations.

Provisional IRA

11. **David Burnside:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list by month since January the shooting incidents attributed to the Provisional IRA in Northern Ireland. [57742]

Jane Kennedy: The table provides details of the shooting incidents attributed to Republican groups. Since 1 January to 30 April 2002 there have been 34 shooting incidents attributed to Republicans. It is not possible to attribute these incidents to any specific paramilitary organisation.

Shooting incidents attributed to Republicans, 1 January to 30 April 2002

	Number of incidents
January	15
February	7
March	7
April	5
Total	34

Note:

These figures may be subject to minor amendment.

Shooting incidents 1 January to 30 April 2002, by DCU

	DCU	*Details of incident*
4 January	Lisburn	Paramilitary-style shooting
5 January	Belfast West	Paramilitary-style shooting
6 January	Fermanagh	Shots heard—5 x bursts of 5 rounds each were fired
7 January	Ballymena	Three shots were fired at a house
12 January	Belfast North	Paramilitary-style shooting
13 January	Belfast West	Paramilitary-style shooting
16 January	Belfast East	Paramilitary-style shooting
17 January	Newry and Mourne	Paramilitary-style shooting
18 January	Lisburn	Paramilitary-style shooting
18 January	Craigavon	Shots fired at a lorry driver
21 January	Downpatrick	Two shots fired into a bar
23 January	Belfast West	Paramilitary-style shooting
23 January	Belfast West	Paramilitary-style shooting
27 January	Lisburn	Paramilitary-style shooting
31 January	Belfast South	Paramilitary-style shooting
11 February	Coleraine	Paramilitary-style shooting
17 February	Belfast North	Shots fired in street
18 February	Belfast West	Paramilitary-style shooting
20 February	Belfast North	Paramilitary-style shooting
21 February	Downpatrick	Shots fired at vehicle—one person killed
26 February	Craigavon	Paramilitary-style shooting
28 February	Belfast North	Paramilitary-style shooting
2 March	Belfast North	Paramilitary-style shooting
3 March	Downpatrick	Shot fired during an armed robbery
9 March	Belfast West	Paramilitary-style shooting
15 March	Newry and Mourne	Paramilitary-style shooting
20 March	Armagh	Eight shots fired at house/vehicle
23 March	Fermanagh	Shots fired at police station
26 March	Lisburn	Paramilitary-style shooting
6 April	Lisburn	Paramilitary-style shooting
7 April	Belfast North	Paramilitary-style shooting
12 April	Lisburn	Paramilitary-style shooting
17 April	Dungannon and South Tyrone	Fatal shooting
18 April	Belfast North	Shots fired

Paramilitary Crime

12. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement about the criminal activities of the paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland. [57743]

Jane Kennedy: The Organised Crime Task Force, which I chair, has identified that the legacy of terrorism remains a significant influence in Northern Ireland. Of the 76 organised criminal enterprises that we have identified operating in Northern Ireland, nearly half are either associated with, or controlled by loyalist or republican paramilitary organisations. The insidious nature of some local problems—notably extortion—can be traced directly to terrorism. In addition, some of the more important criminals derive their status and influence from their current or historic paramilitary links.

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what evidence he has collated of recent breaches of the ceasefire and Belfast Agreement by Republican paramilitaries; and if he will make a statement. [57738]

Jane Kennedy: We keep the ceasefires of all paramilitary organisations under constant review. The Acting Chief Constable's security assessment is that there is no indication that the IRA is intending to recommence its campaign. However, a ceasefire is no longer enough. If there is to be confidence in this process then we need to see a whole-hearted commitment to exclusively peaceful means and a clear demonstration that the war is over.

Organised Crime Task Force

13. **Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the work being done by the Organised Crime Task Force for the next 12 months. [57744]

21. **Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the work of the Organised Crime Task Force to date. [57752]

Jane Kennedy: This year, as last year, the priority areas for concerted multi-agency effort are extortion, drugs, oils-related fraud, tobacco and alcohol duty evasion and money laundering. In addition, we have added two new strategic priority areas: the trade in counterfeit goods and armed robbery. The Organised Crime Task Force has published a range of performance indicators in its year two strategy document, which will be used to judge performance in 12 months time.

17. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the work of the Organised Crime Task Force over the past 12 months. [57748]

Jane Kennedy: A year on from the publication of the Task Force's first "Threat Assessment and Strategy", we have seen some truly remarkable successes against organised criminals in Northern Ireland. During the past 12 months, 57 criminal networks have been subject to detailed law enforcement investigation, 43 have had members arrested for a wide range of serious offences and 24 networks have had members successfully prosecuted. As a result of concerted law enforcement activity during the past year, 42 organised crime networks have been disrupted or dismantled.

Colombia

16. **Mr. Bellingham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he next expects to meet representatives of the US State Department to discuss IRA involvement in the terrorist campaign in Colombia. [57747]

Jane Kennedy: I meet and speak to the ambassador in the US State Department, Dr Haass, regularly. We discuss a wide range of issues.

Mr. Johnny Adair

18. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what conditions have been attached to the release from prison of Mr. Johnny Adair. [57749]

Jane Kennedy: Mr. Adair was released from prison on 15 May in accordance with the Northern Ireland (Remission of Sentences) Act 1995.

As with any prisoner released under this Act, if it appears to the Secretary of State that Mr. Adair's continued liberty would present a risk to the safety of others or he was likely to commit further offences, he can be recalled to prison to serve the period between half and two-thirds point of his sentence without recourse to the courts.

Furthermore, and again as with any prisoner under the Treatment of Offenders (NI) Order 1976, if he is convicted of a non-scheduled offence in Northern Ireland before 15 May 2010—the date on which he would have been released if no remission had been granted, a court may order his return to prison to serve out the remainder of his sentence.

If he is convicted of a scheduled offence for which he receives a custodial sentence, then the court must order his return to prison to serve what remains of his sentence.

Community Security

19. **Mr. Illsley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps the Government are taking to improve community security in Northern Ireland. [57750]

Mr. Browne: The Government published a draft community safety strategy for consultation on 10 April 2002. The strategy sets out a broad framework for action at a local level to address local concerns about crime, the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour. It will require close co-operation from a wide range of agencies in both the devolved and non devolved administrations.

26. **Linda Gilroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps the Government are taking to enhance crime prevention and community safety in Northern Ireland. [57757]

Mr. Browne: The Government are taking forward a number of crime prevention campaigns in Northern Ireland with appropriate partners. In addition, a draft community safety strategy was published for consultation on 10 April 2002. The strategy sets out a broad framework for action at a local level to address local concerns about crime, the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour.

27. **Dr. Iddon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the relationship between community safety partnerships and district policing partnerships. [57758]

Mr. Browne: District Policing Partnerships and Community Safety Partnerships will serve different purposes—the first is accountability based, and the second service delivery. DPPs are made up of elected representatives and independent members. CSP members will be drawn from organisations with responsibility for service delivery. The police will be the common denominator, and close links will be important, with opportunities for the DPP to contribute to the CSP.

Criminal Justice Review

23. **Mrs. Humble:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in implementing the Criminal Justice Review; and if he will make a statement. [57754]

Mr. Browne: The Justice (Northern Ireland) Bill which paves the way for implementing many, though not all, of the accepted criminal justice review recommendations is currently under consideration by Grand Committee in the House of Lords, having successfully completed its Commons stages. Other recommendations are being taken forward administratively. Subject to royal assent, it is intended to publish a revised Implementation Plan which will set out progress made in respect of each recommendation and indicate timescales for their implementation.

Proceeds of Crime Bill

24. **Mr. Savidge:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the impact in Northern Ireland of the Proceeds of Crime Bill. [57755]

Mr. Browne: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Harlow (Mr. Rammell).

Security Situation

25. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the security situation in the Province. [57756]

Jane Kennedy: There is a significant threat from dissident Republican paramilitaries and from disaffected elements within Localism who are intent in continuing with their campaign to disrupt the peace process. Tensions between the two communities in north and east Belfast have erupted yet again in more street violence. This violence is totally unacceptable and must be brought to an end. The appearance of gunmen firing at rioters and the security forces is also a worrying development. We will continue to monitor closely the ceasefires of all the paramilitary organisations and will take appropriate action if considered necessary.

Policing

Mike Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the prospects for the future of policing in Northern Ireland. [57734]

Jane Kennedy: We have laid firm foundations for a new beginning to policing. We have a Policing Board with cross-community participation and broad powers to hold police to account.

I warmly welcome the appointment of Hugh Orde as the new chief constable. He is adistinguished senior police officer who brings with him invaluable experience for both Northern Ireland and the Metropolitan Police.

PRIME MINISTER

European Commission

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Prime Minister what his policy is on the proposal by the President of the European Commission for the Commission to be given powers to issue binding instructions to Governments that deviate from the policy guidelines adopted by euro zone members and to be the sole representative of the EU in international economic and financial meetings. [60583]

The Prime Minister: The Government do not agree with this proposal.

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Prime Minister what his policy is on the proposals of the President of the European Commission to give the Commission powers to recommend action on national budget deficits that could only be overturned by a unanimous vote of all EU Governments; when he was first informed of this proposal; and if he will make a statement. [60580]

The Prime Minister: The Government do not agree with this proposal. The European Commission's communication "A Project for the European Union" was released on 22 May 2002, and I was informed after its release.

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Prime Minister if he was consulted before the President of the European Commission's proposals for additional economic powers to be given to the Commission were publicised; and if he will make a statement. [60587]

The Prime Minister: I was not consulted before the publication of the European Commission's Communication "A Project for the European Union" on 22 May 2002.

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Prime Minister what his policy is on the proposal by the President of the European Commission for the national veto on taxation matters to be abolished; and if he will make a statement. [60584]

The Prime Minister: The Government's position is that unanimity should be retained for decisions on taxation.

Gibraltar

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Prime Minister how many times in the last three years he has discussed Gibraltar with the Spanish Prime Minister. [60791]

The Prime Minister: I talk to the Spanish Prime Minister frequently on a range of EU and other foreign policy issues. We most recently discussed Gibraltar during Prime Minister Aznar's visit to London on 20 May.

Intelligence and Security Committee

Mark Tami: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to lay the Intelligence and Security Committee's annual report before Parliament. [61926]

The Prime Minister: I am grateful to the Intelligence and Security Committee for their valuable work and their latest annual report. Following consultation with the Intelligence and Security Committee over matters which could not be published without prejudicing the discharge of the function and operation of the Intelligence and Security agencies, I will lay the report before the House tomorrow. Copies will also be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The Government will respond formally to the report shortly.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Youth Participation

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what arrangements the Government are making to publish Departments' action plans for the implementation of the core principles for involving children and young people. [61139]

Mr. Denham: In line with the commitment set out in "Learning to Listen—Core Principles for the Involvement of Children and Young People in Government", the following Departments are today publishing their action plans:

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Ministry of Defence

Department for Education and Skills

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Department of Health

HM Treasury

Home Office

Lord Chancellor's Department

These will be placed on the Children and Young People's Unit website, www.cypu.gov.uk, and copies will be placed in the Library.

The Children and Young People's Unit will be reviewing progress against action plans in an annual report.

Sick Leave (Teachers)

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many *(a)* primary school teachers and *(b)* secondary school teachers took sickness absence in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001, broken down by (1) full-time and (2) part-time teachers. [60527]

Mr. Miliband: In the calendar years 1999, 2000 and 2001 (provisional), the numbers of full-time and part-time teachers in the English maintained schools sector taking sickness absence[1] were as follows:

	Full-time	*Part-time*
1999	234,520	30,130
2000	238,820	34,450
2001	246,300	37,300

These figures cannot be broken down by phase.

[1] Sickness absence on working days, whether paid absence or not, of teachers with permanent contracts or contracts of over one month, including teachers without QTS. The numbers of teachers taking sick leave includes an individual teacher only once however many periods of sickness absence they have had.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many days *(a)* primary school teachers and *(b)* secondary school teachers took in sickness absence in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000 and (iii) 2001, broken down by (1) full-time and (2) part-time teachers. [60528]

Mr. Miliband: In the calendar years 1999, 2000 and 2001 (provisional), the numbers of days of sickness absence[1] taken by full-time and part-time teachers in the English maintained schools sector were as follows:

	Full-time	*Part-time*
1999	2,249,150	254,180
2000	2,392,400	301,970
2001	2,461,000	338,900

These figures cannot be broken down by phase.

[1] Sickness absence on working days, whether paid absence or not, of teachers with permanent contracts or contracts of over one month, including teachers without QTS. The number of days taken as sick leave includes all periods of sick leave.

Sure Start

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on Sure Start projects in Barnet. [57890]

Ms Blears: Barnet does not at present have a Sure Start programme operating in the borough. However, the borough has been invited to consider setting up a programme as part of the sixth wave of Sure Start announced on 14 May 2002.

Literacy/Numeracy Strategies

Mr. Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research she has commissioned into the effectiveness of the national literacy and numeracy strategies; and if she will make a statement. [60244]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The university of Toronto is independently evaluating the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies. Last year they produced the following report:

Watching and Learning 2, OISE/UT Evaluation of the Implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, Second Annual Report, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto (September 2001).

They reported that

> "the Strategies have influenced virtually all schools in England, moving literacy and numeracy to top priority in classrooms across the country."

Ofsted is also evaluating the literacy and numeracy strategies through its regular inspections of schools and in two nationally representative samples of primary schools.

Grammar School Ballots

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list, for each of the last three years, the total payments made by her Department to electoral reform services for the purpose of *(a)* establishing the number of parents forming the electorate in area grammar school ballots and *(b)* establishing the list of primary schools whose parents form the electorate in feeder school grammar school ballots. [59244]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested is set out in the table:

£

Petition year	*(a) Establishing number of parents forming electorate in area grammar school ballots*[1]	*(b) Establishing the list of primary schools whose parents form the electorate in feeder school grammar school ballots*[1]
1999–2000	171,396	13
2000–2001	82,982	11
2001–2002[2]	389,516	14

[1] To nearest pound

[2] To date

DEFENCE

1901 Census

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the information memorandum sent to potential bidders for QinetiQ refers to QinetiQ's contract with the Public Record Office for the 1901 Census website; and if he will make a statement. [57797]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 23 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 475W.

Nuclear Decommissioning

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many nuclear facilities, storage areas, fixed equipment and reactors *(a)* have been in the last 30 years and *(b)* are planned to be decommissioned by his Department; and in each case, what the cost was. [60394]

Dr. Moonie: Data on how many nuclear facilities, storage areas, fixed equipment and reactors decommissioned over the past 30 years within the Ministry of Defence is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, expenditure from 1997–98 was provided to my hon. Friend on 5 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 162–63W.

As at 31 March 2001 (the latest available published figures), the MOD's nuclear liabilities amounted to £3,574,809,000 (representing the liabilities discounted at 6 per cent. and expressed in 2000–01 money values) or £16,039,639,000 (undiscounted). A more detailed breakdown is not available in the form requested.

Farnborough Airshow

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what support his Department is giving to the organisers of the Farnborough Airshow taking place in July; and if his Department is providing assistance to enable overseas visitors to attend it. [60616]

Dr. Moonie: In support of the Government's commitment to a strong United Kingdom defence industry, the Ministry of Defence undertakes a broad range of activities in support of The Society of British Aerospace Companies organisation of this prestigious show to help ensure its continued position as the world's premier business aerospace exhibition. Normal marketing support to United Kingdom exhibitors is provided by the Defence Export Services Organisation, and other assistance includes helping the organisers ensure the maximum exposure of United Kingdom products to potential customers by supporting official inward visits.

United Kingdom Hydrographic Office

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made with the Quinquennial Review of the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office; and if he will make a statement. [61910]

Dr. Moonie: I am pleased to announce today the outcome of the first stage of the Quinquennial Review of the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office (UKHO).

Phase 1 of the review, announced on 9 May 2001, was headed by Admiral Sir Jonathon Band, then Deputy CINCFleet. A steering group directed the work of the review team. It had an independent chairperson and comprised representatives of the Royal Navy, the UKHO, the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, the Meteorological Office, HM Treasury, Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Defence's business improvement team.

The UKHO was established as a Defence support agency of the MOD in 1990, and has operated as a Trading Fund since 1996.

Evidence was taken from a wide range of stakeholders and customers, including the Royal Navy, commercial customers, other Government Departments, port authorities and other hydrographic offices, as well as from staff.

Phase 1 of the review recommends that the UKHO should seek to maintain its position as the leading hydrographic office internationally, and should focus on meeting UK defence and Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) obligations. It should continue as a trading fund for the immediate future, but its future status needs to ensure that it is best placed to maintain its self-financing structure in the digital era. While the strong national interest of the UKHO's work is deemed consistent with continued Government ownership and responsibility, the UKHO is encouraged to seek partnerships with the private sector to help it to better exploit both current and new wider markets.

I have accepted the Phase 1 report, in particular the recommendation that the UKHO should aim in the medium term to convert to a wholly owned, Government-owned, company if certain conditions relating to its future role in the digital era are met. Accordingly, I have asked the chief executive to report to the Hydrographic Office Ministerial Advisory Board in two years time, to allow the board to review progress towards viability as a Government-owned company in the digital era, covering both income and cost base, and the protection of data supply. I have placed copies of a summary of the report in the Library of the House.

Phase 2 of the Quinquennial Review will cover the implementation of the recommendations of Phase 1, and review efficiency measures. It will also cover the strategy for addressing the requirements of other Government Departments, and governance and scrutiny issues.

Reserve Forces

Mr. Reed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes he plans to the role of the reserves in home defence and security. [61911]

Mr. Hoon: The work to date on the New Chapter to the Strategic Defence Review indicates that there is scope for an additional role for the reserves in home defence and security tasks, which would draw on their strengths and skills in the response to a crisis and which the reserves would themselves welcome. To explain our concept and to seek views upon it, the Ministry of Defence has today issued a discussion document entitled "The Role of the Reserves in Home Defence and Security". Copies of the document have been placed in the Library of the House. It makes proposals for providing a significant enhancement to the support which the Department and armed forces can provide to the civil authorities in such circumstances in three areas:

by the formation of reaction forces on a regional basis, comprising an average of 500 reserve personnel who volunteer for the role and who would be available to be deployed in a crisis;

by formalising the role of 2 Signals Brigade, and its predominantly Territorial Army subordinate units, in supporting those personnel deploying in response to a crisis, and enhancing its communications equipment accordingly;

by using reserve personnel to improve our contingency planning, and the machinery by which the civil authorities can gain access to support from the armed forces in a crisis.

This is a significant development for our reserve forces, and an important new challenge for them. We will take account of the views of the reserves and their employers on the discussion document in finalising our proposals. At that stage, we will also take a final view on the implications for the size and shape of our reserve forces.

Disposal Services Agency

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what key targets have been set for the Disposal Services Agency for financial year 2002–03. [61912]

Dr. Moonie: The agency was originally launched as the Disposal Sales Agency in October 1994, and was re-launched in November 2000 as the Disposal Services Agency. The agency provides much more than a sales function for surplus Ministry of Defence equipment and stores. It provides a total disposal solution by acting as a broker and adding value through expert advice across the public sector. The agency is therefore operating very much in line with the Government's aim of more joined-up delivery.

The chief executive of the agency has been set the following key targets for the financial year 2002–03.

Key target 1

To achieve a disposal sales gross cash receipt of £25 million from the sales of surplus Government owned equipment and stores. This figure reflects the expected surplus equipment disposal programme.

Key target 2

To meet the key performance indicators as agreed in the Customer Supplier Agreement with the Defence Logistics Organisation.

Key target 3

To maintain and where necessary improve by at least 2 percentage points on the customer satisfaction (baseline) rates as recorded in the 2002 customer survey.

Key target 4

To secure £355,000 sales per person employed for commercial activities.

TRANSPORT

Transport Projects

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions if he will list the major transport investment projects that have been given final go-ahead by his Department since 7 June 2001. [59359]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The following projects were fully accepted in the period:

Heathrow Airport Terminal Five

Extensions to the Heathrow Express and the Piccadilly Line to Heathrow Airport Terminal Five

Oldham Retaining Walls

A689 Sedgefield to Wynyard improvements (Durham)

Barnsley Coalfields Link Road Phases 2 and 3

A2 Bean-Cobham Widening Phase 1.

24 major local transport schemes have been provisionally accepted, conditional on statutory procedures which are essential to the scheme, or where the scheme is dependent on a contribution from a third party.

Four schemes have been added to the targeted programme of improvements—these are still subject to statutory procedures.

Railways

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what legal powers he will hold to require Network Rail to change the nature of the use of sub-contractors for network maintenance. [59332]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

The management of maintenance contracts would be a matter for Network Rail, if it succeeds Railtrack as network operator. The guidelines issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State on 31 October 2001 specify that bidders should demonstrate proposals for focused and effective contract management. Network Rail has said it plans to improve relations with maintenance organisations through longer contracts, better alignment of incentives and by awarding contracts on the basis of best value assessments—not necessarily the lowest price.

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for railways regulation. [62144]

Mr. Darling: As the Government announced in October 2001, they have been considering whether the railways regulatory framework continues to be fit for purpose given the changing circumstances faced by the UK rail industry. The Government's considerations have been guided by a number of key overarching principles:

Providing sufficient comfort and protection to operators and lenders through independent economic regulation and in order to regulate monopoly/monopsony elements and to secure private investment in the railways at an efficient cost;

Ensuring that public expenditure on the railways delivers the Government's objectives and achieves value for money;

Ensuring that the level of public expenditure on the railways respects and reflects the Government's overall spending priorities, including the 10 Year Plan;

Keeping the burden of regulation to the minimum level necessary; and

Ensuring a stable, well led industry with clarity of roles.

Having reviewed the current regulatory regime, the Government propose to build on the existing board structure of the ORR by establishing a statutory regulatory board. This is in line with Government policy on independent regulatory authorities, is consistent with the recommendations of the Better Regulation Task Force, and has been done in the case of the regulation of the gas and electricity industries (Utilities Act 2000) and postal services (Postal Services Act 2000) and is in the course of being done for the Office of Fair Trading (Enterprise Bill) and the telecommunications and broadcasting sectors (Communications Bill).

The regulator's duties include requirements to have regard to the SRA's strategies and budget. In view of the importance the Government attach to continued close working between the SRA and the regulator on these matters, I intend to issue directions to the SRA and guidance to the regulator on how I expect these requirements to be reflected in any future review of the network operator's revenue requirements.

The Government will need to continue to keep the effectiveness of the regime under review as the rail sector develops. The implementation of EU Directives already requires the Government to review the regulatory framework and adjust it in accordance with the Directives as necessary (the implementation of the First Railway Package of Directives is due by March 2003).

In making any further changes to the regulatory regime, the Government will continue to have regard to all of the principles set out above, treating the first one on independent economic regulation as an essential continuing requirement. Should the Government conclude that any change is required, they would consult key stakeholders on proposals in the normal way before bringing forward appropriate legislation.

Rail Links

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent investigations he has carried out into the *(a)* feasibility and *(b)* utility of constructing combinations of single and double lines of rail track adjacent to motorways and trunk highways. [59872]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

None.

Bridge Tolls

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the total revenue was from bridge tolls for each toll bridge in England in each of the last five years. [61098]

Mr. Jamieson: The majority of statutory tolled bridges in England are either privately owned or operated by a local authority and are not legally obliged to send regular accounts to the Secretary of State. As such the information requested is not held by the Department.

Fire Statistics

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* fire stations, *(b)* full time fire-fighters and *(c)* part time fire-fighters there are in each fire authority. [60445]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

Information on the number of fire stations in each fire authority in England and Wales at 1 January for each year from 1997 to 2002 was given in my right hon. Friend's reply to the hon. Member on 19 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 239–42W.

The number of firefighters in each fire authority area in England and Wales at 31 March 2001, the most recent date for which figures are available, is shown in the table:

Number of wholetime and retained firefighters in post in England and Wales at 31 March 2001

Authority	*Wholetime*[1]	*Retained*[2]
Avon	667	160
Bedfordshire and Luton	330	115
Buckinghamshire	292	152
Cambridgeshire	276	295
Cheshire	631	146
Cleveland	601	62
Cornwall	185	407
County Durham and Darlington	405	119
Cumbria	274	370
Derbyshire	465	231
Devon	570	648
Dorset	300	288
East Sussex	425	201
Essex	936	373
Gloucestershire	232	257
Greater Manchester	2,090	26
Hampshire	784	546
Hereford and Worcester	355	294
Hertfordshire	565	212
Humberside	725	276
Isle of Wight	61	152
Isles of Scilly	9	34
Kent	944	494
Lancashire	1,010	285
Leicestershire	498	144
Lincolnshire	189	413
London	5,693	0
Merseyside	1,369	0
Mid and West Wales	502	660
Norfolk	310	424
North Wales	283	483
North Yorkshire	352	331
Northamptonshire	296	182
Northumberland	206	152
Nottinghamshire	581	202
Oxfordshire	230	237
Royal Berkshire	406	122
Shropshire	200	249
Somerset	179	351
South Wales	968	252
South Yorkshire	920	39
Staffordshire	473	304
Suffolk	247	352
Surrey	713	103
Tyne and Wear	1,010	18
Warwickshire	286	149
West Midlands	2,031	8
West Sussex	397	272
West Yorkshire	1,683	166
Wiltshire	222	272

[1] In full time equivalents

[2] In 24 hour units of cover

Source:

Authority annual returns to HM Fire Service Inspectorate

Regeneration

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what central government-sponsored programmes are under way to support physical regeneration projects. [59825]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

Central government-sponsored programmes in support of physical regeneration are primarily implemented through the Regional Development Agencies, the London Development Agency and English Partnerships. For the RDAs and the LDA all funding is directed through the Single Programme. Details of English Partnerships' programmes are set out each year in the Department's annual report.

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much investment has been committed to physical regeneration projects in *(a)* the last five years and *(b)* the next five years. [59826]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

During the past five years the Government's physical regeneration expenditure programme has been undertaken principally through the Regional Development Agencies (RDA), the London Development Agency (LDA) and the Urban Regeneration Agency (URA)(part of English Partnerships).

(a) Gross cash investment on physical regeneration projects in each of the past five years has been as follows:

£ million

	RDAs/LDA (excluding PIP)[1]	*Urban Regeneration Agency*
1997–98	—	359
1998–99	—	463
1999–2000	108	322
2000–01	[2]182	247
2001–02	[3]—	10

[1] RDAs/LDA figures are gross expenditure in cash terms on the Land and Property Programme. They exclude Partnership Investment Programme (PIP) expenditure for 1999–2000 and 2000–01, which is included within the URA figures for those two years.

[2] RDA receipts for this year included £28 million of European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

[3] The Land and Property outturn figure for 2001–02 has not yet been finalised. However, including PIP expenditure and £20 million of ERDF, it is estimated to be approximately £400 million gross in cash terms.

(b) From 2002–03 onwards, the RDAs operate under a Single Programme. Funding for physical regeneration by the RDAs and the LDA cannot therefore be disaggregated from this offices' total contribution to the Single Programme.

Contribution to RDAs/LDA

	£ million
2002–03	1,278
2003–04	1,425

The URA forecasts its investment on physical regeneration projects at approximately £130 million in both 2002–03 and 2003–04.

The level of physical regeneration expenditure by the RDAs, LDA and the URA in the subsequent two years will be determined by the context of the Spending Review and, in the URA's case, also by the outcome of the present quinquennial review of English Partnerships' future role.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Oil and Gas Industry

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the future training requirements in the oil and gas sector. [57307]

Mr. Wilson: An updated review of skills in this sector—funded by DTI, Scottish Enterprise, Aberdeen city council and the new Sector Skills Council COGENT—is due to be published in July this year.

Redundant Oil Installations

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what international agreements to which the United Kingdom is party govern the long-term liability issues of contamination, accidents and maintenance of redundant oil installations that are left in place. [58347]

Mr. Wilson: The Oslo and Paris Convention of 1992 (OSPAR) provides for the protection of the Marine Environment of the NE Atlantic. Under the convention the UK has adopted OSPAR Decision 98/3 which provides a regime for the decommissioning of oil and gas installations and effectively prohibits sea disposal. There is a presumption that installations on the UK continental shelf will be brought back to shore for reuse, recycling or final disposal on land. However, the OSPAR Decision recognises that there may be difficulty in removing the 'footings' of large steel jackets weighing more than 10,000 tonnes and in removing concrete installations. As a result derogations may be granted in these cases if the internationally agreed assessment and consultation process shows that leaving such installations wholly or partly in place is justifiable. If a derogation is granted, the permit will specify who will be liable for the remains and require suitable monitoring and management measures to prevent or mitigate any adverse consequences to both the environment and other users of the sea.

In the UK, to ensure the orderly decommissioning of all installations, including those subject to derogation from the OSPAR Decision, the decommissioning of each installation is addressed within a decommissioning programme. The programme assesses the potential decommissioning solutions and determines the most appropriate disposal option by balancing safety, the environment, impact on other users of the sea, technical feasibility and economics. The programme must be approved by the Secretary of State under the Petroleum Act 1998.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of ordinary written questions for her Department were answered within a week of tabling in each month since June 2001; and what proportion of questions for named day received a substantive answer on that day in each month since June 2001. [58988]

Ms Hewitt: The information is as follows.

	Percentage of:	
	Ordinary written questions answered within five sitting days	*Named day written questions answered on that day*
June 2001	100	56
July 2001	94	47
October 2001	88	46
November 2001	67	35
December 2001	70	20
January 2002	84	34
February 2002	74	47
March 2002	71	29
April 2002	87	61
May 2002	57	33

Compensation Applications

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 698–99W, on compensation applications, if she will provide a breakdown of the top 100 companies and organisations and the amounts paid to those lawyers dealing with vibration white finger and carpal tunnel syndrome. [60803]

Mr. Wilson: In the time given, the Department cannot provide the costs paid to the top 100 solicitors/organisations. The following table updates the details of costs paid to the 10 solicitors/organisations who represent the largest number of vibration white finger claims in ascending order of total claims intimated.

Solicitor/organisations	*Costs paid (£ million)*
1. Thompsons	6.3
2. Browell Smith and Co.	4.8
3. UDM	4.0
4. Raleys	3.5
5. Hugh James Ford Simey	3.5
6. Graysons	2.3
7. Watson Burton	2.2
8. Moss	1.6
9. Towells	1.5
10. AMS Law	1.2

Legal Costs

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer of 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, columns 797–98W, on legal costs, if she will provide a breakdown of the top 100 companies and organisations and the amounts paid to those lawyers dealing with bronchitis and emphysema. [60802]

Mr. Wilson: In the time given, the Department cannot provide the costs paid to the top 100 solicitors/organisations. The following table updates the details of costs paid to the 10 solicitors/organisations who represent the largest number of respiratory disease claims in ascending order of total claims intimated.

Solicitors/organisations	*Costs paid (£ million)*
1. Thompsons	19.2
2. Hugh James Ford Simey	10.7
3. Raleys	5.2
4. Browell Smith and Co.	4.1
5. UDM	3.5
6. Irwin Mitchells	2.7
7. Towells	2.5
8. Graysons	2.3
9. Watson Burton	1.8
10. O. H. Parsons	1.3

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures are *(a)* in place and *(b)* under discussion in her Department in order to ensure compliance with the WEEE directive. [60753]

Mr. Wilson: The WEEE directive is still in draft. The conciliation process is about to commence and the final text should be finalised this autumn. This will allow detailed implementation plans to commence. A formal consultation was completed in December 2000, on the original Commission draft, and there has been constant discussion with all stakeholders since. Informal retailer, local authority and small business focus groups have already been established to consider compliance options, with more planned. A series of formal consultations are planned early next year.

Minimum Wage

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to remove the lower rate of the minimum wage. [60533]

Alan Johnson: We have no such plans. I announced new terms of reference for the Low Pay Commission today and will of course carefully consider any recommendations made on this issue in their next report.

European Structural Fund

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the financial contribution into the United Kingdom's economy has been in each of the last five years from the European Structural Fund. [60710]

Alan Johnson: The total European Union Structural Funds allocations to the United Kingdom for the periods 1994–99 and 2000–06 are euro 12,590 and euro 16,640 million, equivalent to £8,380 and £10,799 million at 2000 prices. The table breaks these totals into the yearly sums. These figures include the European Social Fund allocation.

	Euro million	*£ million*
1997	2,552	1,668
1998	2,569	1,679
1999	2,673	1,748
2000	2,496	1,621
2001	2,471	1,595

The figures in the table are allocations rather than receipts. Some receipts are not recorded centrally and, in any case, receipts in any one year will include reimbursement of some claims submitted in respect of previous years. Similarly some claims submitted during the year in question will not be paid in that year.

Newspaper Distribution Monopolies

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) when she last met the National Federation of Retail Newsagents to discuss wholesaler monopolies of newspaper and magazine distribution; [60496]

(2) if she will meet the chief executive of the National Federation of Retail Newsagents to discuss the wholesaler monopolies of newspaper and magazine distribution. [60497]

Miss Melanie Johnson: My right hon. Friend and other DTI Ministers have not met the National Federation of Retail Newsagents recently.

Responsibility for monitoring the newspaper and magazine distribution market and investigating allegations of anti-competitive behaviour lies with the Director General of Fair Trading. The Office of Fair Trading is currently reviewing the Code of Practice on the supply of national newspapers, introduced following the 1993 monopoly report on newspaper distribution in England and Wales. It is also examining other issues affecting the industry including exclusive distribution and carriage charges.

BNFL

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list, for each of the last three years, each political donation made by British Nuclear Fuels Ltd. and each of its subsidiaries; what budget has been allocated by BNFL and its subsidiaries for political donations in 2002–03; and if she will make a statement. [59241]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 11 June 2002]:* This is a matter for the company. I have asked the chief executive to write to my hon. Friend.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many renewable energy projects attracted financial support from the Export Credits Guarantee Department in each of the last three years; what the level of financial support was for each project; and what percentage these represent of the total *(a)* number and *(b)* value of ECGD funded projects. [57609]

Ms Hewitt: ECGD has not provided new financial support for any renewable energy project during the last three years. During this period, however, additional insurance has been extended in respect of projects for which financial support had been underwritten earlier. Details of insurance provided by ECGD are not disclosed as this is treated as commercial in confidence.

Low Pay Commission

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the Low Pay Commission has been given new terms of reference. [61929]

Ms Hewitt: We have today given the Low Pay Commission new terms of reference. The Government have asked the commission to continue to monitor and evaluate the impact of the minimum wage and to make recommendations, if appropriate, for changes to the levels of the main and development rates. The commission has been asked to report to the Government by the end of February 2003. Copies of the terms of reference have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

I am pleased to announce that we have also recently made two appointments to the Low Pay Commission. The new chair of the commission is Adair Turner, vice chairman of Merrill Lynch Europe and the new employer member is Angie Risley from Whitbread Group plc.

Broadband

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the roll out of broadband connectivity in Northern Ireland. [57731]

Mr. Timms: The Government are committed to making the UK broadband market more extensive and competitive. The Government work with colleagues in the Northern Ireland Executive to support the development of the market. As part of the £30 million UK broadband fund, Northern Ireland will be receiving £1.46 million, which will be used to fund a number of initiatives announced on 19 March 2002.

The Northern Ireland Executive has recognised the development of a leading-edge telecommunications infrastructure as central to the development of the Northern Ireland economy. It has launched a number of initiatives such as the SME Broadband Satellite pilot programme to encourage companies to embrace broadband.

The Northern Ireland Executive will in due course issue a call for expressions of interest in potential flagship projects.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Angola

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what part his Department played in brokering the ceasefire between the Government of Angola and the UNITA rebels signed in April; and if he will make a statement. [58912]

Mr. MacShane: Prior to the ceasefire in Angola, Her Majesty's Government operated a two-track policy towards Angola which was to support the existing sanctions regime against UNITA, as a means of pressing them towards dialogue; while working on the Angolan Government to improve their humanitarian performance, tackle corruption and create some genuine democratic space for possible dialogue. We worked with the Government of Angola, our EU colleagues and the United Nations with the aim of encouraging transparent dialogue between all parties to the conflict.

We welcome and support the current cease-fire and moves towards peace in Angola. The signature of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Chiefs of Staff of Angolan armed forces and UNITA on 4 April is an important step on the path to securing peace and stability. The agreement should be the start of a sustainable process through negotiation and dialogue.

Both sides now need to make firm commitments towards the implementation of a transparent and inclusive political process.

Press Releases

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many press releases have been issued by his Department in each month of 2002. [59499]

Mr. Straw: The number of press bulletins issued by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for the period specified is:

	Number
January	40
February	37
March	39
April	45
May	49
June	1

The figures include a daily bulletin of ministerial engagements and announcements and other press releases. The daily bulletin may contain a number of announcements. All Foreign Office press releases, including statements and speeches by Ministers, can be read on our website at www.fco.gov.uk.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many press releases were issued by his Department *(a)* in each month between May and December 1997 and *(b)* in each year from 1998 to 2001 inclusive. [59498]

Mr. Straw: The number of press bulletins issued by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for the period specified is:

	Number
1997	
May	59
June	49
July	48
August	29
September	51
October	55
November	45
December	45
1998	
January	38
February	33
March	58
April	35
May	34
June	27
July	37
August	29
September	31
October	37
November	27
December	28
1999	
January	47
February	53
March	65
April	76
May	51
June	59
July	59
August	29
September	39
October	48
November	40
December	29
2000	
January	32
February	29
March	41
April	32
May	36
June	39
July	42
August	[illegible]
September	[illegible]
October	46
November	36
December	33
2001	
January	29
February	28
March	39
April	30
May	24
June	31
July	30
August	9
September	35
October	34
November	39
December	35

The figures include a daily bulletin of ministerial engagements and announcements and other press releases. The daily bulletin may contain a number of announcements. All Foreign Office press releases, including statements and speeches by Ministers, can be read on our website at www.fco.gov.uk.

Regulatory Impact Unit

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people his Department employs in its regulatory impact unit; and if he will make a statement. [59874]

Mr. Straw: As a non-regulatory Department, the FCO does not have a dedicated regulatory impact unit. Issues relating to regulatory impact are dealt with by a member of FCO staff as part of his overall duties.

Hawk Jets

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he will be raising the UK's sale of Hawk jets to India during his forthcoming visit to the region. [60419]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary had not planned to discuss the possible sale of Hawk jets to India during his visit to the region, and did not himself raise it. The subject was, however, mentioned by the Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes at his meeting with my right hon. Friend, and a brief discussion on the issue followed.

Liberia (Arms)

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of Liberia's use of revenue generated by its shipping register to purchase arms in breach of the UN embargo. [60169]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The report of the UN Expert Panel published in October 2001 found that in 2000 revenue from the Liberian Shipping Registries Incorporated (LISCR) (which manages Liberia's shipping registry on behalf of the Government of Liberia) was diverted to purchase arms in breach of UN sanctions. Since then LISCR has taken action to prevent this reoccurring. LISCR channels shipping registry funds to Liberia's Bureau of Maritime Affairs which the panel described in April 2002 as 'little more than a cash extraction operation and cover from which to fund and organise off-budget expenditures including for sanctions-busting'. The Expert Panel report published in April 2002 expressed continued concern at the use made by the Bureau of Maritime Affairs of Liberia's shipping registry funds.

President Taylor's involvement in weapons trafficking and his support for armed groups continue to threaten regional peace and stability. The UK therefore welcomes the provisions contained in UN Security Council resolution 1408 (2002) that call on Liberia to establish transparent and internationally verifiable audit regimes to ensure that revenue derived from the Liberia shipping registry is used for legitimate social, humanitarian and development purposes, not sanction-busting.

Turkey

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met members of the Turkish Government; what issues were discussed on their progress towards possible membership of the European Union; and if he will make a statement. [60707]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State most recently met Foreign Minister Cem on 14 May in Reykjavik, during the NATO Foreign Ministers' meeting. They discussed European Defence, the transfer to Turkey of the ISAF lead and Cyprus.

British Citizens (EU Prisons)

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many British citizens spent more than seven days in prison in each EU country, in each year since 1997; and how many were subsequently acquitted. [60386]

Mr. Bill O'Brien: All British Embassies and High Commissions keep records of those British prisoners who have asked the local authorities to inform the British Mission of their detention. These records show how long a prisoner was detained and whether he/she was later acquitted. However the Foreign and Commonwealth Office does not collate statistics in the format requested, and so to provide this information would incur disproportionate costs.

The FCO maintains quarterly records of the number of British nationals serving custodial sentences in prisons overseas and I refer the right hon. Member to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Tooting on 7 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 456–458W.

East Timor

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet representatives of the Chinese Government; and if he will raise the case of Ngawang Sandrol at that meeting. [59782]

Mr. MacShane *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* My right hon. Friend, the Foreign Secretary, hopes to meet Chinese Ministers later in the year. We raise human rights issues, including Tibet, with the Chinese at every suitable occasion and will continue to do so.

Ngawang Sangdrol is one the individual cases that we regularly raise with the Chinese in the context of the biannual UK/China Human Rights Dialogue. We most recently raised her case during the dialogue which took place in Beijing on 15 May. In their response, the Chinese said that her sentence had been reduced by 18 months.

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the UK's diplomatic staffing will be in East Timor. [60484]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The British Office in East Timor was up-graded to an Embassy at Independence on 20 May 2002. There are two diplomatic staff in Dili.

Middle East

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what involvement the UK Government will have in the preparations for peace talks in the Middle East. [60481]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, and a member of the EU, the UK is actively involved in international efforts to revitalise the Middle East Peace Process in order to achieve a just and lasting peace.

A revitalised peace process must lead to the establishment of two viable, secure, territorially sovereign and democratic states of Israel and Palestine, mutually recognised and committed to peaceful coexistence within agreed borders. It should address key issues, particularly in respect of Jerusalem, settlements and refugees. It should also secure a comprehensive peace that includes full peace treaties between Israel, Lebanon and Syria. Only genuine commitment by the parties to such an agenda can break the current cycle of violence and reprisal.

Achieving these goals will require a continuous process that includes confidence building measures and timelines; ensures parallel movement on the political, security and economic tracks; and is based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242, 338 and 1397.

We expect to take this forward at the G8 Foreign Minister's meeting, 12–13 June, and in our consultations with other involved countries in coming weeks.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Pollard: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on progress towards restoring democracy in Zimbabwe. [60246]

Mr. MacShane: There is now a strong international consensus opposed to the actions of the Zimbabwe regime. We will work to strengthen that consensus, while supporting credible regional efforts (in particular the joint initiative of South Africa and Nigeria) to restore democratic legitimacy to Zimbabwe.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the adherence of the Zimbabwean Government to the constitution in respect of *(a)* section 18(1) on the protection of the law and *(b)* section 18(9) on entitlement to a fair hearing within a reasonable time by an independent court. [60184]

Mr. MacShane: It would not be appropriate for me to comment on individual constitutional clauses in isolation. But we have made clear on numerous occasions our deep concern at the Zimbabwean authorities' campaign to undermine the rule of law in Zimbabwe, and its persistent failure to protect and enforce the Zimbabwean people's rights under the country's Constitution.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what measures have been taken to ensure that those who commit violations of human rights in Zimbabwe are brought to international justice; and if he will make a statement. [60407]

Mr. MacShane: The UK Government and its EU and other international partners will continue to focus international attention on abuses of human rights in Zimbabwe.

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) will come into force on 1 July 2002. The Court will not have retrospective jurisdiction over crimes alleged to have been committed before that date.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government are taking to prevent President Mugabe from buying *(a)* arms and *(b)* anti-riot gear for the internal security purposes. [60195]

Mr. MacShane: The UK imposed an arms embargo on Zimbabwe in May 2000. This is implemented by prohibiting the export of goods and technology on the Military List which forms Part III of Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994, as amended.

In addition, on 18 February 2002 the European Union agreed a Council Common Position (2002/145/CFSP) imposing targeted sanctions including a full arms embargo, and an embargo on the sale or supply to Zimbabwe of equipment which might be used for internal repression.

The embargo on the sale or supply to Zimbabwe of equipment which might be used for internal repression is implemented in the Community by Council Regulation 310–2002 and prohibits the export to Zimbabwe from the Community of equipment listed in Annex II of the regulation. This includes, 'anti-riot helmets', 'anti-riot shields', 'body armour, other than those manufactured to military standards or specifications', portable devices designed or modified for the purpose of riot control or self-protection by the administration of an incapacitating substance (such as tear gas or pepper sprays)'.

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimates the Government have made of the number of economic refugees from Zimbabwe in *(a)* South Africa, *(b)* Zambia, *(c)* Botswana, *(d)* Mozambique, *(e)* Madagascar and *(f)* the United Kingdom. [60189]

Mr. MacShane: The South African authorities estimate that there are up to two million Zimbabweans resident in South Africa, the majority being in the north of the country.

No reliable figures are available on the total number of Zimbabweans in Zambia, Botswana, Mozambique, or Madagascar.

As the United Kingdom does not require Zimbabweans to obtain entry visas, it is not possible to estimate the size of the resident Zimbabwean community in the UK. Last year, however, the Home Office received 2,085 applications for asylum from Zimbabweans.

Lakshmi Mittal

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 21 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 255W, on meetings with Embassy staff, what the benefit to the United Kingdom, in foreign policy terms, was of the Lakshmi Mittal Romanian steel contract. [60551]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 11 June 2002]:* I refer the right hon. Member to the answers given by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 610–12W.

Chagos Islands

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much revenue has been generated by the sale of licences to fishing boats fishing in Chagos Island waters in the last 12 month period for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [57249]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 11 June 2002]:* Revenue generated by the sale of licences for fishing in BIOT waters during 2001–02 was £800,892. This figure has yet to be audited.

Honduras

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions have taken place between his officials and representatives of the Government of Honduras in respect of the number of murders of street children; and if he will make a statement. [59243]

Mr. MacShane: We regularly raise our concerns over the distressing plight of street children in Honduras in the framework of our bilateral relations and in international fora. In May 2002, an official from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office while in Honduras, raised the issue of human rights with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and visited a juvenile rehabilitation centre in Tegucigalpa.

EU Ambassadors in Tegucigalpa recently invited the new Human Rights Commissioner to attend a meeting where the plight of street children in Honduras was discussed.

The Honduras Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), a good example of a British Government poverty reduction strategy for developing countries, is designed to integrate actions and commitments to tackle child poverty. Through the PRSP, HMG is committed to strengthening the role of the Honduran Institute for Children and the Family especially in assisting vulnerable children and adolescents; and to helping implement Honduras' National Plan for the Gradual and Progressive Eradication of Child Labour.

Civil Service Recruitment

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, pursuant to the answer of 22 April, *Official Report*, column 230W, on Civil Service recruitment, if he will place in the Library a copy of the questionnaire sent to staff requesting information about education details. [60665]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Yes.

Migrant Workers

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the *(a)* activities and *(b)* budget of the Administrative Commission of the European Communities on Social Security for Migrant Workers. [57899]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I have been asked to reply.

The Administrative Commission on social security for migrant workers is set up under Articles 80 and 81 of EEC Regulation 1408–71, which lays down the rules for co-ordination of member states' social security schemes for workers who move within the European Economic Area. The Administrative Commission's main function is to deal with administrative questions and questions of interpretation of the provisions of Regulation 1408–71. This enables consistency in implementation across the member states. Among its other tasks are the fostering and development of cooperation between member states in social security matters. It may also submit proposals for revising the Regulation.

The Administrative Commission is currently considering a number of items: the proposed European health card; implications arising from decisions of the European Court of Justice; the EU-Switzerland agreement; changes to forms used by member states where a claim for a benefit involves more than one state; matters relating to the electronic issue of documents; proposals for amending the EC regulation on the co-ordination of social security benefits and applications from candidate countries to list certain benefits in the annexes to that regulation.

The budget of the Administrative Commission for the current year is 1.600,000 euros which includes the technical assistance and translation costs.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Street Children

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what projects are supported by her Department designed to improve conditions for street children in Central American countries; and if she will make a statement. [59242]

Clare Short: A list of projects funded through DFID's Small Grants Scheme and Joint Funding Scheme has been placed in the Library of the House.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out the inherent rights and entitlements needed to guarantee a child's right to survival, development and an adequate standard of living. It is crucial that development strategies in all counties address issues of child poverty and secure child entitlements.

Examples of our work in this area include implementation of the Honduras Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), which is a good example of a government poverty reduction strategy, which integrates actions and commitments to tackle child poverty. Through the PRSP the Government has committed to strengthen the role of the Honduran Institute for Children and the Family especially to assist vulnerable children and adolescents; and to implement the National Plan for the Gradual and Progressive Eradication of Child Labour.

The European Commission is also funding projects in Central America with NGOs. In Honduras they are strengthening public agencies working with children at risk, training judges, police and community workers and NGOs working with children. In Nicaragua and Guatemala there are projects addressing the sexual exploitation of children. These programmes total 3.8 million euros (£2.4 million) of which the UK share is approximately 608,000 euros (£400,00).

Saudi Arabia and Kuwait

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid her Department has given to *(a)* Saudi Arabia and *(b)* Kuwait in the past 10 years. [60631]

Clare Short: None.

Grants

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which organisations which were in receipt of a grant from her in 1997–98 no longer are; what the annual saving is; which organisations and outside bodies which were not in receipt of a grant in 1997–98 now are; and what the annual cost is. [61399]

Clare Short: It would involve disproportionate cost to provide a full answer to this question.

Child Labour

Helen Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her assessment is of the scale of child labour; and what steps she plans to take in relation to it. [61925]

Clare Short: The most recent report form the International Labour Organisation estimates that there are 246 million working children. 179 million of them are engaged in the worst forms of child labour that endanger their physical, mental or moral well-being.

The Government will continue to support partners that tackle child labour internationally, nationally and locally, and to promote policies that support poverty elimination and social justice for children. My Department has recently published a paper, "Liberating Children—combating hidden and harmful child labour", which looks at why there are so many children in harmful work, and suggests how everyone—governments, international organisations, business and civil society—has a part to play in tackling this persistent problem.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Criminal Offences

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many criminal offences have been *(a)* created and *(b)* abolished by her Department since 1997. [55435]

Mr. Morley: DEFRA came into being on the 8 June 2001. Since that date over 295 Statutory Instruments emanating from the Department have come into force. A comprehensive and exhaustive list of new and abolished offences could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Some new offences have been created, some offences have been repealed and some re-enacted; most offences relate to breach of the regulations or obstruction of officers enforcing the regulations. Many of the provisions related to foot-and-mouth controls and extended offences to geographical areas covered by the controls.

I can however provide the following information about the following measures creating such offences which have come into force since 8 June 2001:

The Foot-and-Mouth Disease (Control of Vaccination)(England) Regulations 2001 SI No. 2375 prohibit vaccination against foot-and-mouth disease except by licence

The Processed Animal Protein (England) Regulations 2001 SI No. 2376 restrict the feeding of processed animal protein to farmed animals

The TSE Regulations 2002 SI No. 843 provide for the administration and enforcement of measures to deal with transmissible spongiform encephalopathies in all susceptible animals

The Products of Animal Origin (Third Country Imports)(England) Order 2002 SI No. 1227 restrict the importation of products of animal origin

The Plant Health (Phytophera ramorum)(England) Order 2002 SI No. 1299 implement measures to deal with the fungus named in the Order.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund Committee (and working party on irregularities) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55658]

Mr. Morley: The Committee was set up under Council Regulation 17/64 EEC on the conditions for granting aid from the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund. Provisions which currently define the role of the Committee, confer powers on the Commission and establish rules for consultation and adoption of legislation are contained in Articles 11 to 15 of Council Regulation 1258/99 on the financing of the common agricultural policy.

The Committee has both voting and non-voting functions. The procedures for adoption of legislation by the Committee are set out in Article 13 of Regulation 1258/99. This is a management committee procedure (variant IIa). The voting procedure is applied to regulations made under Articles 4 and 5 of Regulation 1258/99 (essentially concerned with accreditation of paying agencies and submission of annual CAP accounts). In addition, a number of other regulations require the FEOGA Committee to express an opinion via Article 13 procedures, in particular on measures adopted under the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS), some horizontal regulations, e.g. on calculating the costs of financing intervention measures, and certain commodity regime provisions which involve the grant of aid from FEOGA funds (in the latter case the sectoral management committee normally sit as a joint management committee with the FEOGA Committee).

The FEOGA Committee may also be consulted in circumstances set down in Article 14 of Reg 1258–99. This provides for the Fund Committee to be consulted:

in cases where provision is made for it to be consulted;

for the assessment of the Fund's credits to be entered in the Commission's estimate for the coming financial year and, if necessary, on additional estimates;

on draft proposals from the Commission to the Council concerning the application of Regulation 1258–99 and on draft reports on the Fund to be submitted to the Council.

The Committee may also examine any other question referred to it by its Chairman either on his own initiative or at the request of a representative of a Member State. It should be informed regularly of the activities of the Fund. Consultation is required by Article 6 of the Regulation (essentially concerning payment of monthly advances from the Fund and decisions on clearance of annual CAP accounts). Consultation does not involve a vote.

The Committee has met 12 times over the past 12 months. The costs of travel and subsistence for two officers was about £13,344. Items currently under its consideration are the budget of the Common Agricultural Policy, and the clearance of accounts process.

Together with Member States, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

> "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (COM (2001) 783 Final).

As part of the review process, the UK Government have encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Standing Forestry Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [55660]

Mr. Morley: The Standing Forestry Committee was established by European Council Decision (89/367/EEC) made on 29 May 1989. Its mandate is to provide for closer co-operation in the forestry sector between Member States and the European Commission and thereby support forestry measures initiated under the Community agricultural structure and rural development policy. Recently the mandate has been extended in practice to provide support under Community environmental policy.

In the last 12 months the Committee met 6 times. The Forestry Commission represents the UK. The annual cost of the Commission's involvement varies, depending on the number of meetings. In the last 12 months the cost was £2,250.

The Committee is currently considering new legislation to monitor and assess the impacts of natural and man-made impacts on the health of forests, audit guidance on monitoring payments for forestry measures and new legislation on evaluation of forestry in rural development. Together with Member States, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Commission Document 5685/02).

As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Joint Meetings of Management and/or Regulatory Committees dealing with agrimonetary questions is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55663]

Mr. Morley: This committee oversees the agrimonetary compensation regulations. It has met twice over the last 12 months. The UK was represented by one official. The cost of travel and subsistence was about £1,024. There are no items currently under consideration.

Together with Member States, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to

> "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission".

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Tuberculosis

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* farmyard and *(b)* feral (i) cats and (ii) dogs have been tested in TB endemic areas by constituency in the last 30 years; and what proportion of these turned out to be TB reactors. [55811]

Mr. Morley: The information is not available in the format requested. However since 1970 a total of 150 cats and 96 dogs have been tested for TB. Of those, 16 cats and one dog tested positive. The statistics gathered do not differentiate between feral and household cats.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether she routinely tests free-roaming farm animals when a TB breakdown occurs. [55845]

Mr. Morley: In addition to cattle, DEFRA will undertake testing of goat herds co-located with a cattle herd that has had confirmed TB reactors. Testing of any co-located farmed deer in the same circumstances is strongly advised but is not carried out as a routine.

Law Enforcement Agencies

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what law enforcement agencies and prosecuting authorities designated with legislation there are within the responsibility of her Department; and what complaints procedure is available for each. [57102]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 May 2002]:* The Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), which was created on the 8 June 2001, is responsible for prosecuting offences in relation to the core Departmental functions administered by various Inspectorates or Services including; the Sea Fisheries Inspectorate, the Veterinary Field Service, the Egg Marketing Inspectorate, the Horticulture Marketing Inspectorate, the Plant Health Safety Inspectorate and the British Cattle Movement Service. It is also responsible for prosecuting offences alleged by the Forestry Commission. Each of the bodies has an established procedure for dealing with complaints.The procedure generally has three stages. Firstly the complaint is considered by managers within the Inspectorate or Service; secondly, if the complaint is not resolved it may be referred to the Departmental Complaints Adjudicator for investigation; and thirdly, if the complaint still remains unresolved the complainant may then write to their Member of Parliament and ask for the matter to be referred to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration.

DEFRA is also responsible for prosecuting offences in relation to six executive agencies; the Rural Payments Agency (RPA), the Central Science Laboratory (CSL), the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS), the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD), the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD). Complaints about the agencies referred to above are initially considered by managers within each agency and ultimately by the Chief Executive of the Agency. If the complaint remains unresolved the complainant may then write to their Member of Parliament and ask for the matter to be referred to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration.

Broadband

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to offer assistance to small businesses in rural areas to enable them to access broadband communications as they become available. [57213]

Alun Michael: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for e-Commerce and Competitiveness, the hon. Member for Paisley, South (Mr. Alexander), on 24 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 631W. Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry and DEFRA with Regional Development Agencies and others are keen to assist in meeting the needs of rural economies.

Canoeing

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason the Angling and Canoeing Liaison Group of the Environment Agency's meeting on Wednesday 8 May to discuss access for canoeists was cancelled; and if she will make a statement. [58369]

Alun Michael: The cancellation of the Angling and Canoe Access Group meeting on 8 May 2002 was due to the high number of apologies for absence sent prior to the meeting.

Given that Government will respond shortly to the University of Brighton research, "Water-based sport and recreation: the facts", the meeting is being rescheduled to allow consideration of this important research.

Rural Development Regulations

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions her Department has had with the European Commission regarding changing rural development regulations to allow *(a)* member states and *(b)* regions within them, to vary the application of voluntary modulation; and what analysis her Department has carried out to ascertain the impact of regionalisation of modulation. [59704]

Mr. Morley: Discussions have taken place between my Department and the European Commission in preparation for the Mid-term Review of CAP. They have included possible changes to the Rural Development Regulation and horizontal measures legislation in relation to modulation and the potential for different rates of modulation in different areas. We will consider carefully the impact of possible different rates of modulation together with other potential changes to the legislation. We will, of course, consult stakeholders on any new options that emerge from the MTR before taking any decisions on implementation.

Imported Meat and Poultry

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will list the *(a)* meat and poultry products imported into the United Kingdom and *(b)* country of origin of products subsequently found to be unsuitable for human consumption in the United Kingdom in the last three years. [60330]

Mr. Morley: Tables detailing the list of meat and poultry products imported into the United Kingdom and the countries from which consignments have been rejected have been placed in the Library of the House. The table of rejected consignments covering all rejections made by UK Border Inspection Posts from 1999 to 2001 has also been placed in the Library of the House; however, details of the reason for rejection are not held centrally.

Noxious Weeds Act

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many prosecutions there have been under the Noxious Weeds Act 1959 since 1972; and what assessment she has made of the Act's effectiveness. [57250]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 June 2002]:* Records of enforcement activity under the Weeds Act 1959 going back to 1972 are not readily available. However, it is rarely necessary to invoke the formal powers of the Act and I can confirm that there have been no prosecutions in the last five years.

The fact that there have not been prosecutions does not mean the Act has been ineffective. The Act puts the onus on landowners to control the spread of injurious weeds from their land. DEFRA investigates each complaint about injurious weeds on its merits, but gives priority to complaints where there is a threat to farmland, farming activities and on farm diversified equine activities. Once DEFRA officials have made the occupier of land aware of the presence of injurious weeds, the matter can usually be resolved satisfactorily through co-operation and advice, without taking statutory action.

Review of London Markets

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Review of London Markets. [61923]

Mr. Morley: In its report on New Covent Garden Market published last year the House of Commons Select Committee on Agriculture recommended a review of the provision of wholesale markets in London.

In response to this recommendation and in conjunction with the Corporation of London, which owns three of the four major wholesale markets in central London, we have commissioned Mr. Nicholas Saphir to undertake a review. Mr. Saphir is an adviser to several large food and farming companies in the United States, South America and Europe and has wide experience of the operation of the food chain in England. We have asked him to produce an initial report by the end of September.

The terms of reference of the review are as follows:

To consider:

whether the existing London wholesale market facilities are well adapted to the needs of the business communities and users which they serve;

the effect on the operation of the markets of the legislation which governs them;

the potential impact of product diversification and changing demand for the services provided by wholesale markets; and

the scope for developing a co-ordinated strategy for the future management of the markets;

and to make such recommendations to the Secretary of State and the Corporation of London as the reviewer considers appropriate, after having regard to the practicality and legal and financial implications of implementing them.

Mr. Saphir may be contacted at the following address:

Review of London Markets
Room 106
Eastbury House
30–34 Albert Embankment
London
SE1 7TL.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Operational Units

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General, pursuant to her answer of 27 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1330W, what *(a)* educational, *(b)* technical and *(c)* professional qualifications are required for the business managers who head each operational unit. [60207]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* Area Business Manager posts do not require the post holder to have specific educational, technical or professional qualifications. Recruitment to these posts is done on the basis of a person specification, which sets out in detail the key competencies for the post. Candidates are required to state clearly evidence which demonstrates their achievement of each competency, and applications are judged on merit.

Crown Prosecution Service

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General how many *(a)* performance reviews and *(b)* case specific reviews were undertaken in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02, broken down by prosecuting authority. [59347]

The Solicitor-General: The CPS prosecutes around 1,350,000 cases a year in the magistrates courts and 115,000 in the Crown Court. Cases are subject to continuous review by prosecutors and mechanisms are in place to monitor CPS area performance quarterly. HMCPSI also undertakes inspections of CPS areas. Since the current cycle of inspections began in 1999, HMCPSI has published 39 area inspections reports.

All cases with an adverse outcome are subject to specific review by a senior prosecutor in the area concerned to ascertain reasons and accountability for the outcome. They number around 1,700 a year in the magistrates courts and 15,000 a year in the Crown Court.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General if each CPS region has recently received a modern IT infrastructure; what the cost of the infrastructure was per CPS region as a percentage of the total revenue budget; what the total revenue budget is in each case; and if these systems are compatible with other systems in the criminal justice system. [59345]

The Solicitor-General: The Connect 42 project provided over 5,300 staff across all of the 42 CPS areas with a common IT infrastructure with modern office automation. The project ran from 1999 and concluded in March 2002, on time and within budget.

The costs of the Connect 42 infrastructure were met from a centrally held HQ budget that was partly funded from the Capital Modernisation Fund. The cost of the infrastructure per CPS area as a percentage of the total 1999–2002 revenue budget and the total gross revenue budget was:

	Total revenue budget £ million (1999–2002)	*Connect 42:* *Expenditure (£ million)*	*As percentage of total area budget*
42 areas	869.5	19.87	2.3
Avon and Somerset	20.0	0.3	1.5
Bedfordshire	8.2	0.2	2.1
Cambridgeshire	10.1	0.2	2.0
Cheshire	14.4	0.4	2.6
Cleveland	10.4	0.3	3.0
Cumbria	8.4	0.3	3.3
Derbyshire	12.1	0.3	2.6
Devon and Cornwall	17.4	0.4	2.2
Dorset	8.0	0.2	2.0
Durham	8.6	0.2	2.6
Dyfed Powys	8.0	0.2	2.5
Essex	21.3	0.3	1.3
Area			
Gloucestershire	7.1	0.2	2.1
Greater Manchester	56.0	1.2	2.2
Gwent	10.7	0.3	2.4
Hampshire	28.5	0.5	1.7
Hertfordshire	13.0	0.3	1.9
Humberside	11.9	0.3	2.3
Kent	23.1	0.4	1.8
Lancashire	26.8	0.7	2.5
Leicestershire	13.3	0.4	2.7
Lincolnshire	7.9	0.2	2.3
Merseyside	13.1	0.8	2.5
London	165.1	3.1	1.8
Norfolk	9.3	0.3	2.9
Northamptonshire	8.3	0.2	2.7
Northumbria	27.2	0.9	3.3
North Wales	10.0	0.3	2.9
North Yorkshire	10.3	0.3	2.5
Nottinghamshire	19.5	0.5	2.6
South Wales	28.0	0.6	2.3
South Yorkshire	18.7	0.5	2.4
Staffordshire	14.5	0.4	3.0
Suffolk	8.8	0.3	2.7

		Connect 42:	
	Total revenue budget £ million (1999–2002)	*Expenditure (£ million)*	*As percentage of total area budget*
Surrey	11.3	0.4	3.3
Sussex	18.9	0.4	2.0
Thames Valley	21.8	0.6	2.7
Warwickshire	4.9	0.1	2.5
West Mercia	14.2	0.4	2.9
West Midlands	52.9	1.2	2.2
West Yorkshire	42.4	1.1	2.6
Wiltshire	7.2	0.2	2.4

The Connect 42 infrastructure provides a secure e-mail facility that is compatible with other government departments through the Government Secure Intranet (GSI) and with the police through the police network, the Criminal Justice eXtranet (CJX).

The CPS is therefore making its full contribution to the target set out in the "The Way Ahead" for all criminal justice professionals to be able to e-mail each other securely.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General which CPS regions are piloting the recommendations of Sir Robin Auld that the CPS should take over responsibility from the police for determining the charge from the outset of the case. [59343]

The Solicitor-General: A six-month pilot to identify the practical implications of implementing the recommendation that the CPS should take over the decision to charge from the police was established in mid-February in Kent (Medway division), Essex (the whole county), Wrexham (North Wales), Halifax (West Yorkshire) and Bath (Avon and Somerset). Two busy charging centres in Bristol were added to the pilot in April. A paper explaining the pilot in more detail is available from the Library.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Solicitor-General if Her Majesty's CPS Inspectorate has assessed the consistency of approach between each CPS area in respect of the *(a)* scrutiny and *(b)* credibility checks undertaken by the staff of the CPS in relation to (i) all cases and (ii) historical sex abuse cases. [59336]

The Solicitor-General: HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPSI) assesses the quality of decision making in each area on the basis of a sample of randomly selected files. Inspectors assess the extent to which prosecutors take all decisions in accordance with the principles set out in the Code for Crown Prosecutors (the Code) promulgated by the Director of Public Prosecutions under section 10, Prosecution of Offices Act 1985. First, there must be sufficient evidence to provide a realistic prospect of conviction. Secondly, once the case has passed the evidential test, the circumstances must be such that a prosecution would be in the public interest. Area inspections reveal that a very high level of compliance is attained, that is 98.3 per cent. and 99.81 per cent. respectively up to the end of March 2002. Assessments of decisions made in child abuse cases are broadly similar.

In the joint inspection conducted by HMCPSI and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary into the investigation and prosecution of cases involving allegations of rape (the Rape Report), published in April 2002, there were insufficient numbers of historic sex abuse cases to render comparisons meaningful. Inspectors found that most decisions were in accordance with the Code, but were not satisfied that all rape cases were being reviewed consistently. Inspectors recommended that in future all rape cases be allocated to specialist lawyers and I informed the House on 25 April 2002 about the action to be taken by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in response to this. Furthermore, the inspectors recommended that the CPS updates, revises and widens its guidance to prosecutors on the review and handling of cases involving allegations of rape and that legal training on sexual offences be updated in the near future and undertaken by all appropriate lawyers and caseworkers. These recommendations, when addressed, will help ensure a consistent approach to the review and assessment of credibility in all rape cases, including historic sex abuse cases.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Winter Fuel Payments

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what progress has been made in discussions with the European Commission about the extent of the UK's legal obligations under European regulations on winter fuel payments; and if he will make a statement. [53502]

Mr. McCartney: We are unable to say when discussions will conclude.

New Deal

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment his Department has made of the impact of the new deal on long-term unemployment. [59649]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Since 1997, the number of people unemployed for one year or more has been cut by nearly three quarters. The new deals have played an important part in this success.

By the end of March 2002, the new deal for young people had helped over 360,000 young people off benefit and into work. Independent research by the National Institute for Economic and Social Research found that the number of young people unemployed for six months or more would be twice as high without the new deal. It also found that the new deal had increased youth employment and had a positive knock-on effect on employment among other age groups.

New deal 25 plus has helped over 100,000 long-term unemployed people into work. In April 2001, we launched an enhanced new deal 25 plus programme, providing a more flexible, more individually-tailored service for long-term unemployed people. Since then, the number of people aged 25 and over unemployed for 18 months or more has fallen by almost 30 per cent.

Rents

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, pursuant to his answer of 24 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 340W, on single room rent, if he will place in the Library a copy of the recent research by the Rent Service showing the average single room rent increases for the UK. [59321]

Malcolm Wicks: The research carried out by the Rent Service was an internal statistical analysis intended to inform the wider development of housing benefit policy. The Rent Service was not asked for and did not produce a formal report of their analysis.

Scottish Executive

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether a Scottish Executive Minister will be a member of the UK delegation to the Employment and Social Policy European Union Council of Ministers meeting on 3 June; and what information is being provided by his Department to the Scottish Executive in connection with pre-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [60278]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: No Scottish Executive Minister attended the Employment and Social Policy Council meeting on 3 June 2002.

It is the responsibility of the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament to scrutinise the Scottish Executive's involvement in preparations for EU Council meetings. These arrangements are a matter for the Committee and the Scottish Executive. The Department provides information to Scottish Executive officials as part of that process.

Agency Start-up Costs

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the cost of creating *(a)* Jobcentre Plus and *(b)* the Pension Service; and if he will make a statement. [47630]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Jobcentre Plus as an organisation came into being on 1 April 2002, replacing the Employment Service and the working age parts of the Benefits Agency. In 56 pathfinder offices across Great Britain it is already helping people get and keep work through providing integrated work-focused services to customers and employers. This new service will be introduced across the whole network over the next few years and at the same time the IT systems which support the business will be improved. The cost of this investment in a modernised, work-focused service will be funded over the next two years from the Employment Opportunities Fund which was established in Spending Review 2000, and thereafter from the outcome of the Spending Review 2002 process. The discussions about the spending review will continue until it concludes in the summer.

The Pension Service also came into being on 1 April 2002, replacing the pension elements of the Benefits Agency. Like Jobcentre Plus it has been established as part of a wider agenda for modernising the delivery of benefits around the needs of customer groups. The investment needed to move towards single transaction technology and planned new services to increase efficiency and accuracy is being funded from the Welfare Modernisation Fund, but as with Jobcentre Plus final figures are dependent on the outcome of Spending Review 2002.

Departmental Underspends

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the *(a)* capital and *(b)* revenue underspend in his Department is expected to be in the financial year 2001–02. [47796]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* Departmental expenditure figures for 2001–02 are not yet finalised. The last forecast position was published in the Budget report on 17 April.

TREASURY

Ministerial Accommodation

Mr. Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what publicly owned accommodation is made available to him in his official role; how many nights he has been in residence at each of these properties in the last 12 months; and what the total cost was of maintaining each of these properties in the last 12 months. [55090]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 9 May 2002]:* I refer to the answers given by the Prime Minister on 28 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1443W and by the Deputy Prime Minister on 21 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 91W. Expenditure on the flat at 10 Downing Street during 2001–02 was £410. Information on the number of nights spent in residence in the accommodation by my right hon. Friend is not available.

Work-related Illness

Mr. Clapham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many employees of his Department retired through work-related ill-health in the last year for which records are available; and what the cost was to the Department. [56088]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* HM Treasury does not maintain records, which enable ill-health retirements to be separately identified as work related. For HM Treasury one member of staff retired with a medical certificate issued by the civil service pension scheme medical adviser in the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002.

Benefits provided on medical retirement are as set out in the rules of the principal civil service pension scheme and laid before Parliament, and provide for an immediate payment of an enhanced pension and lump sum. Ill health retirement expenditure is met centrally from the civil superannuation vote. For the year ending March 2002, provisional expenditure met from the vote was £310 million in respect of all civil service cases for which an ill health pension has been awarded. These cases number approximately 67,000 and include those who have formerly been ill health retired but who have now reached and exceeded the normal retirement age.

National Insurance (NHS)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what cash increase in NI will be applicable to *(a)* NHS house officers, *(b)* NHS nurse consultants, *(c)* NHS senior house officers, *(d)* NHS specialist registrars and *(e)* NHS consultants. [59409]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The Budget 2002 changes in national insurance contributions (NICs) will help to fund improvements to public services and a real terms increase in spending on health over the next five years of 40 per cent.

Estimates for the increase in 2003–04 in employee NICs by grade for England are shown in the table. I regret that reliable estimates for the United Kingdom would be available only at disproportionate cost.

	£ million
House officers	1
Nurse consultants	Less than 1
Senior house officers	5
Registrar group[1]	5
Consultants	17

[1] Higher specialist training grades were restructured in the mid-1990s, with registrar and senior registrar grades being replaced by a combined specialist registrar grades. The published work force data do not allow us to distinguish between specialist registrars and the few remaining staff on the older grades. The figures have therefore been grouped together and are referred to as the registrar group.

Inheritance Tax

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will raise the threshold at which inheritance tax is paid; and if he will make a statement. [60114]

Dawn Primarolo *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* My right hon. Friend has increased the threshold in his Budget this year.

Lakshmi Mittal

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer given by the Foreign Secretary of 21 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 255W, on meetings with Embassy staff, what the economic benefit to the United Kingdom was of the Lakshmi Mittal Romanian steel contract. [60553]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 11 June 2002]:* I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the answer given by the Prime Minister on 14 February 2002, *Official Report*, col. 612W.

Construction Industry

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will target Inland Revenue employment status teams to monitor the employment status of workers in the construction industry. [60633]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer to my previous answer, of 16 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 804W). The Inland Revenue already centrally directs the minimum level of employer compliance resource to be deployed on employment status reviews, including for the construction industry.

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures are *(a)* in place and *(b)* under discussion in his Department in order to ensure compliance with the WEE Directive. [60735]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer the Minister for Energy and Construction is giving him today.

State Pensions

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer of 22 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 92W, to the hon. Member for Glasgow, Pollock (Mr. Davidson), on state pensions, if he will disaggregate the value of unfunded public pension liabilities by scheme; what assessment he has made of the reasons for the changes in the values of unfunded public pension liabilities in recent years; and if he will make a statement. [60807]

Mr. Boateng: The £350 billion Government Actuary's Department estimate for accrued unfunded public service pension schemes liabilities as at 31 March 2001 comprises the following:

£98 billion for England and Wales teachers,

£75 billion for England and Wales NHS,

£59 billion UK civil service scheme,

£51 billion Armed Forces,

£35 billion GB police and fire,

£10 billion Scottish teachers,

£6 billion Scottish NHS,

£16 billion for other schemes such as the Northern Irish public service schemes, overseas pensions, NDPB schemes etc.

The increase in the value of these unfunded liabilities in recent years is due to a variety of factors, the main ones being: increases in prices and salaries, a growth in the number of public servants and reassessments of mortality rates.

Correspondence

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to the letters of 23 January and 15 April from the hon. Member for Huntingdon concerning compensation for tax on further distributions to be made by the Thalidomide Trust. [60712]

D[illegible] Primarolo: Shortly.

Manufacturing Industry

Mr. Cox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Government's support for the manufacturing industry in Greater London. [60709]

Mr. Boateng: The Government have put in place an ambitious programme of micro-economic reforms to raise UK productivity growth. Many of these measures will help manufacturers throughout the UK improve their productivity performance. For instance, manufacturers will benefit from the extension of the R&D tax credit to all firms as announced in Budget 2002, following the introduction of an R&D tax credit for small firms. Manufacturers will be the main beneficiaries of this initiative, as they undertake 80 per cent. of the UK's commercial R&D.

Manufacturing industry in London also benefits from a range of DTI programmes to encourage investment, to promote enterprise, innovation, and knowledge transfer, to raise skills, and to provide an effective and competitive framework. Information on these is available from the

DTI. The Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) have recognized manufacturing as a priority in every region. The introduction of the Single Pot funding arrangement in April 2002 has given the RDAs unprecedented flexibility in the use of their resources. The London Development Agency (LDA) operates a number of schemes to support manufacturers in Greater London. Information on these initiatives is available from the LDA.

Oil Industry

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the impact of the new supplementary tax on North sea oil profits announced in the Budget on oil industry employment in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the UK. [R] [60590]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government made a full analysis of the regime. The changes to the North sea taxation regime will ensure a regime that raises a fair share of revenue and encourages long-term investment, establishing a more secure basis on which companies can plan for the future.

Marriage and Birth Statistics

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the average birth weight was of children of *(a)* married couples, *(b)* cohabitees and *(c)* single mothers in each of the last five years; [60841]

(2) what the infant mortality rate is among children of *(a)* married couples, *(b)* cohabitees and *(c)* single mothers. [60840]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Andrew Turner, dated 12 June 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent questions asking what the average birthweight and infant mortality rates are amongst children of (a) married couples, (b) cohabitees and (c) single mothers in each of the last five years. I am replying in his absence. (60840, 60841)

Information on cohabitation is not collected directly at birth or death registration. However, for births outside marriage some information is available to infer living arrangements. The information available is shown in the tables below.

Average birthweight by live births by type of birth registration in England and Wales, 1996–2000

Average birthweight (grams)

Type of birth registration	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
All live births[1]	3,325	3,322	3,325	3,321	3,327
Inside marriage	3,356	3,354	3,355	3,350	3,357
Outside marriage					
Joint registration, same address	3,298	3,298	3,307	3,308	3,313
Joint registration, different address	3,231	3,234	3,231	3,232	3,237
Sole registration	3,219	3,211	3,214	3,213	3,213

[1] with stated birthweight

Infant mortality rate[1] by type of birth registration in England and Wales, 1996–2000

Type of birth registration	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
All	6.0	5.9	5.6	5.7	5.5
Inside marriage	5.3	5.2	4.9	4.9	4.8
Outside marriage	7.1	6.9	6.8	6.9	6.6
Joint registration/same address	6.6	6.5	5.9	6.3	5.9
Joint registration/different address	8.7	7.4	8.8	8.2	8.0
Sole registration	7.1	7.6	7.6	7.6	7.7

[1] per 1,000 live births

Source:

Office for National Statistics

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many were divorced in the most recent year for which information is available, broken down by year of latest marriage. [60838]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Kidgell to Mr. Andrew Turner, dated 12 June 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your question concerning how many were divorced in the most recent year for which information is available broken down by year of latest marriage. I am replying in his absence. (60838)

The attached table provides the information for those divorced in 2000.

Divorces in 2000 by year of marriage

England and Wales

Year of marriage	*Number of Divorces[1]*
Total all years	141,135
2000	10
1999	813
1998	5,644
1997	7,650
1996	8,550
1995	8,676
1994	8,449
1993	7,912
1992	7,636
1991	6,771
1990	6,620
1989	6,389
1988	5,697
1987	5,297
1986	4,698
1985	4,306
1984	3,889
1983	3,641
1982	3,338
1981	3,260
1980	3,228
1979	2,924
1978	2,721
1977	2,387
1976	2,181
1975	2,232
1974	1,946
1973	1,892
1972	1,767
1971	1,582
1970	1,498
1969	1,235
1968	1,103
1967	882
1966	726
1965	630

Divorces in 2000 by year of marriage

England and Wales

Year of marriage	*Number of Divorces*[1]
1964	504
1963	416
1962	384
1961	290
1960	276
1959	208
1958	198
1957	147
1956	117
1955	98
1954	67
1953	63
1952	32
1951	37
1950	27
1949	21
1948	13
1947	15
1946	12
1945	12
Before 1945	17
Not stated	1

[1] The term divorce here includes both decrees absolute and decrees of nullity

Source:

ONS

Social Care

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 16 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 807W, on social care, if he will make a statement on the recommendation of the Wanless report on a study of the trends affecting social care. [60819]

Mr. Boateng: The Chancellor's Budget statement of 17 April 2002 addressed the recommendations of the Wanless report.

Mortgage Companies

Bob Spink: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to put a duty of care on mortgage companies to repay funds to people who have had their properties repossessed and sold where there is a surplus arising on that sale. [60875]

Ruth Kelly: The Government are giving responsibility for regulating mortgage lenders to the Financial Services Authority (FSA). The FSA will be consulting in due course about its rules including in relation to the issue of repossessions.

Family Incomes (South-west)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) of 9 May 2002, *Official Report*, columns 342–43W, on family income (south-vest), how many families will be eligible for the child tax credit in each region of the United Kingdom. [58785]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates of the number of families with children expected to benefit from the child tax credit directly or via IS/JSA in 2003–04 by Government office region are shown in the table.

Government office region	*Number of families expected to benefit from the child tax credit*
North-east	290,000
North-west and Merseyside	750,000
Yorkshire and the Humber	540,000
East Midlands	380,000
West Midlands	500,000
Eastern	460,000
London	700,000
South-east	670,000
South-west	470,000
Wales	320,000
Scotland	430,000
Northern Ireland	220,000
Total	5,750,000

The estimates given are based on the IGoTM tax benefit model for the UK, based on the Family Resources Survey (1999–2000) uprated to 2003–04 prices. The estimates are based on the number of families with children whose household income makes them likely to benefit from the child tax credit and do not take into account the way in which the new tax credits will respond to changes in income or other circumstances, described in detail in "The Child and Working Tax Credit" (HMT, 2001). Figures are rounded to the nearest 10,000 and the total may not sum because of rounding.

European Council Decisions

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement in response to the four points identified by the Council Recommendation 2002/178/EC on the implementation of member states' employment policies, pertaining to the United Kingdom. [57904]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I have been asked to reply.

The four points relating to the UK raise issues concerning: national social partnership on productivity, skills and work organisation; reducing the gender pay gap and improving child care provision; active labour market policies for unemployed adults; and work based training to address skill gaps and improve skills.

The recommendations to the UK have been fully addressed in the 2002 Employment Action Plan which is being supplied to the Library and put on the internet. The Government's response highlights developments since the 2001 Plan, including: work of the CBI and TUC under the Productivity Challenge; the Kingsmill report on closing the gender pay gap; the increasing focus on wider disadvantage; and the Performance Innovation Unit report on work force development.

CABINET OFFICE

Refurbishment (22 Whitehall)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Cabinet Office, pursuant to the letter CL/02/035437 of 7 May, when he expects to report to the House on his investigation of the circumstances surrounding the procurement of timber for the refurbishment of 22 Whitehall; and if he will make a statement. [60798]

Mr. Alexander: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 11 June 2002, *Official Report*, column 1188W.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Local Government White Paper

Liz Blackman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a further statement on his plans to legislate following the publication of the Local government White Paper, 'Strong Local Leadership-Quality Public Services'. [61490]

Mr. Raynsford: The White Paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services" set out a vision for local government by proposing to give councils new freedoms to respond to the needs of their local communities and establish a new partnership between central and local government to deliver high quality services. We have already made substantial progress in implementing these proposals, today we are taking a further significant step forward by publishing for consultation a draft Local Government Bill which will give effect to those measures which require new primary legislation.

The consultation period will run until 23 August. The draft Bill, together with explanatory notes and regulatory impact assessments has been published on the website for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Copies of all the consultation material have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Single Regeneration Budget

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the grants paid through single regeneration budget V on the Isle of Wight, stating for each the *(a)* recipient organisation, *(b)* amount, *(c)* date of payments, *(d)* objectives and *(e)* performance against measurable performance indicators. [60154]

Mr. McNulty: Single Regeneration Budget V is administered through the Isle of Wight Economic Partnership. Information on recipient organisations, amounts, objectives and outputs to date are contained in the "Island Inclusive SRB5 Delivery Plan 2002/2003", copies of which have been placed in the House.

With regard to date of payments, these are made to the recipient organisations quarterly in arrears in August, November, February and April each year.

Fire Service Funding

Mrs. May: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what funding was made available to fire authorities to assist them to provide fire safety advice to the public in the last 12 months. [60444]

Mr. Raynsford: Responsibility for the provision of fire services, including fire safety matters, rests locally with fire authorities. It is up to the authorities to set budgets in the light of their statutory obligations and local priorities.

Mrs. May: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what funding was granted to the Fire Service, broken down by authority, in each of the last six years. [60438]

Mr. Raynsford: Fire Standard Spending Assessment (SSA) figures for England by fire authority, for the six years ending 2002–03, are shown in the table:

Fire standard spending assessment

£ million

Authority[1]	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Avon	23.406	24.405	25.425	26.725	28.013	30.025
Bedfordshire and Luton	11.307	12.038	12.570	13.083	13.896	14.552
Buckinghamshire	13.407	14.192	14.845	15.201	16.362	16.992
Cambridgeshire and Peterborough	13.649	14.814	15.610	16.237	16.948	17.573
Cheshire	21.037	22.250	22.710	23.211	24.548	25.331
Cleveland	20.132	21.049	21.648	22.229	23.194	24.262
Cornwall	11.268	11.958	12.441	12.831	13.620	14.071
County Durham and Darlington	13.997	14.647	15.125	15.664	16.211	16.418
Cumbria	11.472	12.128	12.667	12.824	13.335	13.879
Derbyshire	21.441	22.472	23.911	24.417	25.133	25.743
Devon	24.148	25.752	26.309	27.485	28.692	29.960
Dorset	14.387	15.100	15.872	16.378	17.049	17.638
East Sussex	17.562	18.652	19.521	20.405	21.646	22.503
Essex	35.109	36.834	38.299	39.465	42.306	43.821
Gloucestershire	10.821	11.155	11.621	12.125	12.283	12.813
Greater Manchester	73.155	77.032	78.833	81.320	84.681	86.602
Hampshire	33.126	35.320	36.637	38.329	40.381	42.486
Hereford and Worcester	12.828	13.339	14.411	14.915	15.257	16.004
Hertfordshire	22.015	23.206	23.679	25.747	26.760	27.827
Humberside	24.033	24.629	25.759	26.516	27.463	28.070
Isle of Wight	3.118	3.395	3.586	3.784	3.968	4.148
Isles of Scilly	0.289	0.297	0.310	0.321	0.337	0.355
Kent and Medway Towns	33.180	35.364	36.557	38.282	40.619	42.299
Lancashire	35.903	37.389	38.785	40.076	41.137	43.295
Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland	19.342	20.168	20.709	21.383	22.288	23.069
Lincolnshire	11.202	11.706	12.097	12.472	13.012	13.812
London	248.164	260.636	270.513	282.240	302.402	319.085
Merseyside	48.400	50.167	51.829	52.549	53.886	54.810
Norfolk	14.856	15.365	16.177	16.739	17.205	18.003
North Yorkshire	14.322	15.299	16.221	16.747	17.664	18.991
Northamptonshire	11,854	12.554	13.083	13.283	14.114	14.628
Northumberland	7.785	8.062	8.506	8.756	9.218	9.456

Fire standard spending assessment

£ million

Authority[1]	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Nottinghamshire and City of Nottingham	22.959	24.314	24.903	25.505	26.537	27.041
Oxfordshire	12.402	13.159	13.546	14.197	15.113	15.917
Royal Berkshire	17.299	18.434	18.883	19.660	20.969	22.019
Shropshire	8.034	8.187	8.478	8.851	9.267	9.498
Somerset	9.091	9.551	10.212	10.491	11.112	11.485
South Yorkshire	32.311	34.064	35.690	36.434	37.478	38.745
Staffordshire Fire Authority	21.122	21.989	22.468	23.262	23.876	24.425
Suffolk	12.029	12.620	13.455	13.897	14.511	15.030
Surrey	23.328	24.347	25.276	26.183	27.941	29.136
Tyne and Wear	35.678	36.288	36.872	37.829	39.511	40.655
Warwickshire	10.345	11.077	11.294	11.669	12.126	12.492
West Midlands	72.317	75.664	78.374	80.706	83.342	86.082
West Sussex	15.855	17.162	17.202	18.631	19.628	20.600
West Yorkshire	57.304	59.609	61.269	62.259	65.253	66.250
Wiltshire and Swindon	10.457	11.041	11.810	12.087	12.711	13.109

[1] Current name of fire authority. A number of authorities were affected by local government reorganisation on 1 April 1997 and 1998 and (London) 3 July 2000.

Note:

In the case of combined fire authorities, for example, Kent and Medway Towns, the fire SSA is allocated to the constituent local unitary authorities.

Fires

Mrs. May: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what percentage of primary fires were *(a)* in road vehicles, *(b)* in dwellings, *(c)* in other buildings, *(d)* outdoor fires, *(e)* in private garages and sheds, *(f)* in retail distribution premises, *(g)* in industrial and transport premises and *(h)* in none of the above in the last 12 months. [60447]

Mr. Raynsford: The most recent data available refer to 2000, and are contained in the table.

United Kingdom 2000

	Primary fires[1,2]	
Location	*Number*	*Percentage*
Road vehicles	94,827	43
Dwellings	70,897	32
Other buildings	22,440	10
Outdoor fires[3]	12,064	5
Private garages and sheds	7,868	4
Retail distribution premises	5,367	2
Industrial and transport premises	4,705	2
None of the above[4]	1,367	1
All primary fires	219,535	100

[1] Including additional "late" call and heat and smoke damage incidents

[2] Figures are based on weighted sample data. Due to rounding data may not sum to 100 per cent. Data for 2000 are provisional.

[3] Other primary fires, excluding road vehicle fires and all outdoor secondary fires.

[4] This category comprises agricultural buildings.

Mrs. May: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what percentage of house fires in each of the last six years were in *(a)* owner occupied housing and *(b)* rented housing. [60440]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mrs. May: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the cost to business resulting from fire-related damage in each of the last six years. [60435]

Mr. Raynsford: The most recent data on the cost of fire are for 1999. The DTLR Costs of Fire model estimates that in that year the direct cost to business of commercial building fires in England and Wales was £620 million.

This figure only relates to the direct cost of commercial fires due to property damage (£580 million) and loss of business (£40 million).

The full cost breakdown for commercial fires includes the costs to business of anticipating fires (e.g. fire protection), costs to local authority fire brigades in attending incidents, and costs to society in terms of deaths and injuries sustained as a result of commercial fires.

The full cost breakdown for commercial building fires is shown in the following table.

England and Wales 1999

£ million

Cost component for commercial building fires	*Cost*
Costs in anticipation of fires:	
Fire protection	1,600
Fire safety	20
Insurance administration	350
Costs as a consequence of fires:	
Property losses	580
Loss to business	40
Fatalities	10
Injuries	40
Fire service response costs	250
Total	2,890

Data are not available for previous years. Earlier estimates, produced by the Home Office and non-Government organisations, were based on different methodologies and are therefore not comparable to the figures shown in the table.

Regional Government

Mrs. May: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what are the *(a)* powers and *(b)* responsibilities, of (i) the

Government offices and (ii) regional chambers of the regions, with regard to (A) sustainable development and (B) social inclusion. [60420]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government offices for the regions bring together the activities and interests of many Government Departments. They deliver the policies and programmes of these Departments as well as promoting a coherent regional approach to cross-cutting activities, including sustainable development and social inclusion. Government office responsibilities are set out in the corporate plan for the RCU/GO network.

Under the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998, the regional chambers have no statutory functions other than that each RDA, in preparing its regional economic strategy, must have regard to its chamber's views. That was put into effect by a ministerial direction under section 8(2)(a) of the Act. However, chambers have, in agreement with other regional partners taken on a range of other functions. In particular a number of chambers have taken on responsibility for producing the regional sustainable development framework, and regional planning guidance.

The regional governance White Paper 'Your Region, Your Choice' contains proposals to enhance the role of both the regional chambers and Government offices. These include providing direct funding to chambers for the purpose of regional planning, central Government support for the chamber in integrating regional strategies, and enhancing the responsibilities of Government offices in a wide range of areas.

Mrs. May: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what *(a)* guidelines and *(b)* requirements are placed on (i) regional chambers and (ii) Government offices of the regions, with regard to their allocation of Government money to their different areas of responsibility; and if he will place copies in the Library. [60421]

Mr. Raynsford: In respect of the regional chambers, a three year funding programme of £15 million commenced in the financial year 2001–02. The Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions issued guidance on the allocation process for the funding in July 2001. This contained guidelines as to the types of projects that might be funded and how the bidding process would work. This was updated and re-issued in February 2002. Each chamber is issued with a grant agreement letter, setting out the requirements and limitations under which the funding is provided. I am placing a copy of the most recent guidance in the Library.

Sponsor Departments have transferred resources to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in respect of the running costs for the RCU/GO network. The Regional Co-ordination Unit allocates these resources to individual Government offices for the regions each year.

My Department and other sponsor Departments delegate funds directly to the Government offices in respect of programmes they deliver on our behalf.

Programme and running costs funds are allocated and managed in accordance with the principals of Government Accounting, appropriate departmental guidance and other guidance specific to individual programmes. The activities and objectives that Government offices undertake in behalf of sponsor Departments with the resources allocated are set out in the corporate plan for the RCU/GO network.

Social Housing

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions of 16 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 800W, on social housing, what other information his Department has collated on the range of initiatives, apart from the cash incentive scheme and home buy, local authorities and registered social landlords in London offer to encourage tenants to relinquish a tenancy. [60883]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Housing Licensing Scheme

Gillian Merron: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress has been made on the introduction of mandatory licensing schemes for houses in multiple occupancy, as stated in the Housing Green Paper 'Quality and Choice: a decent home for all'; and what such licences will specify. [60632]

Mr. McNulty: The Government are committed to introducing a national licensing scheme for houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) and we consulted on our proposals in 1999. We remain committed in legislating for this at the earliest possible opportunity.

Our proposals on HMOs are targeted at combating the significant threat to occupants' health and welfare that exist in this part of the private rented sector. The licensing scheme will aim to ensure that a building in multiple occupation meets acceptable physical standards, that those involved in its management are competent and otherwise fit for such a role and the management arrangements in the property are satisfactory. To that end licences will only be granted to persons who are deemed "fit and proper" and will require such persons to ensure the property meets minimum physical fitness and safety standards, is not overcrowded and is managed effectively for the protection of the occupiers' health, safety and welfare.

Departmental Grants

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which organisations which were in receipt of a grant from him in 1997–98 no longer are; what the annual saving is; which organisations which were not in receipt of a grant in 1997–98 now are; and what the annual cost is. [61398]

Mr. Raynsford: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

OFCOM

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the answer of 15 May, ref 56031, when it was decided to propose the Contents Board in the draft Bill. [57846]

Dr. Howells: The proposals for the Content Board were one of the many matters which had been under consideration following the publication of the communications White Paper in December 2000. The hon. Member will be aware that the draft Communications Bill giving details of the Content Board was published on 7 May.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has for Northern Ireland to be represented on the main OFCOM board. [59113]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* Members of the main board of OFCOM will be appointed for the range of expertise and experience they can provide rather than to represent specific interests. However, the Draft Communications Bill proposes that, in carrying out their functions, each member of the main OFCOM board will have an obligation to take account of the different interests of the different parts of the UK. The Draft Bill also proposes that there be specific representation for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland on the Content Board and Consumers Panel.

Overseas Visitors (Scotland)

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the answer of 6 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 987W, how many overseas visitors came to Scotland in each year since 1998. [60801]

Dr. Howells: The number of visits was as follows:

Year	*Visits from overseas (million)*
1998	1.95
1999	1.86
2000	1.69
2001	1.59

Television Licence Fee

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, pursuant to the answer of 22 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 518W, on the television licence fee, which organisations and people will be part of the review process of future funding arrangements; how the Government will ensure that public service broadcasting is protected under the Royal Charter Review Process; and if she will exempt those aged 65 years and over from paying the licence fee. [60800]

Dr. Howells: As the BBC's charter is due to expire in 2006, we expect the charter review process to begin in 2004. It is too soon to consider how we will conduct the review, but we will want the process to provide an opportunity to consider the BBC's relationship with Government, its role within the overall broadcasting ecology and the arrangements for funding the Corporation. We will, of course, seek to consult as widely as possible during the course of the review. There are no plans to exempt people aged 65 years and over from paying the licence fee.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Departmental Policies (Stalybridge and Hyde)

James Purnell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what impact his Department's policies have had on the Stalybridge and Hyde constituency since 1997. [54332]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 7 May 2002]:* The Home Office is working to build a safe, just and tolerant society in which the rights and responsibilities of individuals, families and communities are properly balanced, and the protection and security of the public are maintained. Detailed information on the impact of Home Office policies across the full range of responsibilities is set out in the Home Office Annual Reports. A copy of the most recent report, Home Office Annual Report 2001–02 is due to be published shortly.

The impact of Home Office policies and actions is not normally examined by constituency and the statistics which the Department collects, such as recorded crime, cannot be matched in the way requested although set out are examples relating to the Stalybridge and Hyde constituency or the immediate locality.

Crime and Reduction

A number of programmes have been set up to reduce crime reduction, which I have highlighted.

Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) projects have been funded in and around Tameside, reducing burglary initiatives funded scheme in and around Ashton under Lyme including alley gating, property making, Home Watch and crime booklets. 22 street wardens provided and established in the constituency.

Safer community's initiatives launched in 2002–03 and allocated £105,158 to assist in crime reduction.

Communities Against Drugs 2002–03 programmes, which will intervene with street crime: these will consist of a targeted offender scheme (Operation Rhodes), mobile CCTV system, truancy sweeps, appointment of anti-social behaviour officer.

Neighbourhood renewal, £3,015 million has been allocated in and around Tameside from 2001–04. These initiatives will intervene with street crime helping to re-establish a just, safe and tolerant society.

Police

Stalybridge and Hyde is in the Thameside division of Greater Manchester Police. I understand that Thameside division had 389 police officers on 31 March 2002, 36 more than in March 1997.

Youth Crime

The Youth Offending Team (YOT) which covers Halton and Warrington has been established since April 2000 and is funded by the Youth Justice Board. It has been allocated estimated funds for the team £292,481 for the forthcoming financial year. The YOT have put in place a full range of youth justice service which have been outlined in the Crime and Disorder Act.

The Cheshire area pledged a reduction in the time from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders. The figures recorded are used to monitor the Governments' pledge to halve the average time from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders in England and Wales from 142 days in 1996 to 71 days. Persistent young offenders who are as categorised as in between the ages 10 to 17-years-old who have been sentenced by any criminal court in the United Kingdom on three or more separate occasions for one or more recordable offence and within three years of the last sentencing occasion is subsequently arrested or has information laid against them for a further recordable offence.

Within the Halton and Warrington schemes set up for adolescents who are given the opportunity to attend swimming activities which are run in February, Easter and the Whitsun and Summer holidays.

More generally, all of the policies of the Home Office will have a greater impact on the residents of Stalybridge and Hyde to a greater extent. For example:

376 Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have been established;

racial harassment and racially motivated crimes have been made criminal offences by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

Information on the Home Office and its policies is also published on its website www.homeoffice.gov.uk.

Illegal Drugs

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to reduce the volume of crack cocaine entering the United Kingdom from *(a)* Jamaica and *(b)* other countries; and if he will make a statement. [56538]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* Crack itself is not usually imported but made in the United Kingdom from cocaine.

Our strategy for combating cocaine trafficking is to disrupt the flow of cocaine as near as possible to the source of supply and the main transit areas. We do this by working closely with the Governments and law enforcement agencies of the countries concerned, including Jamaica, and by strengthening their own counter-narcotics capability with the provision of training, specialised equipment and expertise. My right hon. Friend the then Financial Secretary (Mr. Boateng) recently announced agreement with Jamaica to operate IONSCAN equipment at both Kingston and Montego Bay Airports.

Anti-crime Agencies

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the merger of Her Majesty's Customs and Excise investigation teams into drug and migrant trafficking with NCIS and NCS to create a new organisation relating to international and national organised crime. [58358]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: There are no present plans to merge Customs and Excise investigative teams with those from the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS) and the National Crime Squad (NCS).

Customs, NCIS and NCS work closely together to tackle organised crime threats including drug trafficking and people smuggling. We have established multi-agency working groups to co-ordinate the response to key threats, including the Concerted Interagency Drug Action Group (CIDA) for class A drug trafficking and REFLEX for organised immigration crime, which involve key law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will merge NCIS and the NCS. [58356]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: There are no present plans to merge the National Criminal Intelligence Service with the National Crime Squad.

Asylum Seekers

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in how many instances in the last 12 months the Metropolitan police have been requested to attend the administrative removal of failed asylum seekers in London. [58919]

Beverley Hughes: This information is not routinely collected and could be obtained only by examining individual case records at disproportionate cost.

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people have been in National Asylum Support Service accommodation in each of the last 12 months. [58916]

Beverley Hughes: Figures are only available on a quarterly basis.

The following table shows the number of asylum seekers (including dependants) who are being supported in National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation as at the end of each of the last five quarters.

Asylum seekers (including dependants) supported in NASS accommodation

As at end:	*Number*
March 2001	19,540
June 2001	26,500
September 2001	32,890
December 2001	40,320
March 2002	45,640

Notes:

1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.

2. Figures exclude cases where the asylum seekers support has been ceased.

Information on the number of asylum seekers supported by NASS is published quarterly and is available on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if asylum seekers who appeal against a decision to refuse support will receive support pending the outcome of any appeal of this decision. [59997]

Beverley Hughes: The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) may only provide or arrange for the provision of support for asylum seekers or their dependants who appear to the Secretary of State to be destitute or likely to become so within 14 days.

Where support is provided, it may be terminated early if the asylum seeker has failed to comply with a condition on which support was granted.

Where NASS refuses an application for support or terminated the grant of support early, there is a right of appeal against that decision. There is no right to receive support while an appeal against refusal or early termination of support is outstanding.

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if asylum-seeking families with dependant children may have their support removed if they fail to report as required. [59993]

Beverley Hughes: The nationality, immigration and asylum Bill contains a provision to withdraw support from those who fail, without reasonable cause, to report as required. This provision applies to asylum-seeking families with dependant children in the same way as it does for others. Asylum seekers accepting an offer of support from the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) will be fully informed of the need to comply with a requirement to report and that support may be terminated if they do not do so.

Data Protection Act

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times the revised certificate he signed last December with respect to section 28 of the Data Protection Act 1998 has been used by the Security Service in relation to its functions; and if he will make a statement. [59261]

Mr. Blunkett: The revised certificate has been relied upon 45 times in relation to subject access requests to the Security Service under section 7 of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many subject access requests have been received by the Security Service since the right of access afforded by the Data Protection Act 1998 came into effect; how many of these requests were from data subjects who were not employed or contracted to the service; and what requests for access have resulted in personal data being obtained by data subjects. [59263]

Mr. Blunkett: The Security Service has received 102 requests for subject access under section 7 of the Data Protection Act 1998 since it came into effect.

None were by individuals employed by or contracted to the Security Service.

In 14 subject access cases the Security Service has disclosed personal data.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if organisations which choose to disclose personal data to the Security Service in a way which is subject to Section 28 of the Data Protection Act 1998 are given a copy of the revised certificate signed by him last December; and if he will make a statement. [59262]

Mr. Blunkett: If an organisation asked about the national security exemption in respect of the disclosing of personal data to the Security Service, the Service would explain the operation of section 28 of the Act which, depending on the circumstances, may include providing a copy of the revised certificate.

Crime Initiatives

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on the future structure of *(a)* drug action teams and *(b)* crime and disorder partnerships in areas with two-tier local authorities. [59088]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: In view of the close links between drugs and crime, we believe that there are clear benefits to bringing together the work of Drug Action Teams and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. These include reducing the burdens on agencies in terms of representation; simplifying the Home Office lines of accountability for community safety issues; giving the delivery of the National Drugs Strategy a statutory mechanism; and ensuring more effective targeting of resources.

However, we do not intend to be prescriptive about the structure of any new partnership. That is why we are consulting Drugs Action Teams (DATs), Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) and other stakeholders on how to deliver the new partnership, seeking examples of good practice where they exist to be replicated around the country. Guidance for the new partnerships will be ready for dissemination in September 2002 and, through our regional offices, we will be working with partnerships to identify the best fit for their particular area.

Immigration Service

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans Her Majesty's Immigration Service has for equalities training for teams engaged in administrative removals. [58920]

Beverley Hughes: All immigration officers on general enforcement duties, whether recruited directly or from those already serving at ports of entry, will have received, as part of basic induction training, sessions on the Human Rights Act 1998 and the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000. They will also have received sessions on asylum, including the screening of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) video; professional standards; equal opportunities legislation and diversity issues; and the handling of complaints made by members of the public.

In addition, immigration officers selected for arrest teams, in other words, to conduct arrests in the community without police assistance, undergo a police-led training course which is pass or fail, and which includes mandatory sessions on community relations and diversity issues.

We have judged introduction of arrest teams in London a success, and they are being extended nationwide; however, the issue of equal opportunities, community relations and diversity training is regarded as highly important and so the form and content are being kept under close review.

Asylum Accommodation Centres

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many staff will be employed at asylum accommodation centres; and if he will list the numbers of *(a)* teachers, *(b)* health care staff and *(c)* social workers within the total; [59075]

(2) what incentive payments he is planning to make to staff employed at asylum accommodation centres; [59074]

(3) what arrangements he is planning for the housing of the staff who will be employed at asylum accommodation centres. [59073]

Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Ms Eagle) gave to the hon. Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) on 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 896W, regarding staff numbers.

The numbers of teachers, health care staff and social workers have not yet been set. We expect that most of the work force to be employed in accommodation centres will be drawn from the existing local population, whose school-age children will already be in a local school.

No decisions have been made on remuneration arrangements for staff employed at accommodation centres.

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library *(a)* tender documentation and *(b)* other information given to potential contractors for asylum accommodation centres, including a note of the verbal briefing provided. [60291]

Beverley Hughes: Documentation from the Bidders' Conference held on 30 April will be placed in the Library.

Animal Experiments

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much Government funding is allocated to research into alternatives to animal testing with regard to medical experiments. [59880]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer my hon. Friend the Member for Wallasey (Angela Eagle) gave to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Christopher Chope) on 7 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 518W.

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his policy is on the testing of cosmetics on animals. [59882]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Government secured a voluntary ban on testing cosmetic finished products and ingredients on animals in the United Kingdom in November 1997 and this position will be maintained. It was pursued because we believe that there is inadequate justification for using animals given the benefits of these products and the alternative tests available. The European Cosmetics Directive defines cosmetics to include not only vanity products but also other products such as toothpaste, baby care products and suncream.

We are committed to putting an end to testing cosmetics on animals across Europe and have led the way and worked hard for many years to try and achieve such a ban. We strongly support the 7th Amendment to the Cosmetics Directive, which will introduce a testing ban in the European Union and will extend across Europe what has been almost solely a United Kingdom ban. It will replace the marketing ban envisaged in the 6th Amendment.

In some countries, notably the United States, as indeed currently in other European Union countries, there are mandatory tests which must be carried out on animals as a means of demonstrating a cosmetic's safety for use on humans. We believe that a testing ban in the European Union would strengthen our negotiating position in any subsequent World Trade Organisation (WTO) discussions and enable the pursuance of an improved level of animal welfare within the European Union while ensuring full compliance with WTO rules. The Department of Trade and Industry lead in this area.

Through our contributions to the European Union, we support the work of the European Center for the Validation of Alternative Methods (ECVAM), whose role is to co-ordinate the independent evaluation of the relevance and reliability of tests and validation studies, so that cosmetics products, as well as medicines, vaccines, other biologicals, medical devices, household products and agricultural products, can be manufactured, transported and used more economically and more safely while the current reliance on animal test procedures is progressively reduced.

We also support the Test Guidelines Programme of the Organisation of Economic Development and Co-operation (OECD) which should enable alternative methods to be accepted internationally and with minimum delay.

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures are in place in relation to Government monitoring of animal testing in medical experiments. [59881]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The use of animals in experiments and other scientific procedures is strictly regulated by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 which is widely regarded as the most rigorous piece of legislation of its type in the world. It offers a high level of protection to animals while recognising the need to use animals in research. It also requires the latest ideas and technology to be taken into account when deciding whether the use of animals is justified.

All such procedures, whether for medical experiments or for other purposes, are licensed and tightly controlled under the 1986 Act. Applications for licences and certificates are assessed by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate, who are all highly qualified and experienced in medicine or veterinary science. They have very high professional standards directed at ensuring that animals are protected within the terms of the Act and the conditions of the licences.

Inspectors maintain programmes of visits to establishments to check that the terms and conditions of the licences and certificates are being complied with. All designated establishments are visited regularly, the number of visits to each establishment varying according to its size and the type of work being conducted at any particular time. Two thirds of all visits are without notice. Visits by appointment are usually made to conduct interviews with staff, to discuss new work proposals and ongoing work, to examine records of work, to investigate non-compliance or to view premises being considered for designation.

In deciding whether to grant a licence for any regulated procedure, the 1986 Act requires that the likely benefits of the programme be weighed against the likely adverse effects on the animals concerned (the cost/benefit assessment) and that there are no alternatives which either replace animal use entirely, reduce the number of animals needed or refine the procedures to minimise suffering (the 3Rs). We must also be satisfied that the procedures are likely to achieve the stated objectives.

For the purposes of this cost/benefit assessment, the cost to the animal is considered as the adverse effects of pain, suffering, distress or lasting harm. The benefits must be for humans, animals or the environment and relate to the scientific and/or medical progress likely to result directly from the programme outlined in the application.

We are committed to ensuring that, for as long as there is a need to use animals in scientific research, the legislation to protect them is applied to maximum effect.

Police

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers are employed by the Hampshire Police Force; and if he will make a statement. [60008]

Mr. Denham: Hampshire Constabulary employed 3,477 police officers on 31 January 2002. This was 28 more officers than on 30 September 2001.

On 30 September 2001, the most recent date for which figures have been collected centrally, the force also employed 1,507 civilian support staff.

Private Finance Initiative

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) of 18 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 237W, on the Private Finance Initiative, what savings are expected for each project listed in his answer; and if he will make a statement. [60418]

Beverley Hughes: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) of 24 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 288W.

Police and Criminal Evidence Act

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will issue for consultation the revised draft PACE Codes of Practice. [61928]

Mr. Denham: On 15 May, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced a review of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 and the accompanying Codes of Practice. As part of the overall review process, and in order to provide practitioners with an up-to-date set of Codes as soon as possible, limited amendments are proposed to existing Codes of Practice B-E. These will primarily take account of legislative changes since the Codes were last updated in 1995. Further changes to the Codes may follow from the broader PACE review.

Section 67 of PACE requires that the Secretary of State first prepare and publish revised drafts of any proposed amendments for consultation. The revised draft PACE Codes of Practice B-E were issued for consultation today and copies have been placed in the Library.

HEALTH

Inventures

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how Inventures is accountable to him. [50796]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 18 April 2002]:* Inventures is currently the trading arm which is part of NHS Estates, an executive agency of the Department. The agency chief executive who as accounting officer is directly accountable to my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Health.

Inventures is essentially a consultancy business employing approximately 270 staff with an annual turnover of approximately £15 million. It provides a wide variety of property services including planning, financing, procuring and managing all aspects of health care environment and estates. Its primary customers are the Department of Health and national health service trusts.

Information for Health

Mr. Prosser: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the report commissioned from Professor Protti by the Information Policy Unit and the NHS Information Authority on issues of implementing information for health. [61927]

Ms Blears: Professor Denis Protti of the School of Health Information Science at the University of Victoria, British Columbia was commissioned by the Department of Health to provide an independent assessment of the progress with electronic record development and implementation. He also considered the emerging issues around implementation of the NHS information strategy in general.

The final report is published on the Department of Health website www.doh.gov.uk/ipu/whatnew/prottireport.pdf and copies placed in the Library.

NHS Professionals

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement setting out *(a)* the matters to be covered by the Code of Practice for NHS Professionals, *(b)* when it is to be completed, *(c)* how he intends to publish it and *(d)* the timetable for publication. [56616]

Mr. Hutton: The contents of the Code of Practice for the supply of temporary staffing will cover a generic section and professional specific appendices. The generic section covers; advertising/publicity, commission rates/management fee, continuing professional development, criminal record bureau, equal opportunities and human rights, induction, management of information, management of service, monitoring and adherence, occupational health services, obligations of provider to their own employees, pay and conditions, placement fees, quality assurance and complaints procedures, recruitment and selection process, retaining and maintaining documents, work status.

The code is scheduled to be completed, published and distributed in summer 2002.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he estimates that NHS Professionals will meet its target of operating across all NHS organisations and staff groups by April 2003. [56615]

Mr. Hutton: NHS Professionals continues to be planned and extended in order to be a nationally operating service by April 2003.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many call centres have been set up for NHS Professionals. [56612]

Mr. Hutton: There are currently five call centres across the service of NHS Professionals.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what dedicated IT infrastructure is in place to support NHS Professionals. [56613]

Mr. Hutton: Each provider of NHS Professionals has sourced their information technology solutions to support a nationally integrated network.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of NHS temporary staff he estimates will be provided by NHS Professionals by April 2003. [56614]

Mr. Hutton: NHS Professionals aims to be the primary provider of temporary health care staff to the national health service by April 2003.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the names of the project board members of NHS Professionals. [56611]

Mr. Hutton: The National NHS Professionals and Agency Project Board are listed.

There are a number of other project and steering groups which feed into this national project board, whose membership and structure is determined locally.

Board members	
David Amos	Deputy Director of Human Resources Directorate (Chair)—Department of Health
Christine Beasley	Regional Nurse Director DHSC—London
Marcus Brindle	NHS Purchasing and Supplies Agency Department of Health
Janet Coster	Managing Director of NHS Professionals—WYMAS
Neil Griffiths	Director of Operations/ Deputy Chief Executive Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital
Denis Gibson	Chief Executive Workforce Development Confederation
Caroline Fox	National Lead for Temporary Staffing Department of Health
Sandra Hatton	Lead—Organisation and Leadership DHSC—London
Josie Irwin	Senior Employment Relations Adviser RCN
Avril Imison	Head of NHS Allied Health Professions Branch Department of Health
Paul Jenkins	NHS Direct National Project Manager Department of Health
Debbie Mellor	Acting Head of NHS Employment Department of Health
Sue Meredith	Director NHS Professionals—Oxford
David Moore	Assistant Chief Nursing Officer Department of Health
Anne Rainsberry	DHSC—South
Pat Urry	Pay Branch Department of Health
Kathleen Weekes	Chief Nursing & Healthcare Employment Consultant Department for Education and Employment
Jackie Axleby	Chief Executive Northern England Workforce Development Confederation

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which private nurses agencies are administering NHS Professionals for NHS trusts. [56609]

Mr. Hutton: NHS Professionals is run by the national health service for the NHS.

Nursing Staff Agencies

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what criteria are used to judge the suitability of nursing staff agencies to provide nurses for NHS establishments. [59429]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* Under the Nurses Act 1957, agencies providing nursing staff for national health service establishments are currently licensed by local authorities. From 1 September, they will be subject to regulation by the National Care Standards Commission, from which date the nurses agency regulations and national minimum standards made under the Care Standards Act 2000 are due to come into force.

Following the success of the London agency project, NHS trusts are working together to improve the cost-effectiveness and quality of temporary staff supplied by commercial agencies through agency framework agreements negotiated with a range of agencies that have been vetted using quality, risk and value for money criteria.

General Practitioners

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many whole-time equivalent general practitioners per 100,000 population there were in *(a)* July 2000 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available. [57168]

Mr. Hutton: The Department's general and personal medical services census is recorded annually on 30 September. The request for the information for July 2000 is referred back to the most recent census information, October 1999. The latest information available is the September 2001 census.

The number of whole-time equivalent general practitioners (GP) excluding GP retainers and GP registrars (the NHS Plan group) per 100,000 population were 53.4 in 1999, and 53.0 in 2001.

The total number of whole-time equivalent GPs per 100,000 population was 57.0 in 1999, and 57.4 in 2001.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department produces targets relating to the average number of patients served by a general practitioner. [58822]

Mr. Hutton: There are no targets for the list sizes of general practitioners.

Overseas Doctors

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to alter the requirement for Commonwealth doctors to take an English language test before practising in the UK, with special reference to cases where English is already the first language of the doctor concerned. [57964]

Mr. Hutton: The Medical Act requires such a person to satisfy the General Medical Council's (GMC) registrar that he "has the necessary knowledge of English". We look to the GMC to apply this requirement in a proportionate and non-discriminatory way to each case. We understand that the GMC is to review the way in which it meets its obligations under the Act in relation to language proficiency.

Agency Workers Directive

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the implications of the European agency workers directive for the NHS. [59095]

Mr. Hutton: An initial regulatory impact assessment of the proposed directive on agency workers prepared by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has been placed in the Library.

The Commission's proposal would, as it stands, require that agency workers in the national health service did not receive less favourable basic working and employment conditions than comparable workers employed by the NHS. The proposal contains limited derogations from this requirement, which may be applicable in some cases. The proposal is subject to the co-decision procedure, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry remains in dialogue with other member countries and the Commission.

The NHS policy is to employ personnel on permanent contracts where possible, and to ensure that temporary staff are treated fairly through NHS Professionals (the NHS-led approach to temporary staffing). We are also preparing a code of practice for the supply of temporary staff which is currently being drafted.

Overseas Treatment

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what reciprocal rights NHS patients have for treatment in other EU countries. [59186]

Mr. Hutton: Regulations (EEC) 1408–71 and 574–72 (copies available in the Library) co-ordinate the social security and health care schemes of the EU member states. They contain provisions allowing access to health care throughout the EU on the same terms as provided to the host country's insured population. The following are the most important health care provisions of the regulations:

emergency treatment for tourists temporarily visiting another EU country (the E111 arrangements);

referral specifically for treatment of a pre-existing condition (the E112 scheme);

health care for workers posted to another EU country (forms E101 and E128);

health care in the new state of residence for state pensioners going to live in another EU state (E121); and

health care for members of the family of workers or pensioners where they reside in a different EU state from the worker or pensioner (E109).

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to extend the pilot for the overseas treatment of NHS patients to the Epsom and Ewell constituency. [59092]

Mr. Hutton: The pilot scheme for the overseas treatment of national health service patients is now at an end. Any NHS body can legally commission treatment overseas for its patients. However, the Department has advised any trust wishing to refer patients overseas to contact one of the lead commissioners who have been set up to organise treatment for NHS patients overseas. These lead commissioners are based in Guy's and St. Thomas' Trust and Kent and Medway health authority.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many staff were employed in the Modernisation Agency at 1 April; and what proportion of those staff have clinical contact with NHS patients. [56860]

Mr. Lammy: At the 1 April 2002 there were 440 staff employed by the Modernisation Agency, of which 182 have professional clinical qualifications. 207 of the agency's staff are working directly with clinical teams and eight retain a responsibility for delivery of clinical care as part of their role with the agency.

NHS Bank Staff

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in reducing the use of bank staff within the NHS. [59185]

Mr. Hutton: Our strategy in relation to temporary staffing is:

To reduce the overall demand for temporary staff by expanding the national health service permanent workforce.

To improve the management and cost-effectiveness of NHS 'bank' arrangements through the NHS Professionals initiative.

NHS Professionals is being implemented against a target to operate nationally for all staff groups by April 2003, around 50 trusts are already using the service.

To improve the cost-effectiveness and quality of temporary staff supplied by commercial agencies through co-ordinated contracts negotiated with a range of agencies that have been vetted using quality, risk and value for money criteria.

Between September 1999 and September 2001 there was

a net increase of nurses working in the NHS of 20,740

a 4 per cent. increase in number of qualified allied health professionals

5.7 per cent. more NHS consultants—the second largest increase on record and overall the NHS workforce increased by 4.3 per cent. to 1,1666,000.

Building on the success of the London Agency Project, further agency framework agreements are being developed across the NHS.

Diagnostic and Treatment Centres

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what diagnostic and treatment centres are planned under the NHS plan; when *(a)* construction is due to commence and *(b)* schemes will be completed; and what the cost is of each scheme. [56940]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan commitment is for there to be eight diagnostic and treatment centres (DTCs) open by 2004 with a further 12 in development. We are on course to deliver this.

We announced a "first wave" of eight DTCs in February 2002. A list of the schemes is shown in the table. Development is being supported by £6.8 million central capital, supplemented by funds from local capital allocations. The schemes are on course to be operational by the end of 2002.

Kings College Hospital NHS Trust

North Hampshire Hospitals NHS Trust (Basingstoke Hospital)

North Hampshire PCT (Chase Community Hospital, Bordon)

Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Trust

Redwood (subject to negotiation)

Royal Hospital at Haslar, Portsmouth

Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospitals NHS Trust (Reading)

University College London Hospitals NHS Trust.

In addition the NHS is developing proposals to expand and bring forward the DTC programme further, including reviewing existing proposals.

NHS Direct

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what role NHS Direct will have in providing advice on the threat of chemical and radiological attacks; what training has been provided to those staffing NHS Direct in providing this advice; and if he will make a statement. [57683]

Mr. Hutton: NHS Direct plans to develop relationships within the national health service and with the other agencies involved in emergency planning, such that full use could be made of the capabilities of NHS Direct in the event of an emergency, such as chemical or radiological attack. NHS Direct already has considerable experience in provision of information to the public whenever health scares arise. This experience is likely to be useful and can be built upon should there be a health emergency.

Some aspects of training that would be appropriate in the NHS Direct response to chemical or radiological attack are already incorporated into local and national training programmes.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health on how many occasions between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 *(a)* departmental and *(b)* non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [58720]

Mr. Lammy: This Department has not appointed any non-departmental special advisers.

The available information is shown in the table.

	9–11 October 2001	*6–7 November 2001*
Departmental special advisers	1	1
Non-departmental special advisers	0	0
Destination	Washington	Madrid
Cost of visit	£4,125.76	£580.56

All travel by special advisers is undertaken fully in accordance with the guidelines set out in the "Ministerial Code" and the "Civil Service Management Code".

NHS Leadership Centre

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to make an announcement as to the appointment of a new head of the NHS Leadership Centre; and who has been in charge of the organisation since the departure of the previous head. [59579]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The NHS Leadership Centre forms part of the NHS Modernisation Agency, which was established in April 2001.

Following Barbara Harris' decision to step-down as Director of the NHS Leadership Centre in December 2001, Penny Humphris was seconded to the role from the 31 January 2002 on an acting basis. In the period between December 2001 and end-January 2002, David Fillingham, the NHS Modernisation Agency Director, took direct management responsibilities for the NHS Leadership Centre.

The substantive post of Director of the NHS Leadership Centre is planned to be advertised the week commencing 10 June 2002. An announcement will be made once the recruitment process has been completed.

NHS Consultants

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on progress towards renegotiating NHS consultants' contracts. [58868]

Mr. Hutton: The Government's proposals for the new consultant contract were published in February 2001 and these, alongside the British Medical Association's own proposals, form the basis of continuing negotiations. We have discussed a range of issues and options in the negotiations and we are aiming to be able to announce progress shortly.

Foundation Hospitals

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the right of local communities to establish or convert existing hospitals into foundation hospitals. [59094]

Mr. Hutton: The first wave of foundation hospitals will be selected from among the acute national health service trusts that achieve three-star ratings in July this year. Details of the application process and criteria which will be applied will be published in July. However, successful applicants will need to demonstrate among other things that they have the management capability and clinical support to make a success of NHS foundation trust status, and that they have the support of the local primary care trusts who commission services from them.

Primary Care Trusts

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much debt incurred by health authorities has been taken on by primary care trusts. [59091]

Mr. Hutton: The transfer of assets and liabilities from health authorities to primary care trusts will not be known until the audited accounts are available for financial year 2002–03.

Hospitals (Shropshire)

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what were the budgets for *(a)* the Royal Shrewsbury hospital, *(b)* the Princess Royal hospital, Telford and *(c)* the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt hospital in each year since 1995. [45732]

Ms Blears: Pursuant to the reply given by the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Pontefract and Castleford (Yvette Cooper) on 7 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 103W; I regret that the reply given was incomplete. I can now provide the additional information requested. The reply should read:

Budgets for the Royal Shrewsbury hospital NHS trust, the Princess Royal hospital NHS trust and the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt NHS trust from 1995 to 2001

£000

	Princess Royal	*Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt*	*Royal Shrewsbury*	*Total*
1994–95	23,230	19,638	55,926	103,794
1995–96	30,235	20,595	60,224	111,054
1996–97	31,553	21,028	60,894	113,475
1997–98	33,723	22,368	66,069	122,160
1998–99	36,212	25,723	69,406	131,341
1999–2000	40,216	30,447	84,600	155,263
2000–01	43,770	32,077	80,280	156,127

Note:

The budgets have been assumed to be the total income of the trusts during these financial years.

Source:

Annual accounts of the Princess Royal hospital NHS trust, the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt hospital NHS trust and the Royal Shrewsbury hospital NHS trust.

Ashford and St. Peter's Hospitals Trust

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the franchise plan that he approved when appointing the new chief executive of the Ashford and St. Peter's hospitals trust. [58838]

Mr. Hutton: Trust chief executives are appointed and employed by national health service trust chairman and non-executives on behalf of the trust. Franchise plans are documents that set out future operational proposals for the trust and it is a matter for the trust in question how to use the plan. With the exception of any material that relates to the personnel appointment, and which is confidential, I would expect that the trust board would want to receive and consider the franchise at a meeting held in public.

Smallpox Vaccine

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department assumed responsibility for the awarding of the contract to supply the UK Government with smallpox vaccine; and for what reason the management of this process was transferred to his Department from the Ministry of Defence. [57376]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* Responsibility for the provision of appropriate preventive and treatment measures for the protection of public health rests with this Department. Since smallpox vaccination of the public ceased in the 1970s and smallpox was declared eradicated worldwide, the Department has continued to hold a strategic stock of smallpox vaccine. Following a review of vaccine needs in the wake of the tragic events of September 11, a joint procurement of smallpox vaccine to meet both health and defence needs was deemed appropriate. This was part of the ongoing collaboration on medical countermeasures between the Department of Health and the Ministry of Defence.

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which organisations and companies were considered by his Department when awarding the contract to produce smallpox vaccine for the UK Government; what contact his Department had with each of these organisations or companies prior to the awarding of the contract; when officials from his Department visited each organisation to assess the facilities for making the vaccine; by what criteria each of the facilities was assessed; which other organisations were *(a)* considered, *(b)* contacted and *(c)* visited prior to the creation of a shortlist of organisations; and on what criteria the final shortlist was compiled. [57378]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 23 May 2002]:* Detailed confidential discussions were held with five major pharmaceutical companies who were known to have vaccine manufacturing capability either in the UK or in Europe. The companies, whose agreement to being identified has been obtained, were Acambis, Aventis Pasteur, GlaxoSmithKline, PowderJect and RIVM. All the companies approached responded and the decision to award the contract was taken solely on the basis of the responses received from the companies.

An official from the Department of Health accompanied officials from the Ministry of Defence on a visit to Bavarian Nordic and Impfstoffwerke Dessau Tornav at the end of January on a fact-finding visit to discuss vaccine developments and manufacturing techniques.

The details of the Government's requirements for smallpox vaccine are not being put in the public domain as this is information that might be of use to terrorists.

Clinical Negligence

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department has collated on the take-up rate of mediation to resolve clinical negligence disputes over the past two years. [59640]

Mr. Lammy: The NHS litigation authority is responsible for handling clinical negligence claims made against the national health service. In June 2000, the authority began an initiative to encourage the use of mediation to resolve all suitable cases. 77 offers for mediation have been accepted and at the end of April 2002, 32 mediations have been completed, 31 successfully.

Communication Aids

Mrs. Fitzsimons: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to extend provision for communication aids for severely disabled people. [59754]

Jacqui Smith: The NHS Plan aims to benefit disabled people by increasing provision of community equipment to 50 per cent. more people than in 2000–01 and by integrating health and social service equipment services. Improved funding for the equipment (including communication aids) that such services provide is, and will be, part of increased baseline allocations to health and social services in the years 2001–02 to 2003–04. It is for local services to decide their spending priorities and there are no specific plans to extend provision for communication aids.

Clinicians

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many clinicians within *(a)* the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust and *(b)* all NHS trusts operate outside the trust's communications loop. [58645]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested has never been collected by the Department.

IT Strategies

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated cost is of updating computer equipment in *(a)* Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust and *(b)* all NHS trusts to support Government IT strategies. [58646]

Mr. Lammy: Estimates of the cost of the modernisation of information management and technology in the national health service in England are set out in the report of the review, "Securing Our Future Health: Taking a Long-Term View" from Derek Wanless, published in April 2002.

Information about the costs in individual NHS trusts is not held centrally.

Therapeutic Radiographers

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the vacancy rate is in therapeutic radiographers in *(a)* the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust and *(b)* all NHS trusts; and what the figures were in May 1997. [58643]

Mr. Hutton: Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells National Health Service Trust had a vacancy rate of 6.9 per cent. for therapeutic radiographers as at March 2001 (latest figures available.)

The first vacancy survey was conducted in March 1999, we do not hold vacancy information for 1997.

Information on other trusts vacancies has been placed in the Library.

Department of Health Vacancies Survey March 2001: Vacancies in NHS trusts by region and NHS trust
Qualified therapeutic radiographers 3 month vacancy rates[1,2] *and numbers*[3]

	Three month		*Staff in post*	
	Vacancy rates percentage	*Vacancies*	*(wte)*	*(hc)*
England	8.0	110	1,310	1,450
Northern and Yorkshire	10.4	20	150	170
Hull and East Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust	27.0	10	10	20
Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	18.2	10	60	60
South Tees Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	0.0	0	30	40
The Newcastle Upon Tyne Hospitals NHS Trust	1.1	0	40	50
Trent	1.9	0	150	170
Central Sheffield University Hospitals NHS Trust	0.0	0	30	40
Nottingham City Hospital NHS Trust	0.0	0	30	30
Southern Derbyshire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	8.1	0	20	30
United Lincolnshire Hospitals NHS Trust	0.0	0	30	30
University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust	4.3	0	20	30
West Midlands	15.1	20	80	100
North Staffordshire Hospital NHS Trust	0.0	0	10	10
Royal Shrewsbury Hospitals NHS Trust	8.6	0	10	10
The Royal Wolverhampton Hospitals NHS Trust	26.2	10	20	20
University Hospital Birmingham NHS Trust	15.9	10	30	40
University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire NHS Trust	13.7	0	10	10
North West	3.8	10	150	170
Christie Hospital NHS Trust	10.1	10	50	60
Clatterbridge Centre for Oncology NHS Trust	0.0	0	60	70
Preston Acute Hospitals NHS Trust	0.0	0	30	30
Eastern	6.8	10	140	150
Addenbrooke's NHS Trust	11.6	10	40	40
Essex Rivers Healthcare NHS Trust	0.0	0	20	20
Ipswich Hospital NHS Trust	0.0	0	10	20

Department of Health Vacancies Survey March 2001: Vacancies in NHS trusts by region and NHS trust
Qualified therapeutic radiographers 3 month vacancy rates[1,2] and numbers[3]

	Three month		*Staff in post*	
	Vacancy rates percentage	*Vacancies*	*(wte)*	*(hc)*
Norfolk and Norwich Health Care NHS Trust	0.0	0	30	30
West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust	8.5	0	30	40
London	9.1	20	250	270
Barts and The London NHS Trust	0.0	0	30	40
Guy's and St. Thomas' NHS Trust	2.9	0	30	40
Havering Hospitals NHS Trust	10.9	0	20	20
North Middlesex Hospital NHS Trust	0.0	0	20	20
Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust	14.0	0	10	10
The Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust	25.4	10	30	30
The Royal Marsden Hospital NHS Trust	13.4	10	50	60
University College of London Hospitals NHS Trust	0.0	0	30	30
South East	13.1	30	210	240
Brighton Health Care NHS Trust	19.2	0	10	10
Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust	6.9	0	40	50
Northampton General Hospital NHS Trust	0.0	0	20	30
Oxford Radcliffe Hospital NHS Trust	26.2	10	30	30
Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust	6.5	0	30	30
Royal Berkshire and Battle Hospitals NHS	5.5	0	20	20
Royal Surrey County Hospital NHS Trust	2.9	0	30	40
Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust	21.1	10	30	30
South West	2.9	10	170	190
East Gloucestershire NHS Trust	0.0	0	30	30
Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust	0.0	0	20	20
Poole Hospitals NHS Trust	0.0	0	30	30
Royal Devon and Exeter Healthcare NHS Trust	0.0	0	20	30
South Devon Healthcare NHS Trust and Torbay PCT	9.0	0	10	10
United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust	2.0	0	50	60

[1] Three month vacancies are vacancies as at 31 March 2001 which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more(whole time equivalents).

[2] Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post from the September 2000 non-medical workforce census (whole time equivalent).

[3] Vacancy and staff in post numbers are rounded to the nearest 10.

Notes:

1. Percentages are calculated on actual figures and are rounded to one decimal place.
2. Totals may not equal sum of component parts due to rounding.
3. Due to rounding calculating the vacancy rates using the above data may not equal the actual vacancy rates.
4. Due to the way vacancy data have been collected South Devon Healthcare and Torbay PCT contains combined data.
5. Trusts where staff in post plus vacancies (wte) is less than five have been excluded.
6. Vacancies—between zero and five vacancies.

Source:

Department of Health Vacancy Survey 2001
Department of Health Non-medical workforce Census 2000

Radiotherapy Waiting Times

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce a national standard method of calculating radiotherapy waiting times for NHS health authorities. [58642]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Cancer Plan set out maximum waiting time targets for first cancer treatment. We have introduced national data collection on the 2001 cancer treatment targets and are currently putting in place arrangements to collect information on waits from diagnosis to first treatment for all cancer patients. This information will be collected in a standard way.

Local Improvement Finance Trust

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding is available *(a)* in England and *(b)* for North Staffordshire in support of the Local Improvement Finance Trust for the funding of GP premises; and if he will set out the timetable. [59741]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service local improvement finance trust (NHS LIFT) initiative was announced in the NHS Plan.

The initiative aims to deliver a step change in the quality of the primary care estate. NHS LIFT's initial focus has been to encourage investment in those parts of the country, such as inner cities, where primary care services are in most need of improvement. LIFT's objective will be to contribute to the overall NHS Plan targets of refurbishing or replacing up to 3,000 premises and 500 one-stop primary care centres by December 2004.

The Department has earmarked £195 million (over the current spending review period) to support localities develop their LIFT schemes. All LIFT localities, including North Staffordshire, will receive significant levels of financial assistance.

In February 2001, the Department prioritised an initial six LIFT schemes, and in January, a further 12 schemes were identified. Applications for a third wave of LIFT schemes will be announced later this year. We anticipate a total of 42 LIFT schemes across the country by the end of 2004.

Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received from *(a)* the Audit Commission, *(b)* the Commission for Health Improvement and *(c)* the National Care Standards Commission on the establishment of the Commission for Healthcare Audit and Inspection; and what active consultations he has undertaken. [59869]

Jacqui Smith: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State has received a letter from the acting chair of the Audit Commission and has also had discussions with the chief executives of the Audit Commission, the Commission for Health Improvement and National Care Standards Commission. All have accepted the case for the establishment of the new health inspectorate.

Officials in the Department are in close contact with these organisations regarding the development of detailed policy and implementation plans.

Non-medical Work Force

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many dieticians there are per head of population in each of the national health service trust areas in England; [59593]

(2) how many *(a)* radiotherapists, *(b)* occupational therapists, *(c)* arts therapists, *(d)* orthoptists and *(e)* orthotists there are per head of population in each of the national heath service trust areas in England; [59887]

(3) how many arts speech and language therapists there are per head of population in each of the national health service trust areas in England. [59594]

Mr. Hutton: Information has been provided on a health authority basis for dieticians, radiotherapists, occupational therapists, arts therapists, orthoptists, orthotists and speech language therapists.

Information provided for radiographers covers both therapeutic and diagnostic radiography.

The non-medical work force census does not collect information about orthotists.

Between 1997 and 2001 there were

480 more dieticians—a 21 per cent. increase

2,390 more occupational therapists—a 21 per cent. increase

930 more radiographers—an 8 per cent. increase

129 more orthoptists—a 15 per cent. increase

47 more art therapists—an 8 per cent. increase

815 more speech and language therapists—a 17 per cent. increase.

The information has been placed in the Library.

Roaccutane

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the possible side effects of the anti-acne drug Roaccutane. [59413]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* Roaccutane (isotretinoin) is licensed for the treatment of severe forms of acne. It has been associated with a number of serious side effects since evaluation of the clinical trial data at the time of licensing in 1982. These include dryness of the skin, eyes and mucous membranes, visual disturbances, liver disorders and increases in cholesterol levels.

The safety of all medicines on the UK market is continuously monitored by the medicines control agency. The product information includes the summary of product characteristics for prescribers and the patient information leaflet included in each pack of the medicine. These are also kept under continuous review to make sure that they provide the most up to date and relevant information to healthcare professionals and the public regarding the safe use of the medicine.

One of the key previous amendments to the product information was the strengthening of the warning relating to depression and other psychiatric reactions including suicide, which was approved in March 1998. The Committee on Safety of Medicines considered the issue of the Roaccutane and psychiatric reactions in September 2001 and advised that the existing wording adequately reflected the current level of knowledge with regard to these reactions.

Ritalin

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received regarding inappropriate use of the prescription of Ritalin for children. [60090]

Jacqui Smith: We have no record of recent representations on this subject. Methylphenidate (principal brand name Ritalin) is a controlled drug under Schedule 2 of the Misuse of Drugs Act and is licensed for the treatment of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in children aged six years or older. Treatment should be under the supervision of a specialist in childhood behavioural disorders.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions of Ritalin were issued in each of the last five years for *(a)* attention deficit disorder and *(b)* attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in each (i) region and (ii) health authority. [60088]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not collected centrally in the form, or for the years, requested. The available data on the number of prescription items dispensed in the community (for example excluding items written and dispensed in hospitals) for methylphenidate hydrochloride by health authorities and regions for the period 1999 to 2001 are shown in the table, a copy of which has been placed in the Library. It should be noted that Ritalin, the brand name for a drug used mainly in the treatment of severe forms of childhood attention deficit and hyperactivity disorders, is the principal but not the only presentation of methylphenidate hydrochloride.

Hospital-acquired Infections

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what average time added to patient hospital-stays is from hospital-acquired infections. [59417]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The data requested are not routinely collected.

Antipsychotic Medication

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many prescriptions were issued in 2001 for *(a)* atypical, *(b)* traditional and *(c)* all antipsychotic medication in each region and health authority for age groups (i) 0 to 15 years, (ii) 16 to 59 years and (iii) 60 years and over. [60630]

Jacqui Smith: The information is shown in the table.

Estimated number of prescription items (thousand) dispensed in the community in England for atypical, traditional and all antipsychotics by broad age group by health authorities and regions, 2001

	Atypical Antipsychotics				
			Aged 16 to 59 years		
Health authority in which dispensed	*Children aged 0–15 years*	*Elderly people aged 60 and over*	*Exempt*	*Charged*[1]	*Total*
Eastern region					
Bedfordshire	0.1	9.7	7.4	2.0	19.2
East and North Hertfordshire	0.4	12.5	9.1	2.8	24.8
Hertfordshire	0.3	17.2	14.3	4.8	36.6
Norfolk	0.2	10.1	13.9	2.7	26.8
North Essex	0.2	13.9	13.3	3.3	30.7
South Essex	0.3	12.4	8.7	2.0	23.5
Suffolk	0.2	12.5	6.2	2.0	20.9
Total for eastern region	1.8	88.3	73.0	19.6	182.6
London region					
Barking and Havering	0.0	6.5	5.4	1.7	13.6
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	0.0	17.5	16.5	3.2	37.3
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	0.1	11.5	8.3	2.1	22.0
Brent and Harrow	0.0	5.8	10.8	1.8	18.5
Camden and Islington	0.0	3.7	11.1	1.3	16.1
Croydon	0.0	6.7	7.7	1.4	15.8
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	0.0	9.1	13.5	2.1	24.7
East London and The City	0.1	6.9	17.5	1.5	26.0
Hillingdon	0.0	1.8	3.2	1.1	6.1
Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster	0.0	5.4	9.0	1.6	16.1
Kingston and Richmond	0.1	7.2	4.6	1.9	13.9
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	0.2	13.0	17.6	2.0	32.8
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0.1	10.9	12.4	2.8	26.1
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	0.2	7.8	8.5	1.5	18.1
Total for London region	1.1	114.0	145.9	26.0	287.0
North West region					
Bury and Rochdale	0.0	6.4	8.4	1.3	16.1
East Lancashire	0.2	9.6	9.9	2.1	21.7
Liverpool	0.1	12.0	14.8	1.4	28.3
Manchester	0.1	9.3	17.4	1.2	28.0
Morecambe Bay	0.1	8.0	5.5	1.2	14.8
North Cheshire	0.0	3.8	4.5	0.7	9.0
North West Lancashire	0.0	11.4	10.3	2.6	24.3
Salford and Trafford	0.1	8.6	11.7	1.5	21.9
Sefton	0.0	6.6	9.0	1.2	16.8
South Cheshire	0.1	13.2	11.5	3.1	27.9
South Lancashire	0.0	5.3	5.1	1.3	11.8
St. Helens and Knowsley	0.0	7.3	10.0	1.5	18.8
Stockport	0.1	6.7	6.5	1.2	14.5
West Pennine	0.1	7.2	7.1	1.2	15.5
Wigan and Bolton	0.0	14.7	9.9	1.9	26.5
Wirral	0.1	8.4	10.4	1.7	20.6
Total for North West region	1.0	138.6	151.9	25.1	316.7
Northern and Yorkshire region					
Bradford	0.0	9.7	8.6	1.2	19.6
Calderdale and Kirklees	0.2	11.3	11.7	2.2	25.5
County Durham and Darlington	0.1	9.2	10.0	1.8	21.1
East Riding and Hull	0.0	8.4	11.0	2.1	21.5
Gateshead and South Tyneside	0.2	7.2	5.4	1.0	13.7
Leeds	0.1	16.2	17.1	2.9	36.2
Newcastle and North Tyneside	0.3	17.3	15.2	1.8	34.6
North Cumbria	0.1	6.7	5.5	1.7	14.1
North Yorkshire	0.2	10.7	7.3	2.2	20.4
Northumberland	0.2	4.8	5.6	1.1	11.7

Estimated number of prescription items (thousand) dispensed in the community in England for atypical, traditional and all antipsychotics by broad age group by health authorities and regions, 2001

	Atypical Antipsychotics				
			Aged 16 to 59 years		
Health authority in which dispensed	*Children aged 0–15 years*	*Elderly people aged 60 and over*	*Exempt*	*Charged*[1]	*Total*
Sunderland	0.1	4.6	5.6	0.7	11.0
Tees	0.1	7.6	10.2	1.5	19.4
Wakefield	0.0	8.3	6.2	1.1	15.6
Total for Northern and Yorkshire region	1.7	122.1	119.2	21.4	264.4
South East region					
Berkshire	0.1	11.2	10.4	3.6	25.3
Buckinghamshire	0.1	10.2	9.0	2.2	21.5
East Kent	0.4	10.8	12.1	2.3	25.7
East Surrey	0.0	4.5	4.3	1.9	10.7
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	0.3	16.3	14.5	3.1	34.1
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	0.1	15.1	10.4	2.9	28.5
North and Mid Hampshire	0.3	11.0	7.2	3.0	21.5
Northamptonshire	0.4	6.0	8.0	2.7	17.1
Oxfordshire	0.2	12.3	7.5	3.4	23.4
Southampton and South West Hampshire	0.2	13.0	10.6	2.9	26.8
West Kent	0.3	16.1	13.8	4.0	34.1
West Surrey	0.3	9.5	6.9	3.0	19.7
West Sussex	0.2	11.2	10.9	3.3	25.6
Total for South East region	3.0	147.2	125.6	38.4	314.2
South West region					
Avon	0.1	15.8	16.0	3.3	35.2
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	0.4	5.3	7.7	1.2	14.7
Dorset	0.1	9.3	9.8	3.0	22.2
Gloucestershire	0.1	6.0	6.4	2.0	14.6
North and East Devon	0.5	7.9	9.5	1.9	19.8
Somerset	0.4	8.4	5.6	1.2	15.6
South and West Devon	0.5	11.1	14.5	2.1	28.2
Wiltshire	0.2	12.4	8.6	2.4	23.6
Total for South West region	2.4	76.2	78.1	17.2	173.9
Trent region					
Barnsley	0.0	2.7	3.1	0.9	6.7
Doncaster	0.1	2.6	3.4	0.6	6.8
Leicestershire	0.1	10.9	13.0	2.5	26.5
Lincolnshire	0.6	9.4	6.9	2.0	18.9
North Derbyshire	0.1	3.4	4.8	1.0	9.2
North Nottinghamshire	0.0	4.8	3.0	0.9	8.7
Nottingham	0.0	2.9	2.1	0.7	5.7
Rotherham	0.0	7.7	4.0	0.6	12.4
Sheffield	0.1	4.4	6.6	1.0	12.0
South Humber	0.2	3.5	4.6	0.8	9.2
Southern Derbyshire	0.1	4.6	5.4	1.5	11.6
Total for Trent region	1.3	56.9	57.0	12.4	127.6
West Midlands region					
Birmingham	0.8	16.3	20.7	2.6	40.4
Coventry	0.1	8.7	8.7	1.5	19.0
Dudley	0.2	2.0	3.7	0.9	6.8
Herefordshire	0.0	0.9	2.0	0.4	3.3
North Staffordshire	0.1	7.2	5.2	1.5	14.0
Sandwell	0.1	2.3	3.8	0.7	6.9
Shropshire	0.2	6.7	4.5	1.4	12.8
Solihull	0.1	2.8	2.6	0.6	6.1
South Staffordshire	0.3	9.7	4.9	1.8	16.8
Walsall	0.1	4.7	3.5	0.6	8.8
Warwickshire	0.2	10.1	7.4	2.0	19.6
Wolverhampton	0.0	3.2	3.8	0.4	7.5
Worcestershire	0.4	6.7	5.0	1.4	13.5
Total for West Midlands region	2.6	81.3	75.9	15.8	175.5
England	14.8	824.6	826.7	175.9	1,841.9

Health authority in which dispensed	*Children aged 0–15 years*	*Elderly people aged 60 and over*	*Traditional antipsychotics* Aged 16 to 59 years *Exempt*	*Charged*[1]	*Items personally administered*	*Total*
Eastern region						
Bedfordshire	0.1	10.8	9.1	2.6	0.1	22.7
East and North Hertfordshire	0.1	17.0	14.3	4.9	0.2	36.5
Hertfordshire	0.2	20.7	13.9	5.6	0.1	40.4
Norfolk	0.2	28.8	33.5	7.3	0.4	70.2
North Essex	0.3	22.7	17.0	4.3	0.1	44.5
South Essex	0.2	11.7	13.6	3.0	0.0	28.5
Suffolk	0.2	20.0	14.7	4.3	0.3	39.5
Total for eastern region	1.3	131.7	116.2	32.0	1.3	282.4
London region						
Barking and Havering	0.2	7.8	6.0	1.9	0.0	15.9
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	0.1	14.9	18.0	3.4	0.0	36.4
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	0.1	13.6	10.9	3.2	0.0	27.9
Brent and Harrow	0.0	7.4	8.7	1.9	0.0	18.1
Camden and Islington	0.0	5.2	14.1	1.4	0.0	20.7
Croydon	0.0	6.4	8.2	1.3	0.0	15.9
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	0.1	11.9	17.1	3.5	0.0	32.6
East London and The City	0.1	7.8	18.8	1.9	0.0	28.6
Hillingdon	0.1	4.4	3.6	0.9	0.0	8.9
Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster	0.0	3.5	6.8	1.1	0.0	11.4
Kingston and Richmond	0.0	5.7	4.4	1.5	0.0	11.6
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	0.0	13.4	16.4	2.0	0.0	31.9
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0.1	12.6	11.0	2.5	0.0	26.2
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	0.0	7.1	8.6	1.5	0.0	17.2
Total for London region	1.0	121.7	152.5	28.1	0.0	303.3
North West region						
Bury and Rochdale	0.0	14.7	16.2	3.6	0.0	34.6
East Lancashire	0.1	15.5	20.4	3.3	0.0	39.4
Liverpool	0.1	12.0	21.8	2.0	0.0	35.9
Manchester	0.1	14.8	26.1	2.0	0.0	43.1
Morecambe Bay	0.0	13.1	9.7	2.6	0.1	25.5
North Cheshire	0.1	10.6	13.5	2.9	0.0	27.2
North West Lancashire	0.0	15.8	17.1	3.5	0.0	36.3
Salford and Trafford	0.1	23.1	19.3	3.0	0.0	45.6
Sefton	0.0	11.1	12.6	2.0	0.0	25.7
South Cheshire	0.1	18.8	15.2	3.6	0.0	37.8
South Lancashire	0.1	7.0	5.3	2.2	0.0	14.7
St. Helens and Knowsley	0.1	11.0	14.9	2.3	0.0	28.3
Stockport	0.0	17.1	13.4	3.4	0.0	34.0
West Pennine	0.0	12.9	15.8	2.4	0.0	31.2
Wigan and Bolton	0.1	16.0	15.4	3.2	0.0	34.8
Wirral	0.0	8.4	15.2	2.2	0.0	25.9
Total for North West region	1.2	222.0	252.2	44.3 2	0.2	519.9
Northern and Yorkshire region						
Bradford	0.0	12.8	16.1	2.8	0.0	31.8
Calderdale and Kirklees	0.1	16.8	12.4	3.1	0.0	32.3
County Durham and Darlington	0.2	22.1	19.1	3.5	0.1	45.1
East Riding and Hull	0.1	18.5	14.6	3.1	0.1	36.4
Gateshead and South Tyneside	0.1	10.7	10.9	1.9	0.0	23.7
Leeds	0.1	19.4	23.9	5.1	0.0	48.6
Newcastle and North Tyneside	0.0	11.5	15.8	2.4	0.0	29.8
North Cumbria	0.1	7.9	8.7	2.1	0.1	18.9
North Yorkshire	0.3	21.3	14.3	4.7	0.2	40.8
Northumberland	0.0	8.1	7.3	1.6	0.1	17.1
Sunderland	0.1	6.4	5.4	1.1	0.0	12.9
Tees	0.2	18.4	17.5	2.3	0.0	38.4
Wakefield	0.0	8.9	9.5	2.3	0.0	20.7
Total for Northern and Yorkshire region	1.5	182.7	175.5	36.1	0.6	396.5
South East region						
Berkshire	0.1	14.9	13.4	4.2	0.1	32.6
Buckinghamshire	0.2	12.5	10.4	3.9	0.1	27.2
East Kent	0.2	14.9	14.9	2.7	0.1	32.8
East Surrey	0.0	11.8	6.2	1.7	0.0	19.8
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	0.1	21.6	23.2	4.1	0.1	49.1

Traditional antipsychotics

			Aged 16 to 59 years			
Health authority in which dispensed	*Children aged 0–15 years*	*Elderly people aged 60 and over*	*Exempt*	*Charged*[1]	*Items personally administered*	*Total*
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	0.1	20.2	15.8	3.8	0.1	39.9
North and Mid Hampshire	0.3	11.2	8.5	3.5	0.1	23.6
Northamptonshire	0.2	14.4	13.6	3.7	0.0	31.9
Oxfordshire	0.1	9.8	8.2	3.1	0.2	21.4
Southampton and South West Hampshire	0.2	14.0	12.2	4.1	0.1	30.5
West Kent	0.2	18.0	19.7	5.5	0.1	43.4
West Surrey	0.1	12.5	9.6	3.6	0.0	25.8
West Sussex	0.1	28.8	13.5	4.5	0.1	47.0
Total for South East region	1.8	204.6	169.2	48.5	0.9	425.0
South West region						
Avon	0.2	26.8	25.4	5.1	0.1	57.5
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	0.1	15.5	16.0	2.9	0.2	34.7
Dorset	0.2	23.8	14.7	3.3	0.1	42.2
Gloucestershire	0.3	14.0	13.9	4.7	0.1	33.1
North and East Devon	0.1	14.8	11.9	3.1	0.2	30.0
Somerset	0.1	11.0	9.6	2.1	0.1	22.9
South and West Devon	0.1	19.6	21.7	3.1	0.2	44.7
Wiltshire	0.1	14.2	11.7	4.0	0.1	30.1
Total for South West region	1.1	139.7	124.9	28.3	1.1	295.2
Trent region						
Barnsley	0.1	7.6	5.1	1.6	0.0	14.4
Doncaster	0.1	9.5	9.1	2.1	0.0	20.7
Leicestershire	0.1	21.2	22.2	4.8	0.1	48.3
Lincolnshire	0.1	23.0	16.5	5.8	0.2	45.6
North Derbyshire	0.1	14.3	10.5	2.1	0.0	27.0
North Nottinghamshire	0.1	13.5	8.5	2.1	0.1	24.3
Nottingham	0.1	19.2	15.2	4.3	0.1	38.8
Rotherham	0.1	15.6	7.5	1.1	0.0	24.4
Sheffield	0.2	16.2	15.0	3.2	0.0	34.6
South Humber	0.1	10.7	9.6	2.4	0.0	22.9
Southern Derbyshire	0.1	19.5	12.8	3.4	0.0	35.9
Total for Trent region	1.1	170.3	131.9	33.0	0.5	336.9
West Midlands region						
Birmingham	0.6	24.5	34.7	4.1	0.0	63.9
Coventry	0.1	5.6	8.0	1.7	0.0	15.4
Dudley	0.0	11.2	8.8	2.6	0.0	22.6
Herefordshire	0.2	5.3	4.4	1.0	0.1	10.9
North Staffordshire	0.1	15.3	11.7	3.5	0.0	30.5
Sandwell	0.1	9.5	8.0	1.7	0.0	19.2
Shropshire	0.1	11.7	10.5	2.5	0.1	24.8
Solihull	0.1	3.5	3.5	1.2	0.0	8.2
South Staffordshire	0.1	15.9	11.1	3.0	0.1	30.1
Walsall	0.0	9.9	8.1	1.7	0.0	19.6
Warwickshire	0.0	12.1	9.4	3.5	0.1	25.1
Wolverhampton	0.1	8.4	7.0	1.1	0.0	16.5
Worcestershire	0.3	17.1	9.9	2.3	0.1	29.8
Total for West Midlands region	1.7	149.9	134.9	29.9	0.4	316.8
England	10.8	1,322.7	1,257.2	280.2	5.1	2,876.0

All antipsychotics

			Aged 16 to 59 years			
Health authority in which dispensed	*Children aged 0–15 years*	*Elderly people aged 60 and over*	*Exempt*	*Charged*[1]	*Items personally administered*	*Total*
Eastern region						
Bedfordshire	0.3	20.5	16.6	4.6	0.1	42.0
East and North Hertfordshire	0.5	29.5	23.5	7.6	0.2	61.3
Hertfordshire	0.5	37.8	28.2	10.4	0.1	77.0
Norfolk	0.4	38.9	47.4	9.9	0.4	97.1
North Essex	0.5	36.5	30.3	7.7	0.1	75.2
South Essex	0.5	24.1	22.3	5.1	0.0	52.0
Suffolk	0.4	32.6	20.9	6.3	0.3	60.4
Total for eastern region	3.0	219.9	189.2	51.5	1.3	464.9

	All antipsychotics					
			Aged 16 to 59 years			
Health authority in which dispensed	*Children aged 0–15 years*	*Elderly people aged 60 and over*	*Exempt*	*Charged*[1]	*Items personally administered*	*Total*
London region						
Barking and Havering	0.2	14.3	11.5	3.5	0.0	29.5
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey	0.2	32.4	34.5	6.6	0.0	73.6
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich	0.2	25.1	19.2	5.3	0.0	49.8
Brent and Harrow	0.0	13.3	19.5	3.8	0.0	36.6
Camden and Islington	0.1	8.9	25.1	2.7	0.0	36.8
Croydon	0.0	13.1	15.8	2.8	0.0	31.7
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	0.2	21.0	30.6	5.6	0.0	57.3
East London and The City	0.2	14.7	36.2	3.4	0.0	54.6
Hillingdon	0.1	6.2	6.8	2.0	0.0	15.1
Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster	0.0	8.9	15.8	2.7	0.0	27.5
Kingston and Richmond	0.1	12.9	9.1	3.4	0.0	25.5
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	0.3	26.4	34.0	4.0	0.0	64.6
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth	0.2	23.5	23.3	5.3	0.0	52.3
Redbridge and Waltham Forest	0.3	14.9	17.1	3.0	0.0	35.3
Total for London region	2.1	235.6	298.4	54.1	0.0	590.3
North West region						
Bury and Rochdale	0.1	21.2	24.6	4.9	0.0	50.7
East Lancashire	0.3	25.1	30.3	5.4	0.0	61.1
Liverpool	0.2	24.0	36.6	3.4	0.0	64.2
Manchester	0.2	24.1	43.6	3.2	0.0	71.1
Morecambe Bay	0.1	21.1	15.3	3.8	0.1	40.3
North Cheshire	0.1	14.4	18.0	3.6	0.0	36.2
North West Lancashire	0.0	27.2	27.3	6.0	0.0	60.7
Salford and Trafford	0.2	31.7	31.0	4.5	0.0	67.5
Sefton	0.0	17.7	21.6	3.2	0.0	42.5
South Cheshire	0.2	32.0	26.7	6.7	0.0	65.6
South Lancashire	0.2	12.3	10.5	3.5	0.0	26.5
St. Helens and Knowsley	0.1	18.3	24.9	3.8	0.0	47.1
Stockport	0.1	23.8	19.9	4.6	0.0	48.5
West Pennine	0.1	20.1	22.9	3.6	0.0	46.7
Wigan and Bolton	0.1	30.7	25.3	5.1	0.0	61.3
Wirral	0.1	16.8	25.6	3.9	0.0	46.5
Total for North West region	2.2	360.7	404.1	69.4	0.2	836.6
Northern and Yorkshire region						
Bradford	0.1	22.5	24.7	4.1	0.0	51.4
Calderdale and Kirklees	0.3	28.1	24.0	5.3	0.0	57.8
County Durham and Darlington	0.3	31.3	29.1	5.4	0.1	66.2
East Riding and Hull	0.1	26.9	25.6	5.3	0.1	57.9
Gateshead and South Tyneside	0.3	17.9	16.3	2.9	0.0	37.4
Leeds	0.3	35.6	41.0	8.0	0.0	84.8
Newcastle and North Tyneside	0.3	28.8	31.0	4.2	0.0	64.4
North Cumbria	0.2	14.6	14.2	3.8	0.1	33.0
North Yorkshire	0.5	32.0	21.5	6.9	0.2	61.2
Northumberland	0.2	12.9	12.9	2.7	0.1	28.8
Sunderland	0.1	11.0	11.0	1.8	0.0	24.0
Tees	0.3	26.0	27.8	3.8	0.0	57.8
Wakefield	0.1	17.2	15.7	3.4	0.0	36.6
Total for Northern and Yorkshire region	3.2	304.8	294.8	57.5	0.6	660.9
South East region						
Berkshire	0.2	26.1	23.8	7.8	0.1	58.0
Buckinghamshire	0.3	22.7	19.4	6.2	0.1	48.7
East Kent	0.7	25.7	27.0	5.1	0.1	58.5
East Surrey	0.0	16.3	10.5	3.7	0.0	30.4
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove	0.4	37.9	37.7	7.2	0.1	83.2
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire	0.1	35.3	26.2	6.7	0.1	88.4
North and Mid Hampshire	0.6	22.2	15.7	6.5	0.1	45.1
Northamptonshire	0.5	20.5	21.6	6.4	0.0	49.0
Oxfordshire	0.3	22.0	15.8	6.5	0.2	44.8
Southampton and South West Hampshire	0.4	27.0	22.8	7.0	0.1	57.3
West Kent	0.5	34.0	33.4	9.5	0.1	77.6
West Surrey	0.4	22.0	16.4	6.6	0.0	45.5
West Sussex	0.3	40.0	24.5	7.8	0.1	72.5
Total for South East region	4.8	351.8	294.8	86.9	0.9	739.2

		All antipsychotics				
			Aged 16 to 59 years			
Health authority in which dispensed	*Children aged 0–15 years*	*Elderly people aged 60 and over*	*Exempt*	*Charged*[1]	*Items personally administered*	*Total*
South West region						
Avon	0.3	42.5	41.4	8.4	0.1	92.7
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	0.5	20.8	23.7	4.1	0.2	49.4
Dorset	0.3	33.1	24.5	6.4	0.1	64.5
Gloucestershire	0.4	20.1	20.4	6.8	0.1	47.8
North and East Devon	0.6	22.7	21.4	4.9	0.2	49.8
Somerset	0.4	19.4	15.2	3.3	0.1	38.5
South and West Devon	0.7	30.8	36.2	5.2	0.2	73.0
Wiltshire	0.3	26.6	20.3	6.4	0.1	53.7
Total for South West region	3.5	215.9	203.1	45.6	1.1	489.2
Trent region						
Barnsley	0.1	10.3	8.2	2.6	0.0	21.1
Doncaster	0.2	12.2	12.5	2.7	0.0	27.6
Leicestershire	0.2	32.1	35.2	7.3	0.1	74.8
Lincolnshire	0.7	32.4	23.4	7.8	0.2	64.5
North Derbyshire	0.1	17.7	15.2	3.1	0.0	36.2
North Nottinghamshire	0.1	18.3	11.5	3.0	0.1	32.9
Nottingham	0.1	22.1	17.3	5.0	0.1	44.6
Rotherham	0.1	23.3	11.5	1.8	0.0	36.7
Sheffield	0.3	20.6	21.5	4.2	0.0	46.6
South Humber	0.3	14.2	14.2	3.2	0.0	32.0
Southern Derbyshire	0.3	24.1	18.2	4.9	0.0	47.5
Total for Trent region	2.4	227.2	188.8	45.5	0.5	464.5
West Midlands region						
Birmingham	1.4	40.8	55.3	6.7	0.0	104.3
Coventry	0.2	14.3	16.7	3.2	0.0	34.4
Dudley	0.2	13.2	12.5	3.5	0.0	29.4
Herefordshire	0.2	6.2	6.4	1.4	0.1	14.2
North Staffordshire	0.2	22.4	16.9	5.0	0.0	44.6
Sandwell	0.2	11.7	11.8	2.4	0.0	26.1
Shropshire	0.3	18.4	15.0	3.9	0.1	37.6
Solihull	0.2	6.3	6.1	1.8	0.0	14.3
South Staffordshire	0.4	25.6	16.0	4.8	0.1	46.9
Walsall	0.1	14.6	11.6	2.2	0.0	28.4
Warwickshire	0.3	22.2	16.8	5.4	0.1	44.7
Wolverhampton	0.1	11.6	10.8	1.6	0.0	24.0
Worcestershire	0.6	23.8	14.9	3.7	0.1	43.2
Total for West Midlands region	4.3	231.2	210.8	45.6	0.4	492.3
England	25.6	2,147.2	2,083.9	456.2	5.1	4,717.9

[1] Charged prescription items include those where a charge was made at the point of dispensing and where a patient has a pre-payment certificate.

Notes:

1. The analysis of the data for non-charged categories is based on a 1 in 20 sample of all exempt prescriptions submitted to the Prescription Pricing Authority by community pharmacists, appliance contractors, and dispensing doctors. Personally administered items are free of charge.
2. Antipsychotics are defined in the British National Formulary (BNF) paragraph 4.2.1, antipsychotic drugs. Atypical antipsychotics cover the drugs Amisulpride, Clozapine, Olanzapine, Quetiapine, Risperidone and Zotepine contained within BNF 4.2.1.

Poisons

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department will publish an annual report of all poisonings recorded by the National Poisons Information Service. [60629]

Ms Blears: A copy of the combined annual report of the National Poisons Information Service centres for the year 2000 will be placed in the Library. The combined report for 2001 is not yet available but it will be placed in the Library in due course. The hon. Member may wish to know that in future it is intended to produce a single annual report for the National Poisons Information Service for publication on a wider basis once enhancements to the data collection and analysis systems are completed to enable all centres to record compatible information on the inquiries they receive.

Stroke

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many social workers are *(a)* working in rehabilitative services for stroke victims and *(b)* working in stroke units in hospitals. [60134]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Coronary Care

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what services are available to those who survive heart attacks; and how often these patients were observed after leaving hospital in the last 12 months. [57817]

Ms Blears: The "National Service Framework" (NSF) for coronary heart disease, published in March 2000, sets out the standards of care for the national health service and others to help people who have had a heart attack, with action for secondary care, primary care and rehabilitation services.

The immediate priority identified in the NSF is increasing the use of effective medication for patients who have had a heart attack, following discharge from hospital. Effective medication includes aspirin, statins, beta-blockers and ACE inhibitors. Prescribing will depend on individual circumstances. The myocardial infarction national audit project established by the Royal College of Physicians indicates that the targets set out in the NSF for prescription of effective medication are now being achieved nationally.

How often patients are observed after leaving hospital will depend on individual patient needs.

Osteoporosis

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many of the operations postponed due to osteoporotic hip fractures were cancelled operations in *(a)* Hull and the East Riding and *(b)* England and Wales, in the last two quarters for which figures are available. [57575]

Mr. Hutton: Data on the number of operations postponed or cancelled due to osteoporotic hip fractures are not available, as no information is collected on the reasons for cancellations.

Data on the number of operations cancelled in England by the hospital for non-clinical reasons on, or after, the day the patient was due to be admitted are available in the Library.

Information about health services in Wales are a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Smoking

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the number of people in the UK who smoke, broken down by region. [59793]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 June 2000]:* The information is given in the table.

Estimated percentage and number of current cigarette smokers, among adults aged 16 and over, by region
United Kingdom, 2000

Region	*Percentage*	*Number*[1]
United Kingdom	27	12,900,000
England	27	10,700,000
NHS regional office areas in England[2]		
Northern and Yorkshire	28	1,400,000
Trent	26	1,100,000
West Midlands	26	1,100,000
North West	29	1,500,000
Eastern	25	1,100,000
London	27	1,600,000
South East	25	1,800,000
South West	27	1,100,000
Wales	25	600,000
Scotland	30	1,200,000
Northern Ireland	29	400,000

[1] Estimated number of smokers rounded to the nearest one hundred thousand.

[2] NHS regional office areas are as at 31 March 2002.

Note:

The number of smokers has been calculated using the 1991 census based population estimates for mid-year 2000, aged 16 and over (provided by the Office for National Statistics to the Department of Health).

Sources:

Prevalence of smoking:

(a) Office for National Statistics: General Household Survey 2000, published as 'Living in Britain: Results from the 2000 General Household Survey'.

(b) Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency: Continuous Household Survey 2000.

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the relationship between the incidence of smoking in particular regions of the UK and the amount of NHS health funding allocated to that region. [59794]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The prevalence of current cigarette smoking by region and the health authority total allocation by region are shown in the tables.

The national health service resource allocations take account of a number of factors including population size, age related need and relative need. Smoking prevalence is strongly related to socio-economic group, with prevalence higher in manual groups than non-manual groups. The resource allocation per capita tends to be higher in regions with above average prevalence and conversely, lower in regions with below average prevalence.

Table 1: Prevalence of current cigarette smoking among adults aged 16 and over, by regional office area, England, 2000

Regional office area[1]	*Percentage of cigarette smokers*
England	27
Northern and Yorkshire	28
Trent	26
West Midlands	26
North West	29
Eastern	25
London	27
South East	25
South West	27

[1] NHS Regional Office Areas as at 31 March 2002.

Source:

Office for National Statistics: General Household Survey 2000, published as 'Living in Britain: Results from the 2000 General Household Survey'.

Table 2: Health authority total allocation by regional office area for 2002–03

NHS regional office area [1]	*Total allocation (£000)*
England	41,468,469
Northern and Yorkshire	5,420,886
Trent	4,197,552
West Midlands	4,324,033
North West	5,829,741
Eastern	4,096,433
London	6,974,051
South East	6,694,368
South West	3,931,405

[1] NHS Regional Office areas are as at 31 March 2002.

Source:

Department of Health FID Resource Allocation

Human Genetics Commission

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to the letter of the hon. Member for Pontefract and Castleford of 16 April (ref DOH/3/5653/16), what action the Human Genetics Commission is recommending in relation to Japan Tobacco, Corixa, and lung cancer vaccine licensing. [57133]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The human genetics commission (HGC) is aware of the concerns surrounding US-patented lung cancer vaccines that have been licensed to an overseas tobacco firm. HGC will continue to consider the broader ethical and social implications of the patenting of genetic inventions and will take note of the findings of various reviews of patenting and intellectual property rights that are under way.

Hepatitis

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the National Institute for Clinical Excellence guidelines for implementing the antiviral treatment for hepatitis C. [60524]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* Copies of the guidance on the use of Ribavirin and Interferon Alpha for Hepatitis C from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) have been placed in the Library. The uidance is also available on NICE's website at http://www.nice.org.uk/cat.asp?c=11657.

Diabetes

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much extra funding he plans to provide for the prevention of diabetes over the next five years; and if he will make a statement; [60122]

(2) how much is spent in *(a)* England and *(b)* Gloucestershire on the treatment of diabetes; and if he will make a statement; [60120]

(3) what extra funds he is providing to fund the National Service Framework; and if he will make a statement. [60119]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* Information is not collected centrally on how much is spent on the treatment of diabetes, nor is information available on expenditure on the treatment of diabetes in Gloucestershire. However, it has been estimated that around 5 per cent. of total national health service resources are used for the care of people with diabetes.

The Budget provides the highest sustained growth in NHS history, with annual average increases of 7.4 per cent. in real terms over the five years 2003–04 to 2007–08. Decisions about the allocation of the increased funding will be announced later this year.

Prevention of diabetes is one of the key areas covered by the diabetes national service framework standards, published in December 2001. Local strategies on promoting healthy eating and physical activity, and reducing overweight and obesity, are also being developed as part of the implementation of the national service framework for coronary heart disease. We are taking forward a wide range of work across Government to reduce obesity, to increase physical activity and improve diet.

Attention Deficit Disorders

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in each of the last five years were diagnosed with *(a)* attention deficit disorder and *(b)* attention deficit hyperactivity disorder in each (i) region and (ii) health authority, broken down by age group. [60089]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not collected centrally. The prevalence of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder of all types is estimated at around five per cent. of school-aged children, approximately 345,000 six to sixteen-year-olds in England.

Food Supplements

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received concerning the impact that EU legislation on food supplements will have on the equestrian community. [60013]

Ms Blears: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not recently received any representations concerning the impact of the proposed Directive on food supplements on the equestrian community.

Juvenile Sex Abusers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures his Department takes to address the needs of children and young people who sexually abuse; and if he will make a statement. [57198]

Jacqui Smith: Social services departments should carry out an assessment of the needs of a child who has sexually abused. Such assessments should take into account that children who abuse may have considerable unmet developmental needs, as well as specific needs arising from their behaviour. A young abuser should be the subject of a child protection conference if he or she is considered personally to be at risk of continuing harm. Where there is no reason to hold a child protection conference, there may still be a need for a multi-agency approach if the young abuser's needs are complex. A plan of action should be put in place to address the needs of the young abuser, detailing the involvement of all agencies.

If children who abuse others are thought to have a mental health problem then they may also need to be referred to child and adolescent mental health services. Those facing serious charges need to undergo a forensic assessment and may also, in exceptional circumstances, need to be admitted to a specialist forensic unit.

NHS Estate

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what change there has been in the backlog of maintenance for the NHS estate in 2001–02. [58298]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* Backlog maintenance is defined as the cost to achieve buildings which are sound, operationally safe and exhibit only minor deterioration.

Figures for the outturn of year 2001–02 are still being collected and validated and are therefore not yet available.

Correspondence

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will answer the letter from the hon. Member for Canterbury dated 12 October 2001, regarding briefing on chemical and biological attacks. [57785]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has no record of receiving the hon. Member's correspondence. The Department's ministerial correspondence unit is seeking a duplicate copy of this correspondence.

Dr. Ali Malik

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health where in the national health service Dr. Ali Malik (GMC No. (5) 195377) is employed. [57956]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not keep a register of NHS employees. However doctors are required to provide the General Medical Council (GMC) with a registered address, but this is not necessarily their place of work. The GMC publish the register on the internet.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 13 June 2002

DEFENCE

NATO Forces (Balkans)

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made on restructuring NATO's forces in the Balkans; and if he will make a statement. [62522]

Geoffrey Hoon: At our meeting in Brussels on 6 June, NATO Defence Ministers approved a series of changes to SFOR and KFOR following the Joint Operational Area (JOA) Review.

The Review advocates a regional approach to NATO's peacekeeping operations in the Balkans, whereby both Bosnia and Kosovo will be treated, for military planning purposes, as a single theatre. The security situation in the Balkans has changed since the initial deployment of SFOR and KFOR. NATO's operations will be restructured accordingly, to provide a smaller, lighter and more flexible force that will be better able to meet current challenges.

Implementation of the JOA Review will take place over the next 12 months. It is planned that, by the end of 2002, SFOR will reduce from some 18,000 to some 12,000 personnel and KFOR from some 38,000 to some 32,000. By June 2003, it is envisaged that KFOR will reduce further to some 29,000 troops. Responsibilities for support of civil implementation will be transferred to local authorities and other international organisations, as appropriate. The United Kingdom welcomes the outcome of this review.

This reduction in troop numbers does not signal any reduction in NATO's commitment to the Balkans. Rather, these changes are a sign of the Alliance's achievements to date in bringing security and stability to the Balkans. The United Kingdom, with the rest of NATO, remains committed to the security and stability of the Balkans and will continue to play its full role in achieving the international community's objectives for the region.

Individual nations are now considering and discussing with one another how to adjust their troop contributions in the light of the JOA Review.

Anthrax

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to offer immunisation against anthrax to the armed forces. [62523]

Geoffrey Hoon: Following the delay to the voluntary immunisation programme against anthrax that was caused by difficulties at the Centre for Applied Microbiological Research, which was supplying the vaccine, the programme was re-launched for personnel deployed to the Gulf in May 2001. But continuing uncertainty over the licensing of future supplies meant that it was not extended further to other members of the Armed Forces.

The problems over the licensing of future supplies have now been resolved and the Ministry of Defence took delivery of the rest of the supplies that are required at the end of March this year. We are confident that there will be no difficulties with the future, large-scale production of the vaccine.

It takes six months for immunisation against anthrax to become fully effective. But we may not have nearly so much warning of a change in the threat, nor of the requirement for British Armed Forces to deploy to a high threat area. Given that we cannot expect to predict exactly where or when a threat might arise, or which units of the Armed Forces might be called upon to respond. We have decided to expand the immunisation programme so that all Service personnel, including reserves, and those essential civilians who are likely to deploy on operations, are routinely offered immunisation against anthrax. We plan to expand the programme gradually over the next few years, beginning with those units that are held at the highest readiness.

Immunisation against anthrax is safe and effective. As before, and in keeping with long-standing medical practice, it will be offered to personnel on the basis of voluntary informed consent. By accepting it alongside their other defensive measures, this will ensure that they have the very best protection against anthrax used as a biological weapon.

Performance Targets

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what performance targets have been set for the Defence Secondary Care Agency for the financial year 2002–03. [62524]

Dr. Moonie: Key Targets have been set for the Chief Executive of the Defence Secondary Care Agency (DCSA) for financial year 2002–03. The targets build on the progress already made by the Agency since it formed in April 1996, and are as follows:

Key Target 1—The Operational Requirement

From within the personnel resources provided to the DSCA by the single Services, to meet 100 per cent. of the requirement of the Commanders-in-Chief (CinCs) for secondary care personnel for operational deployments.

Key Target 2—Outpatient Waiting Times

To ensure that 45 per cent. of Service patients referred to the Agency are offered a first outpatient appointment within four weeks of receipt of a referral and 90 per cent. within 13 weeks.

Key Target 3—Inpatient Waiting Times

To ensure that 80 per cent. of Service patients are offered a treatment date which is within 13 weeks of the decision to give inpatient treatment.

Key Target 4—Efficiency

To implement revised medical equipment management policies and make savings of 10 per cent., or more, in the costs of procurement, support and associated training.

Key Target 5—Military Training

To ensure that 80 per cent. of all DSCA personnel, whose medical category permits, are released to receive their Service's annual mandatory military training.

Key Target 6—Personnel for Exercises

To ensure that 80 per cent. of DSCA personnel nominated to established posts in their Service's operational core requirement are released to attend appropriate exercises.

Key Target 7—MQR Implementation

To ensure that the Agency completes the tasks assigned to it by the Medical Quinquennial Review within agreed timescales, including the orderly and effective transfer of functions to other designated organisations and its closure on 31 March 2003.

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what performance targets have been set for the Defence Medical Training organisation for the financial year 2002–03. [62525]

Dr. Moonie: Key Targets have been set for the Chief Executive of the Defence Medical Training Organisation (DMTO) for financial year 2002–03. The targets build on the progress already made by the Agency since it formed in April 1997, and are as follows:

Key Target 1—Academic Success (Quality and Quantity)

To achieve the following academic success rates:

	Per cent.
Phase 2 Training Course (formerly entitled Common Core Course)	96
Specialist Registrars (SpR)	95
Pre-Registration Nurses (PRN)	96

Key Target 2—Academic Success (Timeliness)

The following percentage of trainees achieving academic success to be delivered on time, as agreed with the customer.

	Per cent.
Phase Two Training Course (at first attempt, remainder at second attempt—which normally is within three months	96
SpR	95
PRN	98

Key Target 3—Implement the Recommendations of the Medical Quinquennial Review

To implement the recommendations of the review in liaison with Surgeon General's change management team by 31 March 2003, to ensure that the new Defence Medical Education and Training Agency has full functionality with effect 1 April 2003.

Key Target 4—Corporate Efficiency Target

To achieve a 4.5 per cent. cumulative efficiency improvement demonstrate by the DMTO corporate efficiency index for 2002–03, using 1999–2000 as the baseline year.

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what performance targets have been set for the Defence Dental Agency for the financial year 2002–03. [62526]

Dr. Moonie: Key Targets have been set for the Chief Executive of the Defence Dental Agency (DDA) for Financial Year 2002–03. The targets build on the progress already made by the Agency since it formed in March 1996, and are as follows.

Key Target 1—The Operational Requirement

From within personnel resources allocated to the DDA by single Services to achieve 100 per cent of personnel called forward, trained to required professional and military standards, at the specified readiness for deployment with the Joint Rapid Reaction Force and all operations.

Key Target 2—Dental Risk

To develop a SMART target (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time Related) for Dental Risk categorisation by 31 March 2003.

Key Target 3—Treatment Needs

To reduce the Treatment Need Index (TNI) for each Service to the following:

RN at or below 470;

Army at or below 637;

RAF at or below 330.

Key Target 4—Dental Fitness Category D

To reduce the number of personnel in Dental Fitness category D4 to zero by 31 March 2003.

Key Target 5—Military Training

To ensure that 80 per cent. of all DDA personnel, whose medical category permits, are released to undertake annual military training as specified by respective single Services.

Key Target 6—Personnel for Exercises

To ensure that 100 per cent. of all DDA personnel nominated to established posts in the operational core requirement of their parent Service are released to attend appropriate exercises.

Mr. Levitt: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what performance targets have been set for the Medical Supplies Agency for the financial year 2002–03. [62527]

Dr. Moonie: Key Targets have been set for the Chief Executive of the Medical Supplies Agency (MSA) for financial year 2002–03. The targets build on the progress already made by the Agency since it formed in March 1996 and are as follows:

Key Target 1—Composite Medical Material

To build, completely, to schedule and within budget, by 31 March 2003, 100 per cent. of all modules on the mutually agreed Operational Build Programme, as authorised by Surgeon General's Department (SGD).

Key Target 2—The Operational Requirement

To meet demands from units on active operations for blood products and scaled medical materiel, within the MSA Charter Response Time (Next Day–three Day) as follows:

Within Charter Response Time—90 per cent.;

Follow up (within five days)—97 per cent.

Key Target 3—The Exercise and Training Requirement

To meet 100 per cent of the Services requirements for modularised medical materiel, First Aid Kits, blood and blood products in support of exercises, training, Air Shows and other major events.

Key Target 4—Response to Demands

To meet demands for Category B items (commonly used items with a unit cost of less than £100 and approved by SGD) from units not on active operations, within the MSA Charter Response Times (Next Day–three day), as follows:

Top 250 by value

Within Charter Response Time—95 per cent.

Follow up (within five days)—97 per cent.

Overall

Within Charter Response Time—90 per cent.

Follow up (within five days)—97 per cent.

Key Target 5—Stock Issued to Stock Held Ratio

To improve the ratio of stock issued to stock held from 2.25 to 2.5.

Ministry of Defence Police

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the bases where a US station commander exercised day-to-day operational control over the Ministry of Defence police at *(a)* 1 May 1997 and *(b)* 1 June 2002. [61410]

Dr. Moonie: US Station Commanders are responsible for security at their Stations and exercise day to day operational control over the Ministry of Defence Police in respect of site security duties. The Senior Police officer is responsible to the Chief Constable MDP in respect of the exercise of constabulary powers. MDP officers are currently deployed at RAF Alconbury, RAF Fairford, RAF Hythe, RAF Lakenheath, RAF Menwith Hill, US Navy London (Eastcote) and RAF Welford. These sites also had a MDP detachment on 1 May 1997.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and what percentage of Ministry of Defence police serving on US bases in the UK are provided accommodation free of rent. [61184]

Dr. Moonie: Eight MDP officers stationed at bases made available to US Forces currently occupy housing made available by the Department. Although the officers are not paying rent, the accommodation has been made available in lieu of the payment of housing allowance.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who is paying the costs of the Ministry of Defence police on detached duties at Menwith Hill Station and Fylingdales, including indirect costs incurred through their presence. [61183]

Dr. Moonie: All costs connected with MOD Police at RAF Fylingdales are met from the Defence Budget. The cost of the authorised complement of MDP at RAF Menwith Hill and related costs are recovered from the US Authorities. The complement was increased with effect from 1 February 2002. Until officers are posted in on a permanent basis to fill the newly completed posts, cover is maintained using officers on temporary detachment. Costs are recovered as though all posts were filled on a permanent basis, enhanced to cover the additional costs associated with the detached duty while it continues.

Accommodation Costs

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) of 11 March 2002 *Official Report,* column 654W, on accommodation costs, what the cost was from April 2001 to March 2002 of hotel accommodation for departmental staff working away from home; how many members of staff were so accommodated in the year in question; and what the average cost was per paid-for night of these stays. [61416]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence does not hold data on hotel bookings and costs in the format requested. However it is possible to give the following figures for MoD civil servants who were required to be away from their homes on official business during the period April 2001 to March 2002:

	£
Total cost of hotel accommodation (B + B terms)	15,035,034
Total number of nights accommodated in a hotel on duty	246,003
Total number of bookings	79,655
Average cost per night (B + B terms)	61.12

The total cost of £15 million quoted above differs from that given in my previous response. This is because the earlier figure was for the period May 2001 to April 2002 and was only a projected figure based on incomplete data.

HMS Invincible

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he has had with the Indian Government concerning a possible sale of HMS Invincible. [61162]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence have had no discussions with the Indian Government concerning the possible sale of HMS Invincible.

Mr. Shaun Rusling

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons officials of his Department altered the medical appeal papers of Mr. Shaun Rusling, submitted to the Pensions appeal Tribunal; and if he will make a statement. [60331]

Dr. Moonie: Officials did not alter the medical appeal papers of Mr Shaun Rusling. Evidence was prepared for a Pensions Appeal Tribunal hearing on 10 September 1999. At that Tribunal further diagnoses for appeal were identified. This required preparation of a new set of papers for the further Tribunal hearing on 19 April 2002.

Empty Service Property

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent in each of the last three years on *(a)* rent and *(b)* maintenance of empty service family properties; and if he will make a statement. [60718]

Dr. Moonie: An accurate breakdown of rental and maintenance costs between occupied and empty Service Families Accommodation (SFA) is not available. Because of Service mobility, turnover of occupancy tends to be high and some properties may have several occupants over a relatively short period and various empty spells between occupants. However, on a proportionate basis, the current vacancy rate would indicate expenditure in the broad order of £20 million per annum in rent and £9 million in maintenance. Corresponding figures for a year ago would be £23 million rent and £11 million maintenance, and two years ago when £27 million rent and £14 million maintenance.

Of the current 8,600 empty properties in mainland UK, some 2,400 are in the course of disposal, 2,500 are held for future unit deployments and some 1,000 are empty awaiting modernisation. Others are available to incoming occupants or already under offer to them. Since January 2000, over 10,000 surplus properties have been disposed of.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the legal action against his Department being taken by the New Zealand Nuclear Test Veterans Association. [60952]

Dr. Moonie: Although the Ministry of Defence is aware of previous press articles reporting that the New Zealand Test Veterans Association intended to mount a class action against HM Government, to date no such legal action has been taken.

Deysbrook Barracks

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with other Government Departments about possible future uses of Deysbrook Barracks, near Liverpool; and if he will make a statement. [61276]

Dr. Moonie: Officials in Defence Estates have recently met with Government Office North West in connection with the disposal of the site and the planning application for residential and mixed-use development which is currently being considered by Liverpool City Council.

An official from Defence Estates has also visited the site twice, once in March and once in April, with officials from the Home Office.

No other discussions have taken place.

Media Relations Manager

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when James Clark is to start work in his Department as a media relations manager. [61163]

Dr. Moonie: Following an open competition run in accordance with Office of the Civil Service Commissioners' rules, Mr. Clark took up his appointment as a Communications Adviser working for the Director General Corporate Communications on Monday 10 June 2002.

TRANSPORT

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the mandate of the EC-Poland Joint Transport Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [58411]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

This Committee is established under the provisions of an Agreement between the European Community and Poland establishing certain conditions for the carriage of goods by road and the promotion of combined transport. The remit of the Committee is to ensure that the proper implementation of the Agreement. The Committee would be made up of representatives appointed by the Community and Poland. But I am not aware that it has met in recent times or that there are any plans for it to meet in the immediate future.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the mandate of the EC-Slovak Republic Joint Transport Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [58409]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

This committee is established under the provisions of an Agreement between the European Community and the Slovak Republic establishing certain conditions for the carriage of goods by road and the promotion of combined transport. The remit of the Committee is to ensure the proper implementation of the Agreement. The Committee would be made up of representatives appointed by the Community and the Slovak Republic. But I am not aware that it has met in recent times or that there are any plans for it to meet in the immediate future.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the mandate of the Joint Committee on the carriage of goods and passengers by inland waterway (EC-Czech Republic–Republic of Poland-Slovak Republic) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [58407]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

I have not been able to identify the Committee referred to by the hon. Member.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the mandate of the EC-Czech Republic Joint Transport Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [58408]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

This Committee is established under the provisions of an Agreement between the European Community and the Czech Republic establishing certain conditions for the carriage of goods by road and the promotion of combined transport. The remit of the Committee is to ensure the proper implementation of the Agreement. The Committee would be made up of representatives appointed by the Community and the Czech Republic. I am not aware of recent meetings or that there are any plans for it to meet in the immediate future.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the mandate of the EC-Romania Joint Transport Committee is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [58410]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

This Committee is established under the provisions of an Agreement between the European Community and Romania establishing certain conditions for the carriage of goods by road and the promotion of combined transport. The remit of the Committee is to ensure the proper implementation of the Agreement. The Committee would be made up of representatives appointed by the Community and Romania. I am not aware of recent meetings or that there are any plans for it to meet in the immediate future.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the Regulation establishing an instrument for structural policies for pre-accession (ISPA) is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if he will list the items currently under its consideration; if he will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if he will make a statement. [56769]

Clare Short: I have been asked to reply. The mandate of the ISPA Committee is to oversee the implementation of Council Regulation EC Number 1267/1999, which established ISPA. This determines the strategy framework for ISPA, and approves annual and multi-annual allocations to country and regional programmes.

The ISPA Committee has met three times in the last year. The UK is represented by the Department for International Development (DFID) and the UK Permanent Representation to the European Commission.

The annual cost to public funds of the Committee's work principally comprises the work of DFID officials in assessing and discussing with the EC strategy and programme proposals, as well as the costs of attendance at meetings of the Committee. The precise amounts concerned are not readily available.

The ISPA Committee recently considered a range of 19 environment and seven transport projects across the range of Candidate countries.

Pre-accession programmes and/or work related to them are subject to scrutiny by Select Committees of Parliament. Under Council Decision 1999/468/EC the EC has undertaken to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first such report was deposited in the libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Commission Document 5685/02). We have encouraged the EC to make available on its website a record of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions.

Transport Modes

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what the modal share of transport is by numbers of trips made. [60454]

Mr. Jamieson: The percentage of transport trips by mode for those living in Great Britain, from the National Travel Survey for the period 1998–2000 (the most recent data) is as follows:

Main Mode	*Trips per person per year*	*Percentage share*
Walk	271	26
Bicycle	16	2
Car driver	411	40
Car passenger	228	22
Motorcycle	3	—
Other private	8	1
Bus in London	13	1
Other local bus	45	4
Non-local bus	2	—
LT underground	7	1
Surface rail	12	1
Taxi/minicab	12	1
Other public	2	—
All modes	1,030	100

Fires at Sea

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how many fires have occurred on vessels within 12 miles of the Scottish coastline in the last three years; and how many such incidents involved requests for assistance from coastal fire brigades. [60820]

Mr. Jamieson: There have been 29 occasions reported in the last three years of fires occurring on commercially operated vessels within 12 miles of the Scottish coastline. Of these 29, 12 involved requests for assistance from coastal fire brigades. Statistics are not recorded for other types of vessels.

Dartford Thames Crossing

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what his policy is on ending toll collections at the Dartford Thames Crossing; and to what timetable. [61099]

Mr. Jamieson: The powers that permit tolling at the Dartford Crossing, contained in the Dartford Thurrock Crossing Act 1988, expire on 31 March 2003. However, it was announced on 4 April 2002 that we have decided to introduce a road user charging scheme at the Crossing using powers contained in the Transport Act 2000. The Act requires that the net revenues from the charging scheme be spent on transport projects. It is expected that the charging scheme will commence on 1 April 2003.

National Air Traffic Service

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions what recent discussions he has had with representatives of the insurance industry concerning the availability of insurance cover for the National Air Traffic Service. [61105]

Mr. Jamieson: There have been no recent discussions relating to insurance cover for National Air Traffic Services.

Galileo Project

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions how much the Government will spend on the Galileo Project in each of the next three years. [58242]

Mr. Jamieson: The Galileo satellite navigation programme is funded and managed jointly by the European Community and the European Space Agency (ESA), and the UK is supporting the programme through its contributions to these organisations. The development and validation phase (2002–05), approved in March by the EU Transport Council, is estimated to cost Euro 1.1 billion. Negotiations within ESA over Member States' contributions to its Euro 550 million share of this have yet to be concluded.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Staff Training

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much the Department has spent on staff training and development in each of the last five years. [61056]

Clare Short: In the last five years my Department's spending on staff training and development has been as follows.

	£
2001–02	2,466,066
2000–01	2,041,755
1999–2000	1,304,265
1998–99	833,976
1997–98	1,032,585

In addition, coaching and on the job training are regular features of the line management role but are not included in the overall financial cost for training and development.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Bali Summit

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the outcome of the Fourth Preparatory Committee for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Bali; and if she will make a statement. [61924]

Mrs. Beckett: The Fourth Preparatory Committee meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development gives us a basis for the final run up to Johannesburg. Progress was made on a Programme of Action, which includes the importance of sanitation in eradicating poverty and meeting the Millennium Development Goal on safe drinking water. Broad agreement was also reached on key issues such as the urgent need to restore fish stocks and address illegal fishing, and on the important role non-governmental actors can play in achieving sustainable development. The meeting also recognised the need for a strong focus on Africa.

Other difficult issues remain outstanding, such as how the Summit can address trade and finance issues to complement the Monterrey Consensus and the Doha Development Agenda. There are also specific targets on sanitation, biodiversity loss and energy, which have yet to be agreed. The UK will continue to work constructively with partners to ensure a successful outcome for Johannesburg, including concrete actions and coherent work programmes on energy, water and sustainable patterns of consumption and production.

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* officials, *(b)* Ministers and *(c)* special advisers in her Department are travelling to Bali at public cost. [57838]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* There were 12 officials, one Minister and one special adviser travelling to the fourth preparatory meeting for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Bali from DEFRA.

Rural Affairs

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many meetings of the Forum for Rural Children and Young People have taken place; and what recommendations she has received from the Forum. [61128]

Alun Michael: The Forum for Rural Children and Young People meets quarterly and is supported by DEFRA via a grant from the Countryside Agency. The group is represented on the Rural Affairs Forum for England which I chair.

The co-ordinator for the Forum for Rural Children and Young People—Andrew Brown—was appointed in September 2000. The Forum's Advisory Group includes representatives from most of the major voluntary sector bodies working with children and young people and observers from key Government departments, has held quarterly meetings since then. The Countryside Agency receives quarterly reports from the Forum and approves the Forum's annual report and work plan.

The Forum is working closely with a number of key Government departments on issues involving children and young people. This includes "Connexions", the Children's Unit, and the Department of Health as well as DEFRA. Other work includes a "Guide to the Rural White Paper", and the production of a video, *Experts in Their Fields*, in which children and young people speak about their experiences of living in the countryside. Recently, the Forum has contributed to the cross-cutting review on Children at Risk. We have also established strong links between the Forum for Rural Children and Young People and the Rural Affairs Forum for England that I chair.

I shall be meeting members of the Forum on Tuesday, 18 June.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place the minutes of the Rural Affairs Forum meetings since January in the Library. [61134]

Alun Michael: The Rural Affairs Forum has met twice, on 9 January and 10 April. Copies of the minutes of these are available on DEFRA's website (http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/rafe/index.htm), where we will post future minutes and meeting papers. Copies of the minutes of the first two meetings have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the *(a)* first year and *(b)* average annual running costs of the proposals for the England Rural Development Programme advocated by the Policy Commission on the future of farming and food. [61562]

Alun Michael: The Commission made a wide range of recommendations relating to the England Rural Development Programme. These referred to the agri-environment schemes, to the Vocational Training Scheme, to the Processing and Marketing Grant, to Hill Farm Allowance, and to the Rural Enterprise Scheme. The commission also advocates a shift in the overall balance of Common Agricultural Policy support between production subsidies and rural development measures. The recommendations would involve a range of different timescales for implementation, and the administrative costs involved in each would depend on a number of further decisions on the manner of implementation. For that reason it is not possible at this stage to give an assessment of the costs of the Policy Commission recommendations as a whole. We will publish our response to the recommendations in the Autumn.

Abandoned Vehicles

Mr Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her proposals to penalise, deter and prevent abandoned vehicles; and if she will make a statement. [52225]

Margaret Beckett: We are determined that keepers of vehicles should take full responsibility for them. The Finance Bill includes enabling powers to reform the vehicle registration and licensing system to improve the accuracy of the vehicle record and thus to ensure that those who abandon cars can more easily be brought to book. The Government intend to consult motoring groups and other stakeholders on detailed reforms. The maximum penalty for abandoning a vehicle is a fine of £2,500 or three months' imprisonment or both.

Imported Meat and Poultry

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs from which countries meat and poultry products have been imported into the United Kingdom in the last three years. [60329]

Mr. Morley: The attached table shows the countries from which the UK imported meat and poultry products between 1999 and 2001, as recorded by the Official Overseas Trade Statistics.

Official overseas trade data are subject to a degree of statistical error. Whilst overall level of errors will be low, there will be a much greater proportional effect on countries with low levels of trade. As such, great care is needed when interpreting the data.

PQ 6418: UK imports of meat and meat products (1999–2001)

	1999		*2000*		*2001*	
Country of despatch	*Thousand tonnes*	*£ million*	*Thousand tonnes*	*£ million*	*Thousand tonnes*	*£ million*
Netherlands	333.2	577.6	414.2	651.8	361.0	666.9
Denmark	218.4	330.1	250.0	382.2	274.1	504.9
Irish Republic	192.4	332.3	208.5	360.4	226.1	423.7
France	155.6	231.3	142.4	216.9	141.0	228.5
Brazil	81.6	124.0	97.7	145.5	124.1	190.0
New Zealand	99.8	167.5	97.4	171.3	84.3	165.2
Germany	43.6	75.6	58.7	106.9	79.5	143.5
Belgium	42.4	72.6	43.6	77.6	42.5	81.8
Thailand	23.6	44.9	28.9	58.5	41.4	83.6
Australia	22.3	45.6	18.9	38.1	16.0	36.3

PQ 6418: UK imports of meat and meat products (1999–2001)

	1999		*2000*		*2001*	
Country of despatch	*Thousand tonnes*	*£ million*	*Thousand tonnes*	*£ million*	*Thousand tonnes*	*£ million*
Italy	14.7	42.0	14.2	4.8	24.4	65.9
Spain	14.1	28.1	15.1	29.2	16.9	34.6
Uruguay	11.3	21.7	9.6	20.9	10.0	16.5
Argentina	10.1	18.0	10.5	19.6	6.6	11.8
Botswana	6.2	17.5	5.7	16.9	11.2	30.5
Namibia	6.7	22.8	5.7	19.9	8.6	29.0
Zimbabwe	6.5	16.2	5.9	14.8	4.6	10.4
USA	3.8	7.8	3.8	8.3	2.3	5.3
Sweden	3.8	3.1	1.7	1.7	3.0	4.4
Chile	1.8	3.2	2.5	5.1	4.2	7.8
Poland	1.8	4.2	1.7	4.2	1.9	4.8
Hungary	0.9	2.3	0.8	2.1	2.4	6.3
Croatia	0.7	1.0	0.8	1.0	0.7	1.2
Slovenia	0.5	1.0	0.7	1.0	0.8	1.3
Israel	0.1	0.3	0.4	0.9	1.0	1.8
Portugal	0.2	0.1	1.0	0.8	0.2	0.3
Switzerland	0.0	0.1	0.7	0.9	0.4	0.6
Mauritius	0.7	1.0	0.4	0.5	0.0	0.0
Swaziland	0.3	0.5	0.6	1.7	0.1	0.2
Finland	0.2	0.1	0.4	0.2	0.2	0.3
South Africa	0.3	0.8	0.2	0.5	0.3	0.6
Japan			0.7	1.6	0.1	0.2
Greece	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.5	0.3	0.6
Austria	0.1	0.2	0.0	0.1	0.4	1.4
Singapore	0.3	0.8	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2
Iceland	0.0	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.3	0.3
Canada	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.1	0.2
China	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.1
Paraguay	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.2
Hong Kong	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	0.2
Russia	0.0	0.0			0.0	0.0
Norway	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1	0.0	0.1
Cayman Islands			0.0	0.1		
Dominica			0.0	0.1		
Luxembourg			0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Mozambique	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0		
Panama			0.0	0.1		
Turkey	0.0	0.0			0.0	0.0
Czech Republic					0.0	0.0
Faroe Islands			0.0	0.0		
Jamaica			0.0	0.0		
Uganda	0.0	0.0				
India	0.0	0.0			0.0	0.0
Vietnam	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Indonesia	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Columbia					0.0	0.0
Malaysia			0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Nigeria	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Burkina					0.0	0.0
South Korea	0.0	0.0				
Barbados					0.0	0.0
Eritrea			0.0	0.0		
Pakistan	0.0	0.0				
Antigua & Barbuda					0.0	0.0
Trinidada & Tobago					0.0	0.0
Taiwan					0.0	0.0
Dubai	0.0	0.0				
Qatar					0.0	0.0

Nb. Figures rounded to one decimal place. A blank entry indicates no recorded imports for that year.

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Source:

HM Customs and Excise

Data prepared by Statistics (Commodities and Food) Account and Trade, ESD, DEFRA.

2001 EU data is provisional and subject to amendment.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the mandate of the Management Committee of the common organisation of agricultural markets for oils and fats is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55249]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Management Committee for oils and fats is to assist the Commission in the management of the common organisation of the market for oils and fats as established by Article 37 of Council Regulation (EEC) No 136/66. The Committee has met 17 times over the last 12 months and one official attends; the cost of this attendance to public funds over the last year was £8,500. The Committee considers matters relating to the management of the market for fats and oils.

Together with Member States, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February (Com (2001) 783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agenda and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Peat

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when peat cutting will end at *(a)* Thorne Moor, *(b)* Wedholme Flow and *(c)* Hatfield Manor. [61172]

Mr. Meacher: Commercial peat cutting has already ceased on sites previously operated by the Scotts Company (UK) Ltd at Thorne Moor and Wedholme Flow. Peat cutting on Hatfield Moor will cease by 30 September 2004. Until then cutting of peat at Hatfield Moor will be subject to revised operating protocols agreed between the operator and English Nature that will be set so as to achieve enhanced restoration of the site.

National Parks

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the review of National Park authorities will be completed. [61132]

Alun Michael: We expect to complete the review next month.

Devolution

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has to review the way in which Scottish agriculture issues are dealt with by the UK Government at the EC level. [60058]

Mr. Morley [*Holding answer 10 June 2002*]: As necessary, this Department will continue to deal with Scottish agricultural issues at the EU level in accordance with the provisions of the "Memorandum of Understanding and supplementary agreements between the United Kingdom Government, Scottish Ministers and the Cabinet of the National Assembly for Wales" (Cm 4444) and a bilateral concordat with the Scottish Executive.

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions her Department had with the Scottish Executive in formulating the UK's negotiating position on the mid-term review of the CAP. [60057]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The UK's negotiating position on the mid-term review of the CAP is the subject of an ongoing dialogue between this Department and the devolved administrations. It is, for example, a recurring item for discussion between my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and Agriculture Ministers from the devolved administrations at their regular meetings, most recently on 22 May 2002.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether a Scottish Executive Minister will be a member of the UK delegation to the Agriculture European Union Council of Ministers meeting on 27 May; and what information is being provided by her Department to the Scottish Executive in connection with pre-council scrutiny by the European Committee of the Scottish Parliament. [60277]

Mr. Morley: No Scottish Executive Minister attended the EU Agriculture Council meeting on 27 May. As regards pre-Council scrutiny by the Scottish Parliament, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to him on 24 April 2002, *Official Report*, column 276W.

Biosecurity (South Korea)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the risks of foot and mouth disease being brought into the United Kingdom by *(a)* travellers and *(b)* goods from South Korea. [60275]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* South Korea is not a country that is authorised to export meat or animals to the European Union. We have received veterinary advice that there is no significant risk of football fans or other travellers bringing Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) back from South Korea. We understand that all South Korean World Cup stadia are a long distance from the affected areas and most games will be played in Japan, which does not have FMD.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she has taken to improve the biosecurity arrangements for the arrival at ports of *(a)* travellers and *(b)* goods from South Korea. [60274]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* Veterinary advice is that the risk of travellers bringing foot and mouth disease back from South Korea is not significant. We have, however, issued advice in recent weeks via the Football Association website and the British Consulate in Seoul to advise travellers not to visit farms, and to either keep to the current personal import allowance of 1kg of meat cooked in a hermetically sealed container or, preferably, to bring no meat at all. We have also advised our port and airport enforcement authorities of the outbreak of foot and mouth in South Korea. These measures are in addition to those announced in our Action Plan of 28 March which sets out measures to reduce the risk of animal and plant diseases entering the country.

Foot and Mouth

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food obtained in 2001 about sheep movements from Longtown market, Cumbria; whether any of that information was subsequently mislaid by the Department; and if she will make a statement. [61573]

Mr. Morley: The Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food obtained a great deal of information about sheep movements form Longtown Market, both by consulting the Market's paper records and by discussions with the staff involved. At no time was any of the information mislaid by the Department and all information obtained was followed up.

Abattoirs

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact on small abattoirs of the introduction under S.I., 2002, No. 843 of a requirement that the vertebral column from cattle over 30 months should be removed in licensed cutting plants. [61577]

Mr. Morley: A Regulatory Impact Assessment for the TSE (England) Regulation 2002 (S.I. 2002/843) is placed in the libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

Illegal Meat Imports

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much illegal imported meat was confiscated in the last financial year. [60334]

Mr. Morley: We are still receiving data from the enforcement agencies about animal products seized in the last financial year. As at 6 June 2002, we have been advised that the weight of produce seized since 1 April 2001 is about 60 tonnes. We are unable to provide a precise weight of the volume of meat seized because weight has not always been provided and some consignments contain more than one type of product. We estimate however, that about 43 tonnes of the produce seized contained meat.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many arrests there were in respect of the illegal import of foodstuffs in each of the last 12 months; [54851]

(2) when she will reply to the question from the hon. Member for North Norfolk tabled on 1 May, reference 54851. [61317]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 8 May 2002]:* Last year, HM Customs and Excise arrested three people for offences under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) involving illegal meat imports. Of these, two were convicted of a CITES offence, both received prison sentences of four months. The third person was acquitted but convicted under a separate Animal Health charge resulting in a penalty of a conditional discharge for one year and costs of £100.

Nitrates

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she has taken to consult farmers and growers about the Government's proposed changes to the designation methodology for nitrate vulnerable zones. [61559]

Mr. Meacher: Details of the methodology used to identify potential new Nitrate Vulnerable Zones were set out in Annexe A of the recent consultation paper "How should England implement the 1991 Nitrates Directive?".

We are currently considering all the issues raised responses to the consultation, including comments on this methodology, and hope to make an announcement soon about how we will proceed.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will place in the Library a detailed statement in the changes in methodology that she is applying now to the designation of nitrate vulnerable zones compared with the methodology employed at the time of earlier designations; [61558]

(2) what the scientific basis is for the Government's changes to the designation methodology for nitrate vulnerable zones. [61554]

Mr. Meacher: Below is a table that explains the scientific development of the methodology used to identify Nitrate Vulnerable Zones between the time that the first designations were made in 1996 and the publication of our consultation paper "How should England implement the 1991 Nitrates Directive?" in December 2001.

Developments in methodology for identifying nitrate vulnerable zones

	1996 Methodology	*Proposals set out in "How Should England Implement the 1991 Nitrates Directive?", DEFRA December 2001*
Surfacewater NVZs		
More comprehensive monitoring network, covering all waters, not just drinking water abstraction points.	491 monitoring points established under Drinking Water Directive (1975).	Environment Agency's (EA) General Quality Assessment (GQA) network. Over 7,000 monitoring points established for assessing river water quality.
More data for each monitoring point.	One year's data.	5 year dataset (1996–2000) enables a more robust statistical approach to identifying pollution.
Trend analysis to identify waters which "could contain 50 mg/litre nitrate" if action not taken.	—	Robust statistical technique to identify any additional waters which would be expected to become polluted by 2004 (date of next monitoring review required by Directive), based on 10-year dataset (1990–2000).

Developments in methodology for identifying nitrate vulnerable zones

	1996 Methodology	*Proposals set out in "How Should England Implement the 1991 Nitrates Directive?", DEFRA December 2001*
Designation as NVZ of all land draining into polluted waters.	Only land draining directly into the polluted water was identified as an NVZ. Land draining into the polluted water via a tributary was excluded.	All land in catchment draining into polluted waters identified as an NVZ, as nitrate leaching from any of this land contributes to the pollution. Precise upstream catchment area identified using hydrologically accurate model and Geographical Information Systems (GIS).
Eutrophic NVZs Designation of eutrophic area NVZs.	Criteria for identifying eutrophic waters developed, but not applied in time for 1996 designations.	Criteria applied to identify estuarine/coastal areas where agricultural nitrate contributes to eutrophication.
Groundwater NVZs Extend coverage beyond just drinking water boreholes to all groundwaters.	Monitoring data from Water Supply boreholes.	All available public and private borehole monitoring data has been gathered and fed into the development of a GIS-based groundwater vulnerability model to identify land draining into all high nitrate, highly vulnerable groundwater areas. Scientifically robust, developed by EA's National Groundwater Centre and a consortium of consultants including University of East Anglia's School of Environmental Sciences.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she has *(a)* sought and *(b)* plans to seek advice from the European Commission on the legality of designating the whole of England as a nitrate vulnerable zone under Article 3(5) of the EC Nitrates Directive while different approaches are pursued in respect of Scotland and Wales. [61557]

Mr. Meacher: We have kept the European Commission informed of the options that we are considering for implementing the Nitrates Directive, which were set out in our consultation document "How should England implement the 1991 Nitrates Directive?". We are currently considering responses to the consultation and hope to make an announcement soon about how we will proceed, at which point we will inform the Commission further.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the proposals by the Scottish and Welsh executives for the implementation of the EC Nitrates Directive; and if she intends to apply the *(a)* Scottish and *(b)* Welsh approaches to the Directive in her policy for its implementation in England. [61556]

Mr. Meacher: The Scottish Executive and the National Assembly for Wales both intend to implement the EC Nitrates Directive through applying Action Programme measures within discrete Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (NVZs). This is one of the options set out in our consultation document "How should England implement the 1991 Nitrates Directive?". We are currently considering responses to the consultation and hope to make an announcement soon about how we will proceed.

Food Standards Agency

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the advice that she received from the Food Standards Agency in respect of the implementation of Regulation (EC) No. 999/2001. [61575]

Mr. Morley: The Food Standards Agency has a clear interest in many of the areas covered by Regulation (EC) 999/2001 laying down the rules on the prevention, control and eradication of certain transmissible spongiform encephalopathies and was consulted throughout the creation of a Statutory Instrument for the enforcement and administration of the Regulation.

The Chairman of the Food Standards Agency has also advised Lord Whitty on the implementation of Regulation (EC) No. 999/2001. Information about his advice is available on the following web site: http://www.food.gov.uk/news/newsarchive/64890.

Fly-tipping

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many successful prosecutions there were in *(a)* England and Wales, *(b)* Greater London and *(c)* Enfield for fly-tipping in each of the last five years; what steps she is taking to strengthen protection against this activity; and if she will make a statement. [57853]

Mr. Meacher: Local authorities and the Environment Agency may prosecute for fly-tipping offences. Between 1996 and 2001, the Agency recorded prosecutions for general waste offences on a financial year basis. The data do not distinguish fly-tipping offences from other waste offences. From 1 April 1999, the Agency recorded, on a regional basis, whether an incident involves the unlawful deposit of waste, and whether prosecutions led to convictions or acquittals. This information is given below, but is not broken down within a region. No central register is kept of local authorities' prosecutions.

Prosecutions (England & Wales)

	General waste offences	*Unlawful deposit of waste*
1996–1997	241	
1997–1998	345	
1998–1999	367	
1999–2000	342	219
2000–2001	439	225
2001–2002		264

Convictions (England & Wales)

	Unlawful deposit of waste [1]
1999–2000	211
2000–2001	210
2001–2002	253

Convictions (Thames Region)

	Unlawful deposit of waste[1]
1999–2000	25
2000–2001	30
2001–2002	43

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[1] Prosecutions under section 33(1)(a) of the Environmental Protection Act 1990

There are stringent controls in place to deal with fly tipping, which is a criminal offence. In the event of a conviction, severe penalties are available to the courts, including an unlimited fine and/or imprisonment of up to 5 years. The Environment Agency or the local authority have powers to remove fly-tipped waste and to recover their costs from those responsible.

The Agency is currently working to establish a central unit to co-ordinate its approach to environmental crime. This unit will work with other key enforcement bodies, such as local authorities, the Police and HM Customs and Excise, and will target particular environmental and economic threats such as fly tipping.

Radioactive Waste

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Royal Society's report on developing UK policy for the management of radioactive waste. [58900]

Margaret Beckett: The Royal Society's response is one of 330 replies to the consultation paper *Managing radioactive waste safely* published last September by the UK Government and the Devolved Administrations for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. We are evaluating the responses, and we shall shortly publish a summary as well as announcing what we plan to do next.

Waste Management

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which organisations are responsible for clearing *(a)* hazardous and *(b)* non-hazardous items left through fly-tipping; what ability local councils have to charge organisations for the removal of items; and if she will make a statement. [60099]

Mr. Meacher [*holding answer 10 June 2002*]: Section 59 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 provides local authorities, as waste collection authorities, and the Environment Agency, as the waste regulation authority, with certain powers to require the removal of hazardous and non-hazardous fly tipped waste, or to remove it themselves. Under this section, local authorities and the Agency have the power to recover their costs incurred in removing any such waste from the occupier of the land in question, unless the occupier proves that he neither made, not knowingly caused, nor knowingly permitted the deposit of the waste. In any case the authorities may recover their costs from the person who deposited the waste.

World Summit on Sustainable Development

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what role she played in ensuring the views of women's organisations are heard at the forthcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development. [58252]

Mr. Meacher: The Government are working to engage all stakeholders as part of the preparations for the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Women are one of the nine key stakeholder groups identified in Agenda 21 and we have been in consultation with womens' groups to involve them in the preparations for the Summit.

DEFRA officials have met with representatives from Women's Institute to discuss their postcard campaign "What Women Want" which is featured on the Government's sustainable development website (www.sustainable-development.gov.uk). Margaret Beckett has agreed to meet Baroness Crawley, chairwomen of the Women's National Commission, to discuss with her how the groups she represents can become more closely involved with the preparations for the Summit.

DEFRA officials have also been working closely with colleagues from the Cabinet Office Women's and Equality Unit to identify ways to raise awareness of the Summit specifically across womens' groups.

Correspondence

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* median, *(b)* upper and *(c)* lower decile times taken to reply fully to letters received (i) from hon. Members and (ii) from all sources were in each month since June 2001. [58117]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 21 May 2002]*: The information requested for part (i) is in the table below (in days):

Month	*Median*	*Lower Decile*	*Upper Decile*
June 2001	40.5	12.3	182.0
July 2001	72.0	21.0	168.0
August 2001	79.0	29.0	151.0
September 2001	45.0	18.0	116.0
October 2001	40.0	16.0	102.4
November 2001	41.0	16.0	[1]
December 2001	43.0	20.0	[1]
January 2002	23.0	8.0	[1]
February 2002	18.0	3.0	[1]
March 2002	14.0	3.0	[1]
April 2002	19.5	5.0	[1]

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[1] It is not yet possible to calculate the upper (90 per cent) decile for these months.

Figures are not available for part (ii), as there is no information held centrally for the time taken to answer letters from all sources and its assembly would incur disproportionate cost.

Age Discrimination

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will list for each NDPB or agency sponsored by her Department *(a)* the maximum retirement age adopted for most employees, and that age and *(b)* whether they have a policy of not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age, and that age; [59583]

(2) if *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies have a policy of not considering applications for employment by persons over a particular age. [59584]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The Department and the Agencies it sponsors have a common policy on retirement age. The normal retirement age is 60 although staff in Administrative Officer and Administrative Assistant grades may stay on until the age of 65, no age bar is set on applications for employment beyond the retirement age for the grade in question.

The normal retirement age for members of the Senior Civil Service is determined by the Cabinet Office and is currently 60. Heads of Departments and Agency Chief Executives have some flexibility to retain members of the Senior Civil Service beyond the age of 60 in exceptional circumstances subject to the approval of the Head of the Home Civil Service for the Senior Appointments Selection Committee (SASC) Group.

It is for individual Non Departmental Public Bodies to determine their own policies about the age limits of those they employ, in accordance with existing equal opportunities legislation and good practice guidelines.

Wildlife Projects

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which global wildlife projects her Department has funded in 2001–02. [61169]

Mr. Meacher: In addition to funding for the Darwin Initiative, my Department paid a total of £1.212 million in 2001–02 on assessed contributions to a number of international conservation Conventions and Agreements, and on voluntary payments to those conventions' grants funds to finance specific initiatives. The projects supported are listed below.

United Nations Environment Programme

Great Ape Survival Project (GrASP)

Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)

Bushmeat working group

Seahorse workshop

Range State meeting for the hawksbill turtle

Convention on Migratory Species and Related Agreements

Contribution to the costs of a range state meeting and set-up costs for the Memorandum of Understanding for the conservation and management of marine turtles in the Indian Ocean and South-East Asia

The production of a brochure on Bactrian camels

Guidelines on avoidance of introduction of non-native migratory waterbirds

A study on the potential impacts of marine fisheries on migratory waterbirds

Rehabilitation of important sites for migratory waterbirds, which have been degraded by invasive species of aquatic weeds

Surveys on cetacean abundance and seismic surveys have been supported under the Agreement on the Conservation of Small Cetaceans of the Baltic and North Seas (ASCOBANS)

A project to establish effective national bat conservation and monitoring programmes in Romania and Moldova under the Agreement on the Conservation of Bats in Europe (Eurobats).

Ramsar Convention on Wetlands

Western Palaearctic Waterbird Monitoring Programme

Contribution to the Ramsar small grants fund

IUCN—the World Conservation Union

Species Specialist Group on African Elephants

Species Specialist Group on Sharks

In addition we made contributions to the costs of the General Assembly of the Global Tiger Forum and to the Flagship Species Fund.

Darwin Initiative

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what funding, broken down by project and amount, was provided by her Department through the Darwin Initiative in each of the last five years. [61166]

Mr. Meacher: The Darwin Initiative is a £3 million annual programme of grants which was launched at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. It uses UK expertise to help countries that are rich in biodiversity but poor in resources to help safeguard the world's biodiversity. Information on the total funding for each project is contained in the reports on the Darwin Initiative covering the periods from 1997–98 to 2000–01. The first three are already available in the House of Commons Library. I am arranging for copies of the fourth report to be placed in the House Library. The fifth Annual report, covering the period 2001 to 2002 will be published on 17 June 2002. I will also arrange for a copy to be placed in the House Library.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Subtitling/Sign Language

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to introduce for full TV licence fee payers the opportunity to receive a full service with the option of *(a)* 100 per cent. subtitling and *(b)* British Sign Language translation. [60109]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer Monday 10 June 2002]:* Statutory requirements for the provision of subtitling on Channel 3 and Channel 5, and for the provision of subtitling and sign language translation on digital terrestrial television (DTT) services are included in the 1990 and 1996 Broadcasting Acts respectively. The targets for DTT services are that 80 per cent. of programming should be subtitled and 5 per cent. signed by the tenth anniversary of the start of the service. The recently published draft Communications Bill (Cm 5508–1) extends these targets on DTT to digital cable and digital satellite channels.

In setting these targets, we have aimed to strike the right balance between practicability and benefit. It would be extremely difficult and expensive to meet 100 per cent. targets. In addition, there are a number of unresolved technical issues in the development of a reliable closed signing system, and resultant problems caused by open signing. We believe that the current targets are challenging but achievable, but will keep them under regular review.

Computers

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many computers were replaced in her Department in each of the past three years; how the replaced units were disposed of and by which companies; and at what cost. [60742]

Dr. Howells: My Department replaced two computers in 1999–2000, 23 in 2000–01 and 327 in 2001–02. All machines were disposed of through our outsourced service provider, SchlumbergerSema, and the proceeds from the disposal of the equipment was used to offset future purchases. There was no cost to the Department.

Ministerial Visits

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she last visited *(a)* Wembley, *(b)* Coventry and *(c)* Birmingham. [6015

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State last visited Coventry on 19 March 2002 to attend the Cultural Services conference organised by the Local Government Association. She has yet to visit either Wembley or Birmingham in an official capacity but she has visited both during recent months on party business or in a personal capacity.

Public Consultations

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the public consultations undertaken by her Department since June 2001, stating in each case the *(a)* number of respondents and *(b)* percentage of those specifically consulted who responded. [60140]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer Monday 10 June 2002]*: The Department is actively following the Cabinet Office Code of Practice on Written Consultation. The table below lists the public consultations carried out by the Department since June 2001, indicating (a) the number of respondents and (b) the approximate percentage of those specifically consulted who responded where known.

Document Name	*Date*	*(a) Number of Responses*	*(b) Percentage of those specifically consulted who responded*
Consultation of cricket bodies on measures to address disorder	July 2001	9	100%
Report of the Gambling Review Body	17 July 2001	4,996	Not known
National Museum of Science & Industry Review: stage one consultation	1 August 2001	44	16%
Geffrye Museum/Horniman Museum/Museum of London Review: stage one consultation	8 August 2001	50	57%
Consultation on the draft Digital Television Action Plan	12 October 2001	36	52%
English Heritage Review: stage one consultaiton	16 October 2001	136	40%
National Maritime Museum Quinquennial Performance Review	22 November 2001	14	14%
Consultation on Media Ownership Rules	26 November 2001	8,093	22%
Public Lending Right. Quinquennial Performance Review: Consultation Paper	13 November 2001	49	85%
Fixed Term Directive	November 2001	30	56%
Quinquennial Review on the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art	19 November	50	14%
Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester Quinquennial Performance Review	5 December 2001	42	56%
Spectrum Planning Consultation	11 December 2001	52	36%
Council of Europe—Convention on the Protection of Audiovisual Heritage	20 December 2001	32	86%
Review of Progress towards digital switchover	14 February 2002	11	11%
The Draft Communication Bill	7 May 2002	Not yet completed	
Regent's Park Sports Facilities Consultation	March 2002	151	35%
Changes to Licensing Hours during All New Year's Eve	24 April 2002	Not yet completed	
UK's Open General Export Licensing (OGEL) Limits	April 2002	Not yet completed	
Prize Competitions	23 May 2002	Not yet completed	

Sports/Leisure Database

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress has been made in the establishment of a national database of sports and leisure facilities for England; and if she will make a statement. [61288]

Dr. Howells: Information on sports facilities in England is currently held by a variety of organisations and a single database will enable more strategic Government investment in those areas and facilities which are most important. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport has recently written to Ministerial colleagues at the DfES, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Department of Health, Home Office, the Ministry of Defence and the Local Government Association seeking their views on the scope, content and funding of the proposed database of sports facilities in England.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Science Funding

Miss Kirkbride: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what criteria she will use to decide the allocation of science spending between the research councils and the universities. [58226]

Alan Johnson: In allocating the Science Budget, my right hon. Friend takes into account the strategic needs of the UK's science and engineering base, and aim to maximise the contribution it makes towards innovation, economic growth, enhanced quality of life, and a more sustainable environment.

Automotive Industry

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent measures she has taken to support the automotive industry. [58229]

Alan Johnson: Last month I announced a package of £45 million for the automotive sector to include an automotive academy, two centres of automotive excellence, and support for cross-regional supply chains as a first step to implementing the recommendations of the Automotive Innovation and Growth Team. In 2001 the Department delivered Regional Selective Assistance and Training grant offers totalling £35 million. The Department also spent about £2 million last year on various other projects to promote competitiveness and productivity improvements in the sector. The Department is continuing to support process improvements through the SMMT Industry Forum and research and development through the Foresight Vehicle Programme with commitments to date exceeding £13 million.

Industrial Relations

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the impact of union recognition on industrial relations in the last two years. [58230]

Alan Johnson: Indications suggest that the statutory procedure for trade union recognition has had a positive effect on industrial relations and has encouraged the voluntary settlement of requests for recognition. The Government will examine the operation of the statutory procedure as part of the forthcoming review of the Employment Relations Act 1999.

EU Enlargement

Mr. Lazarowicz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent assessment she has made of the impact of EU enlargement on UK business. [58231]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I made to my hon. Friend the Member for Greenock and Inverclyde (David Cairns) earlier today.

Post Office Network

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the rural post office network. [58233]

Mr. Timms: The Government are committed to the maintenance of a nationwide network of post offices and placed a formal requirement on the Post Office in November 2000 to maintain the network and to prevent any avoidable closures of rural post offices.

The Government have already invested in modernisation comprising some £480 million to computerise the whole post office network. We have made available a £2 million fund to support volunteer and community initiatives to maintain or re-open post office facilities in rural areas where traditional services would otherwise close. Figures for end May 2002, showed that 64 applications—to a value of £500,000—had been assessed and approved and to that date payments of £231,000 had also been made.

In addition, we have received advice form the Postal Services Commission on transitional financial assistance and proposals for the rural network are being developed in the context of that advice.

Office of Science and Technology

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what priorities she has identified for the Office of Science and Technology for the next three years. [58235]

Ms Hewitt: The OST supports me in my role as the Cabinet-level minister with responsibility for science. It helps me deliver our policies on science, as set out in Excellence and Opportunity, the Science and Innovation White Paper, which identified our priorities as excellence in science, opportunities for innovation, and confident consumers. It also helps me to deliver against my Department's Public Service Agreement Objective II, namely to make the most of the UK's science, engineering and technology.

Social Enterprises

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking to support social enterprises in the north-west. [58237]

Alan Johnson: The Strategy for Social Enterprise, to be published in the summer, will address the support that is available to social enterprise throughout the country. It will build on some of the excellent work that is already being done in the regions to facilitate the growth and development of social enterprise.

In the North West, the North West Development Agency aims to invest at least £2 million per annum by 2004–05 on strategic measures to support social enterprise. A package of projects to support social enterprise on Merseyside has been developed to which the Agency is contributing, together with regional partners and EU funding.

Consumer Protection (Software)

Barbara Follett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures her Department is taking to protect consumers' interests in the software market. [58238]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Sale of goods and supply of services legislation provides a wide range of protection to consumers in the software market.

Manufacturing (West Midlands)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her policy is on encouraging manufacturing in the West Midlands. [58239]

Alan Johnson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State published a document on 16 May setting out the Government's Manufacturing Strategy. I understand this has been broadly welcomed in the West Midlands.

Small Businesses

Joan Ryan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what further measures she is taking to tackle the problems caused to small businesses by late payment of invoices. [58240]

Nigel Griffiths: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Caerphilly (Mr. David).

Postal Services (Competition)

Colin Burgon: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultations she has had with the CWU regarding potential job losses following Postcomm's plans to introduce competition into the postal market. [58244]

Mr. Timms: Consignia, or Royal Mail as it will be known in future, is losing £1.2 million a day. Cost saving measures, to put the company on a firmer footing, are a matter for the Board in consultation with the unions.

Ministers have met representatives of the CWU on a number of occasions when a range of issues was discussed. I met the General Secretary on 5 June following publication of the Postcomm proposals.

Postcomm's decision on competition in the postal market published last month takes account of responses to the consultation from stakeholders, including Consignia and the CWU, and the Government welcome this.

Competition

Mr. Barnes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to strengthen United Kingdom competition policy. [58245]

Miss Melanie Johnson: UK competition policy will be strengthened by the provisions in the Enterprise Bill, which was introduced into Parliament on 26 March 2002.

Women Incentive Network

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking to prevent the activities of the Women Incentive Network. [58246]

Ms Hewitt: My Department and Trading Standards Officers are aware of the existence of the Women Incentive Network. It appears to be a gifting scheme, like "Women Empowering Women". My hon. Friend the Minister for Competition, Consumer and Market's letter of 15 September to the hon. Member set out the Department's position on such schemes.

Construction Industry

Mr. Page: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her objectives are in sponsoring the construction industry. [58247]

Mr. Wilson: The Department is seeking to establish a culture of continuous improvement in the construction industry, leading to improvements in productivity, competitiveness, and quality of delivery. The industry is key to the delivery of our investment plans aimed at improving quality of life.

We are taking forward three key policy initiatives as part of our improvement agenda with the industry:

First, Rethinking Construction proves the business case for change and delivers a culture of continuous improvement. In partnership with the industry we are using demonstration projects, case studies and best practice dissemination to show the practical steps construction companies can take to improve their productivity and competitiveness and whereby clients can demand products which offer best value and enhance their own performance. We have agreed to continue the initiative until April 2004.

Second, my Department supports a substantial programme of construction-related innovation and research to support industry improvement. Sir John Fairclough, a former government chief scientist, has recently conducted a review of how we should best provide that support in the future. The report establishes an excellent framework for improving the effectiveness of construction research. We are consulting the industry on how we can work with them to take forward the recommendations.

Finally, through the Quality Mark Scheme, we will enable builders to demonstrate their competence and to distinguish themselves from their less reputable rivals. The Scheme will be rolled out across the country over a three to four year period.

Climate Change Levy

Mr. Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent discussions she has had with representatives of the manufacturing industry on the costs of the climate change levy. [58248]

Mr. Wilson: The Government are continuing to keep in touch with business on the climate change levy to monitor experience with its operation. Primary responsibility for the levy lies with my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The Budget proposals for the levy show Her Majesty's Government's readiness to listen to industry views and to amend the levy's design, where justified. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the Budget that he proposed to:

> introduce complete exemption from the levy for electricity from good quality combined heat and power and from coal mine methane, subject to EU state aid approval;

add new areas of energy saving technology to the list of those benefiting from enhanced capital allowances; and

introduce a new relief for certain recycling processes that compete with processes that benefit from the dual-use or non-fuel use exemptions.

In addition, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has also proposed that the levy rates are to be frozen this year.

Export Credits Guarantee Department

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made on her Department's review of the economic benefits of the Export Credits Guarantee Department; and when it will be completed. [58249]

Ms Hewitt: Good progress is being made on the review of the economic benefits of ECGD, and we are expecting the majority of the work to be completed by the Summer.

Unsolicited Mail

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent representations she has had on the subject of unsolicited mail. [58234]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have received a large amount of correspondence from the public about unsolicited mail. Unsolicited mail can be a legitimate marketing technique but it can also be a nuisance and includes deliberate scams. Action can be taken by registering with MPS and by enforcement bodies where scams are involved.

Accommodation Costs

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Buckingham, of 11 March, *Official Report*, column 699W, on accommodation costs, what the cost was from April 2001 to March 2002 of hotel accommodation for departmental staff working away from home; how many members of staff were so accommodated in the year in question; and what the average cost was per paid-for night of these stays. [61415]

Ms Hewitt: From April 2001 to March 2002, the average cost per night of hotel accommodation for DTI staff working away from home was £80.10.

The DTI has devolved to local management the authorisation of travel claims for its staff, subject to checking procedures. It does not record details of the number of staff requiring hotel accommodation when working away from home. To provide the information requested would entail disproportionate cost.

Advertising Campaigns

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much was spent on press and advertising campaigns in 2001–02; and what the planned expenditure is for 2002–03. [60900]

Ms Hewitt: The DTI spent £6,534,426 on all forms of advertising through COI in 2001–02. This figure, which is subject to audit confirmation, includes the COI rebate, but excludes VAT. Advertising expenditure in 2002–03 will be determined by individual programme budget holders; this information is not held centrally and could only be produced at disproportionate cost.

Committee Mandates

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the implementation of the multi-annual Community action plan on promoting the safe use of the internet is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56739]

Ms Hewitt: The Internet Action Plan Programme Committee was established by Decision 276/1999/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 January 1999, adopting a multi-annual Community action plan on promoting safer use of the Internet by combating illegal and harmful content on global networks. The Committee has met three times over the past 12 months: on 11 September 2001, 22 February 2002 and 28 May 2002.

It is not possible to calculate the cost to public funds of the work of the Committee without incurring disproportionate cost. The programme develops self-regulatory approaches to dealing with illegal or harmful content. Issues currently under consideration are: the selection and funding of awareness and hotline proposals, the terms of reference of the call for tender for the final evaluation of the present programme, and a proposal for a two year extension to the programme.

Together with Member States, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (COM(2001)783 Final). As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Management Committee on Horizontal Questions Concerning Trade in Agricultural Products is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of it work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [55366]

Mr. Morley: The mandate of the Management Committee on Horizontal Question Concerning Trade in Agricultural Products (usually known as the "Trade Mechanisms Group") is to oversee a number of CAP market support and control measures. The Committee's main role is in connection with the regulations pertaining to the import and export of agricultural products.

The Committee meets monthly, with the exception of August.

The UK's usual representation consists of two officials from The Rural Payments Agency ("RPA"). However, officials from other Departments such as HM Customs also attend occasionally, depending on the agenda for the meeting in question.

Travel expenses of approximately £11,000 for two delegates were reimbursed by the Commission. Other costs, consisting of subsistence allowances and travel expenses for additional officials, are met by the parent Agency or department of those in attendance and amounted to approximately 6,300 over the last 12 months.

Issues presently under consideration include a number of amendments and clarifications to the main external trade regulations in response to, for example, reports issued by the Court of Auditors.

Arrangements are in place to report on the Committee's activities through DEFRA, RPA's parent Department. RPA has a range of measures to communicate changes to the regulatory regime to its customers and other interested parties. The activities of RPA generally are subject to scrutiny by various audit bodies, including the National Audit Office.

The Committee may be regarded as a comitology committee. Consequently the following points are relevant in regard to increasing its accountability and transparency:

> Together with Member States, the Commission is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission";
>
> As an obligation to this Decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Libraries of both Houses on 26 February 2002 (Com (2001) 783 Final).
>
> As part of the review process, the UK Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agendas and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the mandate of the Committee for the application of the rules on the manufacture and placing on the market of certain substances used in the illicit manufacture of narcotic drugs and psychotiopic substances is; how many times it has met over the last 12 months; what the UK representation on it is; what the annual cost of its work is to public funds; if she will list the items currently under its consideration; if she will take steps to increase its accountability and transparency to Parliament; and if she will make a statement. [56790]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I have been asked to reply.

The procedures and guidance for meetings of the Drug Precursor Committee are contained in Article 10 of both Council Regulation 3677/90 and Council Directive 92/109/EEC.

This Committee usually meets every quarter. In the last 12 months it met in May, September and December 2001, and in March 2002.

The Home Office is the lead United Kingdom Government Department for this Committee and is represented at all meetings. When necessary representatives of the National Criminal Intelligence Service and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise also attend.

The annual cost to public funds of the work of this Committee is not available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Items currently under consideration by this Committee include: increasing licensing procedures required for the export of the precursor chemicals acetic anhydride and potassium permanganate; evaluation of European Union precursor legislation; and negotiation of a bilateral precursor agreement with Turkey.

The Commission, together with Member States, is currently conducting a review to bring existing legislation on the conduct of comitology committees into line with Council Decision 1999/468/EC, to "simplify the requirements for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission". As an obligation to this decision, the Commission undertook to publish an annual report on the working of committees. The first report was deposited in the Library on 26 February (Commission Document 5685/02).

As part of the review process, the United Kingdom Government has encouraged the Commission to produce and maintain an electronic database of every comitology committee, its agenda and recent actions, to be accessible through its website.

Stationery

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much was spent by her Department on stationery in *(a)* 1995–96, *(b)* 1996–97, *(c)* 1997–98, *(d)* 1998–99, *(e)* 1999–2000, *(f)* 2000–01 and *(g)* 2001–02; what suppliers were used in each of these years, and how much was spent per supplier; what tender processes were undertaken, and what the frequency was of such processes; and if she will make a statement. [61377]

Ms Hewitt: The main provider of stationery to DTI over this period has been Guilbert UK Limited with whom we have a framework arrangement awarded by competitive tender in June 1998. Expenditure under this framework for the years for which information is available is as follows:

FY 1998–99—£1,078,069 (July 1998–March 1999);

FY 1999–00—£1,384,281;

FY 2000–01—£1,567,334; and

FY 2001–02—£1,536,726.

Arms Export Licences

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what licences have been granted for equipment on the military list to *(a)* India and *(b)* Pakistan in each month since December 2001, including military list and dual-use ratings; what equipment is covered under these licences; and if she will make a statement. [60625]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 11 June 2002]:* The number of Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) and Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs) covering items on the military and dual use lists, issued to end users in India and Pakistan in each month since December 2001, is set out in the tables that I have placed in the Libraries of the House. Individual licences might cover a range of items with various ratings. Where this is so, the licence is included in the tables in the total for all of the relevant ratings.

The summary description of the items covered by these ratings will be published in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls, copies of which will be available in the Libraries of the House. In addition India and Pakistan are permitted destinations on certain Open General Export Licences, copies of which are also placed in the Libraries of the House. All relevant export licence applications for India and Pakistan are considered very carefully in the light of the latest developments in the region, on a case by case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria and my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter's statement of 15 March 2002.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what export licences have been granted since 2 May 1997 for the export of small arms production equipment to Pakistan ordnance factories. [60693]

Nigel Griffiths: The export of small arms production equipment is controlled under entries ML18 and ML21 in Part III of Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended. Details of all relevant export licences including any for small arms production equipment issued to Pakistan since 2 May 1997 are published in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 Annual Reports are available in the Libraries of the House. The 2001 Annual Report will be published as soon as possible.

Information on export licences for particular end users is commercially confidential and exempt from disclosure under Part II, Section 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what export licences have been granted since 2 May 1997 for the export of components or sub-assemblies for the MP5 sub-machine gun to Switzerland where the final end-use destination was *(a)* Turkey, *(b)* Finland and *(c)* Pakistan. [60700]

Nigel Griffiths: The export of components and sub-assemblies for machine guns is controlled under entries ML1 and ML16 in Part III of Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended.

Between 2 May 1997 and 27 May 2002 no Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) were issued covering entries ML1 and ML16 where the consignee was Switzerland and the end user was either in Turkey, Finland or Pakistan.

The Export Control Organisation's computer database records only permitted destinations for all Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs). Details of all relevant SIELs and OIELs issued since 2 May 1997 are published in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 Annual Reports are available in the Libraries of the House. The 2001 Annual Report will be published as soon as possible.

Information on export licences for components and sub-assemblies for particular machine guns in commercially confidential and exempt from disclosure under Part II, Section 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what export licences have been granted since 2 May 1997 for the export of small arms production equipment to MKEK in Turkey. [60692]

Nigel Griffiths: The export of small arms production equipment is controlled under entries ML18 and ML21 in Part III of Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended.

Details of all relevant export licences including any for small arms production equipment issued to Turkey since 2 May 1997 are published in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 Annual Reports are available in the Libraries of the House. The 2001 Annual Report will be published as soon as possible.

Information on export licences for particular end users is commercially confidential and exempt from disclosure under Part II, Section 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what export licences have been granted since 2 May 1997 for the export of small arms production equipment to Iran. [60694]

Nigel Griffiths: The export of small arms production equipment is controlled under entries ML18 and ML21 in Part III of Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended.

Details of all relevant export licences including any for small arms production equipment issued to Iran since 2 May 1997 are published in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 Annual Reports are available in the Libraries of the House. The 2001 Annual Report will be published as soon as possible.

The Government's policy with respect to export licensing for Iran was set out in the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth on 28 January 1998, *Official Report,* columns 273–74.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many export licences for military equipment have been granted by her Department in each of the last three years. [60706]

Nigel Griffiths: The number of export licence applications in respect of items controlled for strategic reasons that have been approved and rejected since 1997 are published in the Government's Annual Reports on

Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 Annual Reports are available in the Libraries of the House.

The 2001 Annual Report on Strategic Export Controls will be published as soon as possible.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what export licences have been granted since 2 May 1997 for the export of components or sub-assemblies for the G3 rifle and MP5 sub-machine gun to Iran. [60688]

Nigel Griffiths: The export of components and sub-assemblies for rifles and machine guns is controlled under entries ML1 and ML16 in Part III of Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended.

Details of all relevant export licences including any for components or sub-assemblies for rifles and machine guns issued to Iran since 2 May 1997 are published in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 Annual Reports are available in the Libraries of the House. The 2001 Annual Report will be published as soon as possible.

Information on export licences for particular rifles and machine guns are commercially confidential and exempt from disclosure under Part II, Section 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

The Government's policy with respect to export licensing for Iran was set out in the reply given by my hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Central to my hon. Friend the Member for Rugby and Kenilworth on 28 January 1998, *Official Report*, columns 273–74.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what export licences have been granted since 2 May 1997 for the export of CS pellets to Malaysia; and what the *(a)* quantities and *(b)* end-users in each case were. [60695]

Nigel Griffiths: The export of CS pellets is controlled under entries ML3, ML4 and ML7 in Part III of Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended.

Details of all relevant export licences including those for CS pellets issued to Malaysia since 2 May 1997 are published in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 Annual Reports are available in the Libraries of the House. The 2001 Annual Report will be published as soon as possible.

Information on export licences to end users, and the quantities involved, is commercially confidential and exempt from disclosure under Part II, Section 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what export licences have been granted since 2 May 1997 for technology transfers to Turkey for the licensed production of the T-40 HK33E 40 mm grenade launcher. [60691]

Nigel Griffiths: The export of technology for the production of grenade launchers is controlled under entries ML21 and ML22 in the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended.

Details of all relevant export licences including any for technology for the licensed production of grenade launchers issued to Turkey since 2 May 1997 are published in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 Annual Reports are available in the Libraries of the House. The 2001 Annual Report will be published as soon as possible.

Information on export licences for technology for the production of particular grenade launchers is commercially confidential and exempt from disclosure under Part II, Section 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what export licences have been granted since 2 May 1997 for the export of components or sub-machine guns to Germany where the final end-use destination was *(a)* Turkey, *(b)* Switzerland, *(c)* Finland and *(d)* Pakistan; [60689]

(2) what export licences have been granted since 2 May 1997 for the export of components for the MP5 sub-machine gun to Germany where the final end-use destination was *(a)* Turkey, *(b)* Switzerland, *(c)* Finland and *(d)* Pakistan. [60699]

Nigel Griffiths: The export of components and sub-assemblies for machine guns is controlled under entries ML1 and ML16 in Part III of Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended.

Between 2 May 1997 and 27 May 2002 no Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) were issued covering the ratings ML1 or ML16 where the consignee was Germany and the end user was either in Turkey, Switzerland, Finland or Pakistan.

The Export Control Organisation's computer database records only permitted destinations for all Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs). Details of all relevant SIELs and OIELs issued since 2 May 1997 are published in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 Annual Reports are available in the Libraries of the House. The 2001 Annual Report will be published as soon as possible.

Information on export licences for components and sub-assemblies for particular machine guns is commercially confidential and exempt from disclosure under Part II, Section 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what export licences have been granted since 2 May 1997 for the export of components or sub-assemblies for the HK33 rifle to Turkey where the final end-use destination was in a different country. [60704]

Nigel Griffiths: The export of components and sub-assemblies for rifles is controlled under entries ML1 and ML16 in Part III of Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended.

Between 2 May 1997 and 27 May 2002, two Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) were issued covering the ratings ML1 or ML16 where the consignee was Turkey and the end user was in a different country.

The Export Control Organisation's computer database records only permitted destinations for all Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs). Details of all relevant SIELs and OIELs issued since 2 May 1997 are published in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 Annual Reports are available in the Libraries of the House. The 2001 Annual Report will be published as soon as possible.

Information on licences for components and sub-assemblies for particular rifles is commercially confidential and exempt from disclosure under Part II, Section 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what export licences have been granted since 2 May 1997 for the export of components for the MP5 sub-machine gun to Finland where the final end-use destination was in a different country. [60703]

Nigel Griffiths: The export of components and sub-assemblies for machine guns is controlled under entries ML1 and ML16 in Part III of Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended.

Between 2 May 1997 and 28 May 2002 no Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) were issued covering the ratings ML1 or ML16 where the consignee was Finland and the end user was in a different country.

The Export Control Organisation's computer database records only permitted destinations for all Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs). Details of all relevant SIELs and OIELs issued since 2 May 1997 are published in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 Annual Reports are available in the Libraries of the House. The 2001 Annual Report will be published as soon as possible.

Information on export licences for components and sub-assemblies for particular machine guns is commercially confidential and exempt from disclosure under Part II, Section 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what export licences have been granted since 2 May 1997 for the export of components or sub-assemblies for the MP5 sub-machine gun to Pakistan where the final end-use destination was in a different country. [60702]

Nigel Griffiths: The export of components and sub-assemblies for machine guns is controlled under entries ML1 and ML16 in Part III of Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended.

Between 2 May 1997 and 27 May 2002, no Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) were issued covering the ratings ML1 or ML16, where the consignee was Pakistan and the end user was in a different country.

The Export Control Organisation's computer database records only permitted destinations for all Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs). Details of all relevant SIELs and OIELs issued since 2 May 1997 are published in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 Annual Reports are available in the Libraries of the House. The 2001 Annual Report will be published as soon as possible.

Information on export licences for components and sub-assemblies for particular machine guns is commercially confidential and exempt from disclosure under Part II, Section 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what export licences have been granted since 2 May 1997 for the export of components or sub-assemblies for sub-machine guns to Turkey where the final end-use destination was a different country; [60690]

(2) what export licences have been granted sine 2 May 1997 for the export of components for the MP5 sub-machine gun to Turkey where the final end-use destination was a different country. [60701]

Nigel Griffiths: The export of components and sub-assemblies for machine guns is controlled under entries ML1 and ML16 in Part III of Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended.

Between 2 May 1997 and 28 May 2002 two Standard Individual Export Licences (SIELs) were issued covering the ratings ML1 or ML16 where the consignee was Turkey and the end user was in a different country.

The Export Control Organisation's computer database records only permitted destinations for all Open Individual Export Licences (OIELs). Details of all relevant SIELs and OIELs issued since 2 May 1997 are published in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 Annual Reports are available in the Libraries of the House. The 2001 Annual Report will be published as soon as possible.

Information on licences for components and sub-assemblies for particular machine guns is commercially confidential and exempt from disclosure under Part II, Section 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what export licences have been granted since 2 May 1997 for the export of Pains Wessex CS pellets to Malaysia; and what the *(a)* quantities and *(b)* end-users were in each case. [60697]

Nigel Griffiths: The export of CS pellets is controlled under entries ML3, ML4 and ML7 in Part III of Schedule 1 of the Export of Goods (Control) Order 1994 as amended.

Details of all relevant export licences including those for CS pellets issued to Malaysia since 2 May 1997 are published in the Government's Annual Reports on Strategic Export Controls. Copies of the 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 Annual Reports are available in the Libraries of the House. The 2001 Annual Report will be published as soon as possible.

Information on licences to particular exporters, the end users, and the quantities involved, is commercially confidential and exempt from disclosure under Part II, Section 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Arms Exhibitions and Conferences

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support has been provided by Trade Partners UK to assist PW Defence to *(a)* attend and *(b)* exhibit at MSP exhibitions or conferences in the UK and overseas since 1 May 1997; which exhibitions or conferences were attended; and what amounts were provided [HL60698]

Nigel Griffiths: Trade Partners UK (TPUK) provided support to PW Defence at the following overseas exhibitions under the terms of the Support for Exhibitions and Seminars Abroad scheme since May 1997:

Date	*Event*	*Country*	*Support (£)*
Sep 2000	Africa Aerospace and Defence	South Africa	3,100
Mar 2001	IDEX	UAE	2,300
Nov 2001	MILIPOL	France	2,300
Apr 2002	DSA	Malaysia	3,500

TPUK have no record of supporting PW Defence at any exhibitions or conferences in the UK during this period.

As the House knows, this company has been under investigation following a recent report on their activities.

Departmental Reviews

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the period is of the contract between her Department and Gap Gemini Ernst and Young relating to the current reviews of her Department. [61310]

Ms Hewitt: Cap Gemini Ernst and Young were appointed to support the DTI's reviews of its Priorities and Structure and its Support for Business in August 2001. Work on the Priorities and Structure finished in April this year while the contract for work currently being undertaken on Business Support will finish on 8 July.

Business Links

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the national standards applicable to those delivering Business Link branded services; and whether it is her policy that these standards should be made mandatory. [61308]

Nigel Griffiths: I continue to view the commitment to the National Standards of Professional Competence as key to improving the quality of service available from the Business Link network.

The National Standards of Professional Competence for those delivering Business Link branded services are mandatory.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will place in the Library the annual assessments taken of the Business Links Service by her Department in each of the past four years. [61314]

Nigel Griffiths: Business Link quarterly performance information reports were routinely filed with the Libraries of the House until early 2001. Since then copies have been available electronically via the Small Business Service web site (sbs.gov.uk) on request.

Hard copies will be supplied to the Libraries of the House.

Brian Cotter: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will place in the Library impact assessments relating to the performance of local business links. [61307]

Nigel Griffiths: Yes.

Small Business

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent measures the Government have taken to assist small businesses in offering more flexible hours; and what plans the Government have to ensure that businesses offer flexible hours to all employees. [61149]

Alan Johnson: We are committed to delivering our campaign to promote flexible working in small as well as large businesses. We are working with all businesses to convince them of the business benefits for flexible working, and we are at the same time providing advice on how they can develop flexible working approaches. This includes:

Providing from April 2003, parents of children aged under six and disabled children aged under 18 with a right to request to work flexibly and placing a duty on employers to consider requests seriously. This important new right has been specifically designed to take account of the needs of small business and will be accompanied by a package of support for both employers and employees, including tailored guidance for small businesses.

Helping to tackle the long hours culture in the UK, through an International Study Tour, which will share best practice on how best small as well as large companies maintain or improve productivity whilst tackling the issue of long hours.

Targeting and supporting specific sectors, including small businesses, to facilitate real change in those sectors where there is little experience of flexible working.

Providing support and guidance to employers who want to adopt flexible working but do not know how, through the Challenge Funds, and disseminating the emerging best practice. Our successful Challenge Fund programme, £10.5 million over three years (2000–03) aims to raise employers' awareness of the business benefits of policies and practices that help employees achieve a better balance between work and the rest of their lives. 166 companies, including small businesses, have already received support through the fund, and we have recently announced another round of successful projects, bringing the total number of companies to benefit from this fund to 399.

Nuclear Waste White Paper

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the White Paper on Nuclear Waste will be published. [60055]

Mr. Wilson: The White Paper on managing the nuclear legacy will be published in the next few weeks. In setting out the Government's strategy for cleaning up the civil nuclear legacy, the White Paper will make reference to the separate consultation process on "Managing Radioactive Waste Safely" which is being carried out by DEFRA and the devolved administrations.

Disadvantaged Areas (Business Start-ups)

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to support the start-up of new businesses in disadvantaged areas. [58236]

Alan Johnson: We are spending £170 million over the next three years through the Phoenix Fund and a loan fund for Business Incubators across all regions of England.

We are currently running 96 Phoenix Development Fund projects in disadvantaged areas and amongst under-represented groups, including one project in Barnsley. So far the Development Fund has enabled the start-up of 424 new enterprises and the creation or safeguarding of 1,613 jobs.

We are also supporting 46 Community Development Finance Initiative projects in disadvantaged areas and are currently progressing support to a CDFI in the South Yorkshire area.

The Phoenix Fund is also making £1.5 million available for seven City Growth Strategy initiatives—putting enterprise at the heart of regeneration. A further £3 million is aimed at rural areas through the Development Fund for Rural Renewal.

In addition, the SBS's Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme has guaranteed loans to the value of £5,588,149 to 106 businesses in South Yorkshire.

The SBS recently published (May 2002) a consultation document as part of the process for developing a comprehensive strategy for Start-ups. One of the key objectives in developing the strategy will be to identify and remove barriers (real or perceived) that discourage those in under-represented groups and disadvantaged areas from starting a business, so that the gap between their numbers and the national average is reduced.

The DTI will measure its progress in promoting enterprise in this way by reducing the 35 per cent. difference in business start up rates between the 20 per cent. most prosperous and the 20 per cent. most disadvantaged wards.

Equal Opportunities

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she is taking to encourage women to take up science and engineering careers. [58228]

Ms Hewitt: The Department's Promoting SET for Women Unit will continue to be in existence for another five years to stimulate progress. I have asked Baroness Greenfield to report to me on the development of a more aggressive strategy for women in science and engineering. I also recently announced a new award, in memory of Rosalind Franklin, which will be given annually in recognition of outstanding scientific achievement in innovation and research to raise the profile of women in science. My Department is also funding a national mentoring scheme for women in SET.

Fishermen's Compensation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims were *(a)* submitted and *(b)* paid and what sums were paid out for each fishing port in the scheme for compensating fishermen for the loss of Icelandic waters in the last five years. [61406]

Nigel Griffiths: The figures as of 31 May 2002 are as follows:

Current area of residence of claimant	*Number of payments*	*Amount of compensation £ million*
Hull	1,629	17.5
Grimsby	685	4.7
Fleetwood	320	2.8
Blackpool	46	£352k
Cleethorpes	188	1.4
Newcastle	333	3.5
West Yorkshire	208	1.9
Aberdeen	238	1.3
Others	511	3.8
Total	4,158	37

A total of 7,030 claims, not including duplicates, were received but I regret there is no breakdown of this figure by fishing port.

Employment Agencies Act

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what recent discussions she has had with Bectu and Equity regarding the operation of the Employment Agencies Act 1973; and if she will make a statement; [61100]

(2) when the new regulations under the employment Agencies Act 1973 will be laid before Parliament. [61101]

Alan Johnson: I have had no recent meetings with Bectu or Equity to discuss the operation of the Employment Agencies Act.

We will shortly be issuing the revised draft Conduct of Employment Agencies and Employment Businesses Regulations 2002, which will cover the private recruitment industry, including the entertainment sector. There will be a consultation exercise on certain aspects of those Regulations and they will be laid before Parliament later in the year.

Company Insolvencies (Employees)

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will give a higher priority in her review of employment legislation to the position of employees as creditors in relation to their contractual entitlements in situations where the employing company becomes insolvent. [60091]

Alan Johnson: Under the Insolvency Act 1986 an employee of an insolvent employer has the right to make a preferential claim in the proceedings for certain statutory amounts of unpaid remuneration and unpaid holiday pay. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry does not propose to alter this priority.

Under the insolvency payments provisions of the Employment Rights Act 1996, the employee is entitled to claim a certain statutory proportion of these debts from the Secretary of State, who will pay them out of the National Insurance Fund. The Secretary of State then "steps into the former employees shoes" and has the same preference as employees would have in respect of those debts—and indeed the same preference as they still do have in respect of the proportion of those debts that exceed the statutory maximum payable under the Employment Rights Act, but which still fall within the statutory maximum under the Insolvency Act. However, current section 189(4) of the Employment Rights Act 1996 allows the Secretary of State to be paid in priority to any preferential claims lodged in the insolvency proceedings by former employees.

The Government will be tabling an amendment for Commons Report stage of the Enterprise Bill, following consideration of arguments put forward at Commons Committee stage, to remove this "super preference".

Fireworks

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions have taken place between her Department and *(a)* the Cabinet Office *(b)* the Home Office and *(c)* DEFRA regarding what action can be taken within existing legislation to address neighbourhood safety, noise and nuisance arising from fireworks; and if she will make a statement. [61481]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We have held several discussions between relevant government departments, enforcement agencies and the industry to explore what more can be done to address neighbourhood noise and nuisance. These are continuing and I shall make a statement in due course.

Farnborough Air Show

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support her Department is giving to the organisers of the Farnborough Air Show taking place in July; and if the Department is providing assistance to enable overseas visitors to attend it. [60615]

Ms Hewitt: The Government is committed to a strong UK aerospace and defence industry and my Department is very supportive of this important prestigious event which plays an important role in maintaining the UK's pre-eminent role in the world's aerospace industry. This year, my Department is not providing any financial support to the Society of British Aerospace Companies (SBAC), organisers of the Farnborough International Air Show to fund inward missions. One application was made to Trade Partners UK under the national inward mission scheme, but this did not meet the required criteria. The Defence Export Services Organisation, part of the Ministry of Defence, makes arrangements for the attendance of official overseas defence delegations to Farnborough International and is supporting the event this year.

Trading Standards

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many pirated *(a)* video cassettes, *(b)* compact discs and *(c)* DVDs have been confiscated by trading standards officers in each of the last five years in (i) street markets and (ii) other distribution centres. [59668]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Most local authorities are likely to keep records of seizures of pirate video cassettes, compact discs and DVDs by trading standards, but it would cost a disproportionate amount to collect and collate this information.

Post Office

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what performance standards she sets for delivery of first class letters by the Post Office. [60678]

Stephen Timms: Targets for the Royal Mail's scheduled services and standards are set in the licence issued by the Postal Services Commission (Postcomm) and agreed between Consignia and the Consumer Council for Postal Services (Postwatch). Royal Mail's current target for first class stamped and metered post is for 92.5 per cent. of letters to be delivered the next working day.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what consultation took place between her Department and the Post Office concerning the change of name to Consignia; [57693]

(2) if her Department was asked to approve the change of name by the Post Office to Consignia. [57694]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 20 May 2002]:* The adoption of Consignia as the initial name of the Post Office company was a commercial matter for the company, and although Ministers were informed of the organisation's intentions, it was not an area in which the Government sought to intervene.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Affordable Housing

Mr. Breed: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions of 20 May 2002, *Official Report,* column 118W, on affordable housing, how many empty homes in each region have been empty for *(a)* less than 12 months and *(b)* over 12 months in each of the last 10 years. [61192]

Mr. Tony McNulty: The information requested is not collected centrally at regional level.

The number of Local Authority (LA) and Registered Social Landlord (RSL) empty homes in England that have been empty for *(a)* less than 12 months and *(b)* over 12 months for each of the last 10 years are set out in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Number of LA and RSL homes in England empty for (a) less than 12 months, (b) more than 12 months for each of the last 10 years

	Vacant for:		
	(a) < 12 months	*(b) > 12 months*	*Total vacant*
1 April			
2001	91,600	30,000	121,600
2000	96,100	28,600	124,700
1999	90,100	23,500	116,600
1998	99,200	20,700	110,900
1997	89,400	18,500	107,900
1996	86,000	17,100	103,100
1995	75,900	16,700	92,600
1994	74,600	15,900	90,500
1993[1]	76,900	20,600	97,500
1992	67,500	22,100	89,600

[1] Figures for 1993 are unusually high due to many dwellings bought by RSLs towards the end of the financial year (1992-93) under the Housing Market Package.

Notes:

Figures rouned to the nearest 100.

Sources:

The Department's annual Housing Investment Programme (HIP) returns and the Housing Corporation's annual HAR 10 and Regulatory and Statistical Return (RSR).

Brian Cotter: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the progress and activities of the affordable housing unit with regard to its remit to provide more affordable homes. [60495]

Mr. Tony McNulty: The Affordable Housing Unit was established at the end of last year and is part of the Housing Directorate of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Its remit is to work with partners and stakeholders to significantly increase the supply of affordable housing in high demand areas across the country over the next three years and to contribute to the development of policy on increasing housing supply. We expect to make a statement on policies and measures to improve the supply of affordable housing before the summer recess.

Mr. Breed: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to the answer of the Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions of 26 February 2002, *Official Report,* column 1162W, on affordable housing, how many affordable housing units have been built in rural areas, broken down by region, in each year since 1997. [61198]

Mr Tony McNulty: A regional breakdown of information provided in the *Official Report,* 26 February 2002, column 1162W, relating to affordable housing units completed with social housing grant and with local authority social housing grant respectively, is presented below:

Affordable Housing units built since 1997–98: Rural Authorities in England, by Region

	Units funded through Social Housing Grant:	
	(a) Housing Corporation	*(b) Local Authority*
1997–98		
North East	368	11
Yorkshire	392	107
East Midlands	439	275
Eastern	1,000	736
London	0	0
South East	925	871
South West	1,517	896
West Midlands	401	360
North West	258	65
All Rural Authorities	*5,300*	*3,321*
1998–99		
North East	184	0
Yorkshire	421	97
East Midlands	336	272
Eastern	835	474
London	0	0
South East	1,044	586
South West	1,339	697
West Midlands	269	213
North West	576	143
All Rural Authorities	*5,004*	*2,482*
1999–2000		
North East	276	15
Yorkshire	187	121
East Midlands	434	290
Eastern	532	496
London	0	0
South East	581	431
South West	1,096	562
West Midlands	363	378
North West	462	87
All Rural Authorities	*3,931*	*2,380*
2000–01		
North East	206	6
Yorkshire	412	56
East Midlands	342	320
Eastern	680	468
London	0	0
South East	662	369
South West	1,124	566
West Midlands	160	85
North West	406	140
All Rural Authorities	*3,992*	*2,010*

Notes:

Completions in respect of any schemes originally approved prior to 1996–97 with both Housing Corporation and Local Authority Social Housing Grant support will be counted under both headings, but cannot be distinguished.

Affordable housing schemes comprise those for rent (including Tariff, and Mixed Funded schemes); temporary social housing schemes (including MiniHag, and short-life housing); and shared or outright ownership schemes (including leasehold for the elderly).

Source:

Housing Corporation returns

Ordnance Survey

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether the National Interest in Mapping Service Agreement Review Group agreed in advance that NIMSA funding could be used for colour photography. [61126]

Mr. Tony McNulty: No. NIMSA funding has not supported the move to aerial colour photography by Ordnance Survey.

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will publish a breakdown of Ordnance Survey activities funded under the National Interest in Mapping Service Agreement in 2001–02. [61122]

Mr. Tony McNulty: Since April 1999, National Interest in Mapping Services Agreement (NIMSA) funds have been used by Ordnance Survey for activities that are defined and agreed by the NIMSA review group comprising officials from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Ordnance Survey. These activities are agreed each year in advance, but are subject to change by the review group.

Details about NIMSA activities for 2001–02 will be published in an annual report this summer.

Sir Sydney Chapman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the annual payment was in 2001–02 to Ordnance Survey under the National Interest in Mapping Service Agreement. [61123]

Mr. Tony McNulty: The payment to Ordnance Survey in 2001–02 in respect of the National Interest Mapping Services Agreement was £15,987,245.

Key Workers' Housing

Mrs. May: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much money was spent on key workers' housing initiatives in the last year; how the money was spent; how many people benefited from it; and what their occupations were. [60443]

The Deputy Prime Minister: We are providing £250 million for the Starter Home Initiative (SHI) over the three years 2001–02 to 2003–04 to help 10,000 key workers to buy homes in areas where they would otherwise be priced out of the housing market. This includes expenditure of £2.173 million which helped 90 key workers complete their assisted house purchases between October 2001 and March 2002. The key workers helped were primarily teachers, police officers and health workers.

Special Advisers

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister on how many occasions between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002 his (*a*) departmental and (*b*) non-departmental special advisers have travelled abroad in an official capacity; what places were visited; and how much each visit cost. [58725]

Mr. Douglas Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

Between 1 April 2001 and 31 March 2002, Special Advisers in the Cabinet Office travelled abroad on six occasions, at an average cost of £5,626.26 per trip as the trips involved covered long distance and several countries at a time. All travel by Special Advisers is undertaken in accordance with the rules set out in the *Ministerial Code*, and the *Civil Service Management Code*.

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Pre-Legislative Scrutiny

Mr. Allen: To ask the Chairman of the Information Committee when he expects that the equipment supplied to hon. Members will be capable of viewing pre-legislative scrutiny on-line. [61622]

Mr. Michael Fabricant: The proceedings of the Joint Committee on the draft Communications Bill are webcast as part of a one-year pilot project covering proceedings in the chambers of both Houses, sittings of the House in Westminster Hall, and public proceedings of certain select and joint committees. The pilot project is due to run until the end of December 2002 and is specifically intended as a means by which the general public can follow proceedings in Parliament. It is not accessible via the PDVN since the volume of electronic traffic that might be generated could affect the quality of day to day services on PDVN.

Once the pilot project has come to an end, an assessment will be made of its value. If a webcasting service is to be provided in the long term, a decision will be taken on whether access will be made available within Parliament, bearing in mind any further investment which would be needed. The hon. Gentleman may want to raise the matter with the Broadcasting and Information Committees later in the year, as the pilot project comes to a close.

TREASURY

Advertising

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the expenditure by the Inland Revenue on advertising was in each fiscal year since 1997–98; and if he will make a statement. [38257]

Dawn Primarolo: The expenditure by the Inland Revenue on advertising was in each fiscal year since 1997–98 as follows.

Campaign	*Total (£)*
1997–98	
Self Assessment	4,152,488
1998–99	
Self Assessment	2,351,340
Construction Industry Scheme	651,962
Millennium Gift Aid	2,686,098
ISA Campaign	810,230
1999–2000	
Construction Industry Scheme	949,787
Self Assessment	1,479,997
Employers Campaign	195,637
Working Families' Tax Credit take-up campaign	6,664,663
Disabled Person's Tax Credit take-up campaign	245,638
2000–01	
Self Assessment	3,740,418
PAYE Online	879,646
Call Confidential	1,024,500
Self Employed Registration Helpline	454,972
Children's Tax Credit	5,005,254
Working Families' Tax Credit	4,848,429
Disabled Person's Tax Credit	63,347
2001–02	
Self Assessment (including online)	4,718,205
Working Families' Tax Credit	1,236,039
Disabled Persons Tax Credit	816,426
PAYE online	1,309,060
Children's Tax Credit	21,168
Payroll Giving	191,349
Share Incentive Plan	1,068,217

All figures exclude VAT

All campaigns were contracted through the COI and are independently audited.

All have involved an element of awareness raising as well as informing taxpayers of their specific rights and obligations within the tax system.

As an example, campaign spend on Working Families Tax credit since its introduction in October 1999 has increased awareness of WFTC, with advertising awareness peaking at 68 per cent of the target audience in December 2000. There were 1,293,000 UK families in receipt of WFTC at 30 November 2001, this compares with 833,000 who were receiving Family Credit at its peak.

Tax Credits (Scotland)

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families are in receipt of *(a)* working families tax credit and *(b)* child tax credit in each constituency in Scotland. [61304]

Dawn Primarolo: For the numbers in receipt of the working families' tax credit (WFTC), I refer my hon. Friend to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn) on 16 January 2002, *Official Report,* column 293W. Information about the children's tax credit (CTC) is not available by constituency. However, the number of families eligible for the CTC in Scotland is estimated to be 400,000.

Motor Taxation

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was raised in 2001–02 from *(a)* duty on motor fuel, *(b)* VAT on motor fuel, *(c)* VED, *(d)* VAT on the purchase of all motor vehicles, *(e)* benefit in kind tax on company cars *(f)* benefit in kind on free fuel to company car drivers and *(g)* insurance premium tax on motor insurance premiums. [61165]

John Healey: In 2001–02, the amount of duty received from road fuel was £21.7 billion; £4.4 billion was raised from Vehicle Excise Duty; £2.5 billion was raised from benefit in kind tax on company cars; and £0.9 billion was raised from benefit in kind on fuel to company car drivers.

No figures are available for the amount of VAT raised specifically from either the sale of road fuel or the purchase of all motor vehicles.

Information specifically on insurance premium tax on motor insurance premiums is not collected. Customs & Excise do not require insurers to identify the specific types of insurance policies on which insurance premium tax is paid.

Correspondence

Mr. Beith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will reply to correspondence from the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed of 20 January referring to correspondence dated 23 October 2001 referred to him by the Paymaster General relating to constituents who let holiday cottages and were affected by foot and mouth restrictions. [61319]

Dawn Primarolo: I have done so.

AIRMIC

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with AIRMIC concerning the availability of insurance cover in the aftermath of 11 September; and which sectors these discussions covered. [61103]

Ruth Kelly: The Government is aware that the availability of insurance cover against acts of terrorism has reduced following 11 September. Constructive discussions are ongoing between HM Treasury, the insurance industry and representatives of AIRMIC on possible changes to the Pool Re Scheme which provides terrorism reinsurance for commercial property damage and business interruption. AIRMIC have also been involved in wider discussions between Treasury and industry about the availability of terrorism insurance.

Internet

Mr Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what regional differences exist in the home use of the internet. [58241]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from John Pullinger to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 13 June 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question regarding information on regional differences in the home use of the Internet. I am replying in his absence. (58241)

The attached table presents the most recently available information of households with access to the Internet by Government Office Regions and countries of the UK. The latest headline estimate is that 39 per cent of households in the UK had Internet access at home in the quarter October to December 2001. The more detailed regional analysis is based on a full sample over a 12-month period. While 39 per cent of UK households had Internet access in the fourth quarter of 2001, the average for the twelve months, October 2000 to September 2001 was 37 per cent, therefore this 37 per cent provides the basis for the regional analysis attached.

Percentage of households with access to the Internet by Government Office Regions and countries of the UK: October 2000 to September 2001

Government Office Region and country of the UK	*Per cent.*
North East	26
North West	36
Yorkshire and the Humber	31
East Midlands	40
West Midlands	35
East	41
London	45
South East	45
South West	38
England	39
Wales	27
Scotland	30
Northern Ireland	26
UK	37

Source:

Family Expenditure Survey; Expenditure and Food Survey (April 2001 onwards) Like all estimates from sample surveys these figures are subject to sampling variability. This is greater for sub-groups of the population than for national estimates.

Euro

Mr. Rammell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the extent to which British businesses accept the euro as a means of payment. [58243]

Ruth Kelly: There is no information available on the numbers or types of UK businesses that will accept euro. Within the UK, the euro, like other foreign currencies is not legal tender but is a legal currency. Businesses can therefore choose to trade in it if they want.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he has taken to encourage small businesses to accept the euro. [58223]

Ruth Kelly: Details of the information provided to UK businesses to assist those that want to deal in euro now were set out in the Treasury's Fifth Report on Euro Preparations, published on 4 November 2001, copies of which were deposited in the Library of the House.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH

Export Licences (Israel)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has *(a)*to freeze and *(b)*to revoke export licences to Israel under the Consolidated Criteria; and if he will make a statement. [57546]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Since the outbreak of the intifada in September 2000 and taking into account Israeli military tactics, the Government have revoked a number of export licences to Israel. We currently have no plans to freeze extant export licences to Israel. This policy is kept under constant review.

We consider all export licence applications on a case by case basis against the consolidated EU and national arms export licensing criteria.

Certified Timber

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list the refurbishment projects that *(a)* are in progress and *(b)* will start within the next six months; and what action is being taken to ensure that these will procure certified timber. [59757]

Mr. MacShane: The FCO has the following refurbishment projects in progress: Buenos Aires Residence, Moscow Residence and staff accommodation, Tunis Residence, New Delhi staff accommodation, Pyongyang staff accommodation. Within the next six months the contract will be let for the Pera House office/Residence in Istanbul. All contractors are instructed to comply with UK Government environmental policy on timber procurement.

Leila Khalid

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) on what grounds Leila Khalid was granted a visa to visit the UK; and if he will make a statement; [59004]

(2) if he will review the grant of a visa to Leila Khalid to visit the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement; [59005]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: It has been a long standing government policy not to disclose information on individual applications on the grounds of privacy of an individual. Under Exemption 12 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information I am unable to provide my hon. Friend with the information that he requires.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received in respect of a mass killing and mutilation of soldiers and policemen in Kisingani, Democratic Republic of the Congo. [60726]

Mr. MacShane: MONUC, NGOs and Congolese residents of Kisangani have reported killings on 14 May. However, the origins of the incident, the number and nature of the deaths, and responsibility for the deaths remain unclear. We have encouraged MONUC and UNHCR to conduct a speedy enquiry and to publish their findings as soon as possible.

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the nature and extent of the recent uprising in the city of Kisingani and on the Haut Plateau in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; and what representations he has made to the Government of

Rwanda and the Rassemblement Congolais pour la Democratie about the responsibility for maintaining order. [60725]

Mr. MacShane: Dissent amongst RCD-Goma ranks has been reported at several locations, in particular in Kisangani on 14 May and in the Hauts Plateaux since February. Information remains incomplete. It is clear however, that the rebellions have resulted in an unacceptable loss of life and that the local civilian populations have suffered. We have supported EU and UN statements condemning the violent response of the RCD-Goma leadership in Kisangani and calling on Rwanda to use its influence to calm the situation. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has raised the events in Kisangani with President Kagame.

Devolution

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many times a United Kingdom delegation has been led by Ministers from devolved administrations *(a)* 1999, *(b)* 2000, *(c)* 2001 and *(d)* 2002; who attended in each case; who led in each case; and in what percentage of overall council meetings the United Kingdom delegation has been led by a devolved administration. [60787]

Peter Hain: Decisions on Ministerial attendance at Council meetings are taken on a case-by-case basis by the lead UK Minister.

The table below shows where Ministers from devolved administrations have led a UK delegation. Our calculations estimate this at approximately 3 per cent. of Council meetings.

Year	*Attendee*	*Council Attended*	*Devolved Administration*
1999	Nil	—	—
2000	Jane Davidson	Education and Youth Council, 9 November	Welsh Assembly Government
	Nicol Stephen	Education Council, 8 June	Scottish Executive
2001	Nicol Stephen	Education and Youth Council, 12 February	Scottish Executive
	Susan Deacon	Health Council, 4 June	Scottish Executive
2002	Jane Davidson	Youth Council, 30 May	Welsh Assembly Government

Guantanamo Bay

Ms Christine Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on British detainees at Guantanamo Bay. [62519]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: British officials paid a third visit to Guantanamo Bay between 27 and 31 May. The purpose of the visit was to ask questions relevant to national security, to confirm the identity and nationality of two British detainees transferred there in May and to check on the welfare of all seven British detainees. The officials were from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Security Service.

The officials met the detainees individually. US officials were able to observe the interviews. One detainee has sustained injuries in Afghanistan. He and the US authorities confirmed that he was receiving medical treatment for them. The other detainees appeared to be in satisfactory physical health, though some of them complained of ailments, which are being addressed. Some detainees raised concerns about their status and other aspects of their detention and conditions at Guantanamo, which British officials discussed with the camp authorities. The officials saw no visible sign of mistreatment.

British officials delivered to the camp authorities letters from some of the detainees' families to be passed to the detainees. Some of the detainees asked the officials to relay oral messages to their families. We have passed them and the details of the detainees' circumstances to their families. Personal details are not disclosed in the answer for reasons of privacy. The detainees confirmed that they were able to send and receive letters to and from their families through the camp authorities and through the International Committee of the Red Cross.

All detainees were now housed in recently-built indoor accommodation including individual sleeping, toilet and washing facilities and air-conditioning. The detainees confirmed that they were able to practice their religion and take exercise. The detainees also have access to reading and writing material.

The visiting team found the US camp authorities open and co-operative.

The ICRC continues to maintain a presence at Guantanamo Bay and has access on demand to the detainees.

Sheik Hamad bin Jassin bin Jaber al-Thari

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contact has taken place, at what level and on what dates, between (*a*) Ministers and (*b*) civil servants and the Jersey authorities in respect of matters connected with the freezing of trusts whose beneficiaries include His Excellency Sheik Hamad bin Jassin bin Jaber al-Thari; and if he will make a statement. [61118]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I am informed that there have been no contacts between FCO Ministers and the Jersey Attorney General on this. FCO officials have attended four meetings in March, July and August 2001 at which the Jersey Attorney General or his representatives were present, and have had occasional telephone and e-mail contacts with the Jersey Attorney General's office to exchange information about the investigation. Decisions about the conduct of the Jersey Attorney General's investigation were for him alone.

Mr. Abdul Bassett al-Megrahi

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what response he has made to former President Mandela's request that Mr. Abdul Bassett al-Megrahi be moved to a prison in a Muslim country. [61124]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We are aware from press reports of former President Mandela's call for Mr Al-Megrahi to be transferred to a prison in a Muslim country. We have not received a formal request from him.

Libya agreed to hand over suspects for trial in a third country, and if convicted, to their imprisonment in Scotland. This agreement stands with regard to Mr. Al-Megrahi's imprisonment.

France

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next plans to meet the French Foreign Minister; and if he will raise the issue of the ban imposed by the French Government on imports of beef from the UK. [61327]

Peter Hain: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs met his new French counterpart on 22 May and raised this issue with him. The Government continues to make it clear to the French Government that the ban on UK beef exported under the Date-based Export Scheme is illegal and should be lifted immediately.

Arms Trade

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many meetings officials in his Department have had over the last two years with officials from Jersey's Attorney General's Office concerning investigation of corruption relating to arms deals; and if he will make a statement. [61329]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I am told that over the last two years, FCO officials have attended four meetings at which the the Jersey Attorney General or his representatives were also present. Decisions about the conduct of the Jersey Attorney General's investigation were for him alone.

HMS Invincible

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement regarding the sale of HMS Invincible to India. [61196]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer to my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr James Gray) by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Ministry of Defence today UIN 61162.

India/Pakistan

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with colleagues in the EU, UN, India, Pakistan, the US and Russia regarding the situation on the Indo-Pakistan border. [61195]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary gave an account of his recent contacts with India and Pakistan in his statement to the House on Monday 10 June, *Official Report*, column 595.

CABINET OFFICE

Ministerial Panel on Red Tape

Brian Cotter: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make a statement on the work of the Ministerial Panel on Red Tape. [61334]

Mr. Douglas Alexander: The Ministerial Panel on Regulatory Accountability was set up in 2001 to take a strategic overview of the regulatory system; to tackle instances where progress on regulatory reform is blocked; and to call Ministers to account for new regulation and their performance in addressing the burden of existing regulation.

Regulatory Impact Unit

Brian Cotter: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many policy proposals the Regulatory Impact Unit has been consulted on during the past year. [61336]

Mr. Douglas Alexander: The Regulatory Impact Unit have been consulted on 597 occasions.

In addition the Unit is consulted on an ad hoc basis for advice and assistance. This information is not held centrally, and could only be assembled at disproportionate cost.

Staff Numbers

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many staff were employed by his Department on *(a)*2 May 1997 and *(b)*31 may 2002. [60932]

Mr. Douglas Alexander: Data on staffing levels are not available for the dates requested as they are only collected twice a year, as at 1 April and 1 October. We are currently in the process of collecting the data for 1 April 2002.

I would refer the hon. Member to the documents that were released on 5 June 1997 and 21 February 2002, reporting figures as at 1 April 1997 and 1 October 2001 respectively. Copies of the documents were placed in the Libraries of the House at the time of publication.

PRIME MINISTER

Intelligence and Security Committee

Mr. David: To ask the Prime Minister when he will respond to the Intelligence and Security Committee's Annual report for 2001–02. [62528]

The Prime Minister: I have today laid the Government Response to the Intelligence and Security Committee's Report before Parliament.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when she will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Walsall, North of 16 May concerning a constituent. [61110]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I have replied today, 13 June, to my hon. Friend's letter of 16 May.

Pupil Absence

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of pupil days were lost through absence in *(a)* each LEA and *(b)* England in each year since 1997. [59116]

Mr. Ivan Lewis [*holding answer 10 June 2002*): The information requested is contained in tables, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries.

Learning and Skills Council

Gillian Merron: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will define the common funding approach to be adopted by the Learning and Skills Council for *(a)* 2003–04 and *(b)* subsequent years. [53089]

Margaret Hodge: The foremost principle is that funding must follow the learner. Other principles of the funding system are that it should: be easy to understand, determine funding rates fairly, and be simple in design and administration. It must have the flexibility to cope with provision ranging from full-time classroom learning to on-line learning at home. These principles are based on the extensive consultation carried out by this Department in 1999–2000 and confirmed by the Department and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) in November 2000. We have built on the best elements of the former Further Education Funding Council's national system of formula based funding and the LSC are committed to introduce a single non-bureaucratic system. In 2003–04 further education, work based learning for young people, school sixth forms and adult and community learning will be funded through systems which follow the same principles. The LSC will develop the common funding approach further and plan a single funding system for all the main post-16 learning routes in 2004–05.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance has been given to the Learning and Skills Council on the action to be taken to deal with weaknesses identified following an area inspection and the circumstances under which reorganisation of provision ought properly to be considered; and if she will publish that guidance. [60043]

Mr. Ivan Lewis [*holding answer 11 June 2002*]: The Department's guidance following an area inspection sets out the key elements of an effective action plan, and the basis on which it will be assessed. This is issued to each local LSC and LEA on publication of their Ofsted area inspection report. I have placed a copy of the guidance in the libraries of the House.

The LSC is the body responsible for planning 16–19 provision. It is for them, in liaison with their local partners, to decide what action, including reorganisation, is necessary to address the weaknesses in their area.

Veterinary Science

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many veterinary science students have followed courses in epidemics, farm animals and disease control in universities in each of the last 10 years. [54987]

Margaret Hodge: Epidemics, farm animals and disease control are covered in all veterinary science courses. The table below gives the number of students on undergraduate courses.

Higher Education Students[1] on Undergraduate Veterinary Science Courses UK HE Institutions

Academic year	*Number of Students (thousands)*
1991–92	1.9
1992–93	2.0
1993–94	2.2
1994–95	2.3
1995–96	2.4
1996–97	2.5
1997–98	2.6
1998–99	2.8
1999–00	3.0
2000–01	3.1
2001–02	3.4

Source:

Universities Statistical Record (USR) and Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA).

1. Covers home and overseas students on full-time or part-time courses.

Funding Awards

Mr. Chidgey: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what efficiency gains were factored in the funding awards, made to *(a)* further education colleges, *(b)* sixth form colleges and *(c)* schools with a sixth form in each year since 1997. [56166]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: [*holding answer 15 May 2002*]:

Further Education Unit Funding	*1996–97 actual*	*1997–98 actual*	*1998–99 actual*	*1999–2000 actual*	*2000–01 provisional*	*2001–02 planned*	*2002–03 planned*	*2003–04 planned*
Funding for participation (£)	3,050	3,070	3,120	3,360	3,380	3,500	3,550	3,610
Real terms index	100	98	97	101	100	101	100	99
Total funding (£)	3,050	3,070	3,120	3,440	3,540	3,810	3,990	4,150
Real terms index	100	98	97	104	105	110	112	114

This table shows two real terms indices for each full time equivalent (FTE) student in FE, including sixth form colleges. The first shows unit of funding for participation and includes funding for Qualifying for Success, widening participation and adult basic skills. The second shows a unit of funding for all funding for further education, including funds such as capital, standards fund and Teachers Pay Initiative. Since 1997 colleges have widened participation among learners, broadened programmes of study for 16–19 year olds, increased basic skills provision and improved qualification success rates. Funding for schools with sixth forms was set by individual local education authorities up to 2001–02 and any effciency gains will have varied from place to place.

National Childcare Strategy

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures have been introduced to enhance the National Childcare Strategy in rural areas. [57458]

Margaret Hodge: The National Childcare Strategy offers substantial resources to develop childcare facilities in all areas, including rural communities. The Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative, which is part of the Strategy, encompasses rural communities and was launched in 2001 to create 45,000 childcare places in the most disadvantaged communities. Furthermore, an additional £22 million has been allocated for a round of smaller Sure Start programmes, delivered through Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs). These new Mini-Sure Starts will provide additional resources to new Neighbourhood Nurseries and existing childcare facilities in rural areas, small towns, and pockets of disadvantage.

DfES Officials are working closely with the Countryside Agency to maximise support for rural areas and policies which take the needs of rural areas into account in accordance with the Rural White Paper. There is also a rural adviser seconded to the Early Years and Childcare Unit in my Department to advise on rural issues.

IT Training

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans there are to increase access to IT training for children and adults in Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East. [57692]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The revised National Curriculum requires all pupils aged 5 to 14 to be taught Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and we have a target of 85 per cent. of 14 year olds reaching National Curriculum level 5 or above by 2007. To support schools in reaching this target we have, in particular, a strategy at Key Stage 3 which is currently in pilot and will be rolled out to all schools in the next academic year.

For adults, there are a number of learndirect centres and three UK online centres in Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East. Ufi Limited works closely with organisations involved in local hub partnerships to plan and develop local learndirect provision offering a range of on-line courses including ICT and Basic Skills to individuals over 16. UK online centres provide access to the Internet and email to adults in disadvantaged communities who may have low, or no, ICT skills. There are no current plans to open further UK online centres in Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the effectiveness of ICT training funded by the New Opportunities Fund. [57830]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The New Opportunities Fund ICT teacher training programme is to ensure that serving teachers feel confident and are competent to teach using ICT within the curriculum, with the aim of raising the standards of pupils' achievements. This is probably the largest scale teacher training programme in the world and over 96 per cent. of eligible teachers and over 99 per cent. of schools have already signed up for the training in England.

However, the programme still has 18 months left to run and it is therefore too early to assess the full effectiveness and to say whether the training is having the desired impact on classroom practice.

However, the recent Ofsted report highlighted a number of positive things about the training, namely that the scheme has raised the profile of ICT training in many schools; has helped teachers to improve their ICT skills significantly and that there has been an unprecedented willingness in the teaching profession to embrace ICT.

The Ofsted report also raised concerns that the training has not had as widespread an effect on classroom practice as might be reasonably expected at this stage of the programme. My Department will be working with NOF and the TTA to ensure that these concerns are addressed and that we establish the most effective support for teachers who are crucial to the successful implementation of the overall ICT Schools programme.

Learndirect

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many individuals in Crosby have enrolled on Learndirect; how many courses are provided; and of the number of people enrolled how many (*a*) are new learners and (*b*) have no previous qualifications; [58044]

(2) how many SME's are sponsoring Learndirect learners within the Crosby constituency; and how many individuals from Crosby have contacted the Learndirect freephone advice line; [58045]

(3) if she will list Learndirect centres operating in the Crosby constituency. [58046]

Mr. Ivan Lewis [*holding answer 22 May 2002*]: 399 people in the Crosby constituency have enrolled on learndirect courses. There are 621 learndirect courses available currently. Information regarding the number of new learners and learners without qualifications is not available at constituency level.

Information regarding SME's sponsorship of learndirect learners is not currently available at constituency level. Calls to the learndirect helpline are monitored at Standard Telephone District level only. Information at a constituency level is therefore unavailable.

There is one learndirect centre in the Crosby constituency.

This is Crosby Connect-to-Libraries Centre, Crosby Library, Crosby Road North, Crosby.

Skills (Luton)

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures she plans to take to increase the skills levels of businesses and employees in Luton. [58217]

Margaret Hodge: This is a matter for the Learning and Skills Council. I have therefore asked John Harwood, the Council's Chief Executive, to write to my hon. Friend with the information requested and to place a copy of his reply in the Library.

Further Education

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps she is taking to bring the level of funding in colleges up to that of schools. [58265]

Margaret Hodge: The Government are committed to raising the level of funding for colleges towards that of school sixth forms. By 2003–04 funding for further education will have risen by 26 per cent. in real terms since 1997. Further progress can only be made as resources allow and we cannot commit ourselves beyond the resources we secure. We are looking to the current Spending Review to provide the resources needed to deliver the Government's ambitious agenda for further education.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list for each year since 1997 the (*a*) capital resources committed and (*b*) additional revenue costs incurred on reorganisations involving 16 to 19 provisions. [60041]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 11 June 2002]:* The information in respect of further education sector funding is estimated as follows:

Year	*Capital Funding Committed*	*Revenue Funding Incurred*
1997–98	£0.9 million	£0
1998–99	£0.8 million	£0
1999–2000	£2.6 million	£0.5 million
2000–01	£0.5 million	£1.2 million
2001–02	£19.6 million	£2.2 million

These figures relate to the financial year, 1 April to 31 March.

Information on schools funding is not available because details of allocations to individual schools are held only by Local Education Authorities.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent research has been undertaken by her Department into *(a)* cost effectiveness and *(b)* the impact on quality and standards of different forms of organisation of 16 to 19 provision. [60045]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 11 June 2002]:* In October 1999 OFSTED and the Adult Learning Inspectorate commenced a programme of area inspections that looked for the first time at the totalityy of LSC funded education and training for 16 to 19 year olds in an area. These provide an overview for local planning, organisation and delivery of 16 to 19 provision and the starting point for measurable, continuous improvement.

Local LSCs and their partners can consider whether reconfiguration of provision is needed and whether this takes the form of new collaborative arrangements or more far-reaching organisational change. They take a view on the cost effectiveness of their proposals and clearly aim to improve both quality and standards.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent discussions have taken place between her Department and *(a)* OFSTED, *(b)* Adult Learning Inspectorate and *(c)* the Learning and Skills Council about the organisation of 16 to 19 and adult learning provision. [60046]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 11 June 2002]:* Proposals on 16 to 19 organisations were discussed with OFSTED, ALI and the Learning and Skills Council before the publication in September 2001 of our consultation document on 16 to 19 organisation and inspection. DfES Officials have subsequently maintained periodic contact with all three organisations over these proposals and related matters, including progress of the relevant legislation in the Education Bill currently before Parliament. In implementing the legislation, we shall be holding further discussions with all relevant bodies including the inspectorates and the LSC.

The findings from area inspection reports, (prepared by OFSTED and ALI), may lead to consideration of local re-organisation for 16 to 19 learning opportunities. These are discussed with the LSC on a case by case basis.

On the organisation of Adult Learning, officials continue to work closely with the LSC ad ALI on a range of issues including both organisations' relationship with learndirect, and the delivery of adult and community learning, workforce development, the Investors in People standard, and information advice and guidance for adults.

Mr. Gareth R. Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she is taking to increase funding for further education colleges in line with funding for school sixth forms. [58370]

Margaret Hodge: The Government is committed to raising the level of funding for colleges towards that of school sixth forms. By 2003–04 funding for further education will have risen by 26 per cent. in real terms since 1997. Further progress can only be made as resources allow and it would be unwise to commit ourselves beyond the resources we secure. We are looking to the current Spending Review to provide the resources needed to deliver the Government's ambitious agenda for further education.

Special Needs

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children with special educational needs are unable to read. [58928]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested is not collected centrally.

European Council (Seville)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the Government aims to achieve within the European Union's educational competence at the European Council's meeting at Seville; and if she will make a statement. [59102]

Margaret Hodge: The formal agenda for the Seville Council meeting on 21 and 22 June has not yet been finalised, and there is unlikely to be much discussion of education issues.

The European Commission is preparing a feasibility study to identify options for helping secondary schools to establish or enhance an internet twinning link with a partner school elsewhere in Europe. This was agreed in principle at the Barcelona European Council, following a proposal from the UK and Spain. The Commission was asked to report back to the Seville Council on its findings. We believe there are considerable potential educational benefits in extending school twinning.

Within the limits of Community competence in this area, we always aim to participate fully in any Council discussions, share good practice with other member states and co-operate with each other wherever it makes sense to do so.

Early Years Education

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to her answer of 26 October 2001, *Official Report*, column 453W, on early years' education, if she will publish information on the number of places in early years settings taken up by (*a*) three year olds and (*b*) four year olds. [59240]

Maragret Hodge [holding answer 10 June 2002]: The latest national figures on early years provision in England were published by my Department in the Statistical First Release 09/2002 "Provision For Children Under Five Years Of Age In England: January 2002" in May 2002, a copy of which is available from the Library. Figures at LEA level will be made available in the bulletin to be published in October 2002. An electronic copy of the SFR and the 2001 bulletin are currently available on my Department's website (www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics).

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pre-school places there were in the (*a*) public and (*b*) private sector in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2001. [59363]

Margaret Hodge: The information is not available in the form requested. The headcount for numbers of children aged four in the private and voluntary sector was first collected in 1999 and for children aged three in 2000. The available information is shown in the table.

The Department does not collect information on the total number of places in the private and voluntary sector.

Latest figures on provision for children under five years of age in England were published by my Department in the Statistical First Release "Provision for Children Under Five Years of Age in England January 2002 (provisional estimates) (09/2002)" on 17 May 2002, a copy of which is available from the Library. An electronic copy of this publication is also available on my Department's website (www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics).

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many places there were in day nurseries in each of the past five years; and how many day nurseries there were in each of those years; [56952]

(2) how many registered childminders there were in each of the past five years; [56953]

(3) how many playgroups there were in each of the past five years; and how many places were provided by playgroups in each of those years; [56954]

(4) how many places in after-school clubs were provided in each of the past five years; [56955]

(5) how many places were provided in school holiday schemes in each of the past five years. [56956]

Margaret Hodge: Information is not available in the form requested. The available information is shown in the tables. Local authorities provided the data.

The decline in numbers in some sectors such as the childminding and playgroup sectors coincided with increases in other forms of childcare over the past few years. Since 1995, the number of registered day nurseries has increased from 4,800 to 7,300, the number of registered holiday schemes from 2,900 to 10,500 and the number of registered out of school clubs from 1,300 to 4,300. The number of places for children attending all day care providers rose from 1,182,400 in 1995 to 1,569,200 in 2000. Latest figures on Day Care facilities in England was published by my Department in the Statistical Bulletin "Children's Day Care facilities at 31 March 2001 (08/01)" in October 2001, a copy of which is available from the Library.

Since September 1999, we have also invested substantially in new free early years education places for three year-olds. 335,000 three year-olds took up free early years education places in January 2001, up from 214,000 in January 1997. We estimate that there are free early years education places available for all eligible four year-olds in England. Figures on the take up of free early years places was published in a table alongside Statistical Bulletin 11/2001 "Provision For Children Under Five Years Of Age in England—January 2001". An electronic copy of the Bulletin is available on my Department's website (www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics).

Early estimates of day care provision in England at 31 March 2002 are expected to be published in a Statistical First Release in July.

Table 1: Number of daycare providers, by type[1,2]
England 1997–2001

Position at 31 March each year

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Day nurseries	6,100	6,700	7,000	7,500	7,800
Registered childminders	98,500	94,700	82,200	75,600	72,300
Playgroups and pre-schools	15,800	15,700	15,000	14,300	14,000

[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest 100.

Table 2: Number of daycare providers, by type[1,2]
England 1997–2001

Position at 31 March each year

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Day nurseries	193,800	223,000	247,700	264,200	285,100
Playgroups and pre-schools	383,700	383,600	347,200	353,100	330,200
Out of school clubs	78,700	92,300	113,800	141,100	152,800
Holiday schemes	209,000	256,500	435,300[2]	490,400	598,000

[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest 100.

[2] Additional guidelines were given to providers in 1999.

Lecturers

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many lecturers in further education have lost their jobs in the last year; and in which institutions these cuts have been made. [59287]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Information on numbers of lecturers who lost their jobs is not available.

Higher Education Funding

Mr. Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what *(a)* teaching and *(b)* research funding for higher education establishments was given in the last academic year, broken down by (i) new universities and colleges of higher education and (ii) old universities; [59290]

(2) what HEFCE funding for higher education institutions, divided into *(a)* new universities and colleges of higher education and *(b)* old universities there was in (i) this academic year and (ii) each academic year since 1995. [59291]

Margaret Hodge: The information is published by the Higher Education Funding Council for England in its report "Recurrent grant for 2001–02: final allocations" (report 01/57) which records allocations of recurrent grant to higher education institutions and to further education colleges delivering higher education. Information for previous years is published in equivalent reports, the data for 2002–03 are provisional. Copies of all the reports are available at http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/

Primary Schools

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of maintained primary schools have a nursery. [59362]

Margaret Hodge: Provisional figures show that 35 per cent of maintained primary schools in England had a designated nursery class as at January 2002.

Higher Education Students

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what account is taken of the income of (*a*) resident step-parents or (*b*) non-resident parents in applying means tests to students in higher education. [59710]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The means test for students in higher education takes account of the income of resident step-parents only where the step-parent has legally adopted the student. Where parents are separated or divorced it is for the LEA to decide which parent's income should be assessed. Where the resident parent's income is assessed, payments made by the non-resident parent to support the student or the household are included as part of the income assessment.

Ms. Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment she has made of the effect of the reduction in the availability of maintenance grants on the participation in higher education of students from poorer social classes. [60251]

Margaret Hodge: The proportion of young people from the three lowest socio-economic groups participating in higher education rose from 10 per cent. when loans were introduced in 1990 to 17 per cent. in 1998 when the new student support arrangements were introduced. The proportion had risen to 18 per cent. in 2000, the latest year for which data are available.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the average level of debt faced by students on leaving higher education in the last 12 months. [60253]

Margaret Hodge: My Department has not commissioned a survey which includes estimates of student debt since the Student Income and Expenditure Survey of 1998–99. The next Survey is planned for 2002–03. Recent data on anticipated debt are available from the UNITE/MORI poll conducted in late 2001, which suggest today's students expect average debt on graduation of £8,133. Indicative figures in the 2002 Nat West Money Matters Survey suggest graduates in 2002 will leave with average debts of £10,000.

A significant part of the debt arises from borrowing through the Student Loan Company. Repayment relates directly to earnings and the interest charged only reflects inflation. However, some debt is incurred in commercial borrowing to support a higher level of expenditure. These figures have to be considered in the context of graduates currently earning around 35 per cent. more than the national average and potentially £400,000 more over their working lives.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what information she collects on the social composition of entrants to undergraduate courses in higher education. [60255]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* The most comprehensive information on the social composition of entrants to undergraduate courses in higher education is taken from data collected by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS). Although it is accepted that not all entrants or undergraduate courses use the UCAS route. UCAS assigns social class to applicants based upon the occupation of the parent with the highest income in the applicants household, as reported by the potential student. For applicants aged 21 or over, the occupation of the person contributing the highest income to the household is used.

The latest UCAS data are shown in the table.

Accepted applicants for full-time undergraduate courses, 2001 entry

Social class	*Numbers*	*Percentage of known*
Professional	39,748	14
Intermediate	120,831	44
Skilled non-manual	38,774	14
Skilled manual	48,412	18
Partly skilled	23,114	8
Unskilled	5,604	2
Total known	276,483	100
Unknown	48,989	
Grand total	325,472	

Other information on the social composition of higher education entrants is also available from the Youth Cohort Study (YCS), a series of longitudinal surveys of young people that track their activities in the years immediately after they have completed compulsory education. The YCS is a sample survey of young people that employs a socio-economic group (SEG) classification that differs from the social class breakdown used by UCAS. Therefore, the two sources of information are not directly comparable.

University Lecturers

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans she has to increase the salaries of university lecturers. [60129]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 11 June 2002]:* The Government play no part in setting the levels of pay in the higher education sector. These are subject to regulations between employers, their staff and their representative trade union bodies.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action she has taken to encourage more people to enter into a career as a university lecturer. [60130]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 11 June 2002]:* Our spending plans include £50 million in 2001–02, rising to £110 in 2002–03 and £170 million in 2003–04 to underpin the human resource strategies which each university and higher education college has submitted to the Higher Education Funding Council for England, and which include measures to address issues of recruitment and retention, especially in shortage subjects. Added to that, we gave a commitment to introduce a scheme of "Golden Hellos" for new staff in shortage subjects. We expect to announce our plans in the autumn.

Oxbridge Admissions Policy

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance *(a)* she and *(b)* the Higher Education Funding Council have issued to Oxford and Cambridge universities on admission policy with regard to the (i) social class origins and (ii) schools attended by undergraduate students; and if she will make a statement. [60131]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 11 June 2002]:* Neither my right hon. Friend nor the Funding Council have issued guidance specifically to Oxford or Cambridge universities on these matters. However, my right hon. Friend's letter to the Funding Council (29 November 2001) made it clear that all universities, particularly those significantly below their benchmarks for participation by under-represented groups, need to contribute to widening access to higher education.

Maintained Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of the number of maintained schools with no ethnic minority pupils. [60510]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 10 June 2002]:* At January 2002 provisional information shows that there were 5,220 maintained schools in England with no recorded ethnic minority pupils.

Training Expenditure

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the estimated level of expenditure on training in the private sector was in each of the last 10 years. [60775]

Margaret Hodge: The total expenditure on training by employers in England was estimated at approximately £23 billion for 2000. This figure is based on the Learning and Training at Work 2000 survey. It includes indirect costs—the largest component is the wage costs of the trainees while in training. Comparable figures for earlier years and a breakdown into public and private sector expenditure are not available.

Local Education Authorities

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will list the requirements *(a)* removed from and *(b)* placed on local education authorities in the last year for which information is available. [60837]

Mr. Miliband: The Department does not collect this information centrally, and to do so would incur disproportionate cost.

Teachers (Registration Fee)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate she has made of *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentage of teachers whose General Teaching Council registration fee has been collected by compulsory deduction by their employer. [60881]

Mr. Miliband: The Secretary of State has made no such estimate. The collection of the registration fee is a matter for the General Teaching Council and I have asked the Chief Executive of the Council to write to the hon. Gentleman with information on the present position with regard to compulsory deductions. A copy of her response will be placed in the Library.

Departmental Grants

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which organisations which were in receipt of a grant from her in 1997–98 no longer are; what the annual saving is; which organisations which were not in receipt of a grant in 1997–98 now are; and what the annual cost is. [61395]

Estelle Morris: The information cannot be provided except at disproportionate cost.

"Welcome Back Bonus Scheme"

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if she will make a statement on the availability of the Welcome Back Bonus Scheme, with specific reference to the deadline and the eligibility for claiming it. [61937]

Mr. Miliband: The conditions for payments under the Welcome Back Bonus Scheme were established by the Education (School Teachers' Pay and Conditions) (No. 6) Order 2001, which was laid before Parliament on 27 September last year.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Illegal Drugs

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking permanently to refuse entry to the United Kingdom to individuals apprehended for attempting to bring illegal drugs into the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [56532]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 21 May 2002]:* There are provisions within the Immigration Rules that allow for the refusal of leave to enter or remain in the United Kingdom (UK) of a person who is not a British citizen and who has been convicted of a serious crime, or whose presence here is undesirable. There is also scope for a court to recommend deportation at the end of their sentence of a person when they are convicted in the UK. Any person who is deported from the UK following a conviction for importing illegal drugs would not normally be allowed to return here for a minimum of 10 years.

Ms Christiana Olufunmolayo Olaifa

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will make a decision on the case of Ms Christiana Olufunmolayo Olaifa (ref. 01010047), referred to his Department's Referred Cases Unit from Lagos on 19 September 2001. [58070]

Beverley Hughes: The Referred Cases Unit in Lunar House did not receive the referral from Lagos dated 19 September 2001. A copy will be requested shortly and upon receipt a decision will be made as a matter of priority. I wrote to my hon. Friend on 12 June 2002 setting out the background to the case.

Dangerous Driving

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what representations he has received regarding the penalties for causing death by dangerous driving; and if he will make a statement. [59592]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The Government receive correspondence from members of the public, MPs and the judiciary regarding the penalty for causing death by dangerous driving as well as the sentences imposed in individual cases. A good proportion of the representations are in favour of an increase in the penalty.

The offence of causing death by dangerous driving was included within the ongoing review of road traffic penalties. We have received comprehensive and detailed responses to the proposals in the review's consultation paper, including comments on the proposals for the offence of causing death by dangerous driving, from many representative groups and organisations. We also received a large number of communications, either by letter or e-mail from members of the public. In addition, Ministers meet with representative groups such as RoadPeace and the Motorists Forum from time to time to discuss road traffic issues.

We are in the final stages of completing the Government's response to the consultation exercise.

Youth Justice

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of restorative justice programmes in cutting re-offending by young offenders in each of the police authorities in the UK since 1997. [58889]

Mr. Hilary Benn: Recent Home Office research has included "An Exploratory Evaluation of Restorative Justice Schemes" by David Miers et al (2001). More recently (May 2002), the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published "An Evaluation of the Implementation and Effectiveness of an Initiative in Restorative Cautioning" in the Thames Valley Police area. And the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales has funded an evaluation of 46 restorative justice projects, the results of which are not yet available. We are not aware of any research which is broken down by police authority.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department has made of promoting an increase in the number of solicitors specialising in youth justice cases as a means of decreasing levels of crime and re-offending. [58857]

Mr. Hilary Benn: We have considered with the Law Society strategies to promote a high quality service for youth justice cases. We are keen to see extension of the existing specialisation of solicitors in some areas, but this is more difficult to achieve outside large metropolitan areas. For many practices it would be uneconomic and impractical to focus simply on youth work and most undertake a mix of adult and youth work.

We do consider it important that defence lawyers should be sufficiently well trained and competent to act for all their clients, including youths. Training in youth work is therefore being given greater emphasis. I particularly commend the recent Law Society guide to the youth court, produced with the help of the Youth Justice Board.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last met the Chief of Youth Justice Board to discuss issues relating to youth justice. [58849]

Mr. Hilary Benn: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Blunkett) last met the Chair of the Youth Justice Board to discuss issues related to youth justice on Wednesday 29 May 2002.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes organised by *(a)* the Youth Justice Board and *(b)* in conjunction with the Youth Justice Board. [58850]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The Home Office sponsored Youth Justice Board is responsible for the development of effective practice and intervention programmes across the youth justice system. Evaluation reports on a range of these programmes are currently being prepared. They will be used to provide effective practice guidance to youth justice practitioners.

The Home Office is also preparing an assessment of the effectiveness of the youth justice reforms in reducing juvenile offender reconviction rates. Results are due to be published later this year.

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what benefit to the residents of Leyton and Wanstead the actions and policies of the Chairman of the Government's Youth Justice Board has been; and if he will make a statement. [60323]

Mr. Hilary Benn: Leyton and Wanstead is covered by two Youth Offending Teams (Yots)—Waltham Forest and Redbridge. Both teams have benefited significantly from the Home Office sponsored Youth Justice Board (YJB) in a number of ways.

The two Yots are receiving grant funding in 2002–03 from the YJB for general youth justice services, referral orders and substance misuse work. Waltham Forest is receiving grants totalling £229,048 and Redbridge grants totalling £184,066.

The funding for substance misuse work will ensure that both Yots have access to a named drugs worker. Every young person who comes into contact with either Yot will be assessed with regard to substance misuse. The named drugs worker will provide intervention and referral to specialist agencies and services.

The YJB also provided funding of approximately £250,000 between 1999 and 2002 to AMENDS, a restorative justice project covering Redbridge, Waltham Forest, Enfield and Haringey. The project is receiving further funding from the Board of £80,000 between 2001 and 2004.

Redbridge Yot is receiving funding totalling £74,000 to operate a bail supervision and support scheme funded up to March 2004. The Yot is also receiving approximately £278,000 between 2001 and 2004 to operate a minority ethnic mentoring project.

Neither area currently is covered by the Intensive Supervision and Surveillance Programme (ISSP). However, the YJB has been provided with additional funding of £4.5 million in response to the Street Crime Initiative to ensure all Yots in the 10 Street Crime Areas are covered. All the Outer London Yots, including Waltham Forest and Redbridge will be covered by these additional schemes. It is expected that they will have access to an ISSP scheme by Autumn 2002.

Both Waltham Forest and Redbridge Yots are operating Splash Activity Schemes in Loxford and Chingford Hall during 2002. The schemes are aimed at providing young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods across England and Wales with positive leisure activities during the 2000 February and Whitsun half terms and Easter and Summer school holidays. Each scheme has received a grant of £18,000 from the YJB to operate throughout these holiday periods.

Waltham Forest Yot has also been approached to run five Splash Extra Schemes during Summer 2002. Splash Extra is being funded by the New Opportunities Fund and managed by the YJB. The initiative differs from regular Splash as it targets 9 to 17 year olds. Schemes are based in street crime hot spots identified by the Street Crime Action Team. Each scheme will receive funding of £25,000. Waltham Forest Yot is due to submit their application to the YJB shortly.

There is also a Positive Futures project operating on the Beaumont and Oliver Close estates in Leyton which commenced in January 2002. Positive Futures is managed by YJB and aims to use sport to reduce anti-social behaviour, offending and drug misuse amongst 10 to 16 year olds from disadvantaged estates and neighbourhoods. The project is receiving funding of £117,000 per annum for two years.

Corporate Manslaughter

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to bring forward legislation on corporate manslaughter. [60799]

Mr. Hilary Benn: The Government are committed to introducing legislation to increase corporate liability for manslaughter, and will do so when Parliamentary time allows.

Passports

Mr. Tynan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what procedures are in place to replace a lost or stolen passport in the event of an emergency; what circumstances would be considered an emergency; and what discretion can be applied by the Passport Office. [59706]

Beverley Hughes: On personal application being made at one of its seven passport offices, in an emergency the United Kingdom Passport Service (UKPS) can replace a lost or stolen passport on the same day, or early the following day. The circumstances considered by the UKPS to be an emergency are:

—Compassionate grounds—where the applicant is travelling abroad because of the death or serious illness of a family member or friend; or for hospital treatment; and where travel has been arranged for the seriously ill, and their carers by charitable organisations.

—Urgent business travel which can be confirmed by a supporting company letter.

—Where the passport has been stolen within the last week and travel has already been booked and paid for. In such cases evidence such as a crime reference report or reference number is sought.

In all these circumstances the United Kingdom Passport Service will require time to complete the necessary identity and eligibility checks to confirm the issue of a replacement passport. If it is not possible in such circumstances to complete all these checks, a passport restricted to 12 months validity may be granted.

The same day (premium) service now available from UKPS public counters is not normally available for applications to replace lost, stolen, damaged or unavailable passports, as access to the original issue file and possible further identity checks may be required. The emergency exceptions to the normal policy are therefore tightly drawn to ensure consistency of practice, and to maintain the integrity of the British Passport.

Anti-terrorism Measures

Mr. Mike O'Brien: To ask the Secretary for the Home Department what reforms of the organisations dealing with anti-terrorist intelligence and investigation he plans in order to deal with the terrorist threat. [58357]

Mr. Blunkett: I keep the threat from terrorism under constant review, through my chairmanship of the Ministerial committee on terrorism, and receive regular briefings from the Security Service and the police. If organisational changes are required I will make them. Following the budget statement on 17 April 2002, I announced additional resources for countering terrorism which will allow the enhancement of existing preventative work.

Charity Registration

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proposals his Department plans to bring forward exemptions to compulsory registration of charities following the expiry of the Charity Act Regulations on voluntary registration in September. [60624]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 11 June 2002]:* The position of charities excepted from registration with the Charity Commission is currently under consideration with a view to an announcement on future arrangements being made before the Summer Recess.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Love: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have been settled in *(a)* each region of England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales, *(d)* Northern Ireland and *(e)* Greater London by the National Asylum Support Service in each quarter since it came into operation. [57849]

Beverley Hughes: The information is not available in the form requested. Only those asylum seekers requesting that accommodation be provided as part of an application for support are liable to be dispersed. Other supported asylum seekers receiving subsistence only may choose to live in a particular area whilst their application for asylum is considered.

The table shows the number of asylum seekers including dependants, supported in National Asylum Support Service (NASS) accommodation or receiving subsistence only support in each region as at the end of each quarter since December 2000.

Number of asylum seekers (including dependants) in each region as at the end of each quarter since December 2000[1,2]

Region	*End of December 2000*	*End of March 2001*	*End of June 2001*	*End of September 2001*	*End of December 2001*
England					
East Midlands	900	1,390	1,800	2,630	3,720
East of England	470	1,030	1,370	1,580	2,010
Greater London	6,460	9,830	12,980	15,000	19,380
North East	2,440	3,240	4,100	4,380	4,840
North West	3,560	4,840	6,180	7,200	8,600
South Central	1,530	2,020	2,570	3,150	3,950
South West	530	630	740	880	1,010
West Midlands	1,490	2,360	3,900	5,640	7,450

Number of asylum seekers (including dependants) in each region as at the end of each quarter since December 2000[1,2]

Region	*End of December 2000*	*End of March 2001*	*End of June 2001*	*End of September 2001*	*End of December 2001*
Yorkshire and Humberside	3,640	4,960	6,070	7,330	8,760
Total England	21,000	30,310	39,700	47,780	59,720
Scotland	1,320	2,570	3,720	4,380	4,990
Wales	80	90	390	560	840
Northern Ireland	*	40	60	70	80
Total United Kingdom	22,400	33,010	43,870	52,790	65,630

[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest 10, * indicates a number between one and four.
Figures may not sum due to rounding.

[2] Figures exclude cases where the asylum seekers support has been ceased.

Information on the number of asylum seekers supported in each region by NASS is published quarterly. The next publication will cover the period up to March 2002, and will be available from 31 May 2002 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Child Abuse

Mike Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action the Government have taken to review the procedures followed and personnel employed in complex child abuse investigations, and in particular to issue guidance to agencies on record-keeping and information-sharing in such cases. [62521]

Mr. John Denham: Inter-agency guidance on the strategic management of complex child abuse investigations is published today in response to Recommendation 22 of "Lost in Care", the Report of the Tribunal of Inquiry into the abuse of children in care in the former county council areas of Gwynedd and Clwyd since 1974.

This new guidance builds on the key principles for investigating organised or multiple abuse set out in the Government's child protection guidance "Working Together to Safeguard Children", published in 1999. It has been developed by an inter-agency working group, chaired by the Association of Chief Police Officers, which drew together the experience of a number of police forces, local authorities and voluntary organisations which have been closely involved in undertaking complex child abuse investigations.

The guidance is aimed primarily at the police and social services. It focuses on the specific issues highlighted in Recommendation 22 of access to records and information-sharing, and it also provides practical advice on key inter-agency issues such as setting up and closing an investigation, victim and witness support and media handling. The guidance also addresses concerns raised by those who have questioned the investigative methods used in inquiries, including the methods used to contact potential witnesses and the treatment of alleged offenders.

Copies of the guidance have been placed in the Library.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefits

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are in receipt of *(a)* disability living allowance, *(b)* council tax benefit, *(c)* housing benefit, *(d)* incapacity benefit, *(e)* income support and *(f)* invalid care allowance in (i) the Edinburgh West constituency, (ii) Scotland and (iii) the UK; and what percentage these figures represent of the estimated numbers of the people who are eligible for the benefit in these respective areas. [60266]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information on the numbers of benefit recipients is in the tables.

Numbers of Benefit Recipients—Disability Living Allowance, Incapacity Benefit, Income Support and Invalid Care Allowance

Benefit	*Great Britain*	*Scotland*	*Edinburgh West Parliamentary Constituency*
Disability Living Allowance	2,298,000	256,500	2,400
Incapacity Benefit	1,503,800	189,900	1,700
Income Support	3,940,700	418,000	3,000
Invalid Care Allowance	376,215	37,095	415

Notes:

1. Disability Living Allowance, Incapacity Benefit and Income Support figures are rounded to the nearest hundred and are subject to a degree of sampling variation.
2. Invalid Care Allowance figures are rounded to the nearest five.
3. Social security matters in Northern Ireland are the responsibility of the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Source:

Disability Living Allowance 5 per cent. sample—30 November 2001.

Incapacity Benefit 5 per cent. sample—30 November 2001.

Income Support Quarterly 5 per cent. Statistical Enquiry—February 2002.

Invalid Care Allowance 100 per cent. count—31 December 2001.

Child Support Agency

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will provide a substantive reply from the Chief Executive of the Child Support Agency to the letter from the hon. Member for Walsall, North of 23 April concerning a constituent Ref. PCU113052. [61111]

Malcom Wicks: The Chief Executive, Mr Doug Smith, has now written to my hon. Friend.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Combat Effectiveness and Gender Study

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Minister what discussions she has had with the Ministry of Defence on the combat effectiveness and gender study. [58256]

Ms Hewitt: I have not had specific discussions with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Defence about his study of combat effectiveness and gender. I understand, however, that the Equal Opportunities Commission has been involved with the Ministry of Defence in analysing the role of women in the forces leading up to the study which was published on 22 May.

Employment and Race Directive

Julie Morgan: To ask the Minister if she will make a statement on the recent conclusion of the consultation on the article 13 employment and race directive. [58259]

Ms Hewitt: We have had an excellent response Towards Equality and Diversity consultation: over 850 submissions from individuals, businesses—including smaller enterprises; the voluntary sector; public employers; and a wide range of representative bodies.

We are analysing the responses and will begin further consultation on may detailed issues in the autumn. We will put a summary of the results of the consultation in the Libraries of the House at the same time.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Judiciary

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to review the *(a)* qualifications criteria, *(b)* age criteria and *(c)* method of appointment to the judiciary; and if he will make a statement. [57697]

Ms. Yvette Cooper: *(a)* Eligibility for appointment to professional judicial office is determined by statute. There are no plans at present to review these requirements.

(b) The Lord Chancellor has recently reviewed age criteria and on 30 April this year he removed most of the age limits previously in place for judicial appointments for which he is responsible.

(c) The Lord Chancellor asked Sir Leonard Peach to review judicial appointment procedures in 1999, and following the recommendations in that report, an assessment centre approach is being piloted for the current Deputy District Judge (Civil), Deputy District Judge (Magistrates) and Deputy Queen's Bench Masters competitions. The pilots will run during October and November this year. Assessment activities, lasting one full day, will include role-plays, written exercises, a written test, and an interview. The pilot will be evaluated in early 2003.

The Lord Chancellor is committed to ensuring that there is an open effective and accessible system where everyone who is eligible for, and who wants, an appointment has a fair chance to secure it.

Crown Court (Buckinghamshire)

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if it is his policy to move towards a single location for a Crown Court within Buckinghamshire. [61561]

Ms. Yvette Cooper: There is currently only one Crown Court location within Buckinghamshire, namely Aylesbury. This has been the case since the introduction of the Crown Court in 1972.

Freedom of Information

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if he will list those attending the March seminar held in connection with implementation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, indicating which Departments had a ministerial presence. [61412]

Ms Yvette Cooper: Attendance at the seminar held on 13 March, by the Centre for Management and Policy Studies was as follows:

Participants		*Department*
The Rt. Hon. Baroness Blackstone	Minister of State (Arts)	Department for Culture Media and Sport
Ann Campbell MP	Parliamentary Private Secretary to Secretary of State	Department of Trade and Industry
Mr. Ian Cawsey MP	Parliamentary Private Secretary to Lord Williams	House of Lords
Mr. George Foulkes MP	Minister of State	Scotland Office
Mr. Mike Gapes MP	Parliamentary Private Secretary to Secretary of State	Home Office
The Rt. Hon. Harriet Harman QC	Solicitor General	Law Officers' Department
Mr. Denis Haughey MLA	Junior Minister	Northern Ireland Executive
Ms Ruth Kelly MP	Economic Secretary	HM Treasury
Mr. James Leslie MLA	Junior Minister	Northern Ireland Executive
Mr. Christopher Leslie MP	Parliamentary Secretary	Cabinet Office
The Lord McIntosh of Haringey	Gentleman at Arms Captain of the Yeoman (Deputy Chief Whip)	House of Lords

		Department
Mr. Colin Pickthall MP	Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Foreign Secretary	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Baroness Scotland of Asthal QC	Parliamentary Secretary	Lord Chancellor's Department
Mr Neil Turner MP	Parliamentary Private Secretary	Department for Work and Pensions
Dr. Alan Whitehead MP	Parliamentary Secretary	Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions
Chairs and Speakers		
Mr. Michael Wills MP	Parliamentary Secretary	Lord Chancellor's Department
Mr Alan Cogbill	Director, Civil Justice and Legal Services	Lord Chancellor's Department
Mr. Lee Hughes	Head of Freedom of Information and Data Protection Division	Lord Chancellor's Department
Other Attendees		
Ms Alice French	Private Officer	Law Officers' Department
Miss Ruth Gardiner	Assistant Private Secretary	Lord Chancellor's Department
Mr. Stephen Cowan	Private Secretary	Northern Ireland Executive
Mr John Hughes	Senior Civil Service	Home Office
Mr. David Lamby	Special Adviser to the Secretary of State	Department for Education and Skills

ADVOCATE-GENERAL

Human Rights Act

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Advocate-General how many cases have been brought against her Department under the Human Rights Act 1998; and what has been the cost in (*a*) legal fees to defend cases and (*b*) compensation payments. [45098]

Advocate General: No cases have been brought against either me or my right hon. Friend the Secretary of state for Scotland under the Human Rights Act 1998. Human rights are now integrated in the general law and are rarely the sole basis for a challenge.

In Scotland human rights points may arise as "devolution issues" as defined in paragraph 1, Part I of schedule 6 to the Scotland Act 1998 and since May 1999 over 1,400 devolution issues have been intimated to me.

We do not collect information centrally about the costs to public funds, legal fees or compensation payments in cases which include a human rights issue. In most cases it would be difficult to single out associated costs relating to the human rights element.

SCOTLAND

Human Rights Act

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many cases have been brought against her Department under the Human Rights Act 1998; and what has been the cost to public funds to date in *(a)* legal fees to defence cases and *(b)* compensation payments. [45056]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. and learned Friend the Advocate-General.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Members of Parliament (Personal Data)

Mr. Forth: To ask the President of the Council what information is held by his Department on each hon. Member in relation to *(a)* personal relationships, both current and past, *(b)* financial status and dealings, *(c)* connections with companies and interest groups, *(d)* connections with Governments and *(e)* published works; and what was held in January 2002. [61820]

Mr. Robin Cook: My department does not hold such information.

It does however, maintain a database which contains the names and contact details of each right hon. Member who is a Privy Counsellor.

HEALTH

Prescribing Policies

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what powers doctors possess to prescribe drugs in contravention of local authority policy; what drugs have been prescribed by doctors against local authority policy; how many people have received drugs against local policy in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [56708]

Mr. Lammy: The prescribing duties of general practitioners are set out in the National Health Service (General Medical Services) Regulations 1992. Schedule 10 and Schedule 11 of these regulations list the drugs which may not be prescribed by GPs. Local NHS bodies have no power to introduce additional statutory restrictions.

Hospital specialists are expected to prescribe within the terms of local service agreements.

We do not collect detailed information about local prescribing policies.

Radiologists and Chiropodists

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* radiologists and *(b)* chiropodists there are per head of population in each of the National Health Service trust areas in England. [57210]

Mr. Hutton: Population data are not available by trust but has been given by health authority.

(a) [Between 1997 and 2001 the number of Radiologists has increased by 203 or 14 per cent.]

(b) [Between 1997 and 2001 the number of Chiropodists has increased by 270 or 8 per cent.]

Hospital medical staff within the clinical radiology speciality by Region and Health Authority

At 30 September 2001

	All Staff		*per 100,000* [1]		*per head* [1]	
	no	*wte*	*no*	*wte*	*no*	*wte*
Eastern						
Bedfordshire HA	20	10	2.6	2.0	0.0	0.0
Cambridge HA	60	60	8.3	7.5	0.0	0.0
Hertfordshire HA	30	20	2.5	2.4	0.0	0.0
Norfolk HA	30	30	4.2	4.0	0.0	0.0
North Essex HA	20	20	2.2	2.0	0.0	0.0
South Essex HA	10	10	1.5	1.5	0.0	0.0
Suffolk HA	20	10	2.5	2.1	0.0	0.0
London						
Barking & Havering HA	10	10	3.7	3.6	0.0	0.0
Barnet, Enfield & Haringey HA	20	20	2.3	2.1	0.0	0.0
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich HA	20	20	3.4	3.1	0.0	0.0
Brent & Harrow HA	40	30	7.9	7.2	0.0	0.0
Camden & Islington HA	100	80	27.4	22.3	0.0	0.0
Croydon HA	10	10	2.6	2.6	0.0	0.0
Ealing, Hammersmith & Hounslow HA	80	70	10.7	9.6	0.0	0.0
East London & The City HA	50	50	8.3	7.9	0.0	0.0
Hillingdon HA	10	10	3.5	3.3	0.0	0.0
Kensington, Chelsea & Westminster HA	70	70	17.8	16.1	0.0	0.0
Kingston & Richmond HA	10	10	4.0	3.8	0.0	0.0
Lambeth, Southwark & Lewisham HA	100	90	12.7	11.4	0.0	0.0
Merton, Sutton & Wandsworth HA	60	50	9.5	8.3	0.0	0.0
Redbridge & Waltham Forest HA	10	10	1.3	1.3	0.0	0.0
North West						
Bury & Rochdale HA	10	10	2.0	1.9	0.0	0.0
East Lancashire HA	20	20	3.5	3.0	0.0	0.0
Liverpool HA	40	40	8.8	8.0	0.0	0.0
Manchester HA	80	70	17.8	17.1	0.0	0.0
Morecambe Bay HA	10	10	3.5	3.5	0.0	0.0
North Cheshire HA	10	10	4.5	4.4	0.0	0.0
North West Lancashire HA	30	30	5.7	5.4	0.0	0.0
Salford & Trafford HA	30	30	7.0	6.5	0.0	0.0
Sefton HA	30	30	11.3	10.9	0.0	0.0
South Cheshire HA	20	20	3.5	3.4	0.0	0.0
South Lancashire HA	10	10	3.8	3.8	0.0	0.0
St Helens & Knowsley HA	10	10	3.0	3.0	0.0	0.0
Stockport HA	10	10	3.7	3.5	0.0	0.0
West Pennine HA	10	10	3.0	3.0	0.0	0.0
Wigan & Bolton HA	30	20	4.5	4.3	0.0	0.0
Wirral HA	20	20	5.6	5.1	0.0	0.0
Northern & Yorkshire						
Bradford HA	20	20	3.5	3.3	0.0	0.0
Calderdale & Kirklees HA	20	10	2.6	2.3	0.0	0.0
County Durham HA	20	10	2.5	2.4	0.0	0.0
East Riding HA	40	30	6.0	5.8	0.0	0.0
Gateshead & South Tyneside HA	20	20	5.7	5.2	0.0	0.0
Leeds HA	70	70	9.8	9.3	0.0	0.0
Newcastle & North Tyneside HA	60	50	11.7	10.6	0.0	0.0
North Cumbria HA	10	10	3.4	3.3	0.0	0.0
North Yorkshire HA	30	20	3.4	2.9	0.0	0.0
Northumberland HA	10	10	3.9	3.5	0.0	0.0
Sunderland HA	10	10	4.5	4.5	0.0	0.0
Tees HA	30	30	4.7	4.7	0.0	0.0
Wakefield HA	10	10	2.8	2.6	0.0	0.0
South East						
Berkshire HA	20	10	2.8	1.4	0.0	0.0
Buckinghamshire HA	20	20	2.7	2.5	0.0	0.0
East Kent HA	20	20	3.3	3.1	0.0	0.0

Hospital medical staff within the clinical radiology speciality by Region and Health Authority

At 30 September 2001

	All Staff		*per 100,000* [1]		*per head* [1]	
	no	*wte*	*no*	*wte*	*no*	*wte*
East Surrey HA	10	10	2.3	2.2	0.0	0.0
East Sussex HA	20	20	2.9	2.8	0.0	0.0
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and South East Hampshire HA	20	20	3.5	3.1	0.0	0.0
North & Mid Hampshire HA	20	10	3.0	2.6	0.0	0.0
Northamptonshire HA	20	10	2.5	2.1	0.0	0.0
Oxfordshire HA	60	50	9.2	8.0	0.0	0.0
Southampton and South West Hampshire HA	60	40	10.3	6.4	0.0	0.0
West Kent HA	30	30	2.9	2.5	0.0	0.0
West Surrey HA	30	30	4.9	4.5	0.0	0.0
West Sussex HA	20	20	2.2	2.0	0.0	0.0
South Western						
Avon HA	80	70	8.4	6.8	0.0	0.0
Cornwall & Isles of Scilly HA	20	10	3.0	2.8	0.0	0.0
Dorset HA	30	30	4.1	3.9	0.0	0.0
Gloucestershire HA	20	20	3.0	2.9	0.0	0.0
North & East Devon HA	10	10	2.7	2.5	0.0	0.0
Somerset HA	20	10	3.2	2.7	0.0	0.0
South & West Devon HA	50	50	[illegible]	7.5	0.0	0.0
Wiltshire HA	20	20	[illegible]	2.5	0.0	0.0
Trent						
Barnsley HA	10	10	2.6	2.2	0.0	0.0
Doncaster HA	10	10	3.8	3.7	0.0	0.0
Leicestershire HA	50	50	5.7	5.4	0.0	0.0
Lincolnshire HA	20	20	2.7	2.5	0.0	0.0
North Derbyshire HA	10	10	1.9	1.7	0.0	0.0
North Nottinghamshire HA	10	10	2.6	2.5	0.0	0.0
Nottingham HA	40	40	6.5	6.0	0.0	0.0
Rotherham HA	0	0	0.8	0.8	0.0	0.0
Sheffield HA	50	40	9.1	8.3	0.0	0.0
South Derbyshire HA	20	20	3.0	2.8	0.0	0.0
South Humber HA	10	0	2.0	1.4	0.0	0.0
West Midlands						
Birmingham HA	90	90	9.3	8.6	0.0	0.0
Coventry HA	20	20	6.6	5.9	0.0	0.0
Dudley HA	10	10	2.2	2.1	0.0	0.0
Herefordshire HA	0	0	2.3	2.3	0.0	0.0
North Staffordshire HA	30	20	6.5	4.5	0.0	0.0
Sandwell HA	10	10	3.8	3.5	0.0	0.0
Shropshire HA	20	20	4.3	4.0	0.0	0.0
South Staffordshire HA	10	10	2.2	2.1	0.0	0.0
Walsall HA	0	0	1.9	1.5	0.0	0.0
Warwickshire HA	10	10	2.3	2.1	0.0	0.0
Wolverhampton HA	20	20	7.1	6.5	0.0	0.0
Worcester HA	10	10	2.4	2.2	0.0	0.0

Note:

[1] Calculated using unrounded figures.

Figures are rounded to the nearest ten

"0" denotes five or less.

Source:

Department of Health 2001 medical and dental workforce census.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Qualified scientific, therapeutic and technical staff employed in the Chiropody area of Work and per 100,000 population in England as at 30 September 2001

	Whole-time equivalents	*Per 100,000 population*	*Per head of population*	*Headcount*
England	2,890	6	0.00006	3,560
YO1 Northern & Yorkshire	440	7	0.00007	530
QDD Bradford HA	40	8	0.00008	40
QDE County Durham & Darlington HA	40	6	0.00006	40
QDF East Riding & Hull HA	20	4	0.00004	30
QDG Gateshead & South Tyneside HA	30	7	0.00007	30
QDH Leeds HA	40	6	0.00006	50
QDJ Newcastle & North Tyneside HA	30	6	0.00006	30
QDK North Cumbria HA	30	9	0.00009	30
QDM Northumberland HA	40	13	0.00013	50
QDN Sunderland HA	20	7	0.00007	20

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Qualified scientific, therapeutic and technical staff employed in the Chiropody area of Work and per 100,000 population in England as at 30 September 2001

	Whole-time equivalents	*Per 100,000 population*	*Per head of population*	*Headcount*
QDP Tees HA	40	7	0.00007	40
QDQ Wakefield HA	20	7	0.00007	30
QDR North Yorkshire HA	50	6	0.00006	60
QDT Calderdale & Kirklees HA	60	9	0.00009	60
YO2 Trent	270	5	0.00005	340
QCG Barnsley HA	20	8	0.00008	20
QCH North Derbyshire HA	30	8	0.00008	40
QCJ Southern Derbyshire HA	30	6	0.00006	40
QCK Doncaster HA	10	4	0.00004	20
QCL Leicestershire HA	40	4	0.00004	50
QCM Lincolnshire HA	30	5	0.00005	40
QCN North Nottinghamshire HA	20	5	0.00005	20
QCP Nottingham HA	30	5	0.00005	40
QCQ Rotherham HA	10	5	0.00005	10
QCR Sheffield HA	30	6	0.00006	40
QDL South Humber HA	10	5	0.00005	20
YO7 West Midlands	330	6	0.00006	430
QD9 Birmingham HA	60	6	0.00006	70
QEA Coventry HA	10	4	0.00004	20
QEC Dudley HA	30	8	0.00008	40
QED Herefordshire HA	*	2	0.00002	10
QEE Sandwell HA	30	10	0.00010	30
QEF Shropshire HA	20	5	0.00005	30
QEG Solihull HA	10	3	0.00003	10
QEH North Staffordshire HA	50	11	0.00011	60
QEJ South Staffordshire HA	30	5	0.00005	40
QEK Walsall HA	20	7	0.00007	20
QEL Warwickshire HA	30	6	0.00006	40
QEM Wolverhampton HA	10	6	0.00006	20
QEN Worcestershire HA	30	5	0.00005	40
YO8 North West	570	9	0.00009	690
QC1 South Lancashire HA	10	4	0.00004	20
QC2 Liverpool HA	30	7	0.00007	40
QC3 Manchester HA	50	12	0.00012	60
QC4 Morecambe Bay HA	20	6	0.00006	20
QC5 St Helen's & Knowsley HA	30	9	0.00009	30
QC6 Salford & Trafford HA	50	11	0.00011	60
QC7 Sefton HA	20	8	0.00008	30
QC8 Stockport HA	20	8	0.00008	30
QC9 West Pennine HA	50	10	0.00010	50
QCT Bury & Rochdale HA	40	9	0.00009	40
QCV North Cheshire HA	40	11	0.00011	40
QCW South Cheshire HA	20	4	0.00004	30
QCX East Lancashire HA	40	8	0.00008	50
QCY North West Lancashire HA	40	10	0.00010	50
QDA Wigan and Bolton HA	80	13	0.00013	90
QDC Wirral HA	20	6	0.00006	30
YO9 Eastern	230	4	0.00004	280
QA6 Bedfordshire HA	20	4	0.00004	30
QAX North Essex HA	30	4	0.00004	40
QAY South Essex HA	30	4	0.00004	30
QCF Suffolk HA	30	5	0.00005	40
QER Cambridgeshire HA	20	3	0.00003	30
QET Norfolk HA	50	6	0.00006	60
QEX Hertfordshire HA	40	3	0.00003	50
Y10 London	440	6	0.00006	530
QA2 Hillingdon HA	—	—	—	—
QA3 Kensington, Chelsea & Westminster HA	60	14	0.00014	70
QA5 Redbridge & Waltham Forest HA	30	7	0.00007	40
QAD Croydon HA	20	4	0.00004	20
QAG Kingston & Richmond HA	10	3	0.00003	10
QAH Lambeth, Southwark & Lewisham HA	70	9	0.00009	80
QAJ Merton, Sutton & Wandsworth HA	50	8	0.00008	60
QAP Barking & Havering HA	20	4	0.00004	20
QAR Brent & Harrow HA	30	6	0.00006	30
QAT Camden & Islington HA	40	10	0.00010	40
QAV Ealing, Hammersmith & Hounslow HA	10	2	0.00002	20
QAW East London & the City HA	40	6	0.00006	50
QEW Barnet, Enfield & Haringey HA	40	4	0.00004	40
QEY Bexley, Bromley & Greenwich HA	40	5	0.00005	40

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Qualified scientific, therapeutic and technical staff employed in the Chiropody area of Work and per 100,000 population in England as at 30 September 2001

	Whole-time equivalents	*Per 100,000 population*	*Per head of population*	*Headcount*
Y11 South East	390	4	0.00004	480
QA7 Berkshire HA	30	4	0.00004	40
QA8 Buckinghamshire HA	40	6	0.00006	40
QAE East Kent HA	40	7	0.00007	50
QAF West Kent HA	30	3	0.00003	40
QAK East Surrey HA	10	2	0.00002	20
QAL West Surrey HA	20	4	0.00004	30
QAM East Sussex, Brighton & Hove HA	40	5	0.00005	50
QAN West Sussex HA	40	5	0.00005	50
QCC Northamptonshire HA	30	5	0.00005	40
QCE Oxfordshire HA	30	4	0.00004	40
QD1 North & Mid Hampshire HA	10	3	0.00003	20
QD3 Southampton & South West Hampshire HA	20	4	0.00004	20
QEV Isle of Wight, Portsmouth & South East Hampshire HA	40	6	0.00006	50
Y12 South West	220	4	0.00004	280
QD5 Somerset HA	*	1	0.00001	*
QD6 South & West Devon HA	40	6	0.00006	50
QD7 Wiltshire HA	30	4	0.00004	30
QD8 Avon HA	50	5	0.00005	70
QDV Cornwall & Isles of Scilly HA	30	5	0.00005	30
QDW Dorset HA	20	3	0.00003	30
QDX North & East Devon HA	20	4	0.00004	30
QDY Gloucestershire HA	30	5	0.00005	40

Notes:

1. Staff in post figures are rounded to the nearest ten. Population rates are rounded to the nearest whole number and five decimal place. Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts.

2. Ratios, per head of 100,000 population for chiropodists, range from one to 14, the lowest being Somerset Health Authority that is responsible for one trust only, which does not employ any chiropodists. Neighbouring health authorities provide services for Hillingdon which is also responsible for one trust and does not employ any NHS chiropodists. Herefordshire Health authority provides chiropody services but for statistical purposes are rounded to the nearest whole number.

* five or less and greater than zero.

— zero

Source;

Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.

NHS Name and Logo

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he takes to protect the NHS name and logo from use by companies for commercial gain. [57892]

Mr. Lammy: We have [illegible] clear strategy for branding the National Health Service and we adopt a strong position in protecting [illegible] brand against inappropriate use.

In every case where we are aware of misuse by third parties, we contact the organisation concerned and request that the logo is removed. Where necessary, we take the advice of our solicitors.

The NHS logo is a registered trademark.

Medical Emergencies

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision is made for ensuring that patients are not at risk in emergency situations when members of a full emergency medical team are on call rather than on duty on site; and if he will make a statement. [58397]

Mr. Lammy: The responsibility for ensuring that emergency services, including a full emergency medical team, are staffed according to the demand for emergency care, lies with individual National Health Service trusts.

Individual trusts have policies and procedures in place to provide an appropriate emergency response for the wide spectrum of emergency care that they may need to provide from individual cases to major incidents.

Mr Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what regulations are in place to ensure that hospitals that have the facility for full emergency theatre teams have such teams on duty on site during the night; and if he will make a statement. [58396]

Mr. Lammy: The responsibility for ensuring that emergency services, including the provision of emergency theatres, are staffed according to the demand for emergency care, lies with individual trusts. Normally, trusts who provide a 24 hour emergency service will have a core theatre team to cover emergency surgery and an additional complement of staff "on-call" to supplement the core team if required. This aspect is not "regulated" as such, but will form part of trusts' clinical governance and risk management programmes. The Commission for Health Improvement audit and inspection includes the organisation and standards of emergency care provided by trusts.

Funding (Luton, South)

Margaret Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what moneys have been provided *(a)* directly and *(b)* via agencies for which the Department has responsibility to the Luton, South constituency since 1997. [58588]

Mr. Lammy: Monies have been provided to the former Bedfordshire Health Authority and to the Luton Health Action Zone. The funds are not specifically identified to the Luton, South constituency because deployment is a matter for local determination.

The overall settlement for Bedfordshire in 2002–03, £419.9 million, was a £39.1 million or 10.5 per cent. increase, the fourth largest of any health authority in England.

The constituency does, however, have some of the highest deprivation in Luton and health action zone funding is targeted at areas of deprivation.

Air Ambulance Service

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the Air Ambulance Service is funded in each region in which it operates. [59691]

Mr. Lammy: Funding for ambulance services in England is provided by independent air ambulance charities.

In recognition of the time it takes local air ambulance charities to build their fundraising base, short-term government funding of £2.2 million has been made available across 2001–02 and 2002–03 to help the five air ambulance charities in England who have asked for temporary assistance in meeting their operational costs. The money will be shared between Yorkshire, Dorset and Somerset, North West, East Anglia and Thames Valley and Chiltern air ambulance.

In addition, in January 2002, guidance was issued to National Health Service ambulance trusts and their commissioners stating that the salary costs of the NHS clinical staff who crew that aircraft should be met from NHS funds. This equivalent to around £150,000 per aircraft each year or a total of around £2.1 million across England.

Peter Bradley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when decisions on the "Options for Change" consultation on the future of NHS dentistry will be made; and if he will make a statement. [59319]

Mr. Lammy: The Government plan to publish the final Options for Change report shortly.

Dentistry

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to provide incentives for dentists to stay in the NHS. [55328]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 10 May 2002]:* Over the last 18 months we have spent £100 million on modernising National Health Service dentistry. £10 million of this was for the dental care development fund and the dentistry action plan fund to support local plans to improve access. This money enables health authorities to assist dentists seeking to set up new practices and to expand and modernise existing ones. Furthermore, the £35 million Modernisation Fund provided grants for dentists to improve facilities.

Additionally, the commitment payment scheme, introduced from April 1999, provides incentive payments to dentists, depending on how much NHS work they undertake. From April 2002, the scheme was extended to include dentists who have 5 years or more service in the NHS. Officials continue to work with the profession to see how the scheme might be strengthened in the future.

The Department is also undertaking work with the profession and other stakeholders through the modernising project *Options for Change*, to test out new methods of providing NHS dentistry.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many courses of treatment were delivered through personal dental access services in each year since 1998. [60869]

Mr. Lammy: The total number of courses of treatment carried out in the personal dental service (PDS) is shown in the table for each of the years 1998–99 to 2001–02.

The table includes courses of treatment carried out in dental access centres as well as other PDS pilots.

Personal Dental Service: Number of courses of treatment

thousands

Year	*Number*
1998–99	73
1999–2000	217
2000–01	312
2001–02	480

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many courses of treatment were delivered through dental access centres in each year since 1998. [60871]

Mr. Lammy: The total number of courses of treatment carried out in dental access centres is shown in the table for each of the years 1998–99 to 2001–02.

Personal Dental Service: Number of courses of treatment in Dental Access Centres

thousands

Year	*Number*
1998–99	5
1999–2000	23
2000–01	70
2001–02	197

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many personal dental services posts were *(a)* established and *(b)* filled, broken down by health authority, in each year since 1998. [60866]

Mr. Lammy: The available information is for the number of dentists working in the personal dental service (PDS). This is shown in the table by health authority at 31 March for each year from 1999 to 2002.

The figures are on a headcount basis rather than whole time equivalent and take no account of part-time working.

Some of the PDS dentists also work in other National Health Service dental services such as the General Dental Service and the Community Dental Service.

Personal Dental Service (PDS): Total number of dentists by Health Authority at 31 March 1999 to 2002 England

Health Authority	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*
England	*140*	*252*	*472*	*891*
Avon	0	0	1	11
Barnet, Enfield & Haringey	0	0	0	4
Barnsley	0	0	1	1
Bedfordshire	5	8	9	36
Berkshire	0	0	0	2
Bexley, Bromley & Greenwich	0	3	7	7
Birmingham	0	0	33	43
Bradford	0	0	0	17
Buckinghamshire	16	13	24	29
Bury & Rochdale	0	0	2	5
Cambridgeshire	0	0	6	7
Camden & Islington	0	0	0	1
Cornwall & Isles of Scilly	19	23	30	42
County Durham & Darlington	0	4	5	7
Ealing, Hammersmith & Hounslow	17	16	13	13
East Kent	0	0	3	7
East Lancashire	0	0	2	8
East London & The City	1	1	1	1
East Riding & Hull	0	0	3	10
East Sussex, Brighton & Hove	0	0	0	2
Gloucestershire	0	18	21	26
Herefordshire	0	0	13	19
Isle of Wight, Portsmouth & SE Hampshire	0	5	8	12
Lambeth, Southwark & Lewisham	28	35	35	26
Leicestershire	0	0	0	3
Lincolnshire	0	0	6	9
Liverpool	3	4	15	29
Manchester	0	2	2	3
Morecambe Bay	0	0	0	5
Newcastle & North Tyneside	0	0	0	6
Norfolk	0	0	7	10
North & East Devon	0	0	0	11
North Cheshire	0	0	0	19
North Cumbria	0	0	1	1
North Derbyshire	0	5	5	6
North Essex	3	3	3	4
North Staffordshire	0	0	18	21
North West Lancashire	0	0	1	1
North Yorkshire	0	0	0	8
Northamptonshire	0	3	3	4
Northumberland	1	1	0	0
Nottingham	0	0	0	5
Oxfordshire	0	0	16	21
Salford & Trafford	0	1	1	5
Sandwell	0	0	0	3
Sefton	0	4	4	7
Shropshire	1	5	7	7
Solihull	0	0	0	62
Somerset	0	0	0	9
South & West Devon	0	0	0	19
South Cheshire	24	20	24	32
South Lancashire	4	3	3	5
South Staffordshire	0	0	13	14
Southampton & South West Hampshire	0	18	21	21
Southern Derbyshire	2	4	9	12
St Helens & Knowsley	0	7	13	27
Suffolk	0	2	2	5
Tees	5	5	8	11
Walsall	0	0	0	6
Warwickshire	11	12	14	20
West Pennine	0	0	1	1
West Surrey	0	0	0	49
West Sussex	0	11	15	18
Wiltshire	0	3	5	10
Wirral	0	10	12	14
Wolverhampton	0	3	6	6
Worcestershire	0	0	20	26

1. Number at 31 March each year.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) What the total gross fees authorised for payment for personal dental services were for England and Wales in each year since 1998: [60868]

(2) What the total gross fees authorised for payment for dental access centres were for England and Wales in each year since 1998. [60870]

Mr. Lammy: The figure for this is not available. Dentists working in dental access centres and other personal dental services pilots are salaried employees of primary care trusts and National Health Service trusts. Their income is not drawn from fees.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the mean number of decayed, missing and filled primary teeth was for children aged five, broken down by health authority, in every year since 1996; and what percentage of children aged five had no experience of tooth decay, broken down by health authority, in each year since 1996. [60796]

Mr. Lammy: The British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry (BASCD) carries out a survey every second year to monitor the dental caries experience of five year-old children. The latest results are for 1999–00.

Information on the mean number of decayed, missing or filled teeth for five year-old children by health authority trust for the years 1995–96, 1997–98 and 1999–00 has been placed in the Library.

Information on the percentage of five year-old children with no decayed, missing or filled teeth for 1995–96, 1997–98 and 1999–00 has been placed in the Library.

Figures for National Health Service trusts have been provided where the health authority figures are not available.

Chiropody

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many chiropodists were working in the NHS in 2000; and how many are working in the NHS on the most recent date for which figures are available. [61842]

Mr. Hutton: In 2000 there were 3,470 chiropodists working in the National Health Service. As at 30 September 2001, the most recent information, the total chiropodist workforce had increased by 90 (3 per cent.), to 3560.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to use the services of independent state regulated chiropodists and podiatrists in meeting local service needs. [60682]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan document "*Delivering the NHS Plan*" states that primary care trusts will be free to purchase care from public, private or voluntary providers as appropriate. Decisions can be taken locally on how best to meet local service needs.

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he plans to give to strategic health authorities and primary care trusts on the minimum levels of chiropody and podiatry services that should be provided in each area. [60681]

Mr. Hutton: We have no plans to issue any guidance to strategic health authorities or primary care trusts on minimum levels of chiropody and podiatry services. However, chiropody/podiatry services are essential parts of the national service frameworks for older people and diabetes. The department has also launched a *National Primary and Care Trust programme (NatPaCT)* designed to support PCTs in delivering their key functions which will be:

Improving the health of the community;

Securing the provision of high quality services;

Integrating health and social care locally.

As local organisations, PCTs are best placed to understand the needs of their patient populations. This will ensure that the right services are delivered to the right people in the right location at the right time.

Waiting Times

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were waiting for in-patient treatment for more than 15 months at the Portsmouth Hospital Trust, at the latest date for which figures are available. [61125]

Ms. Blears: The Department's Directorate of Health and Social Care for the south of England makes an analysis of fifteen month waits at the end of each month. The analysis for the end of April 2002, the most recent month for which information is currently available, indicted that no patients were waiting over fifteen months for inpatient treatment at the trust.

Clinical Records

Mr. David Atkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what circumstances information on *(a)* medical and *(b)* other clinical records may be released without the knowledge and consent of the patient concerned; and if he will make a statement. [60387]

Mr. Lammy: Information in medical or other clinical records may be released without the knowledge and consent of the patient concerned where the information concerned does not identify him or her. Where the information might identify the patient any release must satisfy the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 and if the information is also held under obligations of confidentiality any release must comply with common law requirements. Additionally, the provisions of the Human Rights Act 1998 must be satisfied, there must not be a statutory prohibition against the release of information and, in the case of a public sector body, the body must have the *vires* to release information for the purpose in question.

NHS Staff

John Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will publish the results of the 2000–01 survey of violent incidents, accidents involving staff and sickness absence in NHS trusts and health authorities in England. [60667]

Mr. Hutton: The results of the Department of Health's survey of reported violent or abusive incidents, accidents involving staff and sickness absence in National Health Service trusts and health authorities in England in 2000–01 will be placed in the Library.

The survey found that there were 84,273 reported violent or abusive incidents against staff in 2000–01. Details of the number of reported violent or abusive incidents, accidents involving staff, and sickness absence by type of NHS trust are shown in the following tables. There were 108,743 reported accidents involving staff during the same period. The sickness absence rate, measured during calendar year 2000, was 4.68 per cent.

Number of reported violent or abusive incidents in 2000–01, by type of NHS Trust

Type of NHS Trust	*Total number of reported[1] incidents in the year*	*Estimated number of incidents per 1,000 staff per month[1]*
Acute	22,338	5
Multi-service	12,019	8
Ambulance	3,882	13
Community/mental health[2]	37,053	23
Mental health/learning disability	7,766	27
All NHS Trusts[3]	84,214	10

Notes:

[1] Some NHS Trusts were unable to supply data. In particular, some community Trusts were undergoing re-configuration. Figures in this table are for those NHS Trusts which provided figures.

[2] Some "community" NHS Trusts also provide mental health and/or learning disability services.

[3] Includes figures for the small number of Primary Care Trusts which were able to supply data.

Number of reported accidents involving staff in 2000–01, by type of NHS Trust

Type of NHS Trust	*Total number of reported[1] accidents in the year*	*Estimated number of accidents per 1,000 staff per month[1]*
Acute	51,889	12
Multi-service	21,032	14
Ambulance	5,746	21
Community[2]	22,757	15
Mental health/learning disability	2,996	11
All NHS Trusts[3]	106,348	13

Notes:

[1] Some NHS Trusts were unable to supply data. In particular, some community Trusts were undergoing re-configuration. Figures in this table are for those NHS Trusts which provided figures.

[2] Some "community" NHS Trusts also provide mental health and/or learning disability services.

[3] Includes figures for the small number of Primary Care Trusts which were able to supply data.

Average sickness absence rate in 2000, by type of NHS Trust

Type of NHS Trust	*Estimated average sickness absence rate (%)*
Acute	4.46
Multi-service	4.67
Ambulance	6.80
Community	5.09
Mental health/learning disability	5.23
All NHS Trusts[3]	4.73

Notes:

[1] Some NHS Trusts were unable to supply data. In particular, some community Trusts were undergoing re-configuration. Figures in this table are for those NHS Trusts which provided figures.

[2] Some "community" NHS Trusts also provide mental health and/or learning disability services.

[3] Includes figures for the small number of Primary Care Trusts which were able to supply data.

Resourcing Terminology

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the difference is between *(a)* earmarked, *(b)* hypothecated and *(c)* ring-fenced in health service resourcing terminology. [60848]

Mr. Hutton: Resource allocation to the National Health Service in recent years has used the term "earmarked" to refer to funds identified at health authority level with an intention that they be spent on the purpose for which they are allocated; the term "hypothecated" to refer to funds identified at national level with an intention that they be spent on the purpose for which they are allocated; and the term "ring fenced" to refer to funds identified by direction under section 97(6) of the National Health Service Act 1977 and which can only be used for the purpose for which they are issued.

NHS Consultants

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS consultants were formally appraised in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000, *(d)* 2000–01 and *(e)* 2001–02. [61445]

Mr. Hutton: A number of local schemes for the appraisal of National Health Service consultants were in place prior to the introduction of a national system of formal appraisal for NHS consultants in April 2001.

Precise information about the number of consultants appraised in the introductory year of the national scheme, or under the local schemes which preceded it, is not collected by the Department. Chief executives of NHS trusts are accountable for ensuring that all consultants are appraised.

We plan to undertake a scoping exercise later this year to ascertain how the NHS has implemented the arrangements.

Pathology Tests

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in how many instances unregistered staff have performed tasks usually associated with state-registered pathologists in *(a)* March 1999 to March 2000, *(b)* March 2000 to March 2001 and *(c)* March 2001 to March 2002; and at which hospitals. [61453]

Mr. Hutton: This information is not collected by the Department. Clinical Pathology Accreditation (UK) Ltd (CPA), which is the largest accrediting body for UK pathology laboratories providing diagnostic testing for patients, does ask individual services for this information as part of its methodology.

In carrying out their inspections, CPA have encountered a very small number of cases of unregistered staff performing tasks usually associated with state-registered pathology staff. It has checked each circumstance individually before confirming the staff member's suitability to carry out their work. CPA has taken all necessary steps to ensure that patient safety is not compromised and that quality standards are maintained.

The Department is committed to ensuring that patients are properly protected and receive high quality diagnostic services, founded upon a strengthened system of state-registration in the form of the Health Professions Council (HPC), which ensures staff are suitably fit to practise.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much of the funding for NICE-recommended drugs, treatments and technologies has been allocated to audiology services in each NHS trust. [59561]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* Directions have been issued obliging health authorities and primary care trusts to provide appropriate funding for treatments recommended by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. A weighted capitation formula is used to determine each health authority and primary care trust's fair share of available resources, to enable them to commission similar levels of services for populations in equal need. The funding was not allocated by speciality.

The National Health Service will receive an annual average increase of 7.5 per cent. above inflation over the five years 2003–04 to 2007–08. This is now the largest ever sustained increase in NHS funding.

Medical Devices Agency

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to restructure the Medical Devices Agency. [59234]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Minister for Health gave my hon. Friend the Member for Staffordshire Moorlands (Miss Atkins) today.

Cosmetic Treatment

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's policy is on the marketing of the cosmetic treatment Dysport by the Centre for Advanced Microbiology and Research; and what will happen to any profits made by its sale. [59415]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 24 May 2002]:* The Centre for Applied Microbiology & Research (CAMR) manufactures Dysport which is then marketed by Ispen Limited both for use in certain medical treatments, and for ancillary non medical use.

Any income derived by CAMR from any of its activities goes towards the cost of running and maintaining the centre.

Cancer

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the role and responsibilities are of the National Cancer Institute; [55868]

(2) what progress has been made in meeting staffing goals for cancer specialists; and how future progress will be assessed; [55865]

(3) what steps he takes to monitor the way in which NHS trusts deploy funds allocated to deliver on Cancer Plan targets; and how trusts are made answerable for cancer funding spent on other services or financial requirements; [55863]

(4) what plans he has to publish annual figures for national expenditure on cancer research, indicating where money is spent; [55862]

(5) what steps are being taken to raise the profile of the National Cancer Institute amongst those not directly involved in its work; [55864]

(6) what plans he has to develop more extensive and accessible clinical trials databases for cancer research to inform researchers and patients; [55866]

(7) if he plans to publish a map of the regional cancer networks; [55869]

(8) what plans he has to review his policy on a national cancer act, with specific reference to *(a)* cancer registration, *(b)* funding for the cancer research infrastructure and *(c)* a cancer research strategy; [55867]

(9) how the core funding of the national translational cancer research networks is determined; and how frequently it is to be reviewed. [55870]

Ms. Blears: The Government's response to the First Report of the Science and Technology Committee on *Cancer Research—A Follow Up* has been published today, and copies will be placed in the Library.

Medical Agencies

Charlotte Atkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the management of the Medicines Control Agency and the Medical Devices Agency; and if he will make a statement. [62520]

Mr. Hutton: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has decided to merge the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) and the Medical Devices Agency (MDA), to take effect from 1 April 2003. The regulation of medicines and of medical devices are separate fields, working to different legislation, but as technology develops, there are likely to be growing numbers of products that cross the borderline between medicines and devices. Most other European countries have gone down the path of managing these responsibilities in a single organisation, as has the United States. We want to build on the excellence of both organisations in the protection of public health, and ensure that the new agency is well placed to respond to change and retain the UK's leading position.

The post of Chief Executive will be filled through open competition. The new organisation will also have improved governance arrangements, with non-executive members on the board and a new post of Chairman, who we expect to be an authoritative figure able not only to Chair the board and oversee its work but also to represent the organisation and its decisions in public.

Organ Donor Register

Mr. Tom Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people are on the NHS organ donor register; and what percentage of the population this represents, broken down by local authority area; [43307]

(2) how many people have been on the organ donor register for the last five years for which figures are available. [43308]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 14 March 2002]:* The number of patients on the NHS Organ Donor Register at the end of the last five years are as follows:

End of year	*Number registered (million)*
1997	4.67
1998	5.54
1999	8.48
2000	8.03
2001	9.02

There are currently 9.2 million people registered on the NHS Organ Donor Register. This represents 15.3 per cent. of the population.

The figures are not available broken down by local authority. A table of the figures broken down by region is attached.

Region	*Number*	*Percentage of population*
Northern & Yorkshire	835,870	13.4
Trent	637,321	12.4
Eastern	806,534	15.3
London	910,432	12.9
South East	1,401,383	16.4
South West	916,436	18.7
West Midlands	641,611	12.1
North West	920,939	13.9
Channel Isles & Isle of Man	5,225	2.5
England	7,088,436	14.3
Wales	474,722	16.3
Scotland	908,269	17.8
Northern Ireland	151,793	9.1
Not available	394,004	
Total	9,022,479	15.3

Child Protection Register

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what percentage of children were re-registered on the Child Protection Register in the year ending March 1999. [45723]

Jacqui Smith: The proportion of children who were re-registered on the child protection register during the year ending 31 March 1999 was 15 per cent.

Tamoxifen

Mr. Simon Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the criteria for the use of Tamoxifen; [46720]

(2) what plans he has for the use of Tamoxifen for women who do not have breast cancer but are considered to be at high risk. [46721]

Yvette Cooper: Tamoxifen is licensed for the treatment of breast cancer and the treatment of anovulatory infertility.

Tamoxifen is not licensed for the prevention of breast cancer in women who do not have breast cancer. A large international research trial is currently investigating whether Tamoxifen can prevent cancer in healthy women who are considered to be at high risk. When the full trial results are published we will consider what action may be appropriate and estimate the cost implications.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. John Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, what new initiatives his Department has taken in 2001–02 to assist in achieving its Public Service Agreement targets. [47180]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 April 2002]:* The Department's Annual Report for 2001, and the NHS Modernisation Board's Annual Report 2000–01 *("The NHS Plan—A Progress Report")* both set out the many steps we are taking to achieve our objectives. The next Departmental report, to be published shortly, will set out the latest progress.

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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES

SESSION 2001–2002

VOLUME 386

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Printed indexes to Hansard

The volume index is one of three printed indexes to Commons Hansard produced from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Indexing Service (POLIS). It contains references to material in the bound volumes of Hansard. The other indexes produced are:

- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
- The sessional index to Hansard. This contains references to material in the bound volumes for a whole session.

Indexes on the Parliamentary website

Fortnightly, volume and sessional indexes covering material from the beginning of the 1999/2000 session will also appear on the Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk with links to the full text of Hansard.

SCOPE

The indexes include entries covering:

- The content of all material recorded in Hansard, including debates, procedural motions and questions.
- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

ARRANGEMENT

- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
- Where a Member contributes to Parliamentary business and is the subject of Parliamentary business there are separate contribution and subject entries, the subject entry coming first.
- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
- 'St', when abbreviated for Saint, is filed as 'Saint'.
- Numbers are filed as if spelt out, e.g. '10 Downing Street' as if 'Ten Downing Street'.

HEADINGS

Choice of headings

- *Specificity*—Entries summarise the overall content of a debate or question as specifically as the various POLIS thesauruses allow. For example, Education, Higher education, Universities or the name of a particular university is used depending on the breadth of the item.
- *Name headings*—Specific entries are included for the names of people, places, institutions, organisations, committees, programmes, initiatives, publications and legislation when these constitute the overall subject of an item.
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- *Subject headings*—Subject headings are assumed to refer to the whole of England, Great Britain or the United Kingdom unless otherwise stated.
- *Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales*—Material relating to the whole of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales is indexed under these headings.
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- *Foreign countries*—Most material relating to foreign countries is collected under the name of that country. Some additional material may be found under the names of—groups of countries, areas within countries, geographical features, place names associated with particular issues, politicians and heads of state, international bodies, and institutions and companies operating in those countries.
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Parliamentary material and business

- *Material about Parliament*—This is indexed under 'Parliament', the names of the two Houses, the 'Palace of Westminster' and parts of the Parliamentary estate (such as 'Portcullis House').
- *Committees*—Material about committees is indexed under 'Committees', types of committee (such as 'Select committees') and the names of individual committees (such as 'Home Affairs Select Committee').
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- *Legislation*—Entries for Parliamentary proceedings on bills and statutory instruments are entered under their titles. Where the lead word of the bill or statutory instrument does not provide a full or clear indication of the subject there are additional subject entries when the bill or instrument is debated. For example, debates on the 'Child Support Pensions and Social Security Bill' have entries under 'Pensions' and 'Social security benefits' as well as under the title of the Bill.
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- *Speaker and Chair*—Contributions by the Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker and deputies'. Contributions from the chair during Committees of the Whole House are brought together under 'Chairman of Committee of the Whole House'. Significant rulings and statements (as opposed to routine comments) are indicated by the sub-heading 'Rulings and statements' in both cases.

Guidance on headings

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REFERENCES

- References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
- References to debates, but not questions, are accompanied by the date of the item.
- There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings and written questions:
    - References consisting of a number by itself indicate material taken on the floor of the House.
    - References ending in 'wh' indicate Westminster Hall sittings.
    - References ending in 'w' indicate written questions.
- References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting or is a written question.
- References under the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in numerical sequence under the following headings:
    - *Debates etc.* (which includes interventions and points of order as well as significant contributions to debates);
    - *Sittings in Westminster Hall* (covering all debates held as part of the Westminster Hall sittings); and
    - *Questions* (which includes written, oral and private notice questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
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